

THE BENADAHAN EDITION



Ben Ish Hai

THE LIFE & TIMES OF HACHAM YOSEF HAIM

YEHUDA AZOULAY

THE BENADAHAN EDITION



Ben Ish Hai

THE LIFE & TIMES OF HACHAM YOSEF HAIM

מיוסף עד יוסף
לא קם כיוסף

*

“From Yosef until
Yosef there arose
no one like Yosef”

See page 38 for source



Copyright © 2011 by Yehuda Azoulay

ISBN 978-1-60091-125-5

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without prior permission of the copyright holder or distributor.

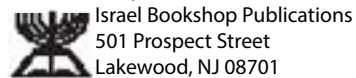


To send stories, historic facts, letters, pictures, manuscripts and other helpful material on the life of Hacham Yosef Haim zt"l, please email the author-yazoulay@sephardiclegacy.com. This information is necessary to submit in future updated and revised editions of Ben Ish Hai – The Life & Times of Hacham Yosef Haim. He, who does so, will be blessed in the merit of the Jewish nation.

Book & Cover design by:



Distributed by:



Tel: (732) 901-3009
Fax: (732) 901-4012
www.israelbookshoppublishations.com
info@israelbookshoppublishations.com

Printed in USA

Distributed in Israel by:
Shanky's
Petach Tikva 16
Jerusalem
972-2-538-6936

Distributed in Australia by:
Gold's Book and Gift Company
3- 13 William Street
Balaclava 3183
613-9527-8775

Distributed in Europe by:
Lehmans
Unit E Viking Industrial Park
Rolling Mill Road,
Jarrow, Tyne & Wear NE32 3DP
44-191-406-0842

Distributed in South Africa by:
Kollel Bookshop
Ivy Common
107 William Road, Norwood
Johannesburg 2192
27-11-728-1822

This publication is dedicated
to the everlasting memory of
our beloved husband and father

Shmuel Bendahan zt"l

(Who left this world on the 27th of Tishrei 5763/2003)

A great leader who toiled all his days with yirat
Shamayim to build and support Torah, with
tremendous respect for talmide hachamim

One of the great founders of the
Montreal Sephardic Community

May his memory be blessed and his merits stand forever.

~

In loving memory of Isaac Stefansky zt"l

(Who passed away on the 12th of Kislev 5733/1973, tragically at
a very young age, and is missed by his loving family)

May his memory be blessed and his merits stand forever.

~

In honor of Mrs. Alegria Bendahan

Wishing her and all her descendants much hatzlachah, refuot, and yeshuot.

Wishing her a refuah shelema & arichut yamim, amen.

~

In honor of Mr. & Mrs. James & Tonia Frohwein and all their descendents

Much hatzlachah, refuot, and yeshuot.

Wishing them all arichut yamim, amen.

The following should have a refuah shelema speedily, amen:

Hacham Ovadia Ben Gorgia; Shmuel ben Luna Lydia; Shmuel Ben Kalmira
Yocheved; Alter Mordechai Ben Frieda; Yaffa bat Freha; Nissim David ben
Chaya Aviva; Eliyahu ben Lisa; & Menachem Eliyahu ben Mordechai

Table of Contents

Haskamot (Letters of Endorsements) — Maran Hacham Ovadia Yosef and Hacham Shalom Cohen / Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu written in the name of his father Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l / Hacham Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron / Hacham Shelomo Amar / Hacham Yitzhak Yosef / Hacham Ben-Tzion Mutzafi / Hacham Reuven Elbaz / Hacham Uriel Yitzhak Harael.....	12
Acknowledgments.....	27
Introduction.....	33
A Remarkable Essay on the Ben Ish Hai — from the master of Torah and pillar of our generation, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef shlit"a (excerpted from Kol Sinai).....	43
Chapter One — Rabbi Moshe Haim (Grandfather of Rabbenu Yosef Haim) / Shene Luhot HaBrit (Two Tablets of the Covenant) / The Brilliance and Empathy of Rabbi Moshe Haim / Hashem Watches Over Those Who Revere Him / The Passing of Rabbi Moshe Haim.....	61
Chapter Two — Rabbi Eliyahu Haim (Father of Rabbenu Yosef Haim) / The Shabbat Room / Giving Charity on Shabbat / Eliyahu Hanavi Distributes Charity / Rabbi Eliyahu's Passing.....	73
Chapter Three — The Life of Rabbenu / The Berachah from the Abir Yaakov / The Ben Ish Hai's Oath / The Prodigy / Rabbenu's Kindness / The Younger Years and Rabbenu's Studies / His Father's Son / Rabbenu's Halachic Judgment.....	85

Chapter Four — The Orator / The Weekly Shabbat Lecture / The Four Major Derashot / Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka / The Indelible Memory of Rabbenu’s Derashot / A Blessing from the Ben Ish Hai / The Wellspring of Torah / Rabbenu’s Appearance / The Consummate Scholar.....99

Chapter Five — A Life of Sanctity / Torah, Wealth, and Sanctity / Teshuvat Hakaneh / The Ben Ish Hai’s Imprisonment / Learning with Eliyahu Hanavi.....117

Chapter Six — Journey to the Holy Land / A Symbol of Righteousness / From Damascus to Jerusalem / Yeshivat Bet-El / Hebron / Me’arat Hamachpelah (The Cave of the Patriarchs) / Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai / The End of an Extraordinary Journey / Precious Stones.....129

Chapter Seven — The Visionary of Yeshivat Porat Yosef / The History of Yeshivat Porat Yosef.....145

Chapter Eight — Leader of the Exile / Permissible Eating / A Leader of World Jewry / “The Greatest in the Generation” / The Enjoyment of Torah / Guidance for Protecting the Soul / The Ben Ish Hai’s Correspondence with Hachamim around the World — Hacham Haim Falagi / Hacham Aharon Azriel / Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar / Hacham Rachamim Yosef Franko / Hacham Haim Hizkia Medini / Hacham Matzliach Mazuz / Hacham Yitzhak Abulafia / Hacham Eliyahu Saliman Mani.....159

Chapter Nine — Rabbenu’s Writings / The Book of Reincarnations / Lost Writings / Rabbenu’s Poetry and Songs / G-d’s Stamp of Approval.....175

Chapter Ten — Rabbenu’s Humility / Rabbenu and the Teenage Boy / A Hatan Is Like a King / Silence Is Golden / A Humble Pen / Drawing Inspiration from the Garbage Collector.....191

Chapter Eleven — A Beloved Community Leader / The Redemption Is Coming / The Merit of Living in the Holy Land / The Power of Amen / Precious Time / The Mitzvah Observance Society / The Herem (Excommunication) / The Community’s Merit Comes First!..... 205

Chapter Twelve — Rabbenu’s Special Powers / The Arab Who Fixed the Price of Lettuce / The Boy Who Desecrated the Synagogue / “The G-d of the Jews Is the True G-d!” / In Honor of Rabbenu / Hacham Agasi’s Laundry Powder / The Amulet That Lasted for Generations / A Healthy Baby / Rabbenu’s Enduring Merit / Appearing in a Dream..... 219

Chapter Thirteen — The Special Ruah Hakodesh of the Ben Ish Hai / The Spirit of Atzilut / The Time of the Redemption / Finding a Lost Bride / With the Assistance of an Angel / The Clock from Switzerland / The Foresight of the Ben Ish Hai / “Avraham, Avraham!” / The Book of Tehillim / Because She Went Bare-Headed / How Rabbenu’s Ruah Hakodesh Saved an Elderly Man / The Ben Ish Hai’s Promise.....233

Chapter Fourteen — Rabbenu’s Last Days and the Passing of a Torah Giant / The Transfer of Rabbenu’s Grave / A Spark of Yosef / The Power of a Tzaddik / “Od Yosef Hai” — The Ben Ish Hai Still Lives / Obituaries..... 245

Chapter Fifteen — Eulogies — Part One / Eulogy by Hacham David Papo zt”l / Eulogy by Hacham Ezra Reuven Dangoor zt”l / Eulogy by Hacham Shimon Agasi zt”l.....261

Chapter Sixteen — Eulogies — Part Two / Eulogy by Hacham Yitzhak Avraham Shelomo zt”l / Eulogy by Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka zt”l / A Jug of Tears / Eulogy by Hacham Yaakov Haim zt”l (son of Hacham Yosef Haim) / Eulogy by Hacham Rahamim Melamed Hakohen zt”l..... 275

Chapter Seventeen — The Legacy Continues — Hacham Yaakov (son of Ben Ish Hai) — Ruach Hakodesh / A Son’s Power / A Not-So-Urgent Mission to India / A Terrifying Account / Special Vision / The Cup of Wine / Hacham David, Grandson of the Ben Ish Hai / A Berachah for Children / Double Blessing / Obituaries for Hacham David / Hacham David Haim — Leader of Iraqi Jewry..... 287

List of the works of Rabbi Yosef Haim — Ben Ish Hai

Chapter Eighteen — Bible Commentary / Even Shelomo — Commentary to Megillat Shir Hashirim / Aderet Eliyahu — Commentary to the Torah and Haftarat / Em Hamelech — Commentary to Megillat Rut / Ben Ish Hai — Derashot and Hiddushim on the Torah / Ben Ish Hayil — Derashot / Ben Yehoyada — Torah Commentary / Benayahu — Torah Commentary / Birkat Haim — on Haftarat and Navi / Divre Haim — Commentary to Kohelet / Haim V'hashalom — Commentary to Tehillim / Nehamat Zion — Thoughts on Echah / Od Yosef Hai — Derashot / Keren Yeshuah — Commentary to Megillat Esther.....305

Chapter Nineteen — Parshanut Hazal / Orah Haim — Haggadah Shel Pesah / Ben Yehoyada — Commentary to the Talmud / Benayahu — Commentaries on Aggadah / Birkat Avot on Masechet Avot / Hasde Avot on Masechet Avot / Mosif Haim — Commentary to the Mishnah.....323

Chapter Twenty — Halachah / Ben Ish Hai — Halachot / Hod Yosef / Yede Haim — Halachic Essays and Responsa / Od Yosef Hai — Halachot / Rav Berachot — Hiddushe Halachot V'he'arot B'divre Torah / Rav Pe'alim — Halachic Responsa.....333

Chapter Twenty-One — Mussar / Ot Haim — Derashot for Bar Mitzvahs, Weddings, and Other Topics / Huke Hanashim (Kanun Alnissa) / Mayim Haim — Mussar..... 343

Chapter Twenty-Two — Tefillot V'tikkunim / Ohr Zarua — Order of Study at the Grave of Rabbi Akiva / Emunat Itecha / Hillula Raba — Order of Learning for Lag B'Omer / Hakafot L'Simhat Torah / Keter Malchut — A Book of Study for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hoshanah Rabbah / Leshon Hachamim — Tefillot V'tikkunim / Malach Habrit / Mamlechet Kohanim — The Order of Study at the Graves of Yehezkel Hanavi, Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, and Ezra Hasofer / Menuhat Hanefesh — Order of Learning for the Night of an Azkarah / Mishmeret Hahodesh — Order of learning for Erev Rosh Hodesh / Seder Hayom — A Daily Order of Learning / Refuat Hanefesh / Sha'are Haim — Commentary to the Avodah

Section of the Yom Kippur Prayer Service / Tikkun Hayesod — An Order of Study and Tikkunim for Tikkun Hayesod / Tikkun Tefillah353

Chapter Twenty-Three — Kabbalah / Benayahu — Commentary on Tikkune Zohar / Da'at U'tevunah — Fundamentals of Kabbalah.....369

Chapter Twenty-Four — Miscellaneous / Imre Bina — A Collection of Riddles / Mashal V'nimshal / Nifla'im Ma'asecha — Stories and Parables / Ateret Tif'eret U'pla'ot Rabot — Questions and Answers in Kabbalah and Aggadah / Additional Miscellaneous Books.....375

Biographical Sketches of Personalities — Hacham Avraham Ades / Hacham Shimon Agasi / Hacham Ezra Attiah / Hacham Haim Yosef David Azoulay (Maran HaHida) / Hacham Aharon Ben Azriel / Hacham Ezra Reuven Dangoor / Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu / Hacham Saliman Eliyahu / Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar / Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya / Hacham Ephraim Menashe Hakohen / Hacham Ezra Yehezkel Eliyahu Hakohen / Hacham Rahamim Melamed Hakohen / Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Yehezkel Hazan / Hacham Ovadia Hedaya / Hacham Yaakov Moshe Hillel / Hacham Sasson Kaduri / Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri / Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka / Hacham Yitzhak Luria (Arizal) / Hacham Eliyahu Saliman Mani / Hacham Haim Hizkiah Medini (Sedei Hemed) / Hacham Ben-Tzion Mutzafi / Hacham Saliman Mutzafi / Hacham Haim Falagi (Habif) / Hacham David Papo / Hacham Shalom Mizrahi Shar'aby (Rashash) / Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani / Hacham Benayahu Shmueli / Hacham Yaakov Haim Sofer (Kaf Hahaim) / Hacham Abdallah Somech /Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah / Hagaon Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky / Hacham Ovadia Yosef.....387

Glossary..... 401

Sources — Select Bibliography / Archives, Museums, and Rare Documentation.....415

OVADIA YOSSEF

RISHON LEZION
AND PRESIDENT OF TORAH SAGES COUNCIL

עובדיה יוסף

הראשון לציון
ונשיא מועצת חכמי תורה

ירושלים א' שבט ה'תש"ל
JERUSALEM

מכתב ברכה

הובאו לפני נליצנות הספר 'חכמי ספרד' תולדות חייהם והנהגותיהם של חכמי הספרדים בחורוה הקדומים בשפה האנגלית, משה ידי אופן, נסע נאמן היוקר והגבד, כשיח ר' יהודה אזולאי שליט"א, אשר קיבץ בעמלנות נורמה ואסוף איש פורזי מעשיות וסיפורים על גדולי ישראל מרובים ומסודרים תפוזו ותב במשכיות כסף דבר רכור על אושני, ולעלא מנא אטינא איישר בוז לאודייתא.

ויהי רצון שחפץ ה' בירו יעלה לברך על המנפיר בקרב ימים, ועוד ישונו מעינותיו חרצה בכריאת איתנה ונהודא פעלייא לאודי ימים ושנות חיים כפסוב ובנפוסים שיכע שמחת וכל טוב יהיה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים, אשר פרוז והן בשתו ושלרו לא יבול, וכל אשר יקשה יעליח.



כ"ג ב"ב אי"ז תש"ל
למ אנו מלטרף כפולו ה
ו"ל"ב לקרא אכר בלח בע"ל
ובעוקר אהר ביום יביאן אהרן
הלכאלס לערה ויהי וקבוצת אהר
ולא איעצה
העלה אב אחיך חנה
שלום בך

OVADIA YOSEF

RISHON LEZION
AND PRESIDENT OF TORAH SAGES COUNCIL

Jerusalem
8 Shevat, 5768

Letter of Blessing

I was brought a copy of the book Hachme Sepharad, the history and practices of the Sephardic Hachamim in the early generations, in the English language, the handiwork of an expert, a faithful, precious, and distinguished young man, R'Yehuda Azoulay shelit"a, who compiled and collected stories and vignettes about the great Sages of Israel. He organized and arranged them as "golden apples in silver coverings," words that are relevant for their context. I congratulate him for his fine work.

May it be Hashem's will that he may soon be privileged to complete this project, and that his wellsprings shall continue to pour forth in good health and wellbeing for many long years of goodness, pleasantness, abundant joy and all good things. "He shall be like a tree set into the ground near streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does he will succeed."

Ovadia Yosef

BS"D

22 Iyar, 5770

I, too – as if this were necessary – join these blessings, mainly because this material will result in the readers strengthening themselves in Torah and fear of Heaven, to increase Torah and glorify it.

Writing and signing in honor of those who support Torah,

Shalom Cohen
(Rosh Yeshiva Porat Yosef)

Maran Rabbi Ovadia Yosef wrote this letter for the first volume of A Legacy of Leaders; we reprint here with his kind permission.

Shlomo Moshe Amar
Rishon Lezion Chief Rabbi Of Israel
President of the Great Rabbinical Court



שלמה משה עמאר
הראשון לציון רבב הראשי לישראל
נשיא בית הדין הרבני הגדול

בס"ד, ט"ו תמוז, תשס"ט
1514-18/ט"ט

אזרת ברכה

הנבאר לפני גליחות מהספר "הכספי ספרד" תולדות חיידיב והנהגותיהם של חכמי ספרד
בחדרה הקדומים בשפה האנגלית שערך וחיבר ר' יהודה אזולאי שלישיא אשר אפי
וקיבץ בעשייתו והנהגתו שנוכל ללמוד מדרכותם השונות הלך לאורם.

הראוי שילאכה יפה עשה שכתב הכל בטוב טעם ודעת.

ואמכרהו שחפץ חי בידו יצלה רבות וכוהונו יתמודד לנו ולבני בישו ולכל עם ישראל.

בחסות
שלמה משה עמאר
הראשון לציון רבב הראשי לישראל



Shlomo Moshe Amar
Rishon Lezion Chief Rabbi of Israel
President of the Great Rabbinical Court

BS"D

Tammuz, 15th, 5769

Letter of Blessing

I have been showed galley's from the English book A Legacy of Leaders – Inspiring Stories and Biographies of Sephardi Hachamim, compiled and authored by R'Yehuda Azoulay shelit"a, who gathered and collected stories and practices [of these Sages] so that we are able to learn from their good ways and conduct ourselves by their light.

I saw that he did nice work and wrote everything with good taste and understanding.

I bless him that Hashem shall find favor in his work and the merit of our Sages shall be with him, his family, and the entire Nation of Israel.

With blessing,

Shlomo Moshe Amar
Rishon Lezion, Chief Rabbi of Israel

Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Moshe Amar wrote this letter for the first volume of A Legacy of Leaders; we reprint here with his kind permission.

RABBI ELIJAHU BAKSHI-DORON
THE RISHON LETZION
Dean of "Binyan Av" Institutions

אליהו בקשי-דורון
הראשון לציון
נשיא מוסדות "בנין אב"

כס"ד

י"ג בסיון התשע"ז

הסכמה

זכה הרב ר' יהודה אזולאי להוציא לאור בשפה האנגלית את הולדת חיים והתגותם של חכמי ספרד כדורות הקדושים.

למען ידעו הדור האחרון כי הם גדולי הדור שבתורתם והנהגותם למדנו את הדרך אשר נלך ואת הסעשה אשר יעשו. יש כספר לקיים את הבטוח יוחי עיניך וזאת את סודך" שרבונינו, תורתם והנהגותם יהיו לנו עינים, וזכותם תעמוד לנו ללכת בעקבותיהם.

וכי החכמים שהמחבר עסק בתורת חיים תעמוד לו להגשיך דרכו בקודש להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה מתוך כריאות נפא ונהורא מעליא וכל טוב.

(כברכה)
אליהו בקשי-דורון
הראשון לציון
נשיא מוסדות "בנין אב"



בית אריאל, דרך יוסטון 5, ת"ד 16498, ירושלים 91164, טל' 02-6446660, פקס 02-6446466
Beit Ariel, 5 Hapigga St, P.O.B. 16498, Jerusalem 91164 Israel, Tel. 02-6446660, Fax. 02-6446466

RABBI ELIJAHU BAKSHI-DORON
THE RISHON LETZION
DEAN OF "BINYAN AV" INSTITUTIONS

13 Sivan, 5770

Approbation

Rabbi Yehuda Azoulay has had the merit to publish in English the life stories of the Sephardic Hachamim of previous generations. He did this so that future generations will know who our leaders were, from whose Torah and behavior we learn the correct path to follow and how to conduct ourselves. This book fulfills the dictum of, "Your eyes should see your teachers," that our rabbis' Torah and behavior should always be before our eyes. In this way, their merit will help us follow in their ways.

May the merit of the Sages about whom the author studies and writes stand him in good stead so that he may continue in his holy work to increase the glory of Torah. May he have strength and help from Above in his endeavor.

With blessing,
Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron
THE RISHON LETZION
DEAN OF "BINYAN AV" INSTITUTIONS

Beit Ariel, 5 Hapigga St, P.O.B. 16498, Jerusalem 91164 Israel
Tel. 02-6446660, Fax. 02-6446466



בית מדרש דרכי הוראה לתלמידי דאר"ה לרבנים ולדענים

Beit Midrash for the Ordination of Rabbanim and Deyanim for Communities in Israel and Abroad

בית המדרש של סדר הראשון לעיון הרב מרדכי אליהו שליט"א
President and Founder Harishon LeTzion Hagaon Harav Mordechai Eliyahu Shlita

בפסיד, יוני סיון תשע"ב
18-10448.10

דברי ברכה

דברי ברכה אלי לכבוד האב"ד החשוב הרב ותורת או"מ היוו שהתמחה בחיבור ספרים על סיפורי דיוקים באגליות, רובם ותועה כבר שני ספרים. וכעת עלה בלבו כתיבת ספר על מוריש ורבינו רשכבה"ד רבינו יוסף חיים זיע"א. רבנו רבינו איש חי וכן שעה היום יצאה תורתו הישנה ויחידותו, בספריו והתנחלותו נלמדים הלכה למעשה בכל בני המדרש ברחבי העולם, כיוון שבדלותו היתה הן בסט, הן בדרש והן בסוד וכל אחד ואחד יכול למצוא את חלקו בספריו. אמרו חז"ל גדול שלומה יותר מלימודה, ואת אמרית שמי שזוכר לשמש תלמידו חכמים, יותר גדול מהלימוד עצמו כיוון שישאף הלכה למעשה. סיפורי דיוקים זה חלק גדול שימשה. כדי לתבוא מעט מדלותו של הבניית ומשימתו נביא כאן הקדמות של סדר אבי מורי שליט"א, והכביה ישלח לו רחמי שכתב ספר מעו זה, וזה לשון קודמו.

כדירת, הדר האחרון, זכנו הקב"ה ליושנת טאוריו של כיצנת קדישא ומרישא הגאון האריזי חדר קסף היים יוציא בעל הרבן איש חי רבן של כל בני העולה, שהיה בקי בכל ויחדי התורה כששט ובקבלה, במקרא ובאגרות, במשניות ובגמרות, בתורת האריזי ובדברי הרמב"ם שר בית הוזהר, והיה לבי כלב האריזי לדעת כל דברי האשונים והאחרונים מהשנים ועד לאחרון המשיקים בספריהם ובספרי השו"ת, כל ר' לא איש ליה, ישפטינו נבדנת בקיאותו הרבה בכל מקציות התורה. (עין בקישור שולחן ערוך של הגאון האריזי רבי ברוך בלדאט ועיקר).

יעוד יש לדעת, שיש החושבים שהרב סיכם וריבנו את כל בקיאותו בתשובותיו בספר רב פעלים וכדומה, אבל טעות גדולה היא זו, כי למרות ההיקף הנרחב שכתשובות אין בהם אלא תמצית העניין לאחד סיטון אחד סיטון, ולא דן ומלמל אלא בדברי ארבעה או חמישה פסקים היסודיים ביותר, וזו גדולתו העצומה.

וכרבים האלה שמקמי מפני של הנדיק והחסיד המקובל הוא – ליקי חכם אפריים הכהן ועל שהיה מתלמידיי של הרב, והוא היה חכם עם הרב הרבה, יהיה נוכח אצל הרב ובמחיצתו כשעה שהוא היה כותב תשובות לשאלות שהגישו אליו. סגנון היה הראה לי קוד גדול ונבוה ואמר לי שהיה לרב בביתו ספרים בספריה שעדלה כמול מהקוד הזה, והיו מגיעים המדפיסים עמשי הספרים עד התקרה, והיה צריך הרב לעלות על סולם בשביל להודיע ספרים לעצמו. והוא אמר לי שעניי הוא ולא זה כיצור על כל שאלה שהיה חרם נשאל היה מודיע שימות רביה של ספרי שירת וסעיין ככולם וסעיין התמצאות ראה כיצור הרב היה בקי בכלם בקיאות נפלאה, וכשהיה סגיע לכלל החלטה והיה נוגע לברוב את התשובה, לא היה שנוט לתשובות אלא ארבעה או חמישה פסקים, והיה איש לי טאילו היה רוצה היה מבני את כל התשובות כולם, אלא שאו היה החומר כמים שאין להם סוף ולא כל קורא היה יכול לעלות למקטקים, ועל כן לא כתב אלא את ההדורים היסודיים ביותר. וזהו הגדלות העצומה של הרב, כי הצטנע והמשיח הן תכונה של גדלות ולשיטה מלאה בתמיד כולל.

רחוב הרב דיינס 17 קריית משה ירושלים ת.ד. 16047 מיקוד: 91340 טל. 02-6514369 פקס 02-6536842
17 Harav Rihneq St., Kiryat Moshe P.O.B. 16047 Jerusalem 91340 Tel: 02- 651 4399 Fax: 02- 6536842

DARCHEI HORA'AH LERABBANIM

Beit Midrash for the Ordination of Rabbanim and Deyanim for Communities in Israel and Abroad
President and Founder Harishon LeTzion Hagaon Harav Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l

13 Sivan 5770

Words of Blessing

These words of blessing are being written in honor of HaHacham Yehuda Azoulay shelit"u, who specializes in writing stories of tzaddikim for the English-speaking public. He has already published two books and has now decided to write a book on the famous sage and Torah authority, Rabbi Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai. The Ben Ish Hai had the special merit that until today his Torah and halachot are studied in batei midrash all over the world. Since he was brilliant in many different aspects of Torah, everyone can find something suitable for themselves among his works.

Our Sages say that it is greater to serve Torah scholars than to learn Torah itself. This is because by serving a talmid hacham we can learn practical halachah. Stories of tzaddikim are a big part of what we call "serving" scholars. To bring out some of the greatness of the Ben Ish Hai and understand his methods, I will quote from my father's (may he merit a speedy recovery) introduction to the work Maayan Zeh:

In our generation, we have merited to bask in the glow of the holy vessel Rabbi Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai. He was proficient in all areas of Torah, including midrashim, aggadot, and allegories. He was also well-versed in kabbalah, including the Torah of the Ari Hakadosh and the Rashash. His heart was like the heart of the Ari, knowledgeable in the works of all the Rishonim and Aharonim from the Talmud until the last of the Aharonim. He was fully versed in their works and the works of responsa. No secret in the Torah was hidden from him, and it is evident from his writings that he mastered all facets of the Torah. (See Kitzur Shulhan Aruch by the great gaon Rabbi Baruch Toledano ztzvk"l)

Furthermore, it is important to understand that some believe that the Rabbi presented and concentrated all his expertise in his responsa in Rav Pealim and similar sefarim, but this is a grievous error. Notwithstanding the wide range of his responsa, they are only a summary of the topic after he sifted and filtered it many times. In the end product he only deals with the four or five most fundamental authorities. This is the essence of his greatness.

Similar things were said by his student, the great gaon and kabbalist Rabbi Ephraim Cohen. He spent many hours sitting with the Ben Ish Hai and was present when he responded to the many halachic inquiries which came to him. He once showed me a very large wall and stated that the Hacham had a library of books on a wall double that size. Its shelves reached the ceiling, so he needed a ladder to reach the books at the top. In addition, Hacham Cohen said he saw with his own eyes how the Ben Ish Hai dealt with each query that was sent to him. He would take down large piles of books and look through every one to answer a single question. When it came to writing his response, he would only quote from four or five sources. He could have easily quoted all the sources, but not everyone would be able to get a clear understanding with all that information provided. This was the essence of his brilliance – for conciseness and succinctness is a quality [that reflects] greatness and mastery of all the material.

Thousands of halachic works were written after the publication of the Shulhan Aruch before the Ben Ish Hai wrote his, but only the Ben Ish Hai merited having his works studied by virtually everyone. Hacham Tzadka HaZaken attributed this to the Ben Ish Hai's perihut [withdrawal from physical pleasures]. The Ben Ish Hai was the holiest of holies in a way that we cannot comprehend. The Divine Presence hovered before him and its light was visible on his face. When one reads his works, it becomes evident that he withdrew from the mundane world and lived in extreme holiness. A composition such as Ben Ish Hai is indeed rare. In it he meshes different layers of understanding; sod with peshat, kabbalah with halachah. Only someone with his genius and brilliance could author such a work.

Our Sages teach us that if one clings to Torah scholars, it is as if he clings to the Divine Presence. Therefore, one who learns the writings of the Ben Ish Hai is clinging to the tzaddik, and, by extension, to the Master of the world. A man who strives to follow in his ways will merit the Ben Ish Hai's intervention on his behalf in the Heavens, and at the time of his passing on to the Next World, will be greeted by none other than the great tzaddik himself.

In his books, especially Ben Ish Hai, Hacham Yosef Haim combined the halachic rulings of Hacham Yosef Caro, the Zohar and the kabbalists, chief among them the Ari Hakadosh. In all areas, he seamlessly meshed the hidden and revealed Torah. With his Divine inspiration, Rabbi Yosef Haim decided on weighty halachic matters. In some instances, he felt that the ruling of the Arizal and other kabbalists should be followed, and in other cases, their ruling was to be followed only by a select few, people who have achieved a high level of spirituality. G-d crowned his efforts with success, and his rulings were accepted by Jews everywhere. The leaders of the previous generation went so far as to say that the Ben Ish Hai should be considered the last authority to establish halachah, and all are to follow his rulings.

It should be noted that this system of following the rulings of the Zohar was not the innovation of the Ben Ish Hai. In many of his writings, Rabbi Yosef Caro, who was known as the greatest halachic authority, included the rulings of the Zohar. His method was such: in any situation where the Gemara does not specifically rule differently, then the ruling of the Zohar is to be followed even when it is contrary to other authorities. The Rema also rules according to the Zohar and kabbalists regarding certain matters. The vast majority of the Sephardic authorities who followed his lead adopted this approach of the Bet Yosef. (See the Eretz Haim, who brought the guidelines of halachic decision-making that are followed in Eretz Yisrael, and he writes in rule 13 in the name of the Hid"u z"l and many authorities, that this rule which the Bet Yosef adopted applies even to the rulings of the Arizal, and all Sephardic communities in all places follow these practices of the Arizal. See also Birke Yosef by the Hid"u z"l, 7:3, where he writes that we apply the rule of "safek berchot lehakel" even against the rulings of Maran, and in siman 46 he writes that we do not apply "safek berachot lehakel" against the rulings of the Arizal, not even based on the words of Maran. He writes there that had Maran seen the words of the Arizal, he would have rescinded his ruling.)

May it be the will of Hashem that no mistake occurs through you, and may we merit the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash and tehiyat hametim. And may we merit seeing all the tzaddikim together with Moshe and Aharon, speedily in our days, amen.

Harav Yosef Eliyahu
Rosh Bet Midrash "Darchei Hora'ah LeRabbanim"

Beit Midrash Darchei Hora'ah LeRabbanim
Maran HaRishon LeTzion Harav Hagaon Mordechai Eliyahu



בשמיים יחס חן אלהים אמן ישר, און אמונים, אולם במן ארצה

אמרת אבות

אם אמת ארבע קלמה ואלו כל "אין און מ" , אלו אמת
אמת און אמת און, ומה און כל און אמת, אמת און אמת אמת
אמת אמת, אמת אמת אמת, אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת

אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת

אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת

אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת
אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת אמת



Yeshivat Bnei-Tzion
Founded by the Holy Kabbalist Rabbi Salman Mutzafi zt"l

Erev Hag HaShavuot Mattan Torah, 5 Sivan, 5770

Letter of Approbation

I have seen the biography of the Ben Ish Hai, who left this world over 100 years ago. He was the leader of all Diaspora, a light for Jews everywhere both in the revealed and hidden Torah. He was a light in the darkness of exile, who ascended to towering spiritual heights, and was a shield and shelter for the sheep he shepherded. He spread Torah to tens of thousands through his books, his classes, and his lectures, word by word; a glorious genius who brought honor to Hashem, Rabbi Yosef Haim zt"l, may his merit protect us.

Although I do not speak or read English, from what I've been shown of the book and from looking over some of the main paragraphs and table of contents, I found that it is written and arranged in a sound, tasteful, and knowledgeable way, and in a professional, pleasing, and comely manner, and I have no doubt that it will be joyfully and warmly welcomed by the readership.

I extend a special blessing from the bottom of my heart to our dear friend, the author, Rabbi Yehuda Azoulay shelit"a, who exerted great efforts to compile and record the life and work of one of the greatest sages in Israel of all generations. He has set for himself a goal to teach future generations the ways and deeds of past leaders of our nation, so that they may learn from them wisdom, teaching, and knowledge.

May it be the will of Hashem that the merit of the tzaddik protect him and those who assisted, and all readers of this book.

With much blessing,
Ben-Tzion Mutzafi

בט"ד

Rabbi Reuven Elbaz

Chief Rabbi of "Beit Israel" district
1 Ezra Street,
Jerusalem 91054, Israel
Tel 02-5000455 Fax 02-5000502

ראובן אלבז

רב ומייצג שכונת בית ישראל וחסידיה
וראש ישיבת "אור החיים"
רח' עזרא 1, ירושלים 91054
טל 02-5000455 פקס 02-5000502

כה איתא

כבוד מלך הדין
אדם האמין הדין אנוק דאיתא על גבוי
הו"ו יהיבא דשמיא סג"ו
הוינא דא אדאס יקו איהבא סקו א ח"י
גאריה גידיה מעלמיה קקא אה בל אה
בטו איהבא סג"ו איהבא איהבא איהבא
אל איהבא איהבא איהבא איהבא
איהבא איהבא איהבא איהבא
איהבא איהבא איהבא איהבא

הדין
הדין
הדין

Rabbi Reuven Elbaz

Chief Rabbi of "Beit Israel" district
1 Ezra Street,
Jerusalem 91054, Israel
Tel 02-5000-455 Fax 02-5000502

28 Iyar, 5770

Approbation and Blessing

In honor of a young man who toils in the tent of Torah,
Rabbi Yehuda Azoulay, shelit"a.

He has shown me his glorious handiwork, his book on
the life and holy ways of the Sephardic leaders of previous
generations. He has done this in a remarkable book written
in the English language, in order that future generations will
know the ways of their fathers. May Hashem find favor in his
efforts, and grant him success and the privilege of spreading
and shining more Torah and pure fear of Heaven. "Greater is
the one who causes others to perform mitzvot..."

With much blessing,
Reuven Elbaz

הרב אוריאל יצחק הראל
ב"ר לובן היעריא סוסה דקרא
דמוסכול "אור תקע" קוליק ירושלים תשס"ז
צ"ט סדן הרה"ק "אביר יעקב" אבנחתזרא

זה הסת כ"ה אלול ה'תשס"ז

הגת ב"ח

כן נא אלקינו המהרש"א זצ"ל (נפטר ז' אלול ה'תש"א)
אמרו ב"ח רמב"ם זצ"ל זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ב"ח רמב"ם זצ"ל זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
אין זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל
ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל ז"ה זכור לטוב וקיים אצל

Harav Uriel Yitzhak Harel
Grandson of Maran Admor Yisrael Abuchatzera zt"l
Rosh Kollel 'Abir Yaakov' Jerusalem
Descendant of Maran Hagaon Hakadosh 'Abir Yaakov' Abuchatzera

Letter of Approbation

We have met the exceptional young scholar Rabbi Yehuda Azoulay, a precious gem in Toronto, who has taken upon himself to publicize the life stories and practices of the greatest Sephardic leaders. He is now compiling a volume about the life and work of the Light of our Exile, the leader of Israel for generations, Rabbi Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai.

I congratulate him on this great endeavor, for our rabbis, most notably the Hazon Ish, have taught us the importance of teaching about the life stories of our Sages. Learning about their deeds and how they conducted themselves serves as a great mussar to live at the peak of our ambition, to ask ourselves, "When will my actions reach the level of that of my ancestors?"

Additionally, we have a tradition from my holy grandfather, the renowned Baba Sali, regarding the greatness of those who conduct themselves according to the customs of the Ben Ish Hai (when the accepted practice does not differ with his ruling).

I extend my blessing to our dear friend, the author, that the merit of the tzaddikim should protect him in all his endeavors. Through his work, may he bring joy to our Father in Heaven, and may he be blessed with only good things in every way.

With blessing,
Uriel Yitzchak Harel
Grandson of Maran Admor Yisrael Abuchatzera zt"l

Acknowledgments

הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו

“Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good;
His kindness endures forever”

(Tehillim 136:1)

First and foremost, I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Who has guided me along the path of truth and the righteous path of Torah. My heart overflows with appreciation to Hashem for giving me the privilege of writing this series of books, starting with the first volume of A Legacy of Leaders published in April 2008. The blessings He has bestowed upon my family and me are immeasurable. I pray that He continue to shower His grace on me, my family, and all the individuals who are affiliated with the Sephardic Legacy Series, along with Klal Yisrael, אמן.

I am indebted to all the prominent rabbis who gave me the honor of endorsing this book: Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shelomo Amar shlit”a; former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron shlit”a; Hacham Shalom Cohen shlit”a, rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Porat Yosef; Hacham

Ben-Tzion Mutzafi shlit"á; Hacham Reuven Elbaz shlit"á; Hamekubal Rabbi Uriel Yitzhak Harael shlit"á; and Hacham Yosef Eliyahu shlit"á, who wrote a letter of approbation in the name of his father, the late Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l.

There are no words to express my feelings of appreciation toward a special individual who spent countless hours on the phone with me and offered his invaluable assistance during the research for this book. Hashgahah (Divine Providence) brought me to Hagaon Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu's Kollel (Darchei Hora'ah L'Rabbanim), and his son, Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu, introduced me to Hacham David, a great-great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai. He provided precious historical information that would otherwise remain unknown to the public, and graced the readership with the personal perspective of a member of this illustrious family.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Naomi Elbinger and Mrs. Rafaella Levine, who translated material for this book. Thank you so much for all your devoted and outstanding work.

My sincerest thanks go to the editor of this volume, David Silverberg, who painstakingly reviewed every minor detail in every chapter, page, and paragraph of the book, and also assisted with research and source material. Thank you!

I am grateful as well to Mr. Sruly Pearl for the magnificent interior and exterior design of this volume. Your unique touch and effects have profoundly enhanced this project, and I am very grateful to you for devoting so much of your time and talents to this book.

I would like to thank Israel Book Shop Publications who are wonderful publishers and distributors and always a sheer delight to work with. Thank you Rabbi Moshe Kaufman, Mrs. Liron Delmar, and your fantastic team for doing such a magnificent job at every single step of the way, and for making this undertaking as pleasant and efficient as possible.

I am grateful to nerartgallery.com, from where the magnificent image of the Ben Ish Hai that appears on the cover of this volume was taken, with their kind permission.

Special thanks are owed to Mrs. Simona Benyamini of the Bernard H. and Miriam Oster Visual Documentation Center of Beit Hatfutsot Photo Archive collection, who allowed me to purchase many photos for this book from the Center's extensive photo archive.

I wish to thank and bless Mr. Albert Bendahan who generously sponsored this book. I simply do not have the words to properly express my gratitude to you for allowing me to bring this dream to reality. May Hashem reward you abundantly for your kindness, and may the merit of Hacham Yosef Haim bring you and your family much health, happiness, and success in all your endeavors.

I am indebted to my dear friend Rabbi Avishai Bar-Osher, author of Hare'ah Hatov, a Hebrew biography of the Ben Ish Hai which was published on the occasion of the 100th year of the Ben Ish Hai's passing. With his kind permission, I incorporated a substantial amount of material from his work in this volume, especially in the sections listing the Ben Ish Hai's publications. May Hashem bless and reward Rabbi Bar-Osher for his hard work and efforts on behalf of Am Yisrael, particularly his weekly live broadcasted shiurim that enable thousands of listeners to hear the inspirational words of Hacham Ben-Tzion Mutzafi. Countless Jews have had their faith and devotion strengthened as a result of your broadcasts and your books. On behalf of all of them and Klal Yisrael, thank you!

Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785-1826, author of Pele Yo'etz) writes:

No other form of donation is considered as great a mitzvah, because any other mitzvah is for a specific time, and once it is done, it is over. But when one gives for the purpose of publishing a holy book, his righteous act lasts for generations, because he gives so many people the opportunity to study the Torah that is in the

published work. One who does so acquires for himself a good name, words of Torah, and a portion in the World to Come as well as in this world.

It is with these words in mind that I humbly express my feelings of gratitude, affection, and admiration for the wonderful people who help and support the Sephardic Legacy Series — Institute for Preserving Sephardic Heritage. Through their selfless generosity, and with the Almighty's boundless grace and kindness, the institute has published thousands of books in English, French, and Hebrew. It is only with the loving support and assistance of each and every one of you that the institute has been able to achieve this remarkable level of success in preserving and perpetuating the glorious heritage of Sephardic Jewry. May Hashem bless each of you with much joy, success, and the ongoing ability and desire to make great contributions to Am Yisrael, אמן.

So much of who I am today is due to my wonderful parents, Joe and Esther Azoulay, and my siblings, Michael, Jamie, and Sarah. I thank you for all you have given me throughout my life. May Hashem bless all of you with good health and long years of contentment and nahat from your children and grandchildren.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Rena, who is my partner in everything that I do and everything that I am. I thank her especially for allowing me to spend countless hours on this avodat hakodesh. May Hashem grant her continued success with her avodat hakodesh, as well, and the joy of seeing the fruits of her efforts in this world. May He bless us both with much nahat from our children, Esther Mazal and Yael.

This book is the product of my extensive research into the life of the legendary sage Hacham Yosef Haim zt"l, incorporating historical documentation, obituaries, rare photos, inspirational stories, family history, and an analysis of all the books he authored. Capturing the life of any remarkable, complex, multifaceted figure is a challenge, and the difficulty is magnified manifold when dealing with a personality

from a country such as Iraq, which produced very little recorded documentation of its history and historical figures. Despite my efforts to “dig” and unearth information about this illustrious sage, I acknowledge the likelihood that there is important information about the Ben Ish Hai that was missed, or that is simply inaccessible. Nevertheless, I hope and pray that I have succeeded in my mission to present an accurate portrait of one of the greatest Torah figures of the modern era.

It is my sincere tefillah to Hashem that this book on the life of Hacham Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, will serve as a great source of inspiration for Klal Yisrael, and motivate us all to draw closer to our Father in heaven.

Yehuda Azoulay
15 Tammuz 5771

(Marking the passing of Rabbi Haim ben Atar —
Ohr HaHaim Hakadosh)

In honor of
Yehuda Azoulay
Hashem should continue to give you
the strength to do all your great work.

Dr. David Yevick

In honor of
Hacham Yosef Haim
– **the Ben Ish Hai**
Rafi Aboud

לעילוי נשמת מרדכי בן רחל
לשפחה בן איבגי

In honor of
Rabbi Meir & Mrs. Gittie Egert
Dovid & Shira Egert

In honor of
Yehuda Azoulay
Hashem should give you the strength
to continue doing your great work.
Lazer & Michal Klein and Family

The Jewish community of Bavel (Iraq) was one of the largest, most prominent and most influential Diaspora communities in Jewish history. The well-documented history of this extraordinary community begins at the time of the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BCE, and continued until the middle part of the 20th century. For two and a half millennia, Babylonian Jewry played a prominent and seminal role in shaping Jewish life throughout the tumultuous centuries of exile.

The history of the Jews of Iraq — who call themselves “Benei Naharayim” (“The People of the Two Rivers,” referring to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers) — can be divided into several distinct periods:

1. Late Biblical history (the Babylonian exile)
2. Greek period (300’s BCE-160 BCE)
3. Parthian period (c.129 BCE-224 CE)
4. Sassanid period (225-634)

5. Islamic Arab period (634-1258)
6. Mongol period (1258-1534)
7. Ottoman period (1534-1918)
8. Modern Iraq (1918-present)

Many empires and conquerors in Iraq and the surrounding areas arose and eventually fell, but the Babylonian Jewish community remained a steady, constant fixture despite the many challenges and turbulent periods that the region endured.

Jews first came to Babylonia during the 6th century BCE, when the Babylonian Emperor Nevuchadnetzar exiled the Jews of the Judean Kingdom to his country in three waves, culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. At this point, Babylonia became the center of Jewish life and remained so for over a millennium. Even after significant numbers of Jews returned to Eretz Yisrael under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe seventy years later, the majority of the exiled Jews remained behind in Babylonia. Later in history, the collapse of the Bar Kochba revolt against the Roman Empire resulted in an influx of Jewish refugees in Babylonia.

The Babylonian Jewish community developed a strong infrastructure of Jewish life, the crown jewels of which were the prominent yeshivot in Sura and Nehardea,¹ academies established by the legendary Sages, Rav and Shemuel. It was here, in these institutions, where the Babylonian Talmud was developed and then compiled. The project of compiling the Talmud was launched by Rav Ashi and Ravina, two distinguished leaders of the Babylonian Jewish community, around the year 550. The editorial work was done by the Savoraim (also known as “Rabbanan Savoraei” — post-Talmudic rabbis), and this process continued for the next 250 years; much of the text did not reach its final form until around the year 700. During

1. The yeshivah of Nehardea was later moved to the city of Pumbedita, or modern-day Fallujah.

the subsequent five centuries, the wealth of material in the Talmud was passionately preserved, studied, and developed in the Babylonian academies. As a result of their influence, this monumental text was recognized and accepted by the entire Jewish world, and it has served as the essential primary halachic text ever since.

Until the rise of the Islamic Caliphate, the Jews of Babylonia enjoyed relative peace and tranquility, allowing the community to thrive and prosper, and serve as the world center of Torah. They were also granted a good deal of political autonomy, and lived under the rule of a Jewish Exilarch (Resh Galuta), whose authority was recognized by the Persian government. From the 9th-11th centuries, the Exilarch was headquartered in the Jewish community in Baghdad, which was founded in the middle of the 8th century. Some forty leaders held the title of Resh Galuta over the course of Babylonian Jewish history, and they all descended from the royal dynasty of King David.

The glory of Babylonian Jewry began to decline with the Mongol invasion in the 13th century and the Islamic discrimination against Jews in the Middle Ages, which included periods of forced conversions at the threat of death. The turmoil caused the numbers in the great Babylonian academies to dwindle, and a migration of Torah scholars to other parts of the world. The center of Jewish life essentially shifted away from Babylonia, and Bavel lost its stature of prominence.

Relative peace returned to the Jews of Iraq in the 16th century when the region came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and conditions remained generally stable until the modern era. In 1932 Iraq became an independent state, whereupon anti-Semitism began to rise. Despite the important role played by the country’s Jews in the early days of the newly-founded state, they were subjected to growing animosity among the general population, reaching its peak in the “Farhoud” attacks in 1941, which resembled the German Kristallnacht. Over the course of the next decade, Iraqi Jews were forced to leave their homeland empty-handed, after 2,500 years of residence in Babylonia. The Iraqi Jewish community numbered

approximately 120,000 in 1948, and nearly the entire population fled as a result of the persecution that followed the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, mostly to the nascent State of Israel. Today, fewer than six Jews remain in Iraq. Hacham Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, is a scion of an illustrious rabbinic family that is credited with restoring the lost glory of Iraqi Jewry. The dynasty began with his grandfather, the renowned Hacham Moshe Haim, who was born in 1752 and served as the rabbi of Baghdad. Under the capable leadership of Hacham Moshe, his students, and his successors, Torah study began to flourish once again in Iraq. The community again produced towering Torah personalities who devoted themselves tirelessly to teaching their communities and injecting new life and spirit into religious observance among Iraqi Jewry. And while there were many outstanding Torah personalities during this period, nobody was as successful in the effort to revitalize Torah in Bavel as Hacham Yosef Haim.

Hacham Yosef Haim's teachers described the young prodigy with a phrase borrowed from the Talmud: ארי עלה מבבל — "A lion ascended from Bavel (Iraq),"² comparing the power of his mind to the strength of a lion. Already as a young man, he established himself as a spectacular and unique link in the glorious chain of rabbinic leadership that began with his illustrious grandfather.³ His stature as a link in this chain was widely recognized, and hachamim who mentioned the Ben Ish Hai in their books often made a point of mentioning his father and grandfather, as well. For example, Hacham Yehuda Fetaya, in the introduction to his work *Bet Lehem Yehuda*, refers to the Ben Ish Hai as "Yosef Haim ben Eliyahu ben Moshe ben Haim."

2. Bava Kamma 117a.

3. Many Jews in Baghdad had last names, or last names that are typical first names, such as "Haim," the last name carried by the Ben Ish Hai and his forebears. Others, however, did not carry last names. For reasons that are unknown, Hacham Yosef Haim's son and grandson did not carry the last name "Haim." It is possible that they simply deemed it unnecessary, as last names in Baghdad weren't essential.

It is difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to properly assess Hacham Yosef Haim's impact upon Iraqi Jewry and the Torah world generally. He was an extraordinary gaon (genius) in all areas of Torah, writing dozens of sefarim that cover topics spanning the spectrum of Talmudic and halachic literature. His halachic rulings were unequivocally accepted by many segments of Sephardic Jewry. His stature as a scholar of kabbalah was acknowledged throughout the Jewish world, and his mastery of the Zohar and other kabbalistic works was almost without parallel. Hacham Yosef Haim also composed works on the liturgy, sermonics, stories, and even riddles and poems. The dazzling breadth of his knowledge, his colorful and lucid writing style, his creativity, and the vast range of topics he covered combined to make his books some of the most precious gifts ever given to Torah Jewry. They rapidly spread and were enthusiastically received throughout the Jewish world, and they are studied and analyzed in all circles of Torah scholarship even today.

Hacham Yosef Haim excelled in every aspect of Torah leadership — as a scholar, author, communal leader, personal spiritual guide, kabbalist, and perhaps most of all, darshan. His enthralling lectures drew literally thousands of eager listeners, and they left a profound impact on the soul of each and every person in the audience. Hacham Yosef Haim inherited this oratorical skill from his father, Hacham Eliyahu, and his grandfather, Hacham Moshe Haim, who were both prominent and inspiring leaders. Every Shabbat he delivered a three-hour derashah in the ancient Tsallat L'echbri Synagogue in Baghdad, which had thousands of seats and was filled to capacity when Hacham Yosef Haim spoke. The diverse audience, which flowed into the surrounding yard, consisted of Torah scholars, laborers, women, and children. Dressed in white clothing and wrapped in his tallit, he wore an angelic appearance that combined with his brilliance and powerful voice to capture the hearts of his listeners, most of whom were much older than him. Hacham Baruch Ben-Haim's mother used to attend these derashot in Baghdad, and she said that Hacham Yosef

Haim's voice resonated throughout the building as though he used a microphone, and everyone heard his pure, holy voice with perfect clarity.

The content of these lectures was based on the parashah, and Hacham Yosef Haim combined agaddah and basic halachot that he felt the people must know. This material formed the basis of his monumental work Ben Ish Hai. The work quickly became the standard reference book for Torah law among Sephardim worldwide. It appealed to a broad readership, scholars and commoners alike. Due to its widespread popularity, Hacham Yosef Haim came to be called by the name of his book — the “Ben Ish Hai.”⁴

Hacham Yosef Haim's approach to Torah was characterized by a unique focus on the practice of Torah. He saw Torah as a way of life for all people, and not as simply a field of study for the intellectual elite. In his study and his rulings, he always took into account the practical realities of normal life and would not rule stringently unnecessarily, as he felt other rabbis did.

Despite his unparalleled achievements and talents, Hacham Yosef Haim never accepted a formal rabbinic position, except for the post of the official darshan in Baghdad, which he held for fifty years. And yet, despite not holding a formal rabbinical post, he was nevertheless recognized as the leading rabbi of his time, as Rabbi Yaakov Hillel notes in his work Tehillot Yosef:

He wasn't actually a rabbi or a Hacham Bashi, nor was he even a resh mesivta; he served as a simple darshan for thousands. And yet in the last two hundred years, since the time of Maran HaHida — Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulay (1724-1806), no other Sephardic gadol has gained such renown as he. His many sefarim — about

4. During his lifetime, he was known by his actual name, Hacham Yosef Haim. It was only after his passing that he became known as “the Ben Ish Hai.”

sixty in all — represent the fundamentals of halachah, mussar, and kabbalah in the Sephardic community. His sefer, Ben Ish Hai, is the Sephardic equivalent of Ashkenazic classics such as the Kitzur Shulhan Aruch, Haye Adam, and Mishnah Berurah.

The Ben Ish Hai's refusal to accept a formal leadership position was characteristic of his generally private, humble nature. Although he delivered public lectures and warmly received anyone who visited him or sought his guidance, he insisted on keeping his life and practices very private. People would often ask his disciple, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, for more information about the hacham, but the Ben Ish Hai instructed him not to answer these inquiries. He did not want to be “broadcast” in the public arena to any degree.

Halachic questions were sent to him from all over the world — Singapore, Bombay, Iran, Kurdistan, Jerusalem, Vilna, Tzfat, and numerous countries and cities worldwide. Questions on every imaginable halachic matter reached his table, and Hacham Yosef Haim responded with comprehensive essays, drawing upon an enormous array of sources from across the spectrum of Torah literature. Whether it was monetary law, kashrut, family life, or even kabbalah, Hacham Yosef Haim, with his phenomenal breadth of knowledge, gave a thorough, well-written response to each and every question.

In 5674 (1914) Hacham Tzadkah Moshe Hutzin moved to Jerusalem with Hacham Yehezkel Ezra Rahamim and Hacham Yaakov Haim Sofer (author of Kaf HaHaim), and upon arriving in the Holy City, they went to visit and seek a blessing from Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar zt”l (the “Yisa Berachah,” 1917-1906).

“Why have you come to me?” he asked. They explained that they had come to behold the great rabbi's holy countenance and receive his blessing.

Hacham Yaakov Shaul was baffled. "You had Rabbi Yosef Haim in Bavel," he said, "and you come to me? There is truly no one like him in the whole world!"⁵

The famous kabbalist Hacham Yehuda Fetaya said about the Ben Ish Hai, "The neshamah of Hacham Yosef Haim was one that was worthy of coming down to this world in generations that preceded this one, but our generation was granted special Heavenly mercy and his neshamah was sent down to the world in our time so that the generation could quench its spiritual thirst from the deep wellspring of his pure Torah."

Hacham Yehezkel Moshe Halevi, head of the rabbinic court of Baghdad, once said, "If Hacham Yosef Haim will tell me that right is left and left is right, I would not question him for a second and I will accept his words as if they were given to Moshe Rabbenu on Har Sinai."

Hacham Yosef Haim's legacy of greatness continues to inspire the entire Jewish world. It lives in the hearts and minds of the thousands of Jews who study and live by his seminal work, Ben Ish Hai, and his other legendary sefarim.

Manyschools, synagogues, and institutions, particularly in Israel, have been built in his name. Countless



Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya

distinguished rabbinic families in Eretz Yisrael follow in his footsteps, including the esteemed Batsri family, who are descendants of the Ben Ish Hai. Many of his disciples became renowned Torah scholars who continued to disseminate his teachings. Today, a century after his passing, his customs, laws, and books are still steadfastly study by Sephardic Jewry and the majority of Torah Jewry.

Hacham Yosef Haim's sphere of influence spreads far beyond the borders of Iraq, and far beyond the pages of this book. The biography presented here is only a slight glimpse into the life of this righteous and revered leader.

May the memory and merit of Hacham Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, be a blessing to all, אמן.

Yehuda Azoulay

5. Several books record this story in the name of Hacham Efraim Hakohen, who heard of this incident from Hacham Tzadka Moshe Hutzin zt"l. See Hareah Hatov p. 108.

A remarkable essay on the Ben Ish Hai
from the master of Torah and
pillar of our generation,
Hacham Ovadia Yosef shelit"א



Excerpted from Kol Sinai

בס"ד

לע"נ

חנניה בן שמחה זריהן ז"ל
מסודי בת רחל ז"ל

לזכות

מרדכי בן מרים אברג'ל שיחי
ורעייתו שמחה בת חי' מסודי שתחי'

וילדיהם

נעמי חי' מסודי בת שמחה אברג'ל שתחי'
רפאל מאיר בן שמחה אברג'ל שיחי'
רינה בת שמחה אברג'ל שתחי'
ארי-ה חנני-ה דוד אברג'ל שיחי'
חנה לאה בת שמחה אברג'ל שתחי'
שרה רבקה בת שמחה אברג'ל שתחי'

ולזכות

הרה"ג יוסף בן רינה אברג'ל שיחי'
ורעייתו הרבנית מרים בת מסעודה אברג'ל שתחי'

The History Of The Ben Ish Hai

This remarkable essay was written by our great teacher, Hacham Ovadia Yosef shelit"a.¹

I thought it appropriate to mention here that which I already wrote in the monthly publication Kol Sinai, with some additional comments, in praise of the great teacher of halachah, Rabbi Yosef Haim zt"l, about his life and his accomplishments, in order to proclaim our great and boundless appreciation for his exalted level of holiness. May his merit, and the merit of his Torah and holiness, provide us with great protection, and may we have the ability to study the Talmud to reach correct halachic conclusions.

Our great rabbi, the great sage, who was renowned across the globe, our master Hacham Yosef Haim zt"l, leader of the Babylonian exile, who wrote Rav Pe'alim, the book Ben Ish Hai, and many other precious books, was conceived and born in holiness in the year 5593 in the Jewish city of Baghdad, in Bavel — which was a celebrated city already in Talmudic times, famous as a city of hachamim and

1. Kol Sinai vol. 1, issue 10 (Elul 5722/1962).

scribes.² During the era of the Geonim, as well, Bavel played a central role in the life of our nation and had a great influence upon the entire Diaspora like a great tower. The eyes of all the Jewish people around the world looked to our hachamim in Bavel — as a place that all mouths turned to for answers. All waited with great anticipation for every utterance that came forth from the holy mouths of the Geonim. The entire earth was illuminated by their glory. Specifically, the one who reached the greatest heights was Rav Hai Gaon, the last of the Geonim chronologically, but the first in stature (he passed away on the seventh day of Pesah, 4798, at the age of ninety-nine). He was a man who spread his Torah throughout the world, and whose illustrious disciples returned to their homelands and were a head taller than the rest of the nation in greatness, and they gathered people to teach them Torah, spreading the light of his Torah to all ends of the earth.

Still in the generation of the Rambam, there lived the gaon Rabbi Shmuel ben Eli zt"l, the rosh yeshivah of the great yeshivah in Bavel, whom the Rambam himself described in glowing terms: "This gaon — his name is renowned among us, and he has achieved high stature in the wisdom of the Talmud. He is, without a doubt, 'an elder who sits in the yeshivah.'"³

Thereafter, however, there was a long period in which Bavel was no longer the center of the Diaspora. Their yeshivot shrank in numbers, and the great Torah scholars and their great yeshivot moved to Germany, France, and other eastern countries. But during the last several generations, the glory of the past was restored and we merited having many great Torah scholars, including Rabbi Moshe Haim zt"l (our rabbi's grandfather) and his student — the righteous, humble

2. See Rashi's commentary to Berachot 54b: "Rav Hanna Bagdata — the name of his city is Baghdad, which was an important city in Bavel." See also Rabbi Yosef Haim's zt"l Mar'ot Yehezkel which appears at the end of the book Od Yosef Hai.

3. Teshuvot HaRambam (Jerusalem, 5694), p. 69.

scholar, leader of the shepherds, Rabbi Abdallah Somech zt"l (who passed away in Bavel on 18 Elul, 5649). They returned Bavel to its previous glory through their brilliant efforts in teaching the masses with all their strength and energy, turning it into a house of Torah.

All the great Torah scholars of Baghdad in those days studied Torah from Rabbi Abdallah Somech, and Torah spread from him to Bavel, Persia, Media, and India. They all drank from this life-giving well. The greatest of his students was our great teacher Rabbi Yosef Haim zt"l, who studied from him and then ascended to unfathomable heights through his intense diligence, understanding, holiness, and piety. The golden era of Bavel returned to its previous stature. We will attempt to delineate some general qualities of his spiritual essence.

Already at a young age, he would hide in the library of his great forefathers, where he diligently studied Torah, turning his nights into

days in order to quench his soul's thirst for G-d's word — that is, halachah. He became greater and greater. It is told that at the age of fourteen, he glanced at a letter with a halachic question from the great scholars of the day that was addressed to his father, Rabbi Eliyahu zt"l, who was a very prominent figure in Bavel. At once, he thought of all the different aspects of the question and immediately sat and composed a response, explaining in great detail the opinions of the great Rishonim and Aharonim, and sent it to Jerusalem. It is printed at the beginning of his book Rav



Hacham Yosef Haim, Baghdad, Iraq. Postcard 1900-1930. (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, courtesy of David Nakar, Israel)

Berachot (in the Ma'arechet Etrog section). Several days after his response was received by the sages in Jerusalem, the response of his father, Rabbi Eliyahu, arrived. They replied to him, "Your young and wise son already answered our question. Regarding him it is said, 'May your father and mother be happy, and may she who bore you rejoice!'" Their prayers bore fruit in abundance, and his holy parents were privileged to see him become a codifier of halachah in Yisroel.

On 7 Elul, 5619, his father, Rabbi Eliyahu, the righteous leader of Bavel, passed away. On the seventh day (13 Elul, 5619), which was declared a day of mourning, the entire community of Baghdad came out in masses to hear the eulogy delivered by his son, Rabbi Yosef Haim. His remarkable words amazed the audience, and they were enchanted by the wisdom of this young man. They realized that he was born for greatness. At that moment, they crowned him their leader, filling his father's shoes in Torah wisdom and in fear of sin. He was but twenty-six years old. And thus he courageously led, proudly waving the flag of Torah until his death on 13 Elul, 5669. He sat on the throne of leadership for fifty complete years and judged the people of Israel truthfully and with justice, writing his many famous compositions that were widely acclaimed in all ends of the earth.

Beginning in 5620, he would [regularly] address the masses, and G-d was the inspiration behind his sweet, clear, and magical words. On weekdays after he prayed vatikin [the morning prayer at dawn] and poured his thoughts before his Creator, while still adorned and crowned with tallit and tefillin, he would sit and learn En Yaakov before the congregation, offering lucid explanations. The insights he developed at the time were compiled into the five-volume work Ben Yehoyada.⁴ Afterward, he delivered a daily, half-hour class in halachah, on Shulhan Aruch, Orach Chaim, and Yoreh De'ah, adding content from the great codifiers among the Aharonim. Every Shabbat, he would

4. The insights presented in his later En Yaakov classes were compiled into the book Benayahu.

deliver a derashah on the weekly parashah for three hours straight, with beautiful, flowing words of Torah. The assembled crowd would not tire, and was rather energized by listening to him. They thirstily drank his words, and their adoration for him grew in leaps and bounds. At the end of the derashah, he would open his mouth with words of straightforward, practical halachot. Even the great rabbis, elders, and judges bowed their heads before him and sat before him with great respect and reverence. And who could see these people in attendance and not attend themselves? At the end of the derashah, they would all take leave of our great teacher by kissing his hand. They would walk out backward in reverence, facing the holy, as the Sages taught us.⁵

During the four well-known Shabbatot — Teshuvah, Zachor, Hagadol, and Kallah — all the other synagogues in the city would be locked during our great teacher's derashah, and the entire community would flock — by the thousands and tens of thousands — to the Great Synagogue to hear our teacher's derashah in halachah and aggadah, that would ensue for four hours. He appeared like a holy angel and his voice was heard as he entered the sanctum [of Torah] with great strength and vigor. Fortunate was the eye that saw this, and fortunate was the ear that heard these holy words!

His greatness in halachah and his ability to clarify the Talmudic discussions according to

5. Yoma 53a.



Baghdad, Iraq Synagogue. (Photo Credit: Stephanie Comfort – www.jewishpostcardcollection.com)

practical halachah was a unique talent, to the extent that many great scholars would not rule on the basis of their opinion without his consent. This included his teacher, Rabbi Abdallah Somech zt"l, who would seek his advice and scholarly view regarding any especially difficult topic.⁶ It is interesting to note what our great teacher wrote in Rav Pe'alim (vol. 2):⁷ "Whenever my teacher (Rabbi Abdallah Somech) zt"l was alive, he would send me his summary of books that he composed on Yoreh De'ah (Zivhe Tzedek on Yoreh De'ah), and in his great humility, he requested that I review them. I made several comments, but I was not able to send them to him. I recall that I commented to him orally on two topics — one of them was an error he made with regard to the worms in yogurt, and he immediately corrected it."⁸ It is therefore not surprising that all the elders of Bavel revered him and lowered themselves before him when they saw that even their esteemed Rabbi Abdallah Somech took his opinion into consideration, because his Torah spoke for itself, and they made him their leader. It is told that the righteous gaon Rabbi Yehezkel Halevi, head of the bet din in Bavel (famous for his piety and for being a man of truth, who fearlessly sought a just and truthful judgment), used to say, "If Rabbi Yosef Haim would tell me that right is left and left is right, I would not question them [his words], and I would treat them as halachah L'Moshe Mi'Sinai."

Despite all the respect that everyone unhesitatingly gave him, his heart did not grow proud and his eyes did not look haughtily; where his greatness was seen — his humility was likewise found. One who delves into his books will immediately see his inner self, and [one who looks] in his book Rav Berachot⁹ [sees] his humility in the introduction

6. See Zivhe Tzedek — Responsa vol. 2, Yoreh De'ah, siman 23 and Even Ha'ezer, siman 1, and elsewhere.

7. Yoreh De'ah, siman 7.

8. See Zivhe Tzedek 84:124.

9. Beginning of Ma'arechet Etrog.

to that book.¹⁰ He showed profound respect for the other hachamim with whom he came in contact. He accustomed himself to stand in honor of even younger hachamim. He would encourage them with his righteous right hand, and, like a father to a son, wanted to see their accomplishments as he advised them. We were given an eyewitness account by his faithful student, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan (one of the founders of Yeshivat Porat Yosef in the Old City of Jerusalem), in his introduction to his book Da'at U'tevunah (Jerusalem 5671):

When I was a young man — approximately twenty years in age — and I would go to his house, he would stand up before me, have me sit next to him, and speak to me as a father would to a son, even though I was a simple student whose job was to serve as the shaliah tzibbur and hazzan in his synagogue.

We similarly heard about our great teacher's humility and piety from the holy mouth of the kabbalist Rabbi Ephraim Hakohen zt"l. The Sages stated in a midrash (cited in Tosafot in Yevamot¹¹), "That which wisdom made a crown for its head — as it says, 'The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Heaven' — humility made as a heel to the sole of its shoe, as it says, 'The heel of humility is the fear of Heaven.'" It is similarly stated in Masechet Avodah Zarah,¹² "Humility is greater than all."

Our great teacher corresponded in writing on halachic issues with some of the great leaders of the generation, who addressed him with utmost respect, including the gaon and Rishon L'tzion Yisa Berachah zt"l in the responsa Ma'aseh Ish,¹³ whose response is also cited in Rav Pe'alim (vol. 4).¹⁴ Indeed, our teacher stood his ground on that topic,

10. See also the introduction to Rav Pe'alim — vol 1.

11. Tosafot, Yevamot 103b, s.v. hamsulayim.

12. ibid. 20b.

13. Even Ha'ezer, siman 4.

14. Even Ha'ezer, siman 2.

and expressed his disagreement with the Yisa Berachah's opinion in writing two and even three times. However, the Rishon L'tzion, who is presented in Rav Pe'alim as retracting his position, actually stood his ground on that topic, as he expressed in a different response that he wrote to our teacher, in Ma'aseh Ish.¹⁵ There he writes to our teacher that he is refraining from writing further on the topic because our teacher is the "master and patron and an expert on the nature of Bavel." He also wrote about this topic to Rabbi Yitzhak Abulafya, head of the bet din in Damascus, as cited in responsa Pene Yitzhak (vol. 5), and also mentioned in Rav Pe'alim.¹⁶

Many of the generation's leaders quoted from his books and discourses with immense admiration during his lifetime, and they exchanged ideas with him with respect and love, as is the way of the Torah: the gaon Rabbi Rahamim Yosef Franco, head of the bet din of Hevron, in Sha'ar Rahamim (vol. 2);¹⁷ the gaon Rabbi Aharon ben Shimon, in his sefer, U'mitsur Devash;¹⁸ the gaon Rabbi Aharon Azriel, head of the bet din in Jerusalem, in his sefer, Kapei Aharon (vol. 1, at the beginning of the book); the gaon Sedei Hemed;¹⁹ in the monthly collection compiled by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Kuenka zt"l; and others. The righteous gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Mani zt"l wrote a treatise of comments on the book Rav Berachot that our teacher wrote in his youth, and he mentions him several times in his book Zichronot Eliyahu.²⁰ Some of Rabbi Mani's comments were sent to our teacher.²¹

It is also told that the great, elderly gaon Maharsha Alefandri zt"l prided himself in front of the hachamim who visited his house that

15. Yoreh De'ah, siman 8.

16. Ibid.

17. Even Ha'ezer, siman 18.

18. Orach Haim, siman 9.

19. Ma'arechet Lamed 141:5, and Pe'at Hasadeh, Ma'arechet Alef, 155.

20. P. 122, paragraph 3; p. 125, paragraph 3; p. 137, paragraph 9; and elsewhere.

21. See his response in Rav Pe'alim, Orach Haim, siman 15.

he exchanged letters in halachah with the gaon Rabbi Yosef Haim of Bavel. Many of the later authorities of the generation discussed his opinions in their holy books, as is the way of Torah, including: the gaon Rabbi Ezra Tarab zt"l, head of the bet din of Damascus, in his work of responsa Sha'are Ezra, and in Milei D'Ezra and Ezra; the gaon Rabbi Tsvi Pesah Frank zt"l, head of the bet din in Jerusalem — may it be built and established — in Kerem Tzion and in Har Tzvi; the gaon Rabbi Rahamim Havita Hakohen, Chief Rabbi of Djerba, in responsa Simhat Kohen; the gaon Rabbi Ovadia Hedaya, in his responsa Yaskil Avdi; and others. Some of the great rabbis of Baghdad cite in their books from his derashot that they heard directly from him, including the gaon Rabbi Yehezkel Ezra Rahamim zt"l, in Atsei Haya'ar, and the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Sofer, in Kaf HaHaim.

His approach to the codification of halachah is based on the words of our master Rabbi Yosef Karo — whose rulings we have accepted — in Bet Yosef and Shulhan Aruch. He wrote in his book Rav Berachot²² that all those living in Israel, Baghdad, and Syria accepted upon themselves the rulings of our master Rabbi Yosef Karo, both his lenient and strict rulings. And he also wrote (p. 154) that even though Rabbi Zera Emet did not rule leniently on the basis of Rabbi Karo's reasoning because many later authorities brought strong proofs against him, and we believe that halachah follows the later opinion — this reasoning does not apply in this case, since we accepted Rabbi Karo's opinion, whether stringent or lenient.

In his great book Rav Pe'alim, he writes that even if one hundred Aharonim disagree with the ruling of Maran, we do not act leniently on the basis of their ruling, even in a situation of considerable loss, because we must follow his opinion based on that which we have accepted by tradition.

22. P. 122.

The gaon Rabbi Shelomo Laniado, rabbi of Aram Soba (Halab), similarly wrote, in responsa Bet Dino Shel Shelomo, that we follow Maran's rulings whether lenient or stringent, and do not bring proofs from those who disagree with him. He also wrote this in his book Kisei Shelomo. Similarly, the gaon and Rishon L'tzion Rabbi Yaakov Elgazi wrote in his responsa, "Here in the holy city of Jerusalem and the surrounding area is the place of Maran, and we follow his rulings, lenient or stringent." Rabbi Eliyahu Yisrael also wrote this, in the book Shene Eliyahu. See also responsa Haim Leyad by Rabbi Haim Falaji zt"l, who wrote, "It is known throughout the world that the hachamim of Spain and France accepted upon themselves and their children to accept the rulings Rabbi Yosef Karo whether lenient or stringent, even if all the Aharonim disagree with him."

Likewise, the gaon Rabbi Yosef Molcho, who authored Shulhan Gav'ah, writes in his work of responsa Ohel Yosef, "Since we accepted Maran's rulings even in the case of leniency, that is what we follow. Even if the Rema and a thousand comparable authorities disagree with him, we, the people of Spain, follow Maran, whether lenient or stringent."

The gaon Rabbi Yaakov Ben Tsur, in Mishpat U'tzedakah B'Yaakov, similarly wrote, "After Maran's works — Bet Yosef and Shulhan Aruch — spread throughout the world, we have only his rulings [to follow] — whatever he says, even lenient [rulings], even against one thousand other authorities."

In responsa Yashiv Moshe Shitrug, [the author] testifies in the name of the gaon Rabbi Yeshayahu Basis zt"l, head of the bet din in Tunisia, that we follow Maran's rulings on every issue, be it regarding the laws of kashrut or regarding monetary laws. And he added that we have a tradition that in every instance where the gaon Rabbi Yitzhak Teib, author of Arech Hashulhan, ruled stringently against Maran's position, in practice he would tell others to follow Maran's opinion; he ruled stringent only for himself.

However, Maran HaHida, in responsa Haim Sha'al, wrote that while it is true that we have accepted Maran's rulings, in the laws of *issur v'heter* we generally ensure to take into account the Rema's opinion. But the gaon and Rishon L'tzion Rabbi Yosef Hazan, author of *Hikrei Lev*, wrote in the later edition concerning this point: "In my opinion, there is no room to be stringent against Maran's ruling; only a Torah scholar may be stringent with himself within the walls of his house. But a judge and halachic authority is not permitted to rule — even stringently — against Maran. The Sages have already taught us²³ that in Rabbi Eliezer's locale they would cut trees to make coals to make a knife on Shabbat for the purpose of circumcision [even though the other Sages disputed Rabbi Eliezer's position and forbade this]."

The *Hikrei Lev* adds a lengthy discussion in which he disagrees with Rabbi Shelomo Moshe Suzin who ruled stringently against Maran in the laws of *issur v'heter*, stating that even in a prohibition relating to *erva* (forbidden relations) we accept Maran's lenient rulings. Nevertheless, when the majority of authorities — in wisdom and numbers — prohibit something, a halachic authority may instruct others to act stringently with regard to a severe prohibition involving *erva*, as opposed to other prohibitions, regarding which a halachic authority may not instruct one to act stringently at all against the opinions of the Rambam and Maran.

In responsa *Kerach Shel Romi*, [the author] cites the words of the *Hikrei Lev* and claims that Rabbi Moshe Suzin rescinded his opinion in deference to the *Hikrei Lev*. The gaon "Saba D'mishpatim," Maharit Elyakim zt"l, similarly ruled that the accepted practice is to rule according to Maran, whether lenient or stringent. And even Maran HaHida himself, in *Mahzik Berachah — Orah Haim*, wrote that although one who wants to be stringent in the laws of Pesah may do so, and this does not constitute arrogance, as it is well known that with regard to Pesah many people act stringently, nevertheless,

23. Masechet Shabbat 130a.

“wisdom is with the humble,” and he should be stringent only within the walls of his house and ensure not to divulge his private conduct to others. And if he serves as a halachic authority, he should rule only according to the actual halachah.

The gaon Rabbi Haim Fontrimuli, too, wrote in *Petah Dvir* that we accepted the rulings of Maran, as did the gaon the saintly Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, in *Zichronot Eliyahu*. And even though we find that the Ben Ish Hai in several instances rules stringently in the laws of *issur v’heter*, it seems that this was intended only as an added measure of stringency. As for the actual halachah, however, one should certainly rule for others only according to Maran’s opinion, even when he rules leniently, as we have written in our book *Halichot Olam*. The gaon Rabbi Yaakov Faraji wrote in responsa *Maharif* that in these locales we rule according to Maran — the master of these areas — and his words were established like halachah *L’Moshe Mi’Sinai* regarding which there is no disagreement. Anyone who strays from his words — even from a lenient ruling to a stringent ruling — is considered as having strayed from the words of the Torah, and disgraces the honor of his rabbis. The gaon Rabbi Baruch Binyamin, in responsa *Mishpetei Tzedek*, wrote this, as well. And although in *Erez Hahaim* he cited the comments of Maran *HaHida* in several places that imply that even while instructing others one may rule stringently in the laws of *issur v’heter*, it appears to me that the accepted opinion is that of the gaon the *Hikrei Lev*, as is clear from the *Aharonim* cited above, as anyone who admits the truth will see upon studying this subject.

His methodology in halachic decision-making is expressed in his introduction to his book *Rav Pe’alim* (vol. 1): the best and most preferred way to arrive at a ruling is to diligently study all the writings of the *Rishonim* and *Aharonim* and works of responsa, until the last of the *Aharonim*, from small to big, including contemporary works whose authors are still living. He himself practiced what he preached, as his own responsa in his four volumes of *Rav Pe’alim* will testify. He gathered together all the opinions of the *Aharonim*

from the giants of *Sepharad* and *Ashkenaz*. His responsa are filled with citations from the *Noda B’Yehuda*, *Panim Me’irot*, *Hacham Tsvi*, *Hatam Sofer*, the gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger, *Maharam Schik*, *Imre Eish*, *Ketav Sofer*, *Hatam Sofer*, the gaon Rabbi Shelomo Kluger, *Sho’el U’Meishiv*, *Minhat Hinuch*, the *Divre Haim* of *Sanz*, and the rest of the *Ashkenazic* halachic authorities. At the same time, his rulings are filled with citations from the giants of the *Sephardim*: *Maharam ben Haviv*, *Peri Hadash*, *Maharit Elgazi*, *Maran Hahida*, *Mahari Ayash*, *Aruch Hashulhan*, *Hikrei Lev*, and *Nediv Lev*. After citing all this, he would delve into the depths of halachah with rational thought and sound reasoning, avoiding *pilpul* that deviates from rational thought and distorts proper halachic methodology. These are the basic characteristics of his approach to halachah.

His greatness in the wisdom of *kabbalah* is greater than all, and already at a young age he began sitting at the doors of the works of *kabbalah*.²⁴ He was almost unparalleled in his generation in *kabbalah*. In the work *Milei De’Ezra*, it is written that we have no one in our generation who is an expert in the words of *kabbalah* and the *Ar”i zt”l* like the gaon Rabbi Yosef Haim. Even the other giants of *kabbalah* in his generation admired and revered him, and were full of praise for his greatness in *kabbalah*. He was like an angel; he revealed hidden and concealed concepts, and he possessed the light [of *kabbalistic* wisdom]. No secret was kept hidden from him. We have only to learn what his faithful student Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan wrote about him in the introduction to *Da’at U’tevunah*: “In the book *Ben Yehoyada*,²⁵ our teacher, the author, wrote: And you, who are delving into these matters, listen closely to what I write and proclaim, and from these words you will gain understanding into many matters. Nearly fifty years ago, a pious *hacham* in our city dreamed that one of the people

24. See what the gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Mani *zt”l* wrote to him in a response that was printed in *Rav Pe’alim*, vol. 3.

25. Vol. 2, p. 29b.

in our city was a gilgul [reincarnation] of Ahaz, the King of Judah. With G-d's permission, I hereby reveal that he was my teacher and master, Rabbi Abdallah Somech, author of Zivhe Tzedek. He was the teacher of our teacher, and our teacher would send him instructions for how to improve and correct his being..."

Our teacher wrote in Ben Yehoyada on Masechet Sanhedrin (103b): "...I heard from my teacher that the first letters of 'asher helev zevahemo yochelu' is 'Ahaz ben Yotam,' but I do not know what this refers to, and why it is mentioned here. But I would add that 'helev zevahemo' without the letter yod has the numerical value of 103, the same as 'eved Hashem' (servant of G-d) — meaning, at the end, he [Ahaz] was corrected and became an eved Hashem. And if you calculate [the numerical value] of zevahemo with the yod, then it yields [the numerical value of] eved HaKel... And in the midrash in Parashat Lech Lecha it says: 'Why was he called Ahaz? Because he 'held onto' [closed] synagogues and study halls. This is what Ahaz said: If there are no bucks, there is no flock of sheep, and if there is no flock of sheep, there is no shepherd, and if there is no shepherd, there is no world. Similarly he figured, if there are no youths, there are no students, and if there are no students, there are no hachamim. And if there are no hachamim, there are no elders, and if there are no elders, there are no prophets, and if there are no prophets, the Almighty will not have His Presence rest among them.' Since he sinned by closing the synagogues and study halls so that there should be no Torah learning, he is only fixed when his soul reaches a rabbi who disseminates Torah in Am Yisrael, in whichever generation, to correct this sin."

Rabbi Yosef Haim did not pass on. His holy, beloved books, that are full of radiance and shine with light, shall "produce their witnesses and be vindicated." The Sages²⁶ said, "'Ben Ish Hai' [literally, 'son of a living person'] — is everyone else the son of a dead person? Rather,

'Ben Ish Hai' — that even when he is dead he is considered alive." Similarly, his book on halachah and aggadah, Od Yosef Hai, testifies that Rabbi Yosef Haim is still alive among us and his memory will never leave us. We will follow his path of learning, teaching, observing, and fulfilling the Torah. May his merit protect us forever.

26. Berachot 18b.

This dedication is in
honor of my brother

Yehuda Azoulay

who has dedicated so much of his
time to this very important cause
of making the world know about
and learn from our *gedolim*.

May you have much *siyata*
d'Shmaya in all of your works.

L'illui Nishmat:

Messod ben Rachel

Esther bat Leah

Yehuda ben Esther

Luna bat Sarah

*Messod and Rachel Azoulay
and Family*

**Rabbi Moshe Haim (Grandfather
of Rabbenu Yosef Haim)**

Rabbenu Yosef Haim was born into a dynasty of towering Torah giants that had led Iraqi Jewry for generations. His father, Rabbi Eliyahu, was a leader of Baghdad Jewry and, by extension, the entire community of Bavel. Rabbi Eliyahu's father, Rabbi Moshe Haim, was the leading rabbi and rosh yeshivah in Baghdad for more than fifty years and had a profound impact on the spiritual quality of the Iraqi Jewish community.

Rabbenu's grandfather, the renowned tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Haim, was born in 5512/1752 and served as the rabbi of Baghdad. He was an extraordinary leader, who inspired his flock to strengthen their observance of Torah and mitzvot.

Legend has it that Rabbi Moshe Haim kept his scholarship secret, and for many years, no one knew of his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. One day he had a halachic dispute with the head of the Baghdad bet din, Rabbi Yechiel Eliya Yehezkel. The matter was so contentious that news of the controversy reached the Arab minister who had been appointed by the Pasha¹ to oversee the governance of the Jewish communities. As Rabbi Moshe Haim was an unknown figure, the minister dismissed Rabbi Moshe Haim's position without a second thought.

Rabbi Moshe Haim eventually left Baghdad and moved to the city of Basra, where he was welcomed and embraced with honor and reverence, and immediately appointed community rabbi. He served in this capacity for several years.

Sometime later, a very complex halachic question was brought before the dayanim and hachamim of Baghdad regarding an agunah — a married woman whose husband had disappeared. Rabbi Moshe Haim wrote a lengthy responsa on the matter in Basra, and sent it to the hachamim of Jerusalem, eager to hear their opinion on this critical halachic question. The hachamim of Jerusalem were amazed by Rabbi Moshe Haim's incisive analysis of the subject, and, in composing their letter expressing their agreement with his opinion, went so far as to compare his Torah knowledge to that of his namesake, Moshe Rabbenu.

When the hachamim of Baghdad learned of Rabbi Moshe Haim's greatness in Torah, they promptly invited him to return to Baghdad. He agreed, and they welcomed him with honor and respect. In 5547/1787 they formally instated him as rabbi of the city, though he was just thirty years old. Rabbi Moshe Haim held this prestigious position for fifty years, until his passing in 5596/1836.

1. "Pasha" was the title given to governors appointed by the Ottoman authorities.



Standing from left to right: Hacham Yeheskel Ezra; Hacham Elia Bassa; Hacham Shimon Mordechei; Hacham Sasson Kaduri; Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya; Hacham Haim Moallem
 Sitting from left to right: Hacham Shmuel Abraham Mjalled; Hacham Ezra Cohen; Hacham Moshe Haim Shamash; Hacham Abraham Hillel; Hacham Sasson Elia; Hacham Moshe Halevi and Hacham Yitzhaq Abraham Mjalled (Baghdad 1910)

From the day of his appointment, he devoted himself tirelessly to spreading Torah learning through the communities of Bavel, filling numerous different roles:

1. He served as head of the bet din, which abided by his every ruling. By virtue of his position, he was authorized to institute new takanot (provisions) and minhagim (customs) that are still accepted as halachah to this very day.
2. He was also the leading darshan (lecturer) in Baghdad. On weekdays while wearing his tallit and tefillin, he would deliver captivating lectures on the Shulhan Aruch and En Yaakov in Zalot Lazjiri, one of the smaller synagogues in Baghdad. On Shabbat he would speak in that synagogue about the weekly

parashah. For the four most important Shabbat speeches of the year — on Shabbat Teshuvah (before Yom Kippur), Shabbat Zachor (before Purim), Shabbat Hagadol (before Pesah), and Shabbat Kallah (before Shavuot) — Rabbi Moshe Haim was the only rabbi in all of Baghdad to address the community. This speech would be delivered in Baghdad's Great Synagogue, which was known as Zalat Lachbiri, and all the city's other synagogues would be closed for the duration of his lecture. All the Jews of Baghdad would crowd into the massive sanctuary to hear Rabbi Moshe Haim's passionate and inspiring discourse, which usually focused on the affairs affecting the community at the time. After his passing, the honor of delivering these important derashot was passed down to his son and, eventually, to his grandson.

3. He also led the large yeshivah in Baghdad that nurtured countless talmide hachamim. His students included Rabbi Reuven David Nawi, whom Rabbi Moshe Haim, as an old man, appointed as head of the bet din; Rabbi Abdallah Somech, author of Zivhe Tzedek; Rabbi Eliyahu Ovadia; and many others scholars who emerged as prominent Torah leaders.

The Jews and rabbis of Baghdad regarded Rabbi Moshe Haim with a combination of awe and affection, and his fame spread throughout the Jewish communities in Arab lands. He is reverently cited in many rabbinic writings, testifying to the profound respect which he commanded. For example, in the introduction to the booklet Devar Moshe (which is appended to the book Rav Berachot by Rabbenu Yosef Haim, Rabbi Moshe Haim's grandson), we find the following passage, describing Rabbi Moshe Haim: "Moshe emet v'Torah'to emet [Moshe is true and his Torah is true]... There could never be enough pages to praise him sufficiently... He was like Moshe [Rabbenu] in greatness... Moshe was very humble... I need say no more."

Rabbi Yisrael ben Shmuel Ashkenazi of Shklov (1770-1839) was a famous disciple of the Vilna Gaon who later moved to Eretz Yisrael

where he led a community called the Perushim. Before Rabbi Yisrael published his magnum opus, Pe'at Hashulhan, he sent a copy to Rabbi Moshe Haim in order to receive his *haskamah* (letter of approbation). In the introduction to Rabbi Moshe Haim's *haskamah*, Rabbi Yisrael described him as the "the great gaon, the candle of Israel, the towering pillar, the elder and most learned of the yeshivah of Bavel, the jewel of his generation..." These terms are borrowed from the Talmud's description of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai, the great rabbinic leader during the destruction of the Second Temple.²

A letter written in Baghdad in 1836 and signed by twenty-seven rabbis, led by Rabbi Abdallah Somech, referred to Rabbi Moshe Haim as "the great gaon, our teacher and the crown of our heads, the magnificent tzaddik Moshe, who judged Israel all the days of his life and led them on the good and straight path, like a compassionate father would his children and friends, without expecting any compensation."

Unfortunately, although Rabbi Moshe Haim left behind many writings, only three *responsa* are extant today. They were published in the books of his grandson, Rabbenu Yosef Haim. Two *responsa* on the laws of *agunot* appear in the book *Rav Berachot*, and one *responsum* is published in *Rav Pe'alim*.

Rabbi Moshe Haim legislated many new *takanot* (enactments) in Baghdad, including the following provisions:

1. He enacted that all *tefillin* be refurbished to ensure that the *battim* (boxes) were perfectly square as mandated by *halachah*. Until then, the *battim* in Iraq were not properly squared. Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, an expert *battim*-maker from Damascus, Syria, came to Baghdad and offered to teach all the local *battim*-makers to properly square the *tefillin*. Rabbi Moshe Haim agreed, and he sent representatives to

2. *Berachot* 28b.

every synagogue in Baghdad to declare that all the tefillin are invalid for the mitzvah, and no berachah should be recited on them, until the battim are exchanged for properly squared battim. Rabbi Moshe Haim was held in such high esteem that even some of the other great scholars, who did not fully agree with this stringency, did not have the audacity to challenge his ruling. And so, all of Baghdad's Jews changed their tefillin.³

2. He declared that all the Jews of Bavel should follow all the rulings of Maran Hahida, Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulay (1724-1806).⁴
3. He overruled the previous practice of reciting the Al Hanissim prayer on the 15th of Adar.⁵ The minhag in Iraq is to celebrate Purim on both the 14th and 15th of Adar, in light of the uncertainty that existed as to which day should be observed in that region. Until Rabbi Moshe Haim's time, Iraqi Jews also added Al Hanissim to the Amidah prayer and to Birkat Hamazon on both days. Rabbi Moshe Haim insisted that they stop saying Al Hanissim on the 15th, because if the 15th was not to be observed as Purim, then this recitation would constitute a hefsek (interruption) that invalidates Birkat Hamazon.
4. He introduced the practice of calculating "halachic hours" based on dividing the time period between amud hashahar (the first morning light) and tzet hakohavim (the point when three medium-size stars are visible) into twelve equal parts.⁶
5. The custom in Baghdad was that a hatan, on the Shabbat after his wedding, was accompanied to the synagogue with singing and dancing, and with non-Jews playing musical

instruments. Although Rabbi Moshe Haim upheld the permissibility of playing music at wedding celebrations, he banned the practice of hiring Arab musicians to play for the hatan on Shabbat.⁷

6. Until Rabbi Moshe Haim's time, the shohtim (slaughterers) in Iraq used knives that were thicker than the razor-sharp blades used nowadays. Rabbi Moshe Haim's disciple, Rabbi Abdallah Somech, writes in his work Zivhe Tzedek that Rabbi Moshe Haim once gathered all the town's shohtim to inspect their knives and their method of shehitah. He was dismayed upon seeing the thick shehitah knives, and ruled that the shohtim who used such knives could not practice shehitah. He also declared that all utensils that had been used to cook and eat meat that was slaughtered with the thick knives were not kosher and required koshering. Rabbi Moshe Haim then instituted a formal takanah that any shoet who uses even a moderately thick knife was disqualified from serving as a shoet. "From that time on," Rabbi Abdallah Somech writes, "praised be Hashem, all of Baghdad and the small surrounding villages began to slaughter with only thin, sharp knives."
7. He introduced the practice of following the Shulhan Aruch's ruling that if a shehitah knife is drawn back and forth during the slaughtering, it does not have to be as long as the width of the animal's neck (as a cut can be performed with less pressure using a sawing motion).⁸
8. He introduced the recitation of the text, "Et Musfe" during the Mussaf service on Yom Kippur, even when Yom Kippur fell on a weekday.⁹

3. Rav Pe'alim part 4, Orah Haim section 2.

4. Zivhe Tzedek part 2, p. 42.

5. Orah Haim, Ben Ish Hai Year 1, Parashat Tetzaveh, ch. 14.

6. This practice is in contrast to the view taken by some authorities whereby the halachic hour is calculated based on the period between sunrise and sunset.

7. Ben Ish Hai, Parashat Shoftim, ch. 18.

8. Zivhe Tzedek I, 24:9.

9. Ben Ish Hai, Year 1, Parashat Vayelech, ch. 20.

In his work *Benayahu*,¹⁰ Rabbenu describes the holiness of his grandfather: “I heard that it was the practice of my teacher, my grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, that when he went along his way through the streets of the city to perform a mitzvah, when in a clean place, he would unify G-d’s Name by saying, ‘Shema Yisrael’ on each street that he walked along.”

And in his book *Od Yosef Hai*,¹¹ Rabbenu praises Rabbi Moshe Haim’s extraordinary wisdom and insight:

I read this story: A learned and respected Arab had a Jew write on a piece of paper in Hebrew the three letters bet, bet, alef. He came to my grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, showed him this paper, and asked what the letters signified. The rabbi immediately and unhesitatingly replied, ‘They are an acronym for ‘Bereshit Bara Elokim’ [‘In the beginning G-d created’]. The Arab marveled at how the rabbi determined the letters’ meaning immediately at the first glance. He had the letters written with that verse in mind in order to test a hacham’s ability to determine their meaning.

Shene Luhot HaBrit (Two Tablets of the Covenant)

In his book *Ben Ish Hai*,¹² Rabbenu tells another story about his grandfather’s keen wisdom:

The story is told of my teacher, my grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, who once had two people come to him for a court case, each presenting contradictory accounts of the relevant events. In his great wisdom and insight, he understood that one of the claimants wanted to swear

10. Yoma 53b.

11. Derashot, Vayikra 72c.

12. Derashot, Parashat Mishpatim; Nifla’im Ma’asecha.

a false oath, and he said to him, “Do you think that I would allow you to swear on a Torah scroll? Believe me, I would only let you swear on the shene luhot habrit [the Two Tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments]!” He immediately told the court attendant to go to the mikveh, immerse ten times, and bring back the shene luhot habrit so that the man could swear on them.

The man was horror-stricken. He was unaware that there was a book entitled *Shene Luhot Habrit* (by Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz, 1565-1630), and he thought that he was about to be presented with the very same Two Tablets that Moshe Rabbenu received from Heaven at Har Sinai, which had been brought to Bavel in the exile and remained there. Seized with terror, he said, “I’ll pay up, but I won’t swear!”

The rabbi said to him, “No, you have already undertaken to swear, so now you must swear.” At that point, the man confessed that he had lied and told the real story.

The Brilliance and Empathy of Rabbi Moshe Haim

In his work *Nifla’im Ma’asecha*, Rabbenu relates another incident of a case that came before his grandfather. This case involved an Arab who claimed that a Jew owed him money. They approached Rabbi Moshe Haim in the synagogue, and the Jew flatly denied the claim and offered to swear. Rabbi Moshe Haim, through his keen insight, realized that the Jew was lying and was prepared to swear falsely.

“I will let you swear,” the rabbi said to the defendant, “but first I want to go home to check something. You two should sit here until I return.” He left the synagogue with the court attendant, leaving the two litigants alone in the synagogue — or so they thought.

Rather than going home, Rabbi Moshe Haim crept up into the women's section, which had an entrance from outside the building, and hid there so he could hear the exchange between the two litigants.

The Arab asked the Jew, "How can you swear a false oath on the Torah? Isn't it true that I gave you the money at such-and-such place?"

"What can I do?" the Jew answered. "I have no way to pay you now, and if I admit to the debt, you will demand payment and have me thrown in jail. Who will take care of my family?" And so the conversation ensued, with the Arab insisting that the Jew confess to the debt, and the Jew refusing.

Finally, Rabbi Moshe Haim returned to the main hall of the synagogue, and informed the litigants that he had overheard their conversation. The Jew, embarrassed, had no choice but to confess.

Rabbi Moshe Haim then asked the non-Jew if he would accept several payments rather than one lump sum, thereby enabling the Jew to repay the loan without compromising his financial stability. The non-Jew agreed, and he left the synagogue awe-struck by the Rabbi's brilliance and empathy.

Hashem Watches Over Those Who Revere Him

Rabbi Moshe Haim was once invited to somebody's home for a meal on Pesah. The host served many different kinds of appetizing food, including rice. When Rabbi Moshe Haim was served his bowl of rice, he noticed a kernel of wheat on top of the bowl.¹³ Hashem protected the great tzaddik from sin, and ensured that he would not eat hametz on Pesah even inadvertently. As a result of this incident, Rabbi Moshe Haim decided to never again eat rice on Pesah.¹⁴

13. Rav Pe'alim 3:30.

14. Even today, descendants of the Ben Ish Hai follow this custom not to eat rice on Pesah (as reported by Hacham David Haim, a great-great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai).

The Passing of Rabbi Moshe Haim

Rabbi Moshe Haim was summoned to the Heavenly Court on 8 Sivan, 5596/1836. Rabbi Yehuda Burla¹⁵ writes about Rabbi Moshe Haim, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true. Like Moshe Rabbenu, who received the Torah directly from Heaven, he did not leave any area untouched. The man Moshe was exceedingly humble."

Although Rabbi Moshe Haim's passing was a devastating loss for the Baghdad community, they took comfort in the fact that he had left a son like him, the great Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, who assumed his father's rabbinic duties. Rabbi Eliyahu Haim was a brilliant Torah scholar, and also served as a mohel, bringing thousands of children into the covenant of Avraham Avinu. His son, Rabbi Yosef Haim, describes his generous, charitable nature: "May my father, the crown of my head, be remembered favorably. I remember that he always designated a separate pocket in his clothing for tzedakah. At different times throughout the day, he would take coins and place them in this pocket. All the contents of that pocket would be distributed to tzedakah..."

15. Rabbi Yehuda ben Yisrael Yaakov Burla was a contemporary and colleague of Rabbi Yom Tov Algazi, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem at that time. He consulted with Hacham Moshe on important halachic matters and regarded him as a Torah giant.

To our dear parents

**Mr. and Mrs. Joe and
Esther Azoulay**

and

**Rabbi and Mrs. Joshua
and Rachel Bittan**

Words cannot describe the admiration
and appreciation we feel towards you.

You constantly show us the right way
with your patience and love. We are
forever grateful for your encouragement,
dedication, inspiration, and generosity.

May Hashem only bless you with health,
happiness, and *berachah* in all that you do.

Yamin and Nogah Azoulay

Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, Father of Rabbenu Yosef Haim

Rabbenu's father, Hagaon Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, was born in Baghdad in 5567/1807. He was renowned throughout his life as a man of good deeds, as well as a talmid hacham, both in nigleh and nistar (the revealed Torah and the hidden Torah). He was known for his remarkable humility, for always shying away from fame and honor.

Rabbi Eliyahu's legendary acts of kindness endeared him to all the Jews of Baghdad. He worked tirelessly to assist Torah scholars and the poor, distributing huge sums of charity money. The vast majority of these funds came from his own pocket, but he distributed them under the guise of a "free loan society," pretending that the money had come from donors, so that nobody would know that he was personally supporting the recipients. His home was always open to

visitors, and many poor and needy people converged upon the rabbi's house at all hours, seeking assistance or advice.

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, in his introduction to the book *Da'at U'tevunah*, presents the following description of Rabbi Eliyahu: "He was a great talmid hacham in nigleh and nistar; he was a holy man, like a heavenly angel. He was very wealthy. He was nobility and Torah knowledge combined into one."

His proficiency in the wisdom of the kabbalah is evident from his book *Midrash Eliyahu*, where he interprets Biblical verses and comments of the Sages according to kabbalah, based on the teachings of the Arizal. He studied kabbalah intensively with his close friend Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, who later settled in Eretz Yisrael and was appointed rabbi of Hebron. This special bond of affection lasted many years, and Rabbi Eliyahu Mani's son, Rabbi Saliman Mani, even compared this relationship to the close bond of friendship that existed between David and Yonatan.

Rabbi Eliyahu had the practice of seeking opportunities to perform rare, uncommon mitzvot. Thus, for example, he performed the precious mitzvah of redeeming a first-born donkey. And whenever he sighted a bird's nest, he would look inside to see if there were eggs so he could perform the mitzvah of shiluah haken (sending away the mother bird before taking the eggs or chicks). Similarly, it is told that before his friend Rabbi Eliyahu Mani left for Eretz Yisrael, he gave him some money with which to buy a plot of land, and instructed



Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan
(disciple of Hacham Yosef Haim)

him to perform the mitzvot that are unique to the Land of Israel on his behalf.

Rabbenu frequently mentions his father's customs and practices. For example, in *Ben Ish Hai*,¹ he writes, "My blessed teacher, my father, would always carry a money purse in his inside pocket from which he would distribute charity several times a day using large coins... He would give to the poor and perform other mitzvot with this money, which he would unfailingly distribute twice a day... Each time he handed it out, he would recite the 'L'shem yichud' [the declaration customarily recited before performing mitzvot] and intend to bring satisfaction to his Creator. He would do this with great joy and excitement."

In their introduction to the book *Midrash Eliyahu*, Rabbi Eliyahu's sons describe with great reverence several of their father's unique qualities: "Only the righteous G-d knows what is in a person's heart; only He knows the intensity of the enthusiasm and joy that our teacher, Abba, felt when we arrived at new Torah insights... Each time, he would consciously intend to unify G-d's Name... He was especially careful to always be inconspicuous and unassuming with his study of kabbalah... He was particularly exacting in his study of the writings of the Arizal, and would never speak a word of kabbalah unless it was as clear to him as the sun."

The Shabbat Room

"When is the 'Shabbat Room' going to be opened?" the young children of the Haim family asked their mother as they waited impatiently in front of a locked door in their house. All week long they waited with eager anticipation for the moment when the special room their parents reserved for Shabbat would be opened.

1. *Ben Ish Hai*, Year 1, Parashat Yayigash, ch. 13.



From right to left: Hacham Moshe Shamash; Hacham Yehezkel Halevi; Hacham Yitzhak Avraham Shelomo; Hacham David Papo; Hacham Sasson Halevi; Hacham Abraham Hillel

This room was locked for six days a week, and on Friday afternoon, when the house was ready for Shabbat, and the kitchen was filled with steaming foods, it was ceremoniously opened. The family would eat the three Shabbat meals in that room, and after Shabbat, the room was cleaned, washed, and locked until the following Shabbat.

The room had a special and holy Shabbat atmosphere. It seemed that even the air of the workweek never entered the room. It was filled with holiness and purity. Ordinary matters were not discussed there, and mundane activities were not performed there. The Shabbat meals were uplifting, filled with soulful singing and discussion of Torah, which were the essence of each meal.

On Friday the children would eagerly offer to help prepare the room for Shabbat, set the table with fancy dishes and place a dish with olive oil for candles, prepared in advance by their father.

“How many chairs do we need this Shabbat?” they would ask each week, knowing that the rabbi always invited passing vagrants who had no place to eat on Shabbat. They were not always able to anticipate how many would come, as it often happened that a last-minute guest would show up at their doorstep.

Giving Charity on Shabbat

Rabbi Eliyahu Haim not only honored Shabbat to the fullest extent possible in his own home, but also made sure that everyone in his town, including the poor, would be able to enjoy Shabbat. Each week, he would check to see if there were anyone in the community who was unable to purchase special foods for Shabbat, and he would not go to the synagogue on Friday afternoon until he ensured that everybody’s Shabbat needs were provided for.

On Friday afternoon, the synagogue in Baghdad was always perfectly clean and orderly. The Shabbat parochet was in place over the ark, and perfumed jars were placed by the bimah. The lamp was lit, and a regal, majestic serenity filled the building.

Just before the people began trickling in for Shir Hashirim, the Rabbi would remove three coins from his pockets and put them on the windowsill by his seat.

“Father,” his young son, Yosef, once asked, “why are you doing this? Why are you putting coins on the windowsill?”

Rabbi Eliyahu sat on his chair and explained, “Each day we give charity during morning prayers, when we reach V’yevarech David. We put in two coins together and another one separately.”

“But on Shabbat,” the young boy interjected, “the coins are muktzeh, so how can we give charity?”

“Indeed,” his father replied, “this is precisely the reason why I put aside the coins on Friday, so that I do not have to touch them on Shabbat. When we reach the relevant part of prayers, I have the intention of designating them for charity, and after Shabbat I put the

money in the tzedakah box. I don't want to miss out on this important mitzvah, so I thought of this solution."

A slightly different account of this custom appears in the book *Ketz Hayamin* (section 20) by Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe: "I heard from the synagogue attendants that he [Rabbi Eliyahu] ensured to fulfill the mitzvah of giving charity while reciting the verse 'moshel bakol' even on Shabbat. He would prepare three small loaves of bread and would give them to the [synagogue] attendants during V'yevarech David. The entire congregation learned from him and emulated him, and soon the attendants did not have to buy bread for Shabbat, because they received more than enough from the community." It is likely that Rabbi Eliyahu observed both practices, but only Rabbenu saw or noticed the coins. As Rabbenu wrote,² "I often could not hear what he said [while performing mitzvot], because he did everything so modestly,"³ and it thus stands to reason that the practice to set aside the coins was not observed by anyone except Rabbi Eliyahu's son.



Rare picture taken in Yeshivat Knesset Meir Eliyahu in the 1920's, Baghdad, Iraq. Center right is Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri. (Photo courtesy of R' Avishai Bar Osher)

2. Ibid.

3. Rabbenu speaks of his father's customs also in *Ben Ish Hai*, Year 1, Parashat Tzav, ch. 31; *Vayera*, ch. 23; and *Naso*, ch. 5; and *Ben Ish Hai*, Year 2, Parashat Vayikra, ch. 20; *Lech Lecha*, ch. 3; and elsewhere.

Eliyahu Hanavi Distributes Charity

The black sky was spotted with thousands of specks of stars. The empty wine cup sat on the table, beside it green, fragrant herbs and a knotted wax candle, whose smoke still lingered in the room.

Rabbi Eliyahu Haim had just finished reciting havdalah. Together with his five righteous sons, he began singing, "Hamavdil ben kodesh l'hol, hatoteinu hu yimhol..."

With the song still on his lips, he approached the cupboard and pulled out an abia — a brown knotted robe made of camel wool. He wrapped himself in the abia and went to another cupboard, which contained bills of money he had saved up all week especially for this occasion. He put the bills in the wide pockets of the robe, and pulled it tightly around himself, so that it covered his face.

He strode quietly toward the home of Rabbi Avraham, a poor talmid hacham with twelve children, who all studied in the community's religious school.

The saintly rabbi knocked on the door three times.

"Who is it?" a voice inquired from inside.

"Eliyahu," the Rabbi responded in a strange voice, providing only his first name. The door opened, and Rabbi Eliyahu threw in one of the bill folds and ran away. Rabbi Avraham stood there at the door, breathless.

"Who was that?" Rabbi Avraham's wife wondered.

"It must have been Eliyahu Hanavi!" Rabbi Avraham exclaimed, his voice and body trembling. "G-d has sent us Eliyahu Hanavi to help alleviate our financial troubles!"

The children heard what happened and couldn't contain their excitement. They had just finished singing the traditional Saturday night hymns, including the song about Eliyahu Hanavi. They continued singing, this time in a louder voice, "Eliyahu Hanavi..."

“Tomorrow,” the mother thought to herself, “right at dawn, I will go to the market and buy flour so that the children can have food!” She raised her hands to the heavens, expressing her gratitude to G-d for the great miracle He had performed for her family.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Eliyahu continued walking through his town, identifying himself as “Eliyahu” and distributing money to the needy.

No one suspected that this generous benefactor was the community’s rabbi. They assumed it was none other than Eliyahu Hanavi, who had come to give them charity just as they finished singing for him.

The next morning several poor women arrived at the market. They hadn’t been there in quite some time, as they had no money for shopping — until the visit by “Eliyahu” the previous night. One bought vegetables, another purchased a large quantity of flour, and a third paid her debt to the grocer so that he would agree to continue selling to the family on credit.

“Where did you get the money to repay the debt?” the grocer’s wife wondered, while weighing a kilo of sugar into a paper bag.

The poor woman leaned forward and whispered, “Eliyahu Hanavi knocked at our door, threw in the money, and disappeared!”

The story spread rapidly throughout Baghdad. There was no child in the city who did not hear of the appearance of Eliyahu Hanavi in the homes of the community’s poor families, his throwing in money, and suddenly disappearing. Thanks to Eliyahu, they realized, the poor people in town would be able to survive another week.

Soon enough, the talk around town centered around the question of who would be privileged to a visit by Eliyahu Hanavi the next Saturday night.

Word of Eliyahu’s arrival reached the rabbi, and he smiled contentedly upon hearing the news. His desire and goal was to give

charity anonymously; it was convenient to have the townspeople think it was Eliyahu Hanavi.

Rabbi Eliyahu continued this weekly practice for several years, until his passing. At his funeral, his son, the Ben Ish Hai, eulogized the revered tzaddik, and announced to the amazed townspeople, “Eliyahu Hanavi who has been giving out money each Saturday night, was my great father, who was concerned with elevating the mitzvah of charity to a level of *matan b’seter* [anonymous giving].”

There was not a dry eye in the crowd.

Rabbi Eliyahu’s Passing

Unfortunately, Rabbi Eliyahu was not granted the blessing of longevity that his father had been given. On 7 Elul, 1859, Rabbi Eliyahu left this world at the age of fifty-two, after a brief illness. Rabbenu was twenty-five years old at the time of his father’s untimely passing.

Rabbi Eliyahu left behind five sons: Yosef, Moshe, Nissim, Yehezkel, and Sasson. In addition, he left behind a well-known kabbalistic work entitled *Midrash Eliyahu*.

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan zt”l tells of an incident that occurred several months before the great sage’s death:

I heard them call him [Rabbi Eliyahu] to the Torah for shevi’i [the seventh aliyah] of Parashat Behar Sinai. The reader pointed to the first verse [of the aliyah], which began, “And if there remain but few years.”⁴ He did not wish to pass on, and so he indicated to the reader to return to the previous verse, which began, “If there be yet many years.” Despite this, he was not saved, and he became ill and left this world a few months later.

4. Vayikra 25:52.

The entire community of Bavel — men, women, and children — grieved the loss of their beloved and revered leader and shepherd. He was eulogized by the greatest rabbis of his generation. Each day during the week of mourning, a different hacham delivered the eulogy. On the seventh and final day, it was Rabbenu's turn to eulogize Rabbi Eliyahu. The entire Jewish community of Baghdad assembled to hear the young, grieving tzaddik speak about his righteous father.

Rabbi Yosef Haim delivered a powerful, inspiring eulogy that moved the entire community to tears. His heartfelt yet measured words awakened new outpourings of grief for the loss of Rabbi Eliyahu. The young Rabbi Yosef Haim's address made such an impact upon the Jews of Baghdad that, despite his young age, they decided to appoint him as his father's successor. They found consolation in the fact that their leader had left behind such a worthy heir to his position.

And so, immediately after the shivah observance, the community leaders approached Rabbenu and asked him to step into the giant shoes of his illustrious father and grandfather and serve as rabbi of the community and as rabbinic leader⁵ of all the Jews in Bavel. Rabbenu accepted their invitation, and he served as the devoted, beloved leader of Iraqi Jewry from that day — 13 Elul, 1859 — until his passing exactly fifty years later, on 13 Elul, 1909.

Several weeks after his appointment, Rabbenu began to publicly address the community from the pulpit of the Great Synagogue of Baghdad, Zalat Lachbiri, the same pulpit from which his father and grandfather had spoken and taught Torah to untold numbers of people. His first derashah, delivered on Shabbat Teshuvah, was especially moving and inspirational, and succeeded in awakening the hearts of everyone in the audience and inspiring them to repent. The

work *Nifla'im Ma'asecha* described the impact that this lecture had upon the community:

When he ascended the pulpit in the Great Synagogue and lectured on Shabbat Teshuvah in his father's place, everyone assembled realized ... that the Almighty had granted him a gifted tongue... Besides being a brilliant scholar, he knew how to reach his audience through parables, humor, the words of our Sages, and riddles."

The eloquence and brilliance of this lecture settled any lingering doubts as to whether the young Rabbi Yosef Haim was worthy of filling his father's shoes.

5. Interestingly, however, Rabbenu did not carry an official title. He was appointed to be a leader, but not as rabbi of a synagogue or rosh yeshivah, or to any other official position.

In memory of

**Abraham Shelomo Edery z”l
and Yosef Amram Edery z”l**



For the *Refuah Shelemah* of
Nissim ben Biba



In honor of our parents (Marc and Judy Kadoch and Kathryn Edery) for their continued support and love towards us. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bless them with happiness, health, long life, *parnassah b’shefa*, and much success in all their endeavors. Amen!

Dedicated by
*David, Joyce, Judy, Avi
and Mordechai Kadoch*

The Life of Rabbenu

Morenu V’Rabbenu Hacham Yosef Haim zt”l was born in Baghdad, Iraq on 27 Av, 5594 / September 1, 1834,¹ to his father, Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, son of Rabbi Moshe Haim.

Hacham Yosef Haim was a bechor, the eldest of his father’s sons. Already during his early years, he showed enormous potential and everyone who knew him sensed that he was destined for greatness. As a small child, Rabbenu would hide in his father’s library day and night, so he could listen to the sounds of learning and absorb his father’s words of Torah and halachah, for which his soul seemed to yearn insatiably.

1. According to some sources, the Ben Ish Hai was born in the year 1835 (see *Re’ah Hatov* p. 51).

The renowned kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Moshe Fetaya stated that “Rabbenu’s soul belonged to the era of the Talmudic Sages, and G-d, in His compassion, sent down such a soul in our times, so that Rabbenu could rejuvenate this barren world with the sweet flowing waters of his Torah.”

A Berachah from the Abir Yaakov

Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, who served as the leader of Baghdad Jewry, was recognized as a great Torah sage and posek, who disseminated Torah to thousands of Jews. Nevertheless, despite his extraordinary accomplishments and the reverence and admiration he enjoyed, he was beset by an internal sadness. Rabbi Eliyahu and his wife had not yet been blessed with children. According to legend, Rabbi Eliyahu’s saintly wife traveled from Iraq to Morocco to receive the berachah of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzera (1807-1880), author of Abir Yaakov and among the patriarchs of the Abuchatzera rabbinic dynasty. Rabbi Yaakov blessed her that she would have a son who would be holy from the womb and would serve as a guiding light for the entire Jewish nation.²



Postcard of Hacham Yosef Haim – Ben Ish Hai
(Photo courtesy of R’ Avishai Bar Osher)

The Ben Ish Hai’s Oath

When Rabbenu passed away, the great kabbalist Hacham Shimon Agasi eulogized the great sage and said, “It has been revealed to

2. Tehillot Yosef p. 5.

me that Hacham Yosef Haim’s soul was rooted in the soul of Yosef Hatzaddik. Thus, just as Yosef Hatzaddik was saved from certain death in a deep pit, similarly, Hacham Yosef Haim was saved from drowning in a deep well.”

He explained that once, when the Ben Ish Hai was a very young boy, he returned home from his studies and went outside to play with his sister. He was playing near a deep well when he suddenly lost his balance and fell in. His frightened sister frantically ran home to tell her mother, screaming, “Yosef has drowned! Yosef has drowned!”

Her screams were heard by all their neighbors, who quickly came running to see what had happened. Yosef’s mother, overcome by fear, stood off to the side, weeping. She could not bring herself to approach the well.

The neighbors, however, immediately went to work trying to save the young boy. One person ran to fetch a doctor, while a neighbor brought a thick rope and tied it around himself. Several others took hold of the loose end of the rope, and the man descended into the well and grabbed onto Yosef’s limp body. The others pulled them both out and they laid Yosef down on the ground. Everyone at the scene was horror-stricken; the boy was clearly not breathing. When



Rabbi Shimon Agasi, Baghdad, Iraq.
Postcard, 1900-1930. (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, courtesy of David Nakar, Israel)

the doctor arrived moments later, he examined the unconscious young boy, wearing an expression of deep concern and fear on his face. The doctor told Yosef's parents that there was little hope their son would survive.

Still, the family and neighbors did not despair. Yosef was quickly carried upstairs to his bed, and his father recited Tehillim at his bedside as the doctor feverishly treated the boy. Suddenly, to everyone's astonishment, Yosef took a deep and abrupt breath and let out a loud cry. The doctor looked at him in near disbelief, and declared that a medical miracle had taken place; Yosef would live.

"Yosef is alive! Yosef is alive!" everyone called out, dancing and jumping about in unbridled exuberance. Yosef himself simply went back to sleep. When he awoke the following morning, he could not remember anything of the incident. His mother served him a hot drink, and told him about the miracle that had occurred. All were amazed to see the color return to his face as he opened his eyes. He got up and continued on his way, acting perfectly normal, apparently unharmed. Yosef then made a vow to devote his life to Torah and mitzvot. He announced, "I promise that from now on I will dedicate my entire life, to the fullest extent possible, to Torah study and avodat Hashem." Everyone was amazed by the sincerity and piety of the young boy's vow, and an enthusiastic "amen!" resounded throughout the room.

Years later, people looked back at this story as a sign of the special protection given to a tzaddik, so that he should not be lost before having the chance to complete his mission.

The Prodigy

When Rabbenu was just four years old, his father tested his knowledge of parashat hashavua, posing a question regarding the story of Adam hiding in the Garden of Eden. After the sin of the



Emissary of the Sasson family of India with the family of Rabbi Yosef Haim, Baghdad, Iraq 1870. Standing far left to right: Guard of philanthropist David Sassoon; Hacham Moshe Haim (brother of Rabbenu); Hacham Yehezkel Haim (brother of Rabbenu); Guard of philanthropist Yosef Gorgi. Centre left to right: Hacham Yosef Haim; philanthropist Yosef Gorgi; philanthropist David Sassoon. Sitting left to right: philanthropist Avraham Gorgi; little boy unknown; Hacham Yaakov Haim (boy - son of Hacham Yosef Haim); Hacham Sasson Haim (brother of Rabbenu). (Beth Hatefutsot Photo Archive)

forbidden tree, the Torah relates, G-d spoke to Adam and asked, איכה ("Where are you?").³ Rabbenu's father asked the young child, "How could it be that G-d asked him, 'Where are you?' Isn't it written,⁴ 'Can any person hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him...? Everything is known to G-d!'"

Rabbenu answered, "This is what G-d said to him: 'איכה', which is an acronym for אני יודע כל הנסתרות — 'I know all that is hidden. So why are you trying to run away from me?'"

3. Bereshit 3:9.

4. Yirmiyahu 23:24.

On another occasion, when he was still a small child, Rabbenu had an argument with his sister about who would hold the havdalah candle, and his sister started crying. Rabbenu's father said to him, "You should let her hold the candle, since she's younger than you. But even though it would be kind to give it to her, I will let you hold the candle if you can tell me why the blessings of havdalah are recited in their particular order: wine, fragrant herbs, candle, havdalah?"

The boy immediately replied that this sequence corresponds to the four levels of human perception, both sensory and spiritual. We first bless over wine, symbolizing taste, which is sensed with the mouth, and then over fragrant herbs, which are smelled with the nose, which is above the mouth. The candle is seen with the eyes, which are situated above the nose, and which signify a higher level of perception. Finally, the highest level of perception is reflected by the blessing of havdalah, the ability to distinguish between things, which as the Sages famously commented, is a direct product of the intellect. This is the reason for the sequence of the blessings.

The profundity and beauty of the small boy's response left a deep impression on everyone who heard it.

Rabbenu's Kindness

Already as a young boy, Rabbenu was involved in charity work, concerning himself with the plight of the needy. He deeply felt the pain of others, and the love of his fellow Jew burned in his heart even from an early age.

Every Friday Rabbi Eliyahu would give each of his children some money to buy toasted seeds, nuts, and sweets for Shabbat, so that they would be able to meet the quota of one hundred berachot.⁵ At

5. Halachah requires reciting one hundred berachot each day. On weekdays when each of the Amidah prayers consists of nineteen berachot, this requirement is relatively easy to observe. On Shabbat, however, the Amidah prayer consists of only seven blessings, and we must therefore add berachot over the course of Shabbat in order to meet the minimum requirement of one hundred berachot.

the end of every Shabbat meal, each child would take his or her bag, recite the appropriate berachot, and enjoy their special Shabbat treats.

The family noticed, however, that week after week, when all the children gleefully indulged in their special treats, Rabbenu did not have any. His father asked him why he did not have a bag of treats, and he replied that he had already eaten them. This was his answer every Shabbat.

His sister could not believe that Yosef finished his treats before Shabbat each and every week. So one Friday, she clandestinely followed her brother when he left home after receiving the money from his father. To her astonishment, little Yosef never bought treats at all. Instead, he took the money to the baker, bought some hallot and pitot, and placed them in a basket. From there he proceeded to the grocery and bought boxes of tobacco, which he also put in the basket. Then he quickly ran to the home of an elderly woman in a poor neighborhood. He gave the woman the basket and bowed his head respectfully, and then she blessed him.

This, his sister now realized, is the reason why Yosef never had any treats for the Shabbat table — he used all the money he received for charity, to help a destitute woman enjoy Shabbat.

That night, when Rabbi Eliyahu asked his eldest son about his missing treats, Rabbenu answered, as usual, that he had already eaten them. But this time, his sister spoke up and said that she knew the real story.

"I never believed that he had eaten them all," she said. "How could it be that every week he ate them and could never control himself like the rest of his brothers and sisters? So I followed him today and I saw that he went to a poor neighborhood." She told the whole story, expressing her admiration for her older brother.

After hearing the remarkable story, their father said, "If this is what you've been doing with the money, then from now on I will give you twice as much!"

The Younger Years and Rabbenu's Studies

After completing his studies in the local Talmud Torah, before reaching the age of bar mitzvah, Rabbenu learned privately with his uncle, his mother's brother, Rabbi David Hai Ben Meir Yosef Nissim zt"l (1817-1905), who later moved to Jerusalem and founded Yeshivat Shoshanim L'David in the Bet Yisrael neighborhood.

At the age of fifteen, in 1848, Rabbenu enrolled in the Yeshivat Midrash Bet Zilka, which was led by the illustrious gaon, Rabbi Abdallah Somecht"l, author of Zivhe Tzedek. Rabbenu quickly became a devoted student of Rabbi Abdallah, and was considered his talmid muvhak — prime disciple. When he returned home from yeshivah, Rabbenu would closet himself in his father's study and review everything he had learned from his teacher, until he committed it to memory.

Several years later, Rabbenu left the yeshivah and secluded himself with his sefarim at home, studying Torah day and night with extraordinary diligence, passion, and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

In 1853 at the age of eighteen, Rabbenu married



Hacham Abdallah Somech (teacher of Hacham Yosef Haim)



Rare picture of Hacham Abdallah Somech (center) with his disciples from Yeshivat Bet Zilka

Rachel, the daughter of Hacham Yehuda Somech, a relative of his teacher Hacham Abdallah Somech. After marrying, Rabbenu continued immersing himself in intense Torah learning, spending his days and nights in the attic of his home, where his library was located, studying with remarkable diligence and purity. Already in his early twenties, he began corresponding on matters of halachah with great Torah scholars around the world, including the rabbinic leaders of Jerusalem, Izmir, Salonika, and Europe. At the age of twenty-two, he held an extensive halachic correspondence with Hacham Haim Falagi (1788-1868), the renowned rabbi of Izmir and one of the great Torah leaders of the time. In his letters to the young sage, Hacham Haim Falagi conferred upon him the titles reserved for the leading scholars of the generation.

Every night, Rabbenu would arise at midnight to recite the Tikkun Hatzot prayer, lamenting the destruction of the Holy Temple, and

at sunrise he would recite the morning prayers. For six consecutive years, he fasted by day and ate only at night, in order to weaken physical drives that could interfere with his service to Hashem. He built a mikveh right outside his home, so he could immerse and purify himself at any time.⁶

His Father's Son

Once, when Rabbenu was fourteen years old, he came upon a letter sent to his father by the hachamim of Jerusalem, asking for his opinion regarding a complex halachic issue that arose. Rabbenu read the question and immediately began to investigate the subject in depth. That same day, he composed a clear response and dispatched it to Jerusalem. When the rabbis received his reply, they were astounded by his genius and immediately adopted his halachic position.

Several days later, the rabbis of Jerusalem received a second letter — from Rabbi Eliyahu, who sent his scholarly response to



Hacham Abraham Falagi, son of Hacham Haim Falagi

the question at hand. Remarkably, the father and son had each independently arrived at the identical halachic conclusion. The sages of Jerusalem sent a letter back to Rabbi Eliyahu extolling his young son's scholarship and expertise. "Blessed are you for having raised him," they wrote, adding *ישמח בו אביו ותגל יולדתו* ("His father shall rejoice in him, and she who bore him shall delight").⁷

Rabbenu's Halachic Judgment

Another account of Rabbenu's prodigious halachic scholarship as a young man was passed down through Rabbenu's family and often retold by his grandson, Hacham David zt"l. Once, when Rabbenu was sixteen years old, there was only one kosher etrog in all of Baghdad in the days just prior to Sukkot. The etrog had grown in a field owned collectively by several orphans, one of whom was a minor (below the age of bar mitzvah). The etrog was sold by the orphans' guardian on their behalf.

The rabbis in Baghdad at the time grappled with the question of whether a berachah could be recited over this etrog on Sukkot. The question related to the complex halachic rules regarding the nature of ownership by minors and their ability to transfer ownership over an object, as well as the status of a sale made on behalf of a group of orphans that includes a minor. As halachah requires personal ownership over the etrog on the first day of Sukkot, the questionable legal status of the only etrog in the city determined whether or not the townspeople would be able to recite the berachah over the arba minim.

The greatest hachamim of Baghdad, including Hacham Abdallah Somech, analyzed and studied the various sides of the issue, but even after extensive deliberations, they could not reach a definitive conclusion.

7. Based on Mishle 23:25.

6. The Ben Ish Hai's mikveh was built in a very unique fashion, sealed with bricks on two sides, and open on the other two sides so that rainwater could flow right into it. This represents the highest standard mikveh, as it resembles an actual wellspring. (This was told to the author by the great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai.)

Baghdad and the Torah world that a special light has begun to shine, and that young Yosef Haim was destined to become one of the greatest Torah giants that the Jewish people have ever seen.

Several days before Sukkot, the hachamim approached Rabbi Eliyahu and asked him to issue a ruling on the matter. He told them that after he awoke in the middle of the night, at hatzot, he would investigate the matter, and in the morning he would present his opinion as to whether the people could recite a berachah over the etrog. Rabbenu heard the question, and immediately resolved not to sleep a wink until he thoroughly investigated every aspect of the issue. He prepared a special lamp in the library of his home that would burn throughout the night, so he would be able to study for as long as he needed to determine the halachah.

That night when Rabbi Eliyahu went to sleep, Rabbenu went to the library and remained there well into the night, poring over halachic works and carefully analyzing every detail relevant to the question at hand. Finally, he reached his conclusion. When his father arrived after midnight to begin examining the issue, he was amazed to find Rabbenu sitting there with all the right books open to all the right pages. Rabbi Eliyahu sat down beside him and allowed Rabbenu to present his conclusion and explain his rationale and proofs. Upon hearing his son's arguments, Rabbi Eliyahu fully agreed with and accepted Rabbenu's ruling.

In the morning, the rabbis, including Hacham Abdallah Somech, came to Rabbi Eliyahu to hear his ruling. The rabbi told them, "My son has already issued his ruling that a berachah may not be recited on the etrog, and I agree with him." Rabbenu then presented the sources that formed the basis of his conclusion. After examining the sources, the rabbis emphatically endorsed Rabbenu's ruling, and the Jews of Baghdad did not recite a berachah over the four species that day.⁸

Rabbenu's astonishing scholarship at a young age heralded the emergence of a unique luminary. Word quickly spread throughout

8. Rabbenu's response to this question was printed in Rav Berachot , 1.

Dedicated in
loving memory of

Morris & Tamara Zeitman

May their *neshamot* be raised in
Gan Eden.

Jack & Lily Bitton

The Orator

Rabbenu was unparalleled in his talents as a darshan (lecturer). His oratory skills were surpassed by none, and throngs of Jews from all strata of the Baghdadi Jewish community came to hear his captivating lectures. Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, in his work *Orot Mimizrah*, writes that the Ben Ish Hai's skills as a darshan were a gift from Heaven, a manifestation of G-d's love and compassion for His people:

In Hashem's great mercy for His exiled children in Baghdad, He gave them the G-dly man Hacham Yosef Haim Hagadol, the Ben Ish Hai, whose words inspired the Jewish communities of the Middle East, from Iraq all the way to North Africa.

Every day, after the Shararit service, while still adorned with his tallit and tefillin, Rabbenu would deliver a shiur from the same pulpit

at which his father and grandfather had stood and taught, in the Zalot Lazjiri synagogue.¹ The class was delivered to a group of laymen and revolved around En Yaakov, the compilation of aggadic sections of the Talmud. The Ben Ish Hai's profound insights into the stories of the Talmud were later collected into the five-volume work *Ben Yehoyada*, as well as in the second edition of *Benayahu*.² These published works, which have enjoyed widespread popularity, offer us a glimpse into Rabbenu's legendary wisdom, scholarship, and creativity.

Immediately after concluding his lecture on En Yaakov, Rabbenu began another half-hour shiur on the *Orah Haim* and *Yoreh De'ah* sections of the *Shulhan Aruch*. The group would complete these two sections of the *Shulhan Aruch* once every four years. Rabbenu would celebrate the event by hosting a large banquet, at his own expense. All the rabbis of Baghdad would be invited and Rabbenu would treat them to new Torah insights that had never before been revealed.³

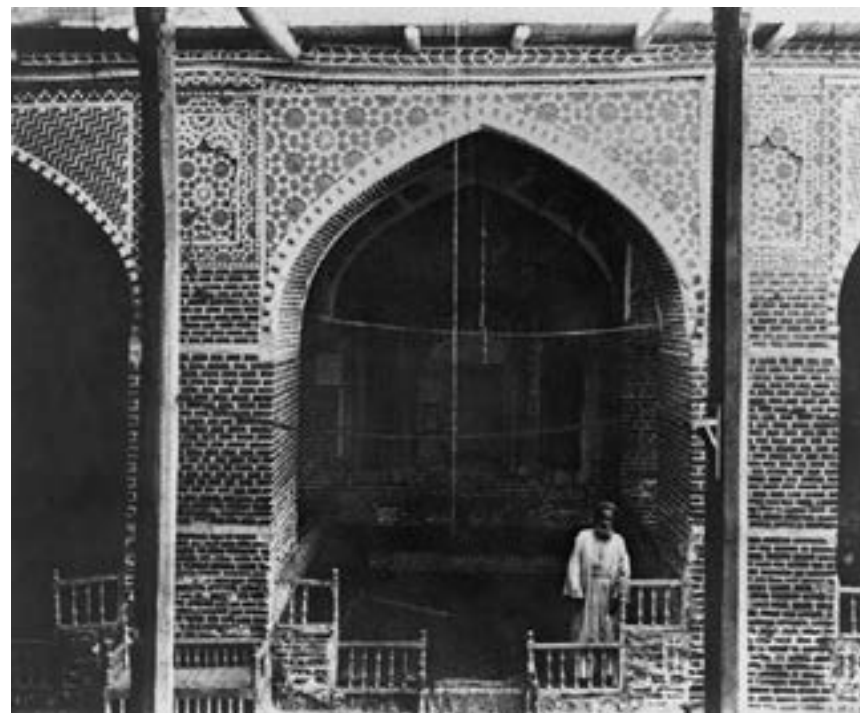
Following the shiurim, the congregants would accompany Rabbenu to his home, where he would seclude himself for the entire day, absorbed in Torah study and the devoted service of Hashem.

Rabbi Saliman Mutzafi zt"l recalled one occasion when two Arab women positioned themselves on either side of the crowd that accompanied Rabbenu from the synagogue. They wanted to cause the rabbi to inadvertently pass between two women. The congregants quickly realized what the women were doing, and they informed Rabbenu, who assured them that this was no cause for concern. Sure enough, the moment Rabbenu approached the area where the

1. The Zalot Lazjiri synagogue was known as the small synagogue in Baghdad, despite the fact that it had room for hundreds of worshippers, because its size paled in comparison to that of the Great Synagogue of Baghdad, the Zalot Lachbiri.

2. Part 1.

3. This account is based on Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan's biography of Rabbenu printed at the beginning of the book *Da'at U'tevunah*. However, from Rabbenu's introduction to *Ben Yehoyada*, it appears that the morning *Shulhan Aruch* class took place before the lecture on En Yaakov.



Chief Rabbi of Baghdad Hacham Ezra Dangoor, between 1923-1928, standing in the archway of the Great Synagogue of Baghdad, Iraq, the oldest synagogue in the city. It was reconstructed for the last time in 1885. (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive)

women stood, one of them fainted, and her friend rushed to help her. Rabbenu turned to his escorts, smiled, and assured them that they can proceed without concern.

The Weekly Shabbat Lecture

Every Shabbat Rabbenu would deliver a *derashah* before a large crowd of men, women, and youths — including the city's rabbis — in the Zalot Lazjiri synagogue. It is reported that even Hacham Abdallah Somech, the Ben Ish Hai's esteemed mentor, attended the lecture. In fact, he was the first person to arrive for the *derashah*, and stood up to his full height when the Ben Ish Hai entered.

The audience remained attentive and alert throughout the three-hour discourse. Rabbenu inspired and enchanted his listeners through his magnificent voice, eloquence, colorful stories, and brilliant insights. These weekly derashot were unparalleled in their ability to captivate such a large audience for such a long period.

In the introduction to his work Ben Ish Hai, Rabbenu described his practice to deliver a weekly derashah:

In this work, I have included halachot collected from various halachot cited in the Shulhan Aruch — in Orah Haim and Yoreh De’ah — since I have made it my custom to speak publicly on these matters every Shabbat. I have read the works containing the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, and I have learned that it was the hallowed custom of the Rishonim to address the people every Shabbat, but not just about midrashim and peshatim [simple interpretation of the Biblical text], but also about halachot, to inform them of G-d’s laws and His Torah, so that they will know the path they should follow and the way they should act. As it says in the Gemara, “Rabbi Yohanan said that Rabbi Meir would divide his lecture into three topics: a third on halachah, a third on aggadah, and a third on parables relevant to verses in the Bible...”⁴

It is well known that if they would speak only about halachah, most people would not be very interested. So the main part of the address must focus on aggadah and morality. While talking about these subjects, the speaker should mention halachic rulings that relate to his topic, in order to cleverly and effectively arouse the interest of his audience about these matters. This

4. Sanhedrin 38b.

was the intent of the holy Tanna Rebbi Meir when he spent one-third of the time speaking about halachot, one-third teaching aggadah, and one-third telling parables. He would arouse the interest of the people in halachah through the other two-thirds, which consisted of aggadah and parables.

It is known that people are drawn to aggadic interpretations and simple Biblical explanations, and one must therefore be clever to work with their mental tendencies. Hence, most of the derashah should be devoted to aggadah and Biblical interpretation, and only the minority should discuss halachah — and these parts should be inserted in the middle or at the end. This is the correct way.

Rabbenu discusses his style of lecturing further in his introduction to Ben Ish Hayil:

It was not my custom to deliver complex Talmudic discourses ... since the enormous crowd that gathered there had no way of grasping this kind of argumentation... Rather, the aggadah needs to be accessible and understandable to everyone. All the darshanim who used to address the people did this, leaving aside complex analysis ... and instead giving simple and direct interpretations of the aggadah... Amid all this they would insert a point of halachah, to inform the congregation of the right path and the right way to act.⁵

5. The Ben Ish Hai’s complex Talmudic discourses were reserved for the annual shiur which he delivered to rabbis and scholars on 7 Elul, to commemorate his father’s yahtzeit. Rabbenu described that event in his introduction to Ben Ish Hayil: “Every year since the passing of my teacher, my father, all the scholars gather in our house on the seventh of Elul... Since everyone assembled is learned, I would speak about complex Talmudic discourses and argumentations.”



Photograph taken in Hacham Yosef Haim's twenty-sixth year. This was the year following the death of his father, Hacham Eliyahu; the year Hacham Yosef Haim took his father's place as leading rabbinical figure of Baghdad.

In his book *Ketz Hayamin*, Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe describes the magnificent spectacle of Rabbenu delivering his weekly address to his community, and the significant impact it had upon the congregation:

Every Shabbat afternoon, before seudah shelishit, he would deliver his regular derashah on the parashah in the synagogue, and it would last at least three hours. The synagogue was filled with people. Even the greatest scholars would come to hear his derashot. He would connect his message to halachah, as printed in his book *Ben Ish Hai*, and he would then conclude by speaking about the redemption in order to comfort us in our exile.

Thereafter, they would recite Minhah in the synagogue, and the entire congregation would then accompany him home, as he made his way to perform the mitzvah of seudah shelishit. As they left the synagogue after the derashah, each person felt that Mashiah was about to arrive any minute.

Rabbenu truly mastered the art of public speaking. Besides the engaging content and loud, resonating voice, he also incorporated humor and even theatrics into his presentations — all while maintaining the dignity and composure of a Torah giant. This element of the Ben Ish Hai's "repertoire" was manifested especially on Purim, when, in the spirit of the day, he would deliver a special humorous lecture on Megillat Esther, as Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe described:

On Purim day ... following the morning prayers and after the Megillah reading, he would deliver a shiur to the members of the yeshivah and reveal profound insights into each and every verse [of the Megillah], in a manner that was appropriate for his audience. He would sit down in a way to show the crowd how Haman was enslaved by Mordechai, and the crowd would erupt in laughter as he sat there delivering his derashah. Not even a hint of a smile crossed his lips; only a glint of humor, as befitting a man of his great stature. As he left the synagogue, poor people would wait for him and he would distribute several coins to each one, without paying attention to how much he gave to whom, using money that was designated for them on the eve of Purim.

It is told that after Rabbenu's passing, when his son ascended the pulpit to speak in his place for the first time, people called out to him, asking him to raise his voice so they could hear him. He answered that while it was true that his father's voice had carried such that everyone could easily hear him, this was not a natural phenomenon;

it was the Shechinah speaking from his throat that produced a loud, clear, audible voice which reverberated throughout the synagogue.

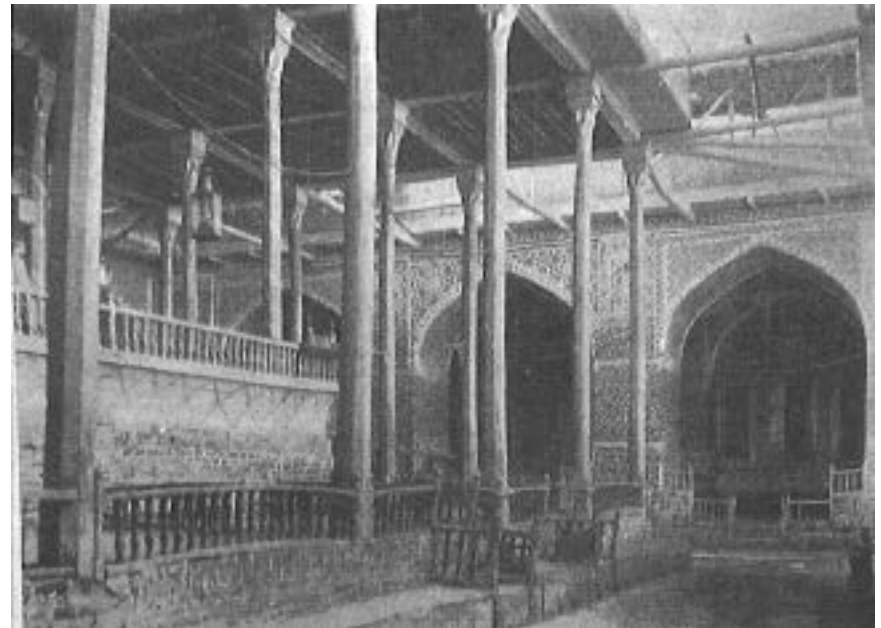
On one occasion, the Ben Ish Hai's weekly lecture was the site of an extraordinary miracle. A mother had brought her small son along and, unable to find a seat inside, she sat with her son together with many other women on the synagogue's roof. At one point during the derashah, the boy tripped and almost fell off the roof. Miraculously, he managed to grab onto a piece of wood that protruded from the roof, and he was able to hang on until the adults on the roof pulled him back up. Naturally, the incident caused considerable commotion in the synagogue. Rabbenu, however, did not allow the tumult to distract him, and continued speaking without pausing for even a moment.

After Rabbenu finished speaking, he asked what had caused the commotion in the middle of his lecture, and the people told him what had happened. He praised Hashem for ensuring that no harm would be caused — even indirectly — as a result of his derashah.

The Four Major Derashot

Rabbenu inherited from his father and grandfather the honor of delivering four major annual derashot in Zalat Lachbiri, the Great Synagogue of Baghdad. On these four Shabbatot, he was the only rabbi in Baghdad to give a public lecture. All the rabbis and scholars from throughout the city, as well as thousands of laymen — men and women — crowded into the synagogue to hear the Ben Ish Hai's presentation. These four Shabbatot were Shabbat Teshuvah (before Yom Kippur), Shabbat Zachor (before Purim), Shabbat Hagadol (before Pesah), and Shabbat Kallah (before Shavuot).⁶

6. According to some sources, Rabbenu's father and grandfather delivered major addresses only on three Shabbatot a year — Shabbat Teshuvah, Shabbat Zachor, and Shabbat Hagadol. At some point, a fourth annual event was added on Shabbat Kallah, when, in preparation for Shavuot, Rabbenu would speak about the love for Torah study and observance.



The Great Synagogue of Baghdad - Tzalat Lachbiri

Rabbenu recorded these derashot into a work which he entitled Ben Ish Hayil. In his introduction to this volume, he humbly describes how privileged he felt to be able to address such large crowds of people:

How can I repay G-d for all His benevolence toward me? In His great kindness and mercy, I was found worthy of standing in the Divine courtyard and serving a large community, of speaking words of Torah and morality and fear [of G-d] and halachah on the four special Shabbatot every year. I delivered a derashah in the presence of a large audience that would befit a king — on Shabbat Teshuvah, Shabbat Zachor, Shabbat Hagadol, and Shabbat Kallah. I stood in the same place where my holy fathers stood before me to address the community, as is the Jewish custom observed throughout the world, instituted by Moshe Rabbenu,

that the rabbis address the public regarding the laws of the holidays on those days, e.g. the laws of Pesah on Pesah, and the laws of Shavuot on Shavuot. Although I know that I, myself, am not worthy of this, the merits of my fathers have earned me this honor, may their souls enjoy eternal life.

Later in this introduction, Rabbenu notes that in these derashot he followed his usual method of teaching inspiring words of aggadah in a manner that was accessible to all, and incorporating halachah into these topics.

Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe presents the following description of these four annual derashot:

On the four Shabbatot, all the synagogues would close so that the entire community would come to hear the halachot of the upcoming holiday. The Great Synagogue was filled to capacity, and people also gathered outside, in the women's section and on the roof. Yet his voice was heard clearly and would ring in people's ears. Despite his age, his voice became more and more powerful. Whoever has not seen the crowded synagogue in the days of that sage has never seen a large crowd! He would speak on those four Shabbatot wrapped in his talit, and while standing, out of respect for his audience, and he would not move around or sway, and his tallit never fell from his shoulders. He would not move at all, and he rather stood perfectly straight, like an angel of the Heavenly host.

In particular, on Shabbat Zachor, when he delivered a derashah on the topic of "the mockery of Haman," the audience would feel as though the miracle was taking place before their eyes and Mordechai and Esther were standing in front of them.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka

Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka zt"l (1867-1936), head of the bet din of Jerusalem and editor of the renowned journal Hame'asef,

once traveled to Baghdad to see the Ben Ish Hai, about whom he had heard so much. Arriving in the city, he was told that the Ben Ish Hai spoke every Shabbat before thousands of listeners. He attended the rabbi's lecture and heard him deliver a spellbinding shiur. Afterward, the residents of Baghdad told him that it would soon be the hillula of the Ben Ish Hai's father, Hacham Eliyahu, when Rabbenu delivered a special shiur in his father's memory.



Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka

Hacham Ben-Tzion attended the shiur — the likes of which he had never before heard in his life. It took only several minutes of listening for him to recognize the Ben Ish Hai's brilliance and mastery of all areas of Torah. Afterward, he requested that the Ben Ish Hai send him a transcript of the shiur every year to include in his journal. From that point on, a transcript of the Ben Ish Hai's annual lecture on his father's hillula was printed in Hame'asef.

The Indelible Memory of Rabbenu's Derashot

Rabbi Benayahu Shmueli recalled a visit he once made together with Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri zt"l to the Babylonian Jewry Heritage



Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri
(Photo courtesy of Albert Hakim)

Center in Ohr Yehuda, which has a precise replica of the Zalot Lachbiri synagogue. Rabbi Kaduri walked through the sanctuary and was reminded of his earlier years in Baghdad.

While standing in the reconstructed synagogue, Rabbi Kaduri recalled the derashot of Rabbenu on the four Shabbatot, and noted exactly where he stood during the lectures. Rabbi Kaduri described how the Ben Ish Hai's face looked as though it was on fire, and how his voice could be heard clearly even at a distance,

such that everyone sensed that the Shechinah was speaking from his mouth. Rabbenu spoke for four hours without stopping, before thousands of people, and everyone heard him clearly, even those seated far away, as though he had a microphone. Rabbi Kaduri added that Rabbenu never repeated the same derashah twice, though he mentioned the same halachot year after year.

A Blessing from the Ben Ish Hai

Many youngsters, who later became outstanding Torah sages, attended Rabbenu's weekly lectures and later, as adults, testified to the profound impact they had upon on them. Rabbi Saliman Mutzafi was among the youths who attended the Ben Ish Hai's public derashot. His son, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, in his work *Olamot Shel Tzaddik*, describes what these experiences meant to his father:

Every Shabbat my father would accompany my grandfather (Rabbi Saliman's father) to the synagogue to hear Hacham Yosef Haim's derashah. When the derashah ended, masses of people would form long lines and wait to kiss Hacham Yosef Haim's hand and receive his berachot.

My father, who was still very young at that time, would clutch my grandfather's cloak and join that line. When his turn arrived, he would kiss Hacham Yosef Haim's hand. With a pleasant smile, Hacham Yosef Haim would place his hand on my father's head and say, "May you have the merit of becoming great in Torah."

This blessing strengthened my father's resolve to study with great diligence. Throughout the week, he would eagerly wait for Shabbat, when he would once again receive this blessing. During my father's later years, he would fondly recall those weekly visits.



Hacham Saliman Mutzafi

The Wellspring of Torah

Rabbenu was a dazzling speaker not only in the synagogue — but even in the privacy of his home.

Once, Hacham Ezra Hakohen, a student of the Ben Ish Hai, went into Rabbenu's room to speak with him. But as soon as he walked in,

Rabbenu said to him, “Before you say whatever you were going to say, first say one verse and repeat it constantly and contemplate it, because tonight is the 7 Elul, the anniversary of the passing of my father and teacher, Rabbi Eliyahu.” The verse Rabbenu wanted him to repeat was פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון (“You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of all living creatures” — Tehillim 145:16).

Rabbenu then spoke for four hours, without stopping, about this verse, sharing with Hacham Ezra 120 different interpretations. The more he spoke, the more passionate and emotional he became. Hacham Ezra later described how the words flowed naturally and effortlessly from the great sage’s lips, like water flowing from a wellspring.⁷



Hacham Ezra Hakohen

Rabbenu’s Appearance

The Ben Ish Hai’s majestic appearance contributed to the unique aura that filled the air when he delivered his lectures. He was graced with a natural charisma which combined with his loud, pleasant voice and eloquence to reach the hearts of his spellbound audiences.

The widely-circulated picture of Rabbenu was taken when he was twenty-six years old. Rabbi Benayahu Shmueli once asked the great kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri (1894-2006) how Rabbenu looked in his old age, and he answered that his face shone as though it were

7. Hacham Saliman Mutzafi zt”l heard this from Hacham Ezra Hakohen, who was a regular visitor in Rabbenu’s home.

on fire. Indeed, even in the picture taken as a young man, Rabbenu’s face is captivating, radiating holiness and purity. His tall stature, long beard, and generally pleasing appearance made him especially charismatic. He exuded confidence and serenity, as a shepherd walking ahead of his flock which obediently follows with unwavering trust.



Hacham Yosef Haim - Ben Ish Hai
(Photo credit: Artist - Binyamin L. Allen)

Rabbenu’s manner of dress added to his venerable appearance.

He wore a rabbinic turban, in accordance with ancient custom, and he maintained the old-style traditional garb, despite the drastic change in dress styles that occurred in his time. In his work Rav Pe’alim, he described the way the turban was worn:

First, a thick, strong hat stuffed with cotton — called a kima — is placed on the head. Another hat, called a fis, is worn over that hat, and a piece of strong white fabric holds them on the head. Then, the large piece of cloth, called a shal, is wrapped around several times in a special fashion, which not everyone knows how to do. Several small pins are inserted into it to hold it in place. This turban is very solid so it can be put on and

taken off the head several times a day. It will keep its shape for a month or two, or even more. You can take it off and put it on without ruining it. I was in doubt as to whether it is permitted to create this turban anew on Shabbat, since it resembles the forbidden activity of repairing.⁸

The Arabs of Baghdad, too, were in awe of Rabbenu's majestic presence. Rabbi Saliman Mutzafi zt"l (1900-1975) recalled that when Rabbenu would walk through the main Baghdad market, all the shopkeepers would come out of their stores to watch, and thousands of merchants would fill the street. They were so impressed by Rabbenu's radiant appearance that they bowed and remained bowing until he passed.

The Consummate Scholar

Rabbi Yehuda Tzadkah zt"l, the famous rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Porat Yosef, described Rabbenu as the consummate well-rounded scholar. He had thorough knowledge of the Talmud and halachah, arrived at incisive and brilliant hiddushim, and was unmatched in his knowledge of kabbalah, but he was nevertheless able to teach and inspire ordinary laymen on a level that was suitable for them. His writing style, too, was clear,



Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah

concise, and accessible. As a leader, he was wealthy, nice-looking, and charismatic. He was not only an expert in Torah, but also a remarkably creative poet and storyteller. Rarely have the Jewish people been granted a leader with such an expansive set of skills, who excelled in every area of learning and leadership.

And this is why the Ben Ish Hai commanded such respect among the Jews of Baghdad, despite not holding an official position of rabbinic authority. The community recognized that they had received a special treasure, the consummate rabbi, scholar, and leader. They reverently referred to the Ben Ish Hai as "al-hacham" — "the wise one." For this is precisely who he was — the one who was "wise" in every sense of the term, a towering giant in every area of Torah leadership. In their awe and reverence for their esteemed rabbi, they faithfully adhered to his every halachic ruling and instruction, following the path he charted for them. In fact, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan (in his work *Nifla'im Ma'asecha*) commented that had the Jews at the time of the First Temple obeyed the prophets as the Jews of Baghdad obeyed Rabbenu, the Bet Hamikdash would not have been destroyed, and we would not have been sent into exile.

8. Rav Pe'alim vol. 1, Orah Haim, siman 26.

Dedicated in memory of
Even (Ezra) Beno

May his *neshamah* rest
eternally in Gan Eden.

*Galit e' David Nathan
Bitton*

A Life of Sanctity

Rabbenu's lifestyle exemplified the ideal of kedushah, of living in the service of the Almighty, and forgoing personal enjoyment and comfort. He spent many hours secluded in his study, engrossed in Torah and avodat Hashem.

The great kabbalist Rabbi Benayahu Shmueli, currently the rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Nahar Shalom in Jerusalem, recalls that when he was a young student at Yeshivat Porat Yosef, he had the opportunity to hear about the Ben Ish Hai from Rabbi Yehoshua Sharbani zt"l. Rabbi Yehoshua, who was then over ninety years old, would spend time each day sitting in the sun outside in the yeshivah's courtyard, as his physicians had instructed. Rabbi Shmueli and several other students would sit with him and listen to inspiring stories about Rabbenu. He had known Rabbenu for many years in Baghdad; in fact, as he once

told the students, he was privileged to recite Birkat Hahamah¹ with Rabbenu three times. Rabbi Yehoshua had also been given the honor of being accompanied by the great sage as he made his way to the dock before sailing to Eretz Yisrael.

On one occasion, Rabbi Yehoshua related that the rabbis of Baghdad were very curious about the Ben Ish Hai's practice of secluding himself in his home each day. The rabbis finally decided that they would together prepare a difficult question so they would have a reason to go to Rabbenu's home to consult with him. They hoped that this visit would provide some clues as to how their esteemed leader spent these mysterious hours of seclusion.

Rabbi Yehoshua was selected for this job. And so, Gemara in hand, Rabbi Yehoshua walked to Rabbenu's house to pose the question. But when he reached the doorstep, he was surprised to find Rabbenu waiting for him.



Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani
(disciple of Hacham Yosef Haim)

“Tell all your colleagues,” Rabbenu said, “that tomorrow morning I will answer the question that you had all worked so hard to prepare.”

Torah, Wealth, and Sanctity

Rabbenu was blessed with the unique combination of Torah scholarship and wealth. His father, Rabbi Eliyahu, was a very wealthy man, and, in accordance with the Torah's laws of inheritance, his firstborn son — Rabbenu — received a double portion of the inheritance. Rabbi Eliyahu's other sons were eager to support their illustrious older brother, and they therefore advised him to invest his inheritance money with them so they could build and run a large business in his name. They realized that the townspeople would want to patronize the business in order to fulfill the mitzvah of providing a Torah scholar with a source of livelihood. In exchange for the investment, Rabbenu would receive a portion of the profits with which to support his family, so that he could devote all his time to Torah learning, writing, teaching, and serving the community.

Rabbenu agreed to his brothers' proposal, and the business succeeded, providing him with a reliable, respectable income. His share of the profits allowed him to immerse himself in Torah study day and night unencumbered by the responsibilities of work, and without suffering the hardships of poverty. Moreover, Rabbenu used the money to support other Torah scholars, and he even sent a monthly stipend to Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, just as his father had done. With a steady source of income, Rabbenu never accepted any official salaried position, and he invested all his time into Torah learning and avodat Hashem (serving G-d).

But despite the material benefits with which he was blessed, he never indulged in physical delights. In fact, Rabbenu observed numerous fasts throughout the year. He fasted every month on the day before Rosh Hodesh, on the anniversary of his father's passing, on 7 Adar — the anniversary of Moshe Rabbenu's passing — and on 5 Av — the anniversary of the Arizal's passing, among other occasions.

1. Birkat Hahamah is the blessing recited once every twenty-eight years when the sun and the earth are aligned in the same position as they were at the time of creation.

Rabbenu thus ended up observing four fasts in ten days during the peak of the sweltering Iraqi summer: the day before Rosh Hodesh Av, 5 Av, 7 Av (the anniversary of his mother’s passing), and, of course, 9 Av (Tishah B’Av). He continued observing these fasts even in his old age.

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan related that Rabbenu refrained from eating watermelon — which was a major staple in the hot, dry Iraqi summer — until Rosh Hashanah, so he could recite the berachah of shehehiyanu over it on the second night of the holiday.²

Rabbenu also maintained a mikveh in his home and immersed in it frequently, so he would be ritually pure at all times.

Furthermore, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan writes that Rabbenu made a point of eating only food that was in a state of taharah (purity). He therefore ensured that any housekeepers in his home involved in preparing or serving food were either young girls before the age of menstruation, or post-menopausal women. In other books, it is reported that he made sure that no woman walked in his courtyard wearing wood-soled shoes, so that the noise of a woman’s footsteps would not disturb his contemplation and studies.

However, while Rabbenu denied himself the luxuries of the world, he never made such demands on the masses. To the contrary, he used his wealth to assist others and opened his doors to feed needy guests to their heart’s content. Rabbi Yehoshua Sharbani recalled how he would visit Rabbenu’s home each day at around lunchtime, when the Ben Ish Hai would open his home to all the poor residents of the city. Rabbi Yehoshua would stand by the window to hear the novel Torah insights that the sage would share with his guests as they ate. He told that after the hungry guests ate their fill, Rabbenu would eat a small morsel of food and then present one of his hiddushim on

2. The Ben Ish Hai also did not eat watermelon until later in the season, when the melons were not as flavorful, in order to limit his enjoyment of earthly pleasures.

Gemara. These hiddushim were printed in his books Benayahu and Ben Yehoyada.

Teshuvat Hakaneh

Rabbenu’s brothers’ business thrived for many years, but in 5642/1882, the tables turned and the brothers fell into enormous debt, losing all their assets. The government suspected them of illegal financial activities, and imprisoned the brothers for one year until their trial was complete and they were found innocent. Rabbenu was also jailed for a month as part of the government’s hostile campaign against the enterprise. This ordeal that ravaged the family caused severe distress to the Ben Ish Hai’s mother, and she died that year on 7 Av.

Rabbenu and his brothers were released from prison, and, while they lost their family business, the inheritance received from their father sufficed to



Brothers of Hacham Yosef Haim: Moshe, Nissim, Yehezkel and Sasson. (Courtesy of Fetaya family)

support them. But although they succeeded in resuming their normal routine, Rabbenu, in the spirit of the famous rabbinic dictum, "There is no suffering without sin," recognized that the suffering he endured must have been the result of wrongdoing. He therefore undertook the teshuvat hakaneh, a six-year program of spiritual rectification, which entails fasting every day — eating only after nightfall — and thoroughly immersing oneself in avodat Hashem (service of G-d). Tradition teaches that one who strictly follows this program for six years is then free from the clutches of the yetzer hara. Rabbenu faithfully adhered to this tikkun for six years, and even during the nighttime, he refrained from meat and wine and ate only legumes. He also remained in his home throughout this period.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan, in his brief biography of the Ben Ish Hai, presents the following description of the teshuvat hakaneh which the Ben Ish Hai observed:

It is well known that as a young man, Rabbenu afflicted himself for six years, as described in Sefer Hakaneh — that one works hard for six years and on the seventh year he is set free from the yetzer hara. And besides all [the measures mentioned in Sefer Hakaneh], he would also deny himself other forms of physical gratification. For example, he did not eat watermelons all summer long, and instead waited until Rosh Hashanah so he could recite the berachah of Shehehyanu on them. This was in spite of the



Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan

stifling heat of the Iraqi summer, when watermelons were a refreshing staple of the diet.

The Ben Ish Hai's Imprisonment

Although Rabbenu never makes explicit reference to this ordeal in his writings, in his work *Od Yosef Hai*,³ he recorded the following story:

There once was a scholar who was a great kabbalist, who was betrayed through lies to the government, and the governor imprisoned him. They did not put him in a cell with the other prisoners, but rather put him in solitary confinement, in a tiny room, and decreed that no man shall visit him or talk to him. After being imprisoned there for thirty days, he was found innocent by the court and returned home unharmed, thirty-one days after entering the jail.

G-d performed a miracle and gave the man peace of mind in the jail. He studied mystical wisdom day and night, and managed to arrive at many new insights into the secrets of the Torah, and he prepared an important shiur. After returning to his home on the thirty-first day, on the night of the thirty-second day, he found himself unable to sleep because he was so perplexed as to the meaning of his having been confined to such a small place for thirty days. While it was true that G-d helped him by granting him mystical insight, and that he lacked nothing spiritually, there was no denying that physically he had suffered greatly. Why had this transpired? He could have written up the shiur at home, so why did he

3. Derashot — Lech Lecha.

need to be in that place? He fell asleep that night with these questions still weighing on his mind.

That night, he dreamed that he was walking alone through a vast desert. Suddenly, he saw a striking elderly man coming toward him, and it seemed to him that this old man either came from the next world, or was an angel from heaven disguised as a man. He approached the old man and said to him, "Sir, I am very perplexed about one thing. Could you tell me the meaning of it?" He told him to speak, and he said, "Tell me the reason why I was confined for thirty days in that harsh, narrow, and bitter jail."

The old man said to him, "Turn around and see what is behind you." He turned around and saw three groups of children, walking one after the other. They all had the same face and looked like that scholar, and they were all fine-looking and pleasing to the eye in every way. The old man said, "It was for the sake of these children that you entered that terrible jail. These children are holy neshamot, who were reincarnated into inanimate materials contained in the tiny room where you sat for thirty days. Some of them share your soul root on the level of nefesh, and others share your soul root on the level of neshamah. That is why they all look like you.

"They are divided into three groups because you rectified and purified each group for ten days, and for this reason you sat there for a total of thirty days. There was no other way to rectify them and extricate them from there besides studying mystical wisdom in that very place; you could not rescue them from a distance by studying in your home. It was also impossible for anyone else besides you to bring about their tikkun.



Scouts of the Midrash Talmud Torah School, Baghdad, Iraq c.1935. In the center, in traditional clothes, is the principal, Rabbi Yehezkel El Waquil. The school was founded in 1932 and was active until 1951. (Beth Hatefutsot Photo Archive, courtesy of David Nakar, Israel)

It was therefore decreed in heaven that false charges would be brought against you that would cause you to be incarcerated in that jail. If the charges had not been made, why else would you have gone there to study the secret wisdom?

"It was also Divine Providence that put the idea into the governor's head to order that no one would visit you, so that you would not be disturbed in your studies, as time was short and there was much to achieve. G-d gave you peace of mind so that you could study undistracted, in order that your study and your new insights would have sufficient power to extract those neshamot from their entrapment in the inanimate matter in that place. You did just that and you were successful, and those

are the children walking after you. They are your sons whom you will see waiting for you in the next world, in Gan Eden, and you will delight in them.

“See how much you gained during those thirty days, and how much goodness you accomplished during that time! All these souls were waiting for you to come there, especially because there were impure non-Jews there engaged in forbidden acts, and they added to the impurity of the place prior to your arrival. These neshamot suffered terribly, and when you came, they were set free.”

The scholar woke up and realized that he had been dreaming, and he rejoiced. He collected the insights that he had thought of in jail and published them in a book called *Matir Assurim*.⁴

Even in his darkest hour, Rabbenu remained resolute in his faith in Hashem and understood that this calamity had befallen him for a reason. He showed how in any circumstance, one must trust that everything that happens is part of G-d’s plan. The Ben Ish Hai’s ordeal resulted in the tikkun of these souls, as well as his own personal growth and development, into an even greater and more exalted spiritual giant than he had been previously. His experiences in the prison cell and the six years of fasting raised him to towering spiritual heights that he might not have achieved otherwise. This incident serves as an inspiring example of lovingly accepting all that Hashem does, and utilizing every situation as a precious opportunity for avodat Hashem and spiritual growth.

4. Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri and Hacham David (grandson of the Ben Ish Hai) confirmed that the scholar in this story is the Ben Ish Hai himself.

Learning with Eliyahu Hanavi

Rabbenu lived on a level that was almost otherworldly. His life of minimal involvement in earthly delights resembled the existence of angels, who exist as purely spiritual beings, without any physical attributes. Indeed, he rose to a level of holiness where he was privileged to speak and learn with Eliyahu Hanavi, the prophet who left this world and has existed ever since in a purely spiritual form.

One of the assistants to the Ben Ish Hai’s cook once heard voices in the rabbi’s room while he was studying. The assistant, assuming the rabbi was speaking with a guest, prepared two cups of tea — one for the rabbi, and one for the guest. He entered the room, only to find Rabbenu sitting there alone, without any guests.

The assistant told the cook what happened, and he went to ask the Ben Ish Hai’s wife what went on in that room.

“How could it be?” he asked. “There were two voices — but only the rabbi was there!”

Rabbenu’s wife replied simply, “Don’t worry.”

The cook’s grandson, who related this story,⁵ said that the Ben Ish Hai was apparently learning Torah together with Eliyahu Hanavi!

5. The cook’s grandson told this story to this author.

In honor of the memory of
**Jacob and Mercedes
Benmergui z”l**
and
Harry Kay z”l

By their children and grandchildren
Robert and Vivian Benmergui
*Yaacov and Esther Bracha
Benmergui and Family*
*Yisroel and Malka Woolfson
and Family*
Shimon Benmergui
Chaya Benmergui

Journey to the Holy Land

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, in his biography of Rabbenu, described his intense love for the Land of Israel, particularly for Jerusalem and the land's other holy sites. Whenever representatives of the rabbis in Eretz Yisrael came to Baghdad, Rabbenu treated them with great respect. He ensured to always speak favorably about the Jews who lived in the Holy Land, and impressed upon the community the importance of empathizing with the difficult plight of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael and helping them. And whenever a letter arrived reporting a crisis facing the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbenu would immediately collect funds from his community and send the money as quickly as he could. He also arranged for most of his books to be printed in Jerusalem in order to support the city's Jewish population that was struggling for survival.

The Ben Ish Hai's deep love for Eretz Yisrael drove him to make the long, arduous journey from Iraq to the Holy Land. Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan presents the following account of Rabbenu's trip to the Land of Israel:

In the year 5629/1869 [on 25 Nissan], Rabbenu set out for Jerusalem, may it soon be rebuilt, escorted by his brother, Hacham Yehezkel. They traveled through vast deserts on unbeaten tracks. From Syria toward Jerusalem, he was accompanied by the greatest rabbis. They were amazed and awed by seeing Rabbenu spending the entire day reviewing Torah sources in his mind from memory, never growing weary even for a moment, despite the stifling heat and the rough and uncomfortable carriage ride. Moreover, while the other travelers collapsed in exhaustion every night and slept till morning, Rabbenu would rise at midnight, full of vigor and determination, and would recite Tikkun Hatzot and then study Torah until dawn.

A Symbol of Righteousness

Rabbenu had made an agreement with the Arab driver who was leading the caravan that they would not travel on Shabbat under any circumstances. Since Rabbenu offered to pay the Arab his daily wage even for the Shabbatot, when he would be able to rest, he happily agreed to the deal.

However, on the first Friday afternoon of the trip, the driver violated his word and refused to stop, claiming that it was too dangerous to rest in the area they were in. Rabbenu insisted that his group would stop for Shabbat, and told the guide that he may continue if he wished. All the Jewish travelers followed Rabbenu's lead and climbed off their camels and wagons, erected their tents, lit a campfire, prepared food, and then joyously and serenely welcomed the Shabbat queen.

The wagon driver pretended to continue on his way, but once he was out of sight, he turned around and went to hide behind some boulders. He wanted to see what would happen to those "foolish Jews" who had stopped for a day in the middle of a dangerous area.

Sure enough, later that night, a gang of bandits secretly laid an ambush around the tents. "These Jews are about to get what they bargained for," the Arab driver smugly thought to himself. "They are about to meet a gruesome end — all because they didn't listen to me!" He eagerly watched as the chief bandit stealthily approached Rabbenu's tent and peeked inside.

Astonishingly, the thief jumped back, apparently stunned by what he saw, and then turned around and fled in a state of panic. His cronies were shaken to their core by the sight of their fearless leader running away in terror, and they also fled.

It was later discovered that the chief bandit had recognized the Ben Ish Hai from a legal dispute he had with a Jew many years earlier, before he had resorted to pirating. This man had brought a claim against a Jew, who flatly denied the claim in the bet din. The plaintiff appealed to Rabbenu, and this time, the awe of the rabbi's presence compelled the Jew to confess. He had denied the claim, he explained, because he simply did not have the money to pay what he owed. Rabbenu immediately reached into his pocket, took out the sum of money in question, and gave it to the Jew so he could repay his creditor.

The gentile creditor was astounded by the rabbi's kindness, and the image of Rabbenu's face was permanently etched in his mind as a symbol of piety and selflessness. Over the years, as his own moral character rapidly declined and he adopted a life of theft and violence, this mental image became increasingly clear and pronounced. When he saw Rabbenu that Shabbat night in the tent, he was stricken with terror and fled.

The Arab driver was awed by what he saw, and realized the stature of the rabbi with whom he was traveling. He immediately ran over to Rabbenu to beg his forgiveness for breaking their agreement, and promised to stop for Shabbat from that point onward.

From Damascus to Jerusalem

On 12 Iyar, two and a half weeks after the convoy departed from Baghdad, it reached Damascus, Syria. The group was joined by several leading figures of the Jewish community of Damascus, and they then continued their trip toward Jerusalem.

Rabbenu's brother, Rabbi Yehezkel zt"l, related that before the group entered the gates of the Holy City, Rabbenu told them that they could not enter the city before immersing in a mikveh. As there was no mikveh in sight, Rabbenu told the people to start digging in the ground beneath their feet. Before long, they uncovered a fresh water spring.

During their stay in Jerusalem, Rabbenu and his brother were hosted by their cousin, Rabbi Shelomo Yehuda, whose mother, Rahel, was the sister of Rabbi Eliyahu, the Ben Ish Hai's father. All the rabbis of Jerusalem came to greet Rabbenu with respect and honor. Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, in his work *Tehillot Yosef*, describes the honor given to the Ben Ish Hai when he arrived in Jerusalem:

On the day he came to Jerusalem, the city's rabbis and leaders from all groups, Sephardic and Ashkenazic alike, prepared a magnificent welcoming ceremony befitting a sage and tzaddik of his stature. The Torah sages were enchanted by him...

Rabbi Shneur Zalman Mendel, in his memoirs,¹ recalls the great reverence shown to the Ben Ish Hai by the rabbis of Eretz Yisrael: "Rabbi Yosef Haim traveled to Eretz Yisrael to pray at the graves of

1. *Zichron Yerushalayim*.

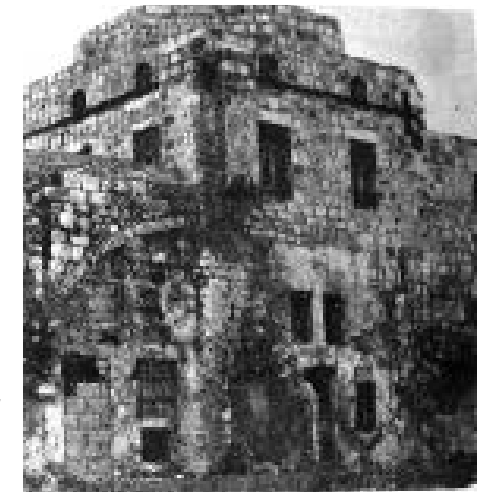
tzaddikim and they accorded him great honor there, for he deserves all the honor in the world..."

Yeshivat Bet-El

The Ben Ish Hai had always longed to meet the great scholars of the renowned Yeshivat Bet-El in Jerusalem, the premier institution of kabbalistic study which was founded by the famous kabbalist Rabbi Shalom Shar'avy zt"l (the "Rashash," 1720-1777). Rabbi Hillel writes:

When he arrived in Jerusalem, he hurried to visit the famed bet midrash Bet-El, where the greatest sages of Jerusalem devote their time to learning the hidden parts of the Torah and to praying with the intentions of the holy Ar'i zt"l. Fortunate is the eye that has witnessed this! All his life, the Ben Ish Hai longed to join these sages in their lofty learning, and now he was finally privileged to do so...

Rabbenu had heard about the great scholars of Yeshivat Bet-El from his teacher and colleague, Rav Eliyahu Mani, and was very eager to meet these sages and ask them certain questions that he had. And so, soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, he went to the yeshiva. He posed his questions to the yeshiva's scholars, and the only one who answered them to his satisfaction was the renowned kabbalist Rabbi Yedidya Rafael Hai Abulafia (the "Yareh," 1807-1869), who was a student of the *Divre Shalom*, the grandson of the Rashash. During the Ben Ish Hai's visit to Jerusalem, he and Rabbi Yedidya enjoyed



Yeshivat Bet-El

many lengthy discussions exploring the deepest mysteries of the Torah.

Hebron

Rabbenu eventually took leave of Jerusalem and headed toward Hebron. Immediately after his departure from Jerusalem, Rabbi Yedidya Abulafia took ill and sensed that his end was near. He sent a messenger to find the Ben Ish Hai and call him back, as he wanted to reveal one more kabbalistic secret before leaving this world. The messenger was unable to locate Rabbenu's group. When Rabbenu returned to Jerusalem after his trip to Hebron, he found Rabbi Yedidya's sons observing shivah for their father. He was distraught by the news of the great sage's death, and especially by the opportunity he lost to learn another insight into the hidden areas of the Torah.

While in Hebron, Rabbenu was reunited with his colleague and mentor Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, the rabbi of the city, whom he had not seen in thirteen years. Throughout this time, they had maintained an active correspondence on various matters of halachah and the customs of the kabbalists in Jerusalem, as Rabbenu often mentions in his books. It was a festive moment for these two sages when they were reunited after so many years.

Me'arat Hamachpelah (The Cave of the Patriarchs)

Of course, during his stay in Hebron, Rabbenu visited Me'arat Hamachpelah, the burial place of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. An article printed in 1870 in the Jewish journal *Halevanon* described the Ben Ish Hai's visit to the holy site:

Several months ago, a lion came out of Bavel and was seen here in Hebron — the glorious and incomparable Hacham Yosef Haim, who visited the tombs of our eternal Patriarchs. He wanted to enter the "bedchamber" [where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs

"sleep"], but some Arabs surrounded him and called out, "Go away, impure one, this is a holy place." Despite the majesty that radiates from the rabbi's face, they began to beat him wantonly. The rabbi was so pained by the fact that this holy place had fallen into the hands of non-Jews that he began to cry, and he returned to his lodging heartbroken.

But the rabbi knew that there was only one thing that the Arabs considered capable of purifying an impure one — money, which they supposedly despised. He called one of the leading Arabs and gave him a handful of money, and he brought the rabbi to that holy place. This time, none of the Arabs protested, because the money had "purified" him.

He then swore an oath in G-d's Name that when he stops in Damascus on his way back to Bavel, he would consult with the minister and commander Shamaya Anjil, who had the ear of the king and his ministers, and advise him to redeem this holy place from the hands of the Arabs. He indeed fulfilled his oath when he was in Damascus, and he spoke with Shamaya Anjil, who, filled with fear of heaven and purity of heart, was happy to take part in this mitzvah and promised to do his utmost to make this happen.

The archives of Hevrat Ahavat Shalom² contain the personal diary of Rabbi Suliman Menachem Mani, the son of Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, in which he describes the Ben Ish Hai's efforts in greater detail:

2. Hevrat Ahavat Shalom, which was founded by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel, is one of the world's leading yeshivot and includes a special branch that trains rabbinic judges, and a select group of scholars engaged in the study of kabbalah. Hevrat Ahavat Shalom also has a rabbinic court based in Jerusalem. Its publishing house has, to date, printed over 350 rare and valuable manuscripts of Sephardic sages.

Adjacent to the wall built near the Me'arat Hamachpelah, where our Jewish brothers come to pray from all over the Land, there is a small opening that leads to an ancient structure which the Muslims call the Kaleh.

When the great lion [the Ben Ish Hai] came from Baghdad and arrived in Hebron to pray at the grave of our fathers, he wanted to enter that Kaleh. But as soon as he went inside, the Arabs surrounded him like a pack of angry wolves and hurled insults at him. They grabbed him by his clothing and dragged him outside.

The hacham was very distraught over the fact that such a holy site was in the impure hands of the Muslims. He summoned an Arab leader, gave him a handsome bribe, and convinced him to take him into the fortress. Having been inside the fortress, the Ben Ish Hai was filled with determination to purchase the site from the Muslims and build a synagogue there, so that Jews would be able to have a quiet corner where they could pray and learn in peace near the grave of their forefathers...

When Rabbenu came to Damascus and relayed his aspirations to ... Shamaya Anjil, the nobleman was eager to offer his assistance. He wrote letters to various dignitaries, both Jewish and Muslim, until he was given permission by the authorities to take measurements of the site in preparation for its sale. But when the kadi³ heard about the plans, he was enraged and refused to allow the transaction to go through. The kadi ordered a group of wealthy Arabs to offer the highest bid for

the site, thereby ensuring that it would remain under Muslim control...

Rabbenu's interest in rescuing Me'arat Hamachpelah from the hands of the Arabs led Rabbi Eliyahu Mani to follow his colleague's lead and travel to Damascus to speak with Shamaya Anjil. But unfortunately, as Rabbi Eliyahu's son recorded, these efforts were unsuccessful, and the Arabs retained control of Me'arat Hamachpelah.

After leaving Hebron, Rabbenu visited the tomb of Benayahu ben Yehoyada, the warrior and scholar who served under King David and King Solomon. Benayahu ben Yehodaya's tomb is situated in Ir David ("City of David"), the original site of King David's capital city which lies to the south of what is today the Old City of Jerusalem. While meditating at the site of this tzaddik's grave, Rabbenu was inspired with special insight into the secrets of the Torah, and this inspiration remained with him for many years. This was the reason he named some of his most famous works in reference to this tzaddik, such as



Benayahu Ben Yehoyada

3. A kadi (sometimes spelled qadi), is a judge appointed in Moslem countries to issue rulings on Sharia, Islamic religious law.



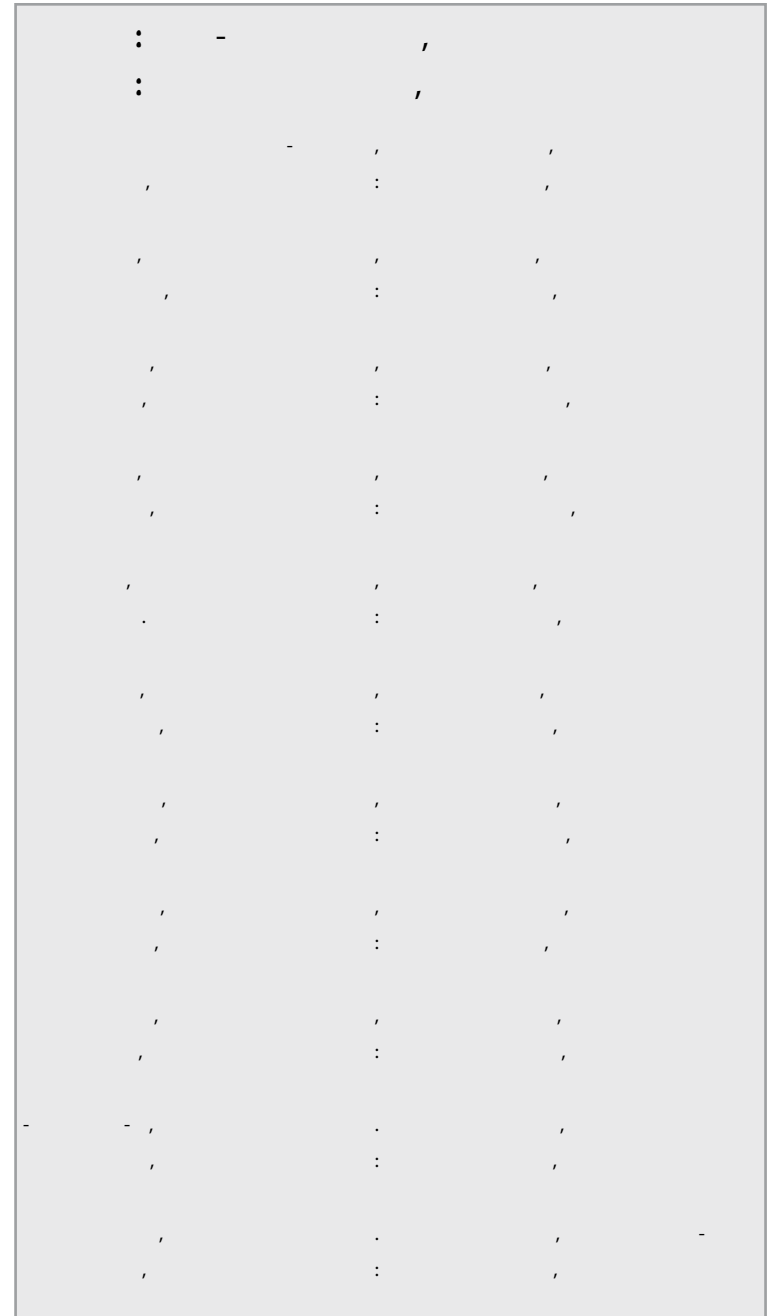
Kever Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai

Benayahu, Ben Yehoyada, Ben Ish Hai, Ben Ish Hayil, Rav Pe'alim, and Mikavtze'el.⁴

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai

Rabbenu then traveled to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai on Har Meron in Northern Israel. It is told that his visit occurred on Lag B'Omer (the date of Rabbi Shimon's passing) and that many Torah secrets were revealed to him at that time. With the inspiration Rabbenu received at the grave of the holy Tanna, he composed "V'Amartem Koh L'Hai," a well-known song about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai which is sung on Lag B'Omer across the Jewish world. It is also told that when one wealthy man heard that song, he was so inspired that he had the words engraved on a solid gold tray and gave it to Rabbenu as a gift.

4. These expressions are taken from a verse in the Book of Shemuel II (23:20) that describes Benayahu: ובניהו בן יהוידע בן איש חיל [קרי: חי] רב פעלים מקבצאל. (This verse appears with slight variation in Divre Hayamim I 11:22.)



The End of an Extraordinary Journey

In his work Ben Yehodaya,⁵ Rabbenu describes one of his experiences along the return trip back to Baghdad:

The people of Nusaybin [in modern-day Turkey] have a tradition that Rabbi Yehuda Ben Betera was buried just outside their city, and that once some non-Jews took stones from the tomb built over his grave. They loaded them on some camels, but the camels immediately became blinded. After this miracle, the non-Jews referred to Rabbi Yehuda ben Betera by the term Me'ami, which means "blinder."

In the year 5629/1869, I made a pilgrimage to the Holy City, may it be speedily rebuilt, and on my way back to Baghdad I traveled via Nusaybin and I was fortunate enough to kiss the stones of his tomb. While I was there, I learned this explanation of this mesechet. May G-d allow his merit to protect us and all of Israel, amen.

The return trip also brought the Ben Ish Hai through the city of Mosul.

Rabbenu finally returned to his home in Baghdad on 29 Elul, 5629/1869, five months after



Rabbi Eliyahu Sayar, head of the Jewish community of Mosul, Iraq, 1900-1905. (Beth Hatefutsot Photo Archive, courtesy of Ezra Laniado, Israel)



1930 - Leaders of the Jewish Community of Mosul with two emissaries from Israel: From right to left: Haye Marioma; the envoy Rabbi Yehushua Palatchi; Nahome Itzhak Halevi; Moshi Shimeon; Aharon Hayou Hammou; the envoy Rabbi Yosef Haim Shrem; Moshi Reuben Shubi; Hacham Hammou; Abed Qafson; Hacham Suliman Ben Rabbi Eliyahu Barzani; Saleh Abdel-Nabi. Second row: Standing: Moshe Hayou Hammou; Baruch Zakhawi; Yahya Fraich; Hacham David Shalom; Semah Shoubi; Rahamim el-Mukhtar; Yahya Shemesh; a Jew from Dehok. Back row: Shaoul Nghoula; Hayim Yosef; Nahome Haim; Hacham Haim Barazani; Abdallah Halwatchi; Esta Abed; David Sassoon; Hacham Eliyahu el Zeghayer; David Salman. (Photo courtesy 'The traveling envoy Rabbi Yosef Haim Shrem' by Dr. Abraham Ben Yaacob)

he embarked on his journey. The community had eagerly awaited the return of their beloved leader, and prepared a festive welcoming ceremony in his honor.

Precious Stones

There is a tradition passed down by the rabbis of Baghdad identifying the city's Great Synagogue, where the Ben Ish Hai would deliver derashot four times a year, as the Shaf V'yativ synagogue in Nehardea mentioned in the Talmud.⁶ The commentators provide the history of this structure, relating that when King Yehoyachin was driven from Jerusalem along with most of the city's residents by

5. Ben Yehodaya (vol. 3).

6. Rosh Hashanah 24b.

the Babylonians,⁷ they carried with them some stones and earth of Jerusalem. Upon arriving in Bavel, they used the stones and earth to build this synagogue, in accordance with the verse in Tehillim,⁸ “For Your servants desire its stones.” According to tradition, the four great Jewish personalities of the Babylonian exile — Daniel, Hananya, Mishael, and Azaria — all prayed in this synagogue.⁹

Following this example, Rabbenu brought a sack of soil and rocks from the Holy Land back to Baghdad, and placed them in the synagogue. David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942), grandson of the great philanthropist David Sassoon (1792-1864),¹⁰ records this incident in his book *The Jews of Bavel*:

Close to the main entrance of the synagogue was a small stone fixed into the wall, and the words “a stone from the Land of Israel” were inscribed upon it. Everyone that passed by that place on their way into the synagogue would touch it and then kiss their fingertips, in accordance with the ancient custom that originated in the book of Tehillim: “For Your servants desired its stones, and loved her dust.” The stone was brought from the Holy Land in the year 1869 by the late Hacham Yosef Haim, who also brought sacks of dirt with him and scattered them on the ground in the synagogue, which had a dirt floor.”¹¹

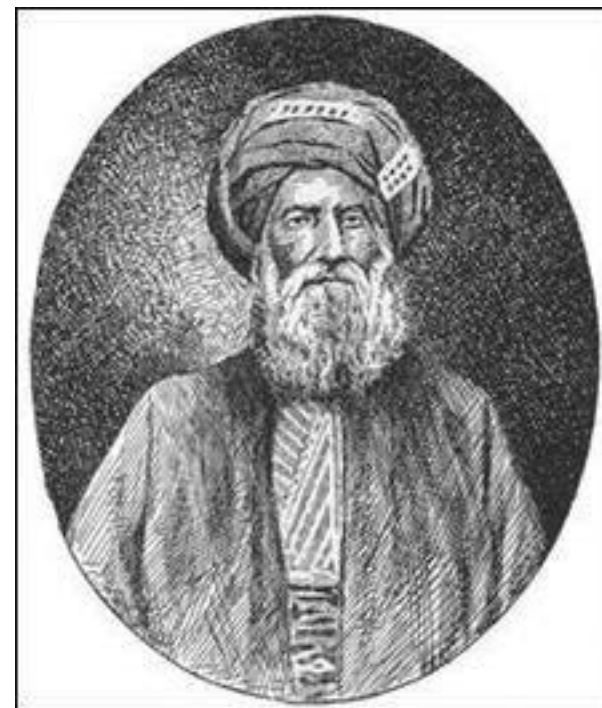
7. Melachim II 24:10-16.

8. 102:15.

9. See Rashi to Tehillim 102:15. Rabbi Ezra Dangoor, in his introduction to *Tzedek U'mishpat*, cites Rabbi Abdallah Somech and other sages as claiming that this tradition has been passed down for generations.

10. David Sassoon was the treasurer of Baghdad between 1817 and 1829. He later became the leader of the community of Baghdadi Jews who emigrated to Bombay (now Mumbai).

11. David Solomon Sassoon's family journeyed from India to Iraq in 1910. His travels in Iraq in general, and in his ancestral city Baghdad in particular, were geared toward collecting, documenting, and researching the history of the Jews in Baghdad. He wrote a



The famed philanthropist David Sassoon

travel diary in Hebrew entitled *Masa Bavel* (“Travels in Babylon”) which was published in 1910 and which he utilized later in composing his book *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*. This diary was later edited and published in Hebrew by Professor Meir Benayahu in 1955, after its author's death (*Travels in Bavel*, Jerusalem, 1955).

In loving memory of our grandparents
Charles Shalom and Sol Botbol
Yosef and Hanna Anidjar
Avraham and Fortuna Levi
Jacov and Malka Neugewurz

May Hashem grant them many years of health
and happiness from all of their children and
grandchildren. Thank you for all your sacrifices, love,
and guidance, and may we share many *semachot*.

Dedicated in honor of our parents
Isaac (Jack) and Clara Botbol
Robert and Gitta Levi

Dedicated in honor of our siblings
Sally and Ariel
& our niece and nephews
Batya, Jordan, Ezra, and Yehuda

In honor of my wife
Amarya
and our children
Raina Clara, Yarden Hanna Fortuna,
Lielle Sivan, and Ness Noah

Dedicated to our dear friend and author
of this magnificent publication
Yehuda Azoulay

Charles Shalom and Amarya Botbol

The Visionary of Yeshivat Porat Yosef

In the late 1800's, there lived in the Indian city of Calcutta a great philanthropist named Yosef Avraham Shalom. Yosef was blessed with fabulous wealth and sought to dedicate a significant portion of his fortune toward aiding his fellow Jews.

He sent a letter to Baghdad, to Hacham Yosef Haim, expressing his desire to establish an institution in Jerusalem to fulfill the great mitzvah of hatzalat nefashot — saving lives — regarding which our Sages famously proclaimed, “Whoever saves one Jewish life is considered to have saved the entire world.”¹ Having been informed that there was no hospital in Jerusalem, and that the local Jewish population was in dire need of a full-scale medical facility, he

1. Sanhedrin, 37a.

decided to establish a modern, well-equipped hospital for the Jews of Jerusalem.

Rabbenu immediately wrote a letter back to Mr. Shalom, advising him that it would be more worthwhile to establish a large yeshivah in Jerusalem. While it is undoubtedly a great mitzvah to offer medical relief to the ill, especially to the poor residents of Jerusalem, other benefactors could easily be found for that important cause. When it came, however, to establishing a yeshivah in Jerusalem that would serve as a world center of Torah and spirituality, donors were hard to come by. Only a select few, Rabbenu explained, reach the level where they fully appreciate the immense value of Torah learning and are prepared to generously support it: "Others can take care of physical health. I do not, however, see too many people concerned with spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, my suggestion is that you establish a yeshivah that is a healing station for all ailments of the soul..."

In his letter to Mr. Shalom, the Ben Ish Hai emphasized the special value of building such an establishment in the Holy City, overlooking the Temple Mount:

Surely a synagogue or study hall built closer to the Temple Mount is superior and holier, since it is closer to the gateway to heaven. This is especially true if the worshippers within it can see from its windows the ground of the site where the Bet Hamikdash stood. This is superior to all! Fortunate is the one who is privileged to pray in such a synagogue and to study in such a house!²

Rabbenu alerted Mr. Shalom to the fact that if he would not contribute to this cause, then it would be highly unlikely that anyone else would take on this vital project.

2. In his work *Od Yosef Hai*, Rabbenu writes that the closer a synagogue or Torah study hall is to the Temple Mount, the holier it is.



Yeshivat Porat Yosef

The great philanthropist took Rabbenu's advice to heart, and decided that he would allocate a very large sum of money toward the establishment of a yeshivah in the Old City, facing the Kotel, which would ultimately come to be known as Yeshivat Porat Yosef. He left an endowment in the charge of his trusted assistant Sir Moshe Sasson, who administered the funds.³ He also endowed several homes, buildings, and shops in Calcutta so that their earnings from rental payments would provide a continuing source of income for the yeshivah and pay the monthly salaries of the yeshivah's rabbis.

The Ben Ish Hai instructed his close disciple Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan to purchase a tract of land for the yeshivah building as close as possible to the Kotel. After making extensive efforts, Rabbi Hazan found a suitable tract of land and managed to solicit the additional funds needed for the construction and upkeep of the yeshivah. He also selected qualified Torah scholars to lead the new institution. Under Rabbi Hazan's capable management, the pieces started coming together and construction got underway.

3. Mr. Yosef Avraham Shalom also urged the members of the wealthy Sassoon family of Bombay to become steady supporters of the yeshivah.

Rabbenu guided and accompanied Mr. Shalom throughout the process of the yeshivah's planning, to ensure that the goal of Yeshivat Porat Yosef would be fueling the flame of Torah among Sephardic Jewry, and preparing the next generation of Sephardic Torah scholars, roshe yeshivah, rabbis, and rabbinic judges both in Israel and the Diaspora.⁴

The yeshivah building consisted of a large synagogue, two enclosed courtyards and nearly fifty rooms, including offices, a library, and dozens of classrooms and residential apartments for destitute Torah scholars. The yeshivah's windows offered a magnificent view of the Temple Mount and the Kotel. Dozens of advanced scholars sat day and night in the enclosed courtyards studying Torah, ruling on halachic issues, and probing the endless depths of Torah. The younger students studied in the yeshivah's



Hacham Saliman Eliyahu (father of Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu)

4. Many graduates of Yeshivat Porat Yosef were sent to the Diaspora to teach and lead Jewish communities. One of the great success stories is that of Hacham Tzion Levy (1922-2008), who was sent to lead the Sephardic community of Panama. In 1951 Mr. Isidore Azrak, a representative of the Shevet Ahim congregation of Panama, came to Israel in search of a young, talented rabbi to lead his community. The Panamanian Jewish community had no rabbi, mohel or shohet, and faced a grave religious crisis. Mr. Azrak met with Hacham Ben-Tzion Uziel (1880-1953) and Hacham Ezra Attiah (1887-1970), two of Israel's leading Sephardic rabbis at the time, and they recommended Hacham Tzion Levy. The great rabbi led what can only be termed a revolution in Panama, raising the standards of religious observance among the Jews of Panama and transforming the community into a full-fledged Torah community.

large synagogue, delving into the classic Talmudic texts with passion and vigor.

Rabbenu advised Mr. Shalom that a second large chamber should also be built as a center for the study of kabbalah and where students of kabbalah could pray facing the Kotel with the kavanot of the Rashash. Such an institution, Rabbenu wrote, would "raise the Shechinah from the dust" and hasten the arrival of the Final Redemption. This yeshivah was called Oz V'hadar, and for thirty years, it served as a thriving center of kabbalistic study, where the prayer service followed the text and customs of the Arizal and the Rashash. The institution was led by Hacham Saliman Eliyahu, Hacham Ephraim Menashe Hakohen, Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani, and other great sages.

Sadly, Mr. Yosef Avraham Shalom did not live to see his yeshivah. Before his passing, he wrote a beautiful letter expressing his thoughts and feelings about this monumental project, and his charge to the



Chief Sephardic Rabbi Ben-Tzion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953) with the staff of teachers, Jerusalem 1940s. Photo: Herbert Sonnenfeld (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, Sonnenfeld collection)

students and staff of the yeshivah. The letter is engraved on the podium of the yeshivah's main sanctuary, and it reads as follows:

17 Sivan 5671/1911

To my brothers and friends, hachamim, officials, and inspectors of this holy establishment:

Those who are honored with knowledge of Torah know how hard I worked, with all my body and soul, to build this bet hamidrash for the hachamim who will study here, in order to fulfill the commandment, "And you shall engage in it [the Torah] day and night." They shall take their yearly stipend from the money I have set aside in Calcutta. I give you this oath — you who are in charge of this great mitzvah — in the name of He Who dwells in Tzion, Who is before your eyes in this holy place [the Western Wall], that you shall not rest in your leadership of this place, and you shall follow the conditions in my last will and testament, to glorify the Name of G-d, to create Torah in Tzion, and the word of G-d in Jerusalem in such a holy place, about which it was stated: "My eyes and heart will be there for all days." Indeed, thanks to Yeshivat Porat Yosef, we have been privileged to see Jerusalem return to her days of glory.



Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah speaking; from right to left: Hacham Ovadia Yosef; Hagoan Rabbi Betzalel Zolty; Hacham Ezra Attiah; Hacham David Pardo

The yeshivah's name, Porat Yosef, was chosen as an everlasting memorial to Mr. Yosef Avraham Shalom, the righteous benefactor who built this historic institution.

The History of Yeshivat Porat Yosef

Yeshivat Porat Yosef was one of the first Sephardic yeshivot established in Eretz Yisrael in modern times. The cornerstone for the yeshivah was laid in 1914, but the outbreak of World War I delayed its construction, and it was not formally inaugurated until 1923. The great sage Rabbi Ezra Attiah was named rosh yeshivah, and Rabbi Ben-Tzion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953), who would later become Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, served as the first president of Yeshivat Porat Yosef and presided over the first official meeting of the yeshivah. For the next quarter-century, the yeshivah blossomed. Generally speaking, the staff and students did not endure any hostilities on the part of their Arab neighbors throughout this period, when Eretz Yisrael was under the British Mandate.

Yeshivat Porat Yosef was home to an enormous Torah library, which contained thousands of volumes as well as rare, priceless books and manuscripts. Among the treasures contained in the library were writings of Rabbi Eliyahu Mani, the Chief Rabbi of Hebron;



Porat Yosef in the Old City of Jerusalem as it stood before 1948

a commentary on the mishnah by the Ben Ish Hai; and numerous writings by Hacham Ezra Attiah, the rosh yeshivah. The library also had on its shelves several handwritten manuscripts dating back to the period of the Geonim. A short while before the 1948 War of Independence, Rabbi Eliyahu Mani's son, Rabbi Aharon Mani, donated approximately five hundred valuable books from his father's library to the yeshivah.

Alongside the traditional yeshivah studies, the yeshivah sought to prepare its students for jobs enabling them to serve Jewish communities in Israel and around the world. It therefore established a program for students to become shohtim and mohelim, as well as a special synagogue where students studied the text and melodies of the prayer service according to ancient Sephardic tradition.

During the War of Independence, the Old City of Jerusalem was the site of fierce fighting between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Jordanian Legion. The Jordanians ultimately captured the Old City and took many soldiers and civilians — including numerous great



The Arab Legion attacking Yeshivat Porat Yosef, May 1948

Torah scholars of the Jewish quarter — into captivity. After the war, the Jordanians destroyed the Jewish institutions in the Old City, including the magnificent Tiferet Yisrael synagogue, the historic Hurvah synagogue, and Yeshivat Porat Yosef, which was set ablaze and reduced to ashes. Tragically, the flames consumed dozens of Torah scrolls as well as the yeshivah's library, destroying thousands of rare and invaluable books and manuscripts.

As disheartening as this mayhem was, the great scholars of Yeshivat Porat Yosef were resolute in their desire and conviction to continue realizing the vision of its founders. The yeshivah moved outside the Old City, initially settling in the Bukharin quarter, where the students managed to learn in several different synagogues, albeit under difficult conditions. The yeshivah's rabbis would circulate among the different buildings and deliver their classes. Nine years

Yeshivah "Porath Joseph," Jerusalem
P. O. Box 1484



ISAAC HERZOG,
Chief Rabbi of the Holy
Land, Jerusalem.

March 8, 1948.
The Yeshivah PORATH JOSEPH is one of the greatest in Israel and the greatest of our Sephardic brethren.
Forced to leave the Old Holy City, where all our sacred structures have been utterly demolished, the students are scattered in various places and their progress is suffering greatly in consequence.
We are endeavoring now to set up a suitable building or to acquire one.
I earnestly appeal to our brethren everywhere, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, to contribute generously towards the Building Fund as well as towards the general upkeep of this great, holy, Torah center.
With the Blessings of the Torah and Zion,
ISAAC HALEVI HERZOG
Chief Rabbi.

בן איון פארט יוזעף
רוב הויפט האטן ליוון
בארן ירושלים ירושלים
ביום י אור תש"ח
ישיבת פורת יוסף, ספרדיות
מיוסדות זו עשרות שנים והיא
הגדולה מכולן ששקורה בירושלים
במסורת אבות ומסורת ישראל.
ישבה פורת יוסף אשר שכינה
בארץ ירושלים על קרקע הקדש וזו
הייתה ישיבה למבין בנות האשכנזי
במסורת אבות ורבות ולומדיה היו
מקובלים פה זה זמן מפורסם בתי
המסד והמסורות אז לעולם פורת
יוסף זה.
בגלל קרוב את כל ישיבה עם אלה
אחרים חובבי תורה ולומדיה לקום
— על מנת לבנות על הישיבה
הגדולה האם בעקבות ירושלים
היה בין ישיבה תורה ללומדיה לקום
ישיבה עם האשכנזים במסורת
במסורת אבות ומסורת ישראל
לכן ישיבה בלומד המסורת
פורת יוסף ירושלים.
הוא כבוד לתורה וירושלים המזרחית
עם בין ישיבה וכן קום לקומת אלה
תורה זו על מנת תכל תורה
תורה זו על הקומת המסורת
בנות קולם זה ליקומת תורה
בית זה עם ישיבה קדש לאשר לו
איון תורה תורה וזו הי מיוסדות
בן איון פארט יוזעף
רוב הויפט

Palestine Post, March 20, 1949
– Yeshivat Porat Yosef



In center, from left to right: Hacham Ezra Attiah and Hacham Yaakov Ades

later, in 1957, the yeshivah relocated to a newly-constructed building in Jerusalem's Geulah neighborhood, which served as its home for the next decade.

After Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 Six Day War brought the Old City under Jewish control, the ruins of the Jewish Quarter began to be rebuilt. Architect Moshe Safdie designed a new complex for Yeshivat Porat Yosef on the institution's original site overlooking the Western Wall. The new building, based on the original design, evinces a present-day look, lending the facility a traditional feel with a modern appearance. The yeshivah returned to its former location, but retained the facility in Geulah as a secondary branch of the institution.

In 1970 on 19 Iyar, the rosh yeshivah of Porat Yosef, Hacham Ezra Attiah zt"l, passed away, leaving a painful void for Sephardic Jewry worldwide.⁵ The rabbis of the yeshivah selected Hacham Yehuda

5. During this period, Hacham Shelomo Laniado and Hacham Ephraim Menashe



Yeshivat Porat Yosef Inauguration. From left to right: Hacham Yehuda Tzadkai; Hacham Yosef Rafu; Hacham Yaakov Ades; Hacham Ezra Attiah; Hacham Yom Tov Politi; Hacham Shalom Rafu; Hacham Ezra Shrem

Tzadkah zt"l to succeed Hacham Ezra, and Hacham Yehuda led the yeshivah until his passing on 12 Marheshvan, 5753 (1992). He was succeeded by Hacham Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul zt"l, who passed away on the 19 Tammuz, 5758 (1998). Hacham Moshe Tzadkah shlit"a, the son of Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah, was appointed rosh yeshivah after the death of Hacham Ben-Tzion. It was decided that two other great sages — Hacham Shalom Cohen shlit"a⁶ and Hacham Tzion Zangi shlit"a — would serve alongside him.

Yeshivat Porat Yosef now boasts three locations in Jerusalem — in the Old City, Geulah, and Katamon — all of which are sites of intensive, advanced Torah study.

Over the years, Yeshivat Porat Yosef has produced many towering Torah sages that emerged as leading rabbinic figures in the Sephardic world. The following is a list of some of the most prominent alumni of Porat Yosef:

Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan (student of the Ben Ish Hai, co-founder and principal of Yeshivat Porat Yosef); Hacham Ovadia Yosef (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel and president of Torah Sages Council); Hacham Yaakov Yosef (head of Hazon Yaakov and rabbi of the Givat Moshe neighborhood); Hacham Yosef Ades; Hacham Moshe Ades; Hacham Yaakov Ades; Hacham Ezra Ades; Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri (leading scholar of kabbalah at the yeshivah); Hacham Mansour Ben-Shimon; Hacham Sadya Lofez; Hacham Eliyahu Lofez; Hacham Shalom Lofez; Hacham Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul; Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah (Rosh Yeshivat Porat Yosef); Hacham Haim David Levy; Hacham Baruch Ben Haim; Hacham Tzion Levy; Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel); Hacham Yehuda Mualem; Hacham Ben-Tzion Atton; Hacham Shabtai Atton

Hakohen worked together with Hacham Ezra Attiah, serving as principals of the yeshivah. Hacham Yaakov Ades and Hacham Ovadia Hedaya served in the capacity of roshe metivta.

6. Hacham Shalom Cohen is the son of Hacham Ephraim Menashe Hakohen, a student of the Ben Ish Hai.

(Rosh Yeshivat Reshit Hochma); Hacham Shelomo Sharbani; Hacham Yosef Sharbani; Hacham Yehuda Hakohen Shako; Hacham Avraham Harari-Raful; Hacham Ezra Attiah (Rosh Yeshivat Porat Yosef); Hacham Shelomo Laniado (Rosh Yeshivat Porat Yosef); Hacham Shelomo Maravi; Hacham Eliyahu Maravi; Hacham Ezra Hedaya; Hacham Ovadia Hedaya (Rosh Yeshivat Bet-El); Hacham David Shlush; Hacham Benayahu Shmueli; Hacham Yitzhak Hakohen Rabin; Hacham Ben-Tzion Mutzafi.



Hacham Yaakov Ades

These are just some of the countless Torah sages who attended Yeshivat Porat Yosef and went on to make enormous contributions to the Torah world.

This landmark institution, which has changed the face of Sephardic Jewry across the globe, was the brainchild of the Ben Ish Hai. It was his vision and influence that led Mr. Yosef Avraham Shalom to build this citadel of Torah. The ongoing success of Yeshivat Porat Yosef is a direct result of Rabbenu's foresight and leadership, and an everlasting symbol of his legacy of spiritual greatness.

Dedicated in loving memory
of
Pinhas and Lola Abecassis

May their *neshamot* rest in Gan Eden.

We pray that the *zehut* of these
tzaddikim guide our families and
future generations in the path of
Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut hassadim*.

*Jacob and Mercedes
Abecassis & Family*

Leader of the Exile

Leading rabbis and scholars in Baghdad and beyond looked to Rabbenu as the final authority on all Torah matters. Even some of the greatest hachamim of the time deferred to Rabbenu's rulings without any hesitation or a second thought.

Permissible Eating

It was customary in the Jewish community of Baghdad that when a person died, the water in the neighboring houses was spilled out and not used.¹ Once there was a woman who was unaware of this custom, and the day a neighbor passed away, she cooked a meal for her husband using water that should have been discarded. After the meal was prepared, she learned about the local custom, and realized

1. This custom is codified in the Shulhan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 339:5).



Rabbi Sasson Kaduri with the leaders of the community and the members of the Magles el Ruhani, Iraq, 1933. From left: Hacham David Saul; Hacham Eliya; Hacham Sasson Shayek; Hacham Benjamin (head of Magles El Ruhani); Rabbi Sasson Kaduri; Hacham Yehoshua Chugi Abudi (head of the Bet Din); Hacham Rafael (member of the Bet Din); Hacham Yehoshua; and Hacham Matza'afi (member of the Bet Din). (Bet Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, courtesy of Dr. Meir Sasson, Israel)

that she would have to throw away the food she had just prepared. The woman felt very distressed, and her mother urged her to consult with a hacham.

They went to a certain renowned hacham who instantly ruled that the food may not be eaten and must be discarded. The woman and her mother started heading to the market to purchase new food.

Along the way, they passed by the Ben Ish Hai's home and decided to seek his guidance. They told their story to Rabbenu, and informed him of the ruling they had received from the other hacham. Rabbenu told them that it was permissible to eat the food, and he took out

a small piece of paper and wrote down the source for his ruling for them to show the other hacham, who had ruled differently.

The women returned to the first hacham, and he immediately admitted his error, and bemoaned, "How could I forget that source? It is certainly permissible to eat the food. I myself would be willing to taste it!"

This is how highly the other great rabbis of Baghdad regarded the rulings of the Ben Ish Hai, and how they readily deferred to his view on all matters.

A Leader of World Jewry

All the rabbis of Baghdad, and many rabbis from around the world, would send their questions to the Ben Ish Hai in order to receive his opinion and ruling on various matters. His reputation spread far and wide as a leading authority on all religious matters.

Rabbenu maintained regular mail correspondence with several of his generation's leading Torah sages, all of whom accorded him honor and reverence. He regularly exchanged letters with Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elyashar zt"l (the "Yisa Berachah," 1817-1906), Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, as recorded in Rabbi Elyashar's work Ma'aseh Ish. He also corresponded with Rabbi Yitzhak Abulafia zt"l (1830-1910), Chief Rabbi of Damascus, as mentioned in Pene Yitzhak (vol. 5).²



Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar

2. Rabbi Abulafia is also mentioned in Rav Pe'alim.

In 5616/1856 when Rabbenu was twenty-one years old, he corresponded on a halachic matter with Rabbi Haim Falagi zt"l (1788-1868), the rabbi of Izmir, Turkey. In his work Hukat Hahaim,³ Rabbi Falagi describes Rabbenu as "graceful in wisdom, a noble man of noble birth, from royal stock, glorious in judgment, the perfect sage, the outstanding judge, the son of scholars, the son of nobles."

Rabbenu is cited in the works of several of his generation's leading Torah sages, who describe him with awe and admiration and treat his writings with reverence. These include Rabbi Rahamim Yosef Franco (1835-1901), head of the Hebron bet din, in his work Sha'are Rahamim;⁴ Rabbi Aharon Azriel (1819-1874), head of the Jerusalem bet din, in his work Kfi Aharon (part 1); and Rabbi Haim Hizkiyahu Medini (1834-1905), author of Sedei Hemed.⁵ And the famous gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Mani zt"l (1824-1899) authored a booklet of notes on the book Rav Berachot, which Rabbenu wrote as a precocious youngster, and he mentions it several times in his book Zichronot Eliyahu.⁶

Rabbenu would occasionally interact with his fellow scholars and rabbinic



Hacham Haim Hizkiyahu Medini (Sedei Hemed)

contemporaries in the pages of the monthly journal, Hame'asef, edited by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Kuenka. It is also recorded that the Rabbi Shelomo Eliezer Elfandri zt"l (1826-1930) would boast to other Torah scholars that he maintained a halachic correspondence with the Ben Ish Hai.

The Ben Ish Hai's prominence in the Torah world led the leading rabbis of Jerusalem to ask, toward the end of his life, in 1909, that he accept the position of Rishon L'tzion, the official Chief Rabbi of all Sephardic communities. It was felt that his influence and stature would help quell the disputes that raged among the various communities, and that he could serve as an authoritative, universally-accepted voice of Torah guidance. However, Rabbenu chose to decline the invitation, and instructed his close disciple, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, to deliver a letter to the rabbis who had written him, expressing his decision to refuse the offer.

The reason why Rabbenu chose not to accept this position remains somewhat of a mystery. Some sources indicate that he declined out of sheer humility, for the same reason why he never carried an official title even in Baghdad.⁷ Regardless, this episode reflects the respect and admiration the Ben Ish Hai received from the other rabbinic leaders of his time, who sought his guidance and regarded him as the generation's premier Torah sage.

"The Greatest in the Generation"

Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu⁸ once described a visit paid to him by the Ropshitzer Rebbe. The rebbe asked Hacham Mordechai what he was learning at that time, and he said he was learning something in memory of the Ben Ish Hai, whose hillula (anniversary of his death) was around that time. Upon hearing Hacham Mordechai mention

3. Hoshen Mishpat, siman 51.

4. Orah Haim, siman 18.

5. Ibid., siman 30 and in Pe'at Hasadeh, ch. 1.

6. Zichronot Eliyahu pp. 122,125,137, et al.

7. See Arze Halevanon vol. 2, pp. 970-975.

8. Ma'amar Mordechai pp. 72-73.

the Ben Ish Hai, the rebbe said that he had something very special and important to tell the rabbi.

After the first rebbe of Belz passed away, his followers inscribed on his tombstone the words, *חד בדורא* ("the greatest in the generation"). The same honor was bestowed on his son, the second Belzer Rebbe, after his burial. When the third rebbe left this world, the hassidim approached his son and asked whether they should continue the tradition of inscribing these words on the rebbe's tombstone.



Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu

To their astonishment, the rebbe instructed them not to make the inscription. He explained, "Far away in Iraq, there is a great sage by the name of Hacham Yosef Haim. He is the only one deserving of the title, 'Greatest in the Generation.' Therefore, I cannot use those words as the epitaph for my father."

The Enjoyment of Torah

Leading scholars would often consult with the Ben Ish Hai when they confronted a difficult question or a complex passage in a Torah text. His view was seen as the final authoritative voice on any issue.

There were once two elderly hachamim embroiled in an argument concerning a certain passage in Idra, a portion of the Zohar. The two scholars interpreted the passage differently, and neither could convince the other to accept his reading. Finally, they decided to consult with Rabbi Ephraim Menashe Hakohen, a close colleague and disciple of the Ben Ish Hai. They met with Rabbi Ephraim Menashe and discussed the matter, but he was unable to resolve their debate to their satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Hacham Yosef Haim was studying Torah in another room, some distance from the site of the debate. He could not possibly have heard what the scholars were discussing, yet he suddenly entered the room where they were meeting and answered their question.

As soon as Rabbenu rendered his opinion, the talmid hacham who had held this view rose excitedly and embraced him. The Ben Ish Hai did not understand why the man reacted with such enthusiasm until the elderly scholar told him about the lengthy argument that had raged between him and the other man.

"Believe me," the Ben Ish Hai declared, "that the zechut of your delving into this matter in depth enabled me to uncover the true explanation at this particular moment. This is how it works with Torah study — when one ben Torah delves deeply into a certain intricacy, its explanation will often be revealed to another ben Torah. This is what our Sages mean when they say, 'Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish nation are one.'"

All the hachamim who were present vividly sensed the presence of the Divine Spirit in the room!

Guidance for Protecting the Soul

The Ben Ish Hai even provided personal spiritual advice and guidance for the great tzaddikim of his time. Rabbi Derzi related that



Hacham Ephraim Menashe Hakohen
(disciple of Hacham Yosef Haim)

when Rabbenu saw Rabbi Yehuda Fetaya, he warned him never to allow himself to become angry, even slightly. Rabbenu, with his keen spiritual insight, perceived that Rabbi Yehuda possessed a uniquely holy soul, one which was especially sensitive to spiritual ills, such as anger. Even the slightest tinge of anger, the Ben Ish Hai, warned, could cause the soul to depart from his body, and Rabbi Yehuda thus had to exercise extreme caution to protect himself.



Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya

Additionally, Rabbi Derzi told, Rabbenu would occasionally write to his teacher, Rabbi Abdallah Somech, instructing him to recite a particular verse before going to sleep. This recitation, Rabbenu explained, would enable his soul to journey during his sleep to a place in the heavens where hidden secrets of the Torah are revealed. His understanding of the soul was on such a level that he knew precisely what was needed to protect each soul and help it reach its maximum potential.

✧

The Ben Ish Hai's Correspondence with Hachamim around the World

Hacham Haim Falagi (Izmir, Turkey)

Rabbi Haim Falagi was the renowned rabbi of the great Torah community in Smyrna, Turkey. He was a prolific writer who authored

dozens of works, including: Kaf Hahaim, Matzah Haim, Zechirah L'haim, U'vacharta B'haim, HaHafetz Haim, Ginzei Haim, Birkat Mo'adecha L'haim, Kol Hahaim, Yismah Haim, Nishmat Kol Hai, Smichah L'haim, Sifre Haim, Enei Kol Hai, Amudei Haim, Pene Haim, Re'eh Haim, Ruah Haim, Torah V'haim and Tenufah Haim.

Hacham Haim was known to be very selective in using honorifics when describing other rabbis. He carefully measured all titles according to the person's level. In his work, *Matzah Haim*,⁹ he outlines specific procedures for using honorifics:

It has been agreed not to use the title "hahacham hashalem" ["the perfect scholar"] and higher [praise] for any person without the permission of the rabbi of the city, and no cantor may add the title "hahacham hameromam" to the title "hahacham hashalem" and higher, except with the permission of the rabbi who teaches Torah in his synagogue. This remains the custom today. The cantor only has permission to grant titles lower than the title of "hahacham hameromam." But he should be careful even with titles lower than "hahacham hashalem," granting titles only to those who are worthy, for if he is not careful, aside from the sin of flattery, it can sometimes cause arguments and anger. The rabbis in every generation must be very careful in this regard, particularly in our times, when everyone seeks honor, demanding greatness that they do not deserve.

He also cites Rabbi Yaakov Emden as emphasizing the gravity of the prohibition against excessively praising a human being, even if he is a great person.

In light of Rabbi Haim Falagi's strict, discerning use of titles, his descriptions of Hacham Yosef Haim are remarkable, and a testament

9. P. 28a.

to the reverence he felt for his younger colleague. When Hacham Yosef Haim was twenty-two years old (in 1856), he sent a letter to Rabbi Haim Falagi, who was already a renowned Torah sage. Rabbi Falagi later printed this letter in his work, *Hukot Haim*.¹⁰ In his response, Rabbi Falagi referred to Rabbenu's letter in the following terms:

...the words of a wise man, a prince of royal lineage, the splendorous hacham hashalem, the great judge, who possesses lineage and learning, Rabbi Yosef, son of the great rabbi, Rabbi Eliyahu, son of the great rabbi and rosh yeshivah of Iraq, Rabbi Moshe.

He then added a personal blessing to the young scholar: "And to Yosef he said: I shall bless him ... long life shall be his, blessings without end ... his wellsprings shall pour forth as one of the great ones, and the Jews shall have light — the holy Torah."¹¹ And in the introduction to his work, *Enei Kol Hai*, Rabbi Falagi writes, "See what was written by the beloved rabbi, our colleague in Torah, of great lineage, from Iraq, the honorable Rabbi Yosef Haim."

Hacham Aharon Azriel (Jerusalem)

Rabbi Aharon Azriel was the rabbi of Jerusalem and author of *Kapei Aharon*, *Ozen Aharon*, and other works. In a responsum dealing with a legal document written in Iraq, he makes reference to one of the Ben Ish Hai's books:



Hacham Aharon Azriel

10. P. 66a.

11. See *Hukot Haim* p. 66a.

The work *Rav Berachot* was recently reprinted — a work by our colleague, the prestigious rabbi of great lineage, the honorable Rabbi Yosef Haim — and I immediately read it from beginning to end, to examine its words and enjoy its Torah...

Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar (Jerusalem)

The Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elyashar (born in 1817), authored numerous important Torah volumes, including *Ish Emunim*, *Yissa Ish*, *Divre Ish*, *Ma'aseh Ish*, *Derech Ish*, *Olat Ish*, *Sha'al Halsh*, *Simha L'Ish*, and *Pene Halsh*. He frequently corresponded with the Ben Ish Hai, whom he considered a sage without parallel in his generation.

Rabbi Yosef Cachuri, in the introduction to *Tikkun Tefillah V'Seder Hayom*, tells of a group of sages who, in 1904, moved from Iraq to Jerusalem, and paid a visit to Rabbi Yaakov Shaul. The group consisted of Rabbi Tzadaka Moshe Hutchin, Rabbi Yehezkel Ezra Rahamim, and Rabbi Yaakov Haim Sofer (author of *Kaf HaHaim*). Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elyashar asked them why they had come to visit him.

"We have come to show our respect," they replied.

Rabbi Yaakov Elyashar, baffled, responded, "You have Rabbi Yosef Haim in Baghdad and you come to me? There is none like him in the whole world!"



Hacham Yaakov Haim Sofer (Kaf HaHaim)

Hacham Rachamim Yosef Franco (Hebron)

Rabbi Rahamim Yosef Franco (1835-1907), the Rabbi of Hebron, corresponded with the Ben Ish Hai through a public exchange in the

monthly Torah journal, Hame'asef. Rabbi Rahamim later printed their correspondence in his work, Shaarei Rahamim.¹² In one installment, he describes Rabbenu as “my friend, my son, and my brother, beloved of my soul forever ... the great Rabbi Yosef Haim of Iraq...” He also writes, “Today I have been enlightened, for issue 35 of Hame'asef has been published, containing an important article from the beloved rabbi of Iraq, Rabbi Yosef Haim...”

Hacham Haim Hizkiyahu Medini (Crimea-Ukraine)

Rabbi Haim Hizkiyahu Medini (1835-1905) was born in Jerusalem and later served as rabbi in Karasubazar in Crimea-Ukraine. Toward the end of his life, he was appointed rabbi of Hebron. He corresponded with the Ben Ish Hai, who would send him copies of his works. In one place, in his famous work *Sedei Hemed*,¹³ Rabbi Haim Hizkiyahu writes, “Now, after I have completed this segment and prepared it for print, I received the wonderful work, the second volume of *Rav Pe'alim*, from the great Rabbi Yosef Haim of Iraq...”¹⁴



Hacham Haim Hizkiyahu Medini (*Sedei Hemed*)

Hacham Matzliah Mazuz (Djerba, Tunis)

Rabbi Matzliah Mazuz, in his work *Ish Matzliah*,¹⁵ discusses the Ben Ish Hai's ruling allowing riding a bicycle on Shabbat under certain

12. Volume 2, *Even Ha'ezer*, chapter 18.

13. Lamed 141:51.

14. On another occasion, the *Sedei Hemed* sent a letter to Hacham Yosef Haim seeking his advice and financial assistance with his personal publishing.

15. Vol. 1, *Orah Haim* ch. 35.

conditions.¹⁶ He refers to Rabbenu in this context as “the great lion of Iraq, Rabbenu Yosef Haim.” Rabbi Mazuz disagrees with the Ben Ish Hai's ruling, but not before emphasizing his singular stature and authority as a halachic decisor:

Even though the rabbi's honor is great in my eyes, and his words in all his holy books are very precious to us, and we accept them as if they were given at Sinai, and even his ruling concerning the bicycle is said with sound logic and is very reasonable — nevertheless, we are concerned for the destruction that may come from it, G-d forbid. I have already said that the rabbi is correct concerning the halachah, but because of the reality of our unruly generation, we are very hesitant...

In the biography of Rabbi Mazuz printed at the beginning of *Ish Matzliah*, it is told that Rabbi Rafael Mazuz, Rabbi Matzliah's father, was accustomed to recite *Tikkun Hatzot* every night. He instructed one of the scholars to prepare for him a calendar of the molad,¹⁷ because Rabbenu wrote in *Ben Ish Hai*¹⁸ that the tikkun should not be recited at the time of the molad. He also ensured to perform virtually all the tikkunim that Rabbenu prescribed in his work, *Lashon Hachamim*, for fear that perhaps he had sinned in a previous incarnation. Rabbenu's books were especially precious to him, and he reviewed *Ben Ish Hai* several times. He also prepared



Hacham Matzliah Mazuz

16. *Rav Pe'alim* vol. 1, *Orah Haim* ch. 35.

17. The first appearance of the new moon, marking the beginning of a new lunar month.

18. *Ben Ish Hai*, Year 1, Parashat *Vayishlah*, ch. 5.

a summary of the main laws found in Ben Ish Hai. Someone once asked him why he did not kiss his hand after reciting the Shema, as is customary in many communities, and he explained that this custom does not appear in Ben Ish Hai.

It is also mentioned in Ish Matzliah¹⁹ that Rabbi Mazuz would recite “L’Shem Yihud” before washing his hands, learn a specific order of texts during meals, and say the prayers for counting the omer, all based on Rabbenu’s Lashon Hachamim.

Hacham Yitzhak Abulafia (Tiberias)

Rabbi Yitzhak Abulafia (1824-1910) was born in Tiberias, where he eventually served as rabbi. In 1870, he was appointed rabbi of Damascus. He was considered one of the greatest halachic authorities of his generation. In his work Pene Yitzhak,²⁰ he makes reference to a response he received from “the honorable, wondrous, and pure Rabbi Yosef Haim,” adding that in this response he has seen “visions of G-d.” He refers to the Ben Ish Hai in this context as “the supreme authority, the wondrous Rabbi Yosef Haim.”

Hacham Eliyahu Saliman Mani (Hebron)

Rabbi Eliyahu Mani was born in Baghdad in Tammuz 1818. He studied in Bet Midrash Zilka, where he became one of the closest and most distinguished students of Rabbi Abdallah Somech, who was also the primary teacher of Rabbi Yosef Haim. In Iyar 1855, he moved to Jerusalem. Following the passing of the Rabbi of Hebron, Rabbi Haim Hizkiyahu Medini, Rabbi Eliyahu was appointed his successor.

Rabbi Yosef Haim and Rabbi Eliyahu Mani exchanged many letters on matters of kabbalah and halachah, and the former would often inquire into the customs of Jerusalem. In all their letters, the two

sages addressed each other with great reverence and respect.²¹ The elders of Baghdad related an incident where Rabbi Eliyahu was once in Iraq and had difficulty understanding a complex passage in the Zohar. Rabbi Yosef Haim clarified the matter for him, and Rabbi Eliyahu was overjoyed. He embraced Rabbenu with all of his might, and exclaimed, “How fortunate you are, Israel, that this holy rabbi lives among you!”

19. P. 17.

20. Vol. 5, Even Ha’ezer, chapter 13.

21. See, for example, Rabbenu’s comments in Ben Ish Hai, Year 1, Vayishlah 6-11 and 13-27; Rav Pe’alim vol. 1, Orah Haim, siman 15; vol. 2, Orah Haim, siman 12; vol. 3, Orah Haim, siman 41-42, and Rabbi Eliyahu Mani’s comments in Zichronot Eliyahu, Orah Haim, siman 3-9 and Yoreh De’ah, siman 17-21.

This chapter is dedicated
in loving memory of my
dear, beloved sister

Michelle Mamann-Gozlan

Michal bat Aziza

who passed away on
Sunday afternoon, June 19th, 2011.

May her *neshamah* rest
in Gan Eden, amen.

*Mr. and Mrs. Guidy
and Monica Mamann*

Rabbenu's Writings

Rabbenu's books have been a source of guidance and inspiration for generations of Jews around the world. His prolific writings cover virtually all areas of Torah study; there is hardly a single Torah topic that Rabbenu did not touch upon or address somewhere in his writings.

Even if we had no biographical data about the Ben Ish Hai, and had not heard the countless stories that abound about his piety and scholarship, we would recognize his great stature simply through his literary output. He discussed virtually every Torah topic, including the most complex and intricate subjects in halachah and kabbalah, with unparalleled clarity. The dozens of volumes he produced form a foundation of Torah scholarship that has guided scholars and laymen alike to this very day.



Handwriting of Hacham Yosef Haim - Ben Ish Hai

Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan wrote the following about Rabbenu's prolific writings:

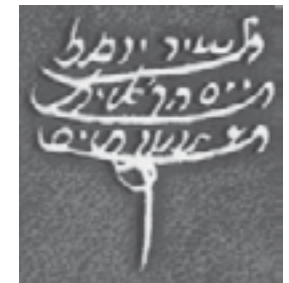
Nothing further needs to be said about his greatness in all areas of Torah study, since his books bear eloquent witness to the extent of his brilliance, wisdom, and insight, and the depth of his knowledge on every level: pshat, remez, derash, and sod. All his writings were done for the sake of Heaven, and anyone who studies Torah

for the sake of Heaven will realize and know and feel this as he reads his holy books.

Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe, in his Ketz Hayamin, describes the remarkable scope of the Ben Ish Hai's output and the authoritative stature that his works have earned:

Rabbenu was fluent in every aspect of the entire Pardes of the Torah. He was an expert not only in the laws of kashrut and prayer, but also in the laws of family life and civil law, to such an extent that all the cases in bet din were decided by him. Hacham Yehezkel HaLevi zt"l (1839-1924) said that even if Hacham Yosef Haim said something that seemed to directly contradict the Shulhan Aruch, his ruling would still be followed because his words were said with ruah hakodesh and the Heavens concurred with him.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul commented that "anyone who learns Rabbenu's books will be rewarded with holiness and fear of Heaven."



Signature of Hacham Yosef Haim - Ben Ish Hai

Rabbenu's vast knowledge of halachah and unique talent of extracting practical halachah from an immense array of sources earned him a special level of authority among the sages of his time and thereafter. Even the greatest rabbis would not trust their own rulings before consulting with the Ben Ish Hai. In fact, Rabbenu's own teacher, Rabbi Abdallah Somech, often conferred with Rabbenu when dealing with a difficult halachic issue.¹

1. Zivhe Tzedek II, Yoreh De'ah, siman 23, and elsewhere.

The Ben Ish Hai mentions his esteemed mentor's practice in his work Rav Pe'alim:²

When my teacher, the great Rabbi [Abdallah Somech], was alive, he sent me the booklets which he wrote on Yoreh De'ah,³ and in his great humility he asked me to review them. I had a few comments on them, but I did not deem it respectful to send them to my teacher via a messenger. I remember that I told them to him verbally, in person. There were comments about two issues, one of them relating to the law regarding insects in yogurt. He wasted not a moment in correcting his book."⁴

The reverence which Rabbi Abdallah Somech showed to Rabbenu had a profound impact upon the latter's stature among the rabbis of Iraq. Seeing that even the great sage, Rabbi Abdallah, deferred to the view of the Ben Ish Hai, who was his disciple, they looked to him as an unparalleled Torah giant and an authoritative voice on all Torah matters. And even beyond Iraq, rabbis throughout the world would send letters to the Ben Ish Hai asking for his opinion and guidance. He responded to each letter with patience, attention, grace, and humility.

Upon the publication of his halachic work Ben Ish Hai, Rabbenu distributed free copies to rabbis and yeshivah students. He also gave a copy to Hacham Yehezkel Ezra Rahamim, author of Atzei HaYa'ar, who was renowned for his brilliance.

Several weeks later, Hacham Yehezkel came to Rabbenu and humbly requested permission to ask a question. He noted that in a particular section in Ben Ish Hai, Rabbenu issued a halachic ruling

that contradicted the ruling of four other halachic authorities. Rabbenu acknowledged that his ruling was disputed by the four authorities mentioned by Hacham Yehezkel, but then immediately proceeded to cite thirty halachic sources supporting his ruling. He then asked Hacham Yehezkel if he wanted to hear additional sources, but the rabbi politely declined.

The kabbalist Hacham Efraim Menashe Hakohen zt"l recalled one occasion when he entered Rabbenu's room while he was writing, and saw that Rabbenu's hand flew across the page at remarkable speed. Normally, when people wrote with a feather and quill, most of the ink on the page would dry before the writer completed that page. The Ben Ish Hai, however, wrote so rapidly that the ink would still be fresh and moist when he was two pages ahead, such that he had to lay out the all the wet pages side by side on a special shelf so they could dry.

"This was not due to the power of his quill," Hacham Efraim commented, "but rather to the special Divine assistance that was showered upon him, as is known."

It is also told that once, as he was writing at an especially rapid pace, simultaneously thinking, organizing his thoughts, and writing, his hand strayed off course and he wrote a line on the binding of the book. When the manuscript was being prepared for printing, the printers noticed that a line was missing from the page. Hacham Avraham, the son of Rabbenu's brother Hacham Nissim Haim, took it upon himself to find the missing line — and he found it written in the binding of the book. He understood that in his remarkable speed, Rabbenu wrote this line out of place.

Rabbenu chose to have his books printed specifically in Jerusalem, for reasons described by Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan:

Most of his books were printed in the holy city of Jerusalem in order to benefit the artisans and businesses of our Holy Land. Some say that it was simply because

2. Vol. 2, Yoreh De'ah, siman 7.

3. This refers to Rabbi Abdallah Somech's work Zivhe Tzedek.

4. See Zivhe Tzedek 84:124.

he wanted his books to be printed in a holy place, and certainly the place of printing has an influence... Even though in doing so he put his precious writings in danger, Rabbenu did not desist [from sending his manuscripts to Jerusalem].

This process was especially time consuming, as described in the memoirs of Gad Frumkin (1887-1960), the son of Rabbi Yisrael Dov Frumkin, owner of the Frumkin Publishing House, where most of the Ben Ish Hai's works were printed:⁵

The books of Hacham Rabbi Yosef Haim, the rabbi of Baghdad, were regularly printed on my father's printing press. The handwritten manuscript would arrive in the Ottoman mail [delivered by Ottoman postal carriers] about forty days after being dispatched from Baghdad. Like all other cargo, the mail was transported on camel-back and would travel a long journey across the desert.

Frumkin also noted that the workers in the press in Jerusalem had some difficulty reading the manuscripts. "The handwriting was not like the handwriting of other rabbis. It was clear and written on one side of the paper only, but only a few people could read it because it was written in the script of the Sephardim." Despite the complications it entailed, Rabbenu still found it worthwhile to have the



Rabbi Yisrael Frumkin

5. Rabbi Yisrael Dov Frumkin (1850-1914) was known not only for his printing press, but also as a pioneer of Hebrew journalism, an author, and a builder of Jerusalem.

printing done specifically in Jerusalem, rather than in his hometown of Baghdad.

The first book that Rabbenu sent for printing in Jerusalem was Rav Berachot. A kabbalist living in Jerusalem named Hacham Avraham Ades received a copy of the work, and was told that it was authored by a rabbi in Baghdad and had just left the printing press. Hacham Avraham read the entire work and then told everyone around him that the book had a scent of kedushah.

A similar pronouncement was made by the leading rabbi of Tzefat, the Ridbaz (Rabbi Yaakov David Wilovski, 1845-1913). He purchased copies of the Ben Ish Hai's works as soon as they were published, and publicly stated that when he studied Rabbenu's books, he could sense the kedushah radiating from them. "A fragrance of sanctity and purity emanates and is clearly discernable from the works of this Resh Galuta [Exilarch] from Iraq," he said.⁶

It is recorded that during World War I, Rabbi Haim Soloveitchik of Brisk zt"l told his students who had been forcibly drafted into the Russian army to take with them Rabbenu's book Ben Ish Hai, which includes both halachah and aggadah, and is arranged according to the order of the weekly parshiyot.⁷

The Book of Reincarnations

In addition to his published works, Rabbenu also produced written material which was not intended for publication. Among the most fascinating of his unpublished works is a series of notes he wrote to Rabbi Haim Vital's *Sefer Gilgulim* (Book of Reincarnations), in which Rabbi Haim Vital recorded the entire history of reincarnations revealed to him by the Arizal.

6. Adonenu pp. 188-189.

7. Ibid. p. 127.

Rabbenu mastered this area of kabbalah, the notion of the human soul and its transmigration. In the introduction to his biography of the Ben Ish Hai, Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan described Rabbenu's remarkable insight into the nature and origin of certain people's souls:

He would send letters to a few hachamim instructing them to study texts that connected to their souls' roots. The texts were from the Bible, the holy Zohar or the Idrot, and he would tell them to study them on a particular day at a particular time, and sometimes he would tell them to light a candle in the name of a particular Tanna or Amora, or for the Arizal and Rabbi Haim Vital.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan added in this context a reference to Rabbenu's book *Ben Yehoyada*,⁸ where we find an example of this extraordinary perception:

And you, wise reader, please listen well to these words regarding a righteous hacham, a kabbalist, here in our city. It was written about this hacham while he still lived that he was a reincarnation of Ahaz, the king of Judea. With the permission of the Almighty, I hereby reveal to you a secret — that he was none other than our teacher Hacham Abdallah Somech zt"l, author of *Zivhe Tzedek*, which was printed in Bavel.

Hacham Ben-Tzion then described how the Ben Ish Hai assisted his mentor in rectifying the tarnished soul:

Rabbenu used to write to Rabbi Abdallah Somech, telling him which texts he should study and which tikkunim he should perform to correct his soul root. Everything that happened to him in his lifetime, from

8. *Ben Yehoyada* vol. 5, p. 29b.

the day he was born until the day of his passing, and even after he left this world — Rabbenu revealed it all to him and knew the reasons for everything. Since these things were said in the utmost secrecy to a select few, I hesitate to put them in print. It could also be said that Rabbenu refused to publish them due to his great humility, lest people regard him as having *ruah hakodesh*.

Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri told Hacham Benayahu Shmueli that Rabbenu owned a copy of *Sefer Gilgulim*, in which he wrote down the names of the hachamim of his time, the history of their souls' migrations, and the tikkun required for each, including the reincarnated soul of Ahaz in Rabbi Abdallah Somech, as recorded by Hacham Ben-Tzion Hazan.

Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri added that Rabbenu kept this book hidden in the attic of his home, so no one would find it. Once, however, Rabbenu's son, Hacham Yaakov Haim, secretly followed his father and discovered where he hid the book. He then tried on numerous occasions to get the book, but was unsuccessful, until he finally managed to access it and peek inside. He saw that he was a reincarnation of the wicked biblical King Ahav — and instantly regretted opening the book and learning this information.

Elsewhere in *Ben Yehoyada*, Rabbenu makes explicit reference to a person who possessed the reincarnated soul of Ahav:

I will tell you another hiddush about a Torah scholar from our city who dreamed about another G-d-fearing Torah scholar, may the Almighty grant him long life, that he is a reincarnation of Ahav, the king of Israel. The talmid hacham who was the subject of the dream had difficulty accepting that he was a reincarnation of Ahav, and was pained by this. I told him, "Don't be distressed. Firstly, there is no doubt that you have your own soul,

and only one part of Ahav's soul was reincarnated in you. Also, why do you look down on Ahav, who lived in that bygone era when people's souls were very great? Only the good part is reincarnated in you. Who knows if there is anyone else in our generation whose soul can match the good portion of Ahav that is reincarnated in you?" I told him that G-d would grant him a good, peaceful, and long life and would help him rectify his own soul, as well as the soul that was reincarnated in him.⁹

Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri further recounted that Hacham Yaakov Haim once tried to access the book when Rabbenu was giving his daily shiur on En Yaakov and Shulhan Aruch after the morning prayers. Instead of listening to the shiur, Hacham Yaakov ran home to seize the opportunity to look in the book. At that very moment, Rabbenu arose and told his audience that he had to leave. He took off his tefillin and ran after his son. When he caught up with him, he warned him not to touch the book again. Rabbenu subsequently moved the book to a new hiding place, and it was never seen again.

Lost Writings

No fewer than sixty written works of the Ben Ish Hai have been published and are available today. As massive a literary output as this seems, it is clear from several passages in Rabbenu's writings that he composed other works which have, for one reason or another, been lost. In his introduction to Ben Ish Hayil, he wrote:

Even though I started to address the public in the year 5620/1860, I have only brought the derashot of four particular years for publication... With G-d's

9. After the passing of Rabbi Abdallah Somech, Rabbenu delivered a eulogy during which he revealed that it was Rabbi Abdallah who possessed the reincarnated soul of King Ahav.

munificent help, I will print the derashot of the years before 5651/1891...

...And so I have been forced to print only a small part of the fruit of my pen, a mere quarter of the material I possess, and no more. I have not included even one of the hiddushim that I revealed regarding the verses of the haftorot, since there are so many of these that they are worthy of their own book, with G-d's help.

It is thus clear that the Ben Ish Hai wrote many manuscripts that he was unable to publish.

Similarly, in the introduction to his book Benayahu on the Zohar and the Tikkunim, Rabbenu writes that the work represents only a small fraction of his insights into the Tikkunim. He also mentions his plans to publish his written commentaries to the Zohar, plans which, unfortunately, never materialized.

Rabbenu makes mention of his book Makbetziel¹⁰ numerous times in Ben Ish Hai, Rav Pe'alim, and elsewhere. It seems that this work contained analyses of the Talmud and the Rishonim, as well as some halachic material. Unfortunately, this work was lost. It is recorded that a copy was held in the library of Yeshivat Porat Yosef in the Old City of Jerusalem, which was burned by the Jordanian legion after its conquest of the Old City in 1948.¹¹

The rabbis of Bavel reported that Rabbenu wrote about eighty books, of which, as mentioned earlier, only sixty have been published and are currently available.¹² It has been discovered that many of his books were confiscated by the Iraqi government,¹³ and there were

10. The word appears in the Book of Shemuel II 23:20 in reference to King David's general Benayahu Ben Yehoyada.

11. See Adonenu p. 131.

12. See Adonenu pp. 131-132.

13. In recent years, numerous unpublished, handwritten manuscripts of the Ben Ish Hai

apparently others that were never published for unknown reasons. Regardless, the loss of these works is a tragic loss for Torah and for Am Yisrael.

Rabbenu's Poetry and Songs

The Ben Ish Hai's creativity was not manifest only in his dazzling output of Torah literature. The book *Ketz Hayamin* describes Rabbenu's talent in composing poetry and songs. Numerous beautiful piyutim and songs that Rabbenu composed are still sung today and testify to his remarkable literary and musical talent. These accomplishments become even more remarkable when we consider his grueling schedule of Torah study, Divine service, and communal work, which we would not have expected to leave any time or energy for musical and liturgical compositions. Evidently, the Ben Ish Hai regarded music and poetry very highly as effective means of inspiring people to love and devote themselves to Hashem.

Rabbenu wrote piyutim for virtually every occasion: ordinary weekdays, Shabbat, Motza'ei Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, bar mitzvah, the blessing for the new moon, and all the Jewish holidays, including Simhat Torah, Tu B'Shvat, Purim, Lag B'Omer, and Shavuot. He also wrote piyutim about subjects such as exile and redemption, love for the Land of Israel, and the tzaddikim.

One of the Ben Ish Hai's most famous songs is "Va'amartem Ko L'Hai," which he composed when he visited the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai in Meron. This song has been almost universally adopted and is sung in a wide range of Jewish communities. Many of Rabbenu's other piyutim are dispersed among his books and in siddurim printed in Baghdad. It is believed that he composed a total of approximately 200 songs, about eighty of which have survived to this day.

have been discovered in Iraq, including a collection that was found in Saddam Hussein's palace in Baghdad. See my article, "Unearthing Hidden Treasures" in *Community Magazine*, September 2009.

G-d's Stamp of Approval

Hacham Yehuda Tzadkai zt"l, famed rosh yeshiva of Porat Yosef, followed all the customs and practices of the Arizal, in accordance with the opinion of the Ben Ish Hai, who was his mother's uncle. He made a point of studying Rabbenu's book *Ben Ish Hai* every Shabbat, and endeavored to follow Rabbenu's opinion and guidance on every matter, as recorded in *Ben Ish Hai* and his other works. Hacham Yehuda also displayed a huge oil painting of Rabbenu in his room.

Hacham Yehuda told his students a remarkable story which, in his view, revealed the Almighty's "stamp of approval" to the Ben Ish Hai's works as an authoritative source of Torah scholarship. There was a young toddler in Jerusalem who was discovered to be an extraordinary prodigy. At the age of two or three, when the teacher of his Talmud Torah taught the class the prayers, this boy would immediately recite the whole prayer. Even though he had never heard the prayer, he knew the entire text by heart. And when he heard a verse of Tehillim, he would continue the verse and then recite the entire chapter from memory. The elder residents of Jerusalem tested his knowledge of the Bible and found that he could recite any verse by heart, though his immature mind did not comprehend the words he was mouthing.

Hacham Yehuda heard about this amazing child, and went to meet him in person. He found that the rumors were true. Hacham Yehuda needed to recite just the first few words of any part of the Bible, the Talmud (Babylonian or Jerusalem) or the Midrash, and the boy would finish the sentence for him. He even quoted him part of the book *Ben Ish Hai*, and the boy was able to recite the text verbatim. However, when the child heard passages from the books of other leading rabbis of that era, he could not recite the rest of the passage. Hacham Yehuda said that he knew then that Ben Ish Hai was officially

“endorsed” by G-d, and given the same status of authority as primary works such as the Talmud and Midrash.¹⁴

14. The story is recorded in Ha'lr Hamizrah (pp. 217-218). Hacham Yehuda added that the parents consulted with Rabbi Yitzhak Zev Soloveitchik (“the Brisker Rav,” 1886-1959), who noted the Talmud’s famous comment (Niddah 30a) that every infant learns the entire Torah from an angel while in the womb. The angel strikes the child’s mouth just before birth, causing him to forget everything he learned. Apparently, Rabbi Yitzhak Zev said, the angel, for some unknown reason, did not strike this child’s mouth.

After meeting the child, Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah took the boy to the Belzer Rebbe zt”l (Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, 1877-1957, also known as “Reb Arele” and as the “Kedushat Aharon”). The rebbe blessed and prayed for the child, and he forgot all his Torah knowledge, so that he would have to exert time and effort to gain Torah knowledge and perform the mitzvot, which is the purpose of a person’s existence in this world. Hacham Yehuda told this story to Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu zt”l, who related the incident in one of his public lectures, as transcribed in the weekly pamphlet Kol Tzofayich. (See also Adonenu p. 134.)

À la memoire de Messod Asher et
Michal Fibi Wizman
qui nous ont quitté le
24 Nissan 5771
à la fleur de l'âge.

Ils étaient les pilliers de la communauté
juive de Shanghai. Leur attachement
à la Tora, leur generosité et leur jôie
de vivre auront marqué toutes les
personnes qui les ont connus.

Que le merite du Ben Ish Hai
protege leur fils David Yossef afin
qu'il puisse grandir dans le droit
chemin de la Tora et des mitsvots.

*Dedies par Simon et
Deborah Torjmane*

Rabbenu's Humility

Among the Ben Ish Hai's many extraordinary qualities was his unparalleled humility. He earned respect, reverence, and fame from throughout the Jewish world, the greatest scholars and rabbis sought his guidance and regarded his rulings as authoritative — and yet he always conducted himself with simple humility. He never looked down on others, and never gloated or prided himself over his unmatched achievements. His greatness in Torah was paralleled only by his humility.

Rabbenu expressed his view of himself very clearly, in the introduction to his work Rav Berachot:

It should also be stated that to anyone who hears my words and says, "Who are you? You are a worm, not a man, yet you speak as though you are among the greatest..." I reply that even though I know that I am of

small worth, that I am ignorant and foolish, that I am nothing and no one, and, moreover, I am empty of good deeds and actions, nevertheless, G-d's righteousness will cover me, and I will find shelter in it...

Rabbenu's humility led him to treat all Torah scholars whom he encountered with honor, even if their stature paled in comparison to his. He stood in the presence of even young talmide hachamim and kohanim. He never spoke condescendingly; he spoke to people with admiration and patience, humbly offering guidance and counsel like a caring, loving father.

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan¹ described the respect and honor with which the Ben Ish Hai treated all Torah scholars, regardless of their stature:

Words cannot describe the depths of his humility. When he saw a talmid hacham coming toward him, he would run toward him joyfully, like he had found a treasure; he would approach him and greet him with a big smile. He would sit down with him and listen to all his words and requests. When they had finished and the man turned to leave, Rabbenu would walk with him, accompanying him to the gate of his courtyard. When he saw the young men who were known to be dedicated to Torah study, his face would brighten. As a young man of barely twenty years old, when I visited his home he would stand up for me and then sit me down next to him, and would talk to me like I was his beloved son. I was not a talmid hacham, just a regular student, though I served in the holy capacity of hazzan² in his synagogue.

1. Introduction to Da'at U'tevunah.

2. According to one of the descendants of Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, the original family name was not Hazan, but rather Nachum. Rabbi Ben-Tzion was given the name Hazan because of his beautiful voice, and it has been the family name ever since. The Ben Ish Hai

A similar account is given by Hagaon Hacham Ben-Tzion Kuenka zt"l, one of the great rabbinic leaders of Jerusalem, who served as editor of the journal Hame'asef for nearly two decades (during the years 1896-1915). The journal served as a forum for presenting selected writings of the Ben Ish Hai.

In 1899 Hacham Kuenka visited Baghdad as a representative of Yeshivat Bet-El in Jerusalem, and to raise funds for his journal. He later described the royal honor with which he was treated by the community and the rabbis of Baghdad:

The honor that I was shown in the city of Baghdad from nearly all its rabbis and leaders was truly immense, particularly from his honor, the great and famous gaon, the Head of the Exile of Bavel, Rabbi Yosef Haim zt"l. He treated me with such great respect that I was truly embarrassed by it all. Our Sages put it best when they said that love distorts the line of justice. The love and affection that he showered upon me was like that of a father for his son. He was the main reason for the tremendous honor I received. He and the others pressed me exceedingly to stay in Baghdad and serve as the Hacham Bashi, but I told him that I actually wanted to live my life outside the public eye. I don't want to be a rabbi or a dayan or any other sort of public personage. Additionally, the honored rabbi's son, Rabbi Yaakov, who is also great in the revealed and hidden Torah, and the famous Rabbi Yehezkel Ezra ben Rahamim, both treated me with lavish affection and honor. Besides showing me honor, these three rabbis worked to ensure that I received a significant amount of donations. They personally gave me very handsome donations.

loved hearing hazanut, especially from his student Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan.



Alliance school. Hacham Ezra Dangoor, Hacham Sasoon, and the rest are Jewish dignitaries.

When I left Baghdad early one Sunday morning, they showed me great honor as I left the city. And on the previous Shabbat, I had rabbis and other dignitaries coming to show parting respect to me from morning till night. After Arbit came the turn of Rabbi Yosef Haim, who visited me and bid me farewell. We parted with words of halachah.

Although the Ben Ish Hai was regarded as the leading sage of his time, he insisted on lavishing honor upon the other scholars of the generation. As opposed to the normal tendency among people, to pursue honor that they do not deserve, Rabbenu did just the opposite, going to great lengths to honor others, and refusing to accept the honor that he rightfully deserved.³

3. Rabbenu never wrote approbations for books, as many other leading rabbis often did.

Rabbenu and the Teenage Boy

Rabbenu's humility led him to show love, care, and concern for all Jews, young and old, ignorant and learned, simple and distinguished. In fact, alongside his scholarly works, which have been read, studied, and analyzed by the greatest sages ever since, he also wrote books for the unlearned laypeople. His work *Huke Nashim* presents general guidance for the women of Baghdad, who had little or no scholarly background, and his works *Mashal U'nimshal* and *Imre Bina* contain riddles and stories for children and uneducated adults. Rabbenu did not consider himself too important to write material for the uneducated masses, to address their needs and guide them along the path of Torah. His humble devotion to even the "ordinary" Jew endeared him to all members of the community, and enabled him to lift and inspire people from across the spectrum of the Iraqi Jewish community.

Among the most remarkable examples of Rabbenu's legendary love and concern for all Jews, and his ability to transform people's lives through the power of this genuine love, is his special relationship with Hacham Efraim Hakohen zt"l. Hacham Efraim was not especially

However, as Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan wrote, this practice in no way reflected any disdain or lack of respect for his colleagues:

He never wanted to give his approbation to any book. This was not due to a low opinion of the writers of his era, G-d forbid. In fact, Rabbenu did not even want to write a letter of approbation for the book *Zivhe Tzedek* written by our teacher Rabbi Abdallah Somech zt"l, who was his own teacher. The reason which I have heard is that his grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, wrote an approbation for book *Pe'at Hashulhan* by Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, a student of the Vilna Gaon, in the year 5597 (1837), and he passed on to the next world that same year, without ever seeing the book in print. Likewise, his [Rabbenu's] father, Rabbi Eliyahu, wrote a letter of approbation in the year 5619 (1859) for the book *Kol Sasson* by the kabbalist Rabbi Mordechai Sasson, and he also passed on to the next world that same year, without ever seeing the book in print. For this reason, Rabbenu would not allow himself to write any letters of approbation.

Rabbenu made only one exception to this policy: he wrote a letter of approbation for his son's (Hacham Yaakov's) work, *Tzizim U'frachim*, explaining that "a son is like his father."

dedicated to Torah study during his youth. But once, when he was fourteen years old, he saw Rabbenu on the streets of Baghdad, and Rabbenu's awe-inspiring countenance made a deep impression on him. He felt a rush of inspiration within him, and desperately sought to meet with the rabbi. Efraim ran home, bathed and changed his clothes, and then quickly set out for Rabbenu's home.

Meanwhile, Rabbenu, who was around sixty-five years old at the time, arrived home and told his attendant that he could not receive any visitors that day. He instructed the attendant to kindly ask visitors to return the next day, and that even if the head of the community came to see him, he should apologize on the rabbi's behalf and politely refuse to allow him in. Indeed, a number of prominent rabbis and community figures came to the Ben Ish Hai's home, and the attendant politely explained that the rabbi could not meet with them that day.

Soon later, young Efraim arrived at Rabbenu's home with youthful vigor and excitement. His heart pounding with trepidation, he knocked on the door. Rabbenu's faithful attendant opened the door and, barely looking at the teenage boy standing at the doorstep, offered the rabbi's apologies just as he had done previously to the distinguished hachamim and community leaders who had come before him. He told him that Rabbenu was not receiving visitors that day, and that he should return the next day. The attendant then shut the door in the face of the heartbroken boy.



Rare postcard of Hacham Yosef Haim with his signature. (Photo courtesy of R' Avishai Bar Osher)

Rabbenu, who was deeply immersed in learning inside the house, suddenly called to his attendant and told him to chase after the boy and immediately bring him back. The attendant stood there in astonishment, but Rabbenu urged him to move quickly, before the boy disappeared from sight. And so he ran off and soon returned with young Efraim.

After Efraim left, Rabbenu called his attendant and explained to him why he suddenly changed his mind when this fourteen-year-old boy came to his home. This boy Efraim possessed an immense soul destined to shine forth and illuminate the Jewish world. However, a pure spirit had only just been ignited within him, and if the attendant hadn't run after him and brought him back, the pure spark in young Efraim would have been snuffed out and never been rekindled.

Indeed, on that very day Rabbi Efraim enrolled in the yeshivah Midrash Bet Zilka, and with time he became a renowned talmid hacham and kabbalist.

Sometime later, Rabbenu visited Midrash Bet Zilka and witnessed a raging battle of Torah. The rosh yeshivah, Rabbi Avraham Dangoor, was delivering a shiur, and all the students were arguing with each other about various points relevant to the subject matter under discussion. The only student who did not participate in the heated debate was Rabbi Efraim Hakohen, who sat to the side silently. He was observing an indefinite ta'anit dibur (a "fast" abstaining from speech), and thus kept perfectly quiet.

Rabbenu asked the rosh yeshivah to send young Efraim to his home so he could speak with him. When Rabbi Efraim arrived at Rabbenu's home, Rabbenu extended a very warm welcome and spoke with him for a long while. From that point on, Efraim always participated in the class discussions, consistently dazzling his peers — and, especially, his rosh yeshivah — with his extensive knowledge, which until then had gone unnoticed. Before long, he was acknowledged as the yeshivah's most outstanding student. After that meeting, and

until the Ben Ish Hai's passing some four years later, Rabbi Efraim barely left Rabbenu's side. Despite his tender age, he was given the unique privilege of being allowed to visit Rabbenu at any time.

At one point during this period, Hacham Efraim's parents, who were supporting him, decided to leave Baghdad and relocate to a particular village. They urged him to come with them. Hacham Efraim approached Rabbenu and asked for advice as to whether he should join his parents, or remain in Baghdad to continue studying Torah, and Rabbenu advised him to stay in Baghdad. Hacham Efraim had no means of supporting himself in Baghdad without his parents, but he placed his full trust in Rabbenu, and decided to stay.

When Rabbenu was called to the Heavenly Court, Hacham Efraim was left alone, without his beloved rabbi. His financial situation steadily deteriorated until he barely had any food to eat. Desperate and frightened, Rabbi Efraim secluded himself in his room and said, "Rabbenu Yosef Haim, you know that I stayed in Baghdad as you instructed, so that I would not leave my studies. But now I have reached the edge of the abyss, and I have no way to support myself. I cannot go and pray at your graveside, as I am a kohen, but I beg you to pray for me before the Almighty that I will receive my parnassah [livelihood]!"

The very next day, Hacham Efraim saw his prayer answered. He received a letter from his parents informing him that they had won the lottery. A significant sum of money was enclosed with the letter.⁴

This special relationship began when Rabbenu saw the vast potential latent within an outwardly unimpressive fourteen-year-old boy. He wasn't too proud to take this child under his wings. With patience and humility, Rabbenu taught and guided the young man and set him along the path of spiritual greatness.

4. This story was recounted by Hacham Efraim's son, Hacham Shalom Hakohen shlit"a, current rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Porat Yosef.

A Hatan Is Like a King

A relative of the Ben Ish Hai named Yitzhak Baruch was planning a wedding for his son, Abed al-Nabi Yehezkel, and asked Rabbenu to serve as the mesader kiddushin (officiating rabbi).

When the wedding day arrived, the hatan and his father came to Rabbenu's home to remind him of the occasion that was being held that evening. As soon as they entered, Rabbenu jumped out of his seat and exclaimed, "Why did you come all the way here with the king⁵ on the day of his wedding? I should be giving him the honor of going to see him!"⁶

Silence Is Golden

Another aspect of the Ben Ish Hai's humility was his silence about his accomplishments. There were many things that he knew through his ruah hakodesh, but he would often remain silent and give the impression that he knew nothing about them. Just as Hashem conceals His greatness behind the veneer of the natural order, similarly, Rabbenu kept his greatness hidden and did not flaunt his spiritual achievements.

One Shabbat night, Rabbenu's son, Rabbi Yaakov had a dream in which he saw his father marrying another woman. Concerned that the dream perhaps heralded his mother's imminent passing, Rabbi Yaakov undertook a fast, even though it was Shabbat, when fasting is generally forbidden. That afternoon, when Rabbi Yaakov entered the synagogue for Minhah, an elderly man approached him and asked why he was fasting on the holy Shabbat. Rabbi Yaakov told the man his dream and explained that he was fasting on behalf of his mother.

5. "A hatan is like a king: just as everyone sings the praises of a king, similarly, everyone sings the praises of a hatan" (Pirke D'Rabi Eliezer ch. 16).

6. This incident was passed down through the generations of the Ben Ish Hai's own family.

“You should know,” the old man said, “that you did not understand the real meaning of the dream you dreamed. The wedding you saw in your dream signified the fact that your great father has come up with outstanding hiddushim. There was a celebration as though the holy Torah and your father were married. It is not because your mother’s end is near, G-d forbid.”

Immediately following the Minhah service, Rabbi Yaakov hurried over to his father to tell him everything that had transpired. But before he could even open his mouth, Rabbenu said to him, “Go tell that elderly man that he shouldn’t tell you everything that is revealed to him from heaven.” Rabbi Yaakov realized that his father had already known about the dream and that he had observed a fast, but, in his humility, he chose not to reveal the ruah hakodesh that he possessed.

The Ben Ish Hai also discouraged people from speaking about his achievements. Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan writes that rabbis and writers repeatedly implored him to tell them about Rabbenu, but Rabbenu strictly forbade him from sharing information about him under any circumstances.

Not only did he himself keep silent about his accomplishments — he demanded that others keep silent about him, as well.

A Humble Pen

When it came to the accomplishments which could not be concealed — such as his public lectures and published works, which very clearly demonstrated Rabbenu’s towering stature — he made a point of attributing his success to the merit of his righteous forebears, rather than take personal credit. In the introduction to his book *Ben Ish Hayil*, for example, he writes:

How can I repay Hashem for all the goodness He has bestowed on me, Who allowed me, in His great mercy and kindness, to serve in the House of Hashem, to speak

words of Torah, mussar, fear of Heaven, and halachah on the four Shabbatot ... in the presence of a large audience befitting the glory of a king ... in the same place where my holy fathers addressed the masses... I myself know that I am not worthy of this; however, the merits of my fathers have earned me this honor, may their souls rest in the eternal world.”⁷

Another tactic that Rabbenu employed in his attempt to publish scholarly works without earning fame was publishing anonymously. Thus, for example, he did not put his name on one of his most important published works, the collection of responsa *Torah Lishmah*. He truly fulfilled the ideal of *Torah lishmah* — Torah solely for its own sake — by concealing his identity so as not to receive honor or distinction through this publication. He signed each responsum in that book with the name “Yehezkel Kahali” and altered its date of composition so that no one would identify the author.

Ultimately, however, this attempt failed. Rabbenu’s son, Rabbi Yaakov, revealed that his father was the author of *Torah Lishmah*, and noted that the name “Yehezkel” has the same numerical value as the name “Yosef” (156), and “Kahali” has the same numerical value as “Haim” (68).⁸

7. Other examples can be found in his book *Aderet Eliyahu* and in several of his other published works.

8. Rabbi Yaakov revealed this information to Rabbi Shimon Agasi, who mentioned it to Rabbi Efraim Hakohen. Hagaon Rabbi Avraham Ades also identified “Yehezkel Kahali” as the Ben Ish Hai. After the publication of the second section of Rabbenu’s work *Rav Pe’alim*, Rabbi Avraham noticed that Rabbenu there cites comments from the work *Torah Lishmah* in the name of Yehezkel Kahali. He immediately turned to Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan and said that the Ben Ish Hai wrote *Torah Lishmah*, noting the numerical correspondence between the names “Yehezkel Kahali” and “Yosef Haim.” Rabbi Avraham then sent a letter to the Ben Ish Hai with a list of questions, including the question of who composed *Torah Lishmah*. Rabbenu responded with detailed answers to all the questions — except the question concerning the authorship of *Torah Lishmah*, unwilling to divulge that he wrote the book.

Years later, Rabbenu's grandson, Rabbi David zt"l, moved to Israel and brought with him all of Rabbenu's remaining manuscripts. This collection included the original manuscript of Torah Lishmah, in Rabbenu's handwriting, each letter bearing the signature, "Yehezkel Kahali." In his introduction to the edition of Torah Lishmah published in Jerusalem in 5733 (1973), Rabbi David explained that his grandfather used a pseudonym in order to demonstrate that he produced this work strictly lishmah — for the sake of Torah, and not for personal honor or any other purpose.

Rabbenu similarly withheld his name from his work Meir Bat Ayin. In a letter written in 1933 to Mrs. Pircha Sasson, Rabbi Hazan wrote that he had known for many years that the anonymous work was composed by the Ben Ish Hai.⁹ Rabbi Hazan also wrote an introduction to Meir Bat Ayin in which he discussed Rabbenu's authorship of this work and his tendency to refer to himself as somebody else, in the interest of humility. In particular, Rabbi Hazan pointed to a number of stories the Ben Ish Hai told in his work Hasde Avot¹⁰ about a certain righteous Jew — which was actually him. "He attributed them to others," Rabbi Hazan wrote, "because of his great modesty."

Drawing Inspiration from the Garbage Collector

To the extent to which Rabbenu worked to downplay and conceal his accomplishments, he was quick and emphatic in observing and trumpeting the qualities of everyone around him.

Rabbenu's nephew, Rabbi Binyamin ben Rabbi Moshe, once visited his uncle on Erev Shabbat, and found Rabbenu sitting and crying.

"Why are you crying?" he asked. "Does something hurt you?"

"Nothing hurts," the Ben Ish Hai replied, "but just one hour ago, a man whose job it is to clean up the garbage from the courtyard

came in, and the members of my household invited him to taste the Shabbat food. The man refused because he had been warned not to enjoy what belongs to others. I felt envious of him and I was overcome with emotion. I saw that there is a simple man who is greater than me, as it says in the Talmud, 'Greater is he who lives by the sweat of his brow than one who fears heaven.' That's why I'm crying."

Rabbenu was capable of learning from anybody — even a garbage collector. As great as he was, he always focused his attention on what he still had to achieve; as high as he climbed, he always looked up and saw that there more rungs left on the ladder. Rather than feel content and proud with what he has achieved, he constantly looked to grow. And he was willing to find sources of inspiration anywhere — even in the simple, ordinary layman.

9. The letter is held in the archives of Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center.

10. P. 10 and p. 114b.

In memory of

Margalite Matild Zaig bat Irene z”l
Joseph and Mamo Ouanounou z”l
Joseph and Kamira Bonan z”l

May their *neshamot*
rest in Gan Eden, amen!

A Beloved Community Leader

Rabbenu was revered by the entire community of Baghdad — men and women, young and old, scholar and layman. They accorded him great respect and sought his advice and blessing for all matters big and small. He assisted every person with love, patience, and wisdom, guiding his constituents through the thicket of life’s challenges and helping them overcome even the most formidable hurdles.

The Redemption Is Coming

Rabbenu was constantly looking to improve and guide his community with regard to matters both big and small. There was once a certain young boy in Baghdad who was very skinny, and whom all the children in town derisively called “Ketzba,” which means “reed.” When Rabbenu heard of the insulting nickname given to this boy, he told the children to instead call him “Ketz Ba” (“the redemption

is coming”), to inject positive significance into the nickname. Characteristically, he found a way to transform a childish insult into an expression of hope. Rather than scold the children for insulting their peer, he did something even better — turning their insult into a name signifying our aspirations for national redemption.

The Merit of Living in the Holy Land

Rabbenu was very successful in the area of shalom bayit, helping married couples restore and maintain harmony in the home. Couples would often consult with him and eagerly seek his involvement to help them resolve their conflicts.

There was once a businessman in Baghdad who had enjoyed financial success throughout his life, until he suffered a sudden downturn, falling into a state of abysmal poverty.

After carefully examining his options, he decided that he could likely recover his fortune by transferring his business to Turkey. His wife, however, strongly opposed moving to Turkey. She insisted that she would leave Baghdad only to settle in Eretz Yisrael. She had so often heard Rabbenu speak about the great mitzvah of living in the Holy Land, and therefore refused on moving anywhere else. Finally, the man decided to seek the Ben Ish Hai’s advice.

Rabbenu heard the man describe his situation, and then summoned the wife. He explained to her that halachah requires a wife to obey and follow her husband wherever he desired to go, especially when his decision is based upon financial considerations. Despite all the virtues of living in Eretz Yisrael, he said, the daily fulfillment of the Torah was even more important. He promised her that some day she would indeed have the great merit of immigrating to the Holy Land together with her husband.

The man and his wife left for Turkey where he rebuilt his business and once again enjoyed financial success. Many years later, they

moved to Eretz Yisrael. The family settled in Jerusalem, where they supported numerous Torah institutions.

The Power of Amen

A story is told of two merchants in Baghdad who dealt in used clothing and furnishings. Once, as they were hurrying to the home of a certain non-Jew who was selling merchandise, a man stopped them and asked if one of them could complete a minyan so he could recite kaddish. One merchant said he had no time, while the other decided to take advantage of the opportunity for a mitzvah. After the kaddish recitation, the man proceeded to his destination. As he had feared, the other merchant purchased all the valuable merchandise, leaving behind only some old rags. The man did not want to leave empty-handed, so he purchased the remaining pile of scraps for next to nothing.



Jewish merchants in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo Credit: Stephanie Comfort – www.jewishpostcardcollection.com)

Upon returning home, he sorted through the rags and came upon an old, worn-out pillow. He opened it to remove the feathers, and inside he found a solitary pearl. The merchant immediately took the pearl to the jeweler, who estimated its value at fifty gold pieces, which he paid the merchant in cash. While it had appeared that he lost business by doing the

mitzvah of completing the minyan, Hashem saw to it that he would be aptly rewarded.

The merchant took the money home, and shared the news with his wife — who was far less excited about the fifty gold pieces than he was. She berated him for selling the pearl at such a low price, and demanded that he go back to the jeweler to rescind the transaction.

The man was torn. On the one hand, as an honest merchant of good standing, he did not want to retract his sale. But on the other hand, he did not want to disappoint his wife. What should he do? He went to the Ben Ish Hai for advice.

“It is quite simple,” Rabbenu said to the merchant. “You responded to a half-kaddish, which means you answered ‘amen’ five times. Our sages taught that the reward in this world for answering ‘amen’ is ten gold pieces. Your five ‘amen’ responses gave you fifty gold pieces, in addition to your reward in the next world.” The merchant left the Ben Ish Hai satisfied with the knowledge that he had made the right decision, and had sold the pearl for precisely the correct amount.¹

Precious Time

A certain Jew in Baghdad once borrowed money from Rabbenu. From that day on, Rabbenu changed the usual route that he took on his way to the yeshivah, walking along a different route that did not pass by the borrower’s home. He did not want the man to see him and feel ashamed that he owed the rabbi money.²

The new daily route took the rabbi past the store of a Jewish barber, who couldn’t help but notice that the Ben Ish Hai had started walking by his shop. Overcome by curiosity, the barber finally approached Rabbenu and asked for an explanation. Rabbenu happily explained the halachah requiring a lender to avoid the borrower in order to

1. Ahavat Haim — Parashat Hayei Sarah, p. 102.

2. In accordance with the halachah established in Bava Metzia 75b.

spare him embarrassment, which accounted for his new route to the yeshivah.

The barber asked Rabbenu how much he was owed, and then promptly took out his wallet and repaid the debt owed by the borrower. He told Rabbenu that he simply could not bear to see him waste his precious time and energy by walking a circuitous route every day!

The Mitzvah Observance Society

In 5629 (1869) several hachamim in Baghdad, at the initiative and under the leadership of the Ben Ish Hai, got together to form what they called a “Mitzvah Observance Society.” The society was modeled after the Hevrat Ahavat Shalom group which had been formed at Yeshivat Bet-El,³ whose members would work together to fulfill various takanot. An article in the journal Hamaggid⁴ described the establishment of the society, and the goals and vision of its founders:

In the afternoon of the holy Shabbat, 26 Elul, 5628, the members of the society gathered in the synagogue. The group included several great and venerable leaders of Israel, including our teacher and master, the holy tzaddik Hacham Abdallah Somech; the faithful and wondrous leader and speaker, author of the books Aderet Eliyahu,

3. Forty hachamim studied in Yeshivat Bet-El, and Rabbi Shalom Shar’aby formed a special group of twelve scholars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Yisrael, who were bound together by their commitment to especially rigorous standards of study and piety. They followed an exceptionally grueling schedule of Torah learning and prayer, even far more demanding than the standard, intensive yeshivah curriculum.

4. Year 12, issue 49. Hamaggid (literally, “The Declarer”) was founded in 1856, in Lyck, East Prussia (today, the city of Elk, Poland), as the first Hebrew weekly newspaper, and publication continued until 1903. (During its last decade, it was called Hamaggid L’Yisrael [“The Declarer to Israel”].) It contained extensive news reports from Jewish communities around the world, as well as general world news, critical historical essays, poetry, book reviews, business advertisements, and personal notices. (Information taken from Nedavot: Town Index to Donor Lists in Hamaggid, 1856-1900, compiled by Jeffrey A. Marx.)

Birkat Avot, and Rav Berachot, our teacher Rabbi Yosef Haim, son of the tzaddik, the holy kabbalist, the author of Kisei Eliyahu, Rabbi Eliyahu, and grandson of our famous teacher Rabbi Moshe Haim; and other famous rabbis... Other leading and well-respected figures were also in attendance. I was a mere observer, humbled in the presence of this awesome assembly.



Hacham Ovadia Hedaya giving shiur in Yeshivat Bet-El. Sitting in the center, wearing white, is Hamekubal Rabbi Mordechai Sharaby

Our revered masters said the following: Are we not aware of the commandment in the holy Torah that one must “Love your fellow man as yourself”? Each and every Jew must love his fellow Jew and treat him like a part of his own self, physically and spiritually. He must help and support him in any way he can. It is also a mitzvah to give him good and proper advice to help him find his way, both in matters relating to his day-to-day, worldly contentment, and matters relating to

his eternal, spiritual happiness. Our Torah luminaries impressed upon us the fundamental importance of this precious mitzvah. These venerable sages did not neglect to mention that the Jewish nation was not capable of receiving the Torah until they all united together, like one person with one heart. Now, too, as we live in bitter exile, we cannot expect that redemption shall arrive until the spirit of love, fellowship, peace, and friendship dwells among us.”

And so the distinguished people in the crowd were aroused with pure emotion, with hearts full of joy, elation, love, and affection; they were united as one person, banded together with the help of Hashem. They sealed a covenant of love and fellowship, formed a single unit, bound together by bonds of love and friendship, and established an honorable society which shall be known as the Mitzvah Observance Society. This group would be dedicated to raising the banner of Torah and elevating it to its rightful stature, and to enacting good and effective takanot for the benefit of our people in this city.

And if Hashem shall expand our reach beyond our borders, we shall also look favorably upon our poor and destitute brothers spread and dispersed among the cruel nations throughout the lands of Persia and Media, and all the cities of Kurdistan. There our brothers live in want and distress, suffering and sighing, buckling under the heavy burden which they bear in this harsh world, which is aggravated by the nations that surround them. These people have no one to turn to. These terrible troubles have come about because they have not seen the light of the Torah and wisdom, and they are now mired in foolishness and ignorance, and are void of all

knowledge. They lack any leader to guide them back to the ways of Torah and wisdom, to teach and instruct them, to show them the right path to walk and the right way to act. No one cares for them.

We beg Hashem for help and assistance in establishing our society. May He grant us the strength to improve their lot and their condition, and guide us along the path of justice for the benefit of our fellow Jews. And may we be given the merit of seeing the coming of the Mashiah. Amen.

The society was thus formed as a means of bringing merit to help the oppressed, downtrodden Jews of the time. Its members felt a genuine, deep-seated love and devotion to every Jew, regardless of where he lived and his level of observance, and they were committed to doing what they could to help the Jews of their time who were suffering from poverty and oppression.

The Herem (Excommunication)

The Sages of the Mishnah issued a strict warning against attempting to conspire against Torah scholars: “But beware of their glowing coal lest you be burned — for their bite is the bite of a fox, their sting is the sting of a scorpion, their hiss is the hiss of a serpent.”⁵ One individual named Jacob Obermeyer (1845-1935) failed to heed this warning, and suffered the consequences of attempting to oppose the revered rabbi of Baghdad.

Jacob was a Bavarian (modern-day Germany) Jewish Oriental researcher, scholar, and a traveler. In 1869 he was summoned to Baghdad from Vienna to serve as a teacher in a school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Paris-based organization for Jewish education.

5. Avot 2:15.

Soon after his arrival in Baghdad, Jacob Obermeyer began to interfere in the city’s religious and communal matters. He publicly questioned and mocked various halachic rulings, particularly the rulings of the Ben Ish Hai, as well as the customs and changes to the prayer services that Rabbenu introduced based on kabbalistic writings. He was brazen and arrogant enough to publish a letter in Hamaggid⁶ sharply denouncing the great rabbi.

When copies of this issue of Hamaggid reached Baghdad, all the city’s rabbis, under the leadership of Rabbi Abdallah Somech, joined together and instituted a herem (formal order of excommunication) against Jacob Obermeyer. The herem was proclaimed in all the streets and synagogues of Baghdad. The rabbis also sent a strongly-worded letter to Hamaggid protesting the journal’s decision to publish Obermeyer’s article, whereby it became an accomplice to the denigration and slander of a Torah scholar. The letter of protest was signed by twenty-seven of Baghdad’s leading rabbis. They also wrote a letter to the Rishon L’tzion, Rabbi Avraham Ashkenazi, urging him to publicly express outrage over the incident. These letters were published in the journal Halevanon⁷ on 25 Nissan, 5636 (1876). Several of Jerusalem’s rabbis, including the Rishon L’tzion and Rabbi Shalom Moshe Hai Gagin, joined in the protest and wrote letters of their own, which were published several weeks later, criticizing Jacob Obermeyer for insulting the Ben Ish Hai and undermining the honor of the Torah.

As a result of the herem, and by order of the Hacham Bashi, Jacob Obermeyer was denied entry into all the synagogues in Baghdad.

6. Year 20, Issue 7.

7. Halevanon (1863-1886) was among the first Orthodox newspapers circulated in Eastern Europe. It was founded by Yaakov Lifshitz as a means of combating the influences of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) and secular Zionism. (Information taken from Sarah Abrevaya Stein’s *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empire*.)

Seeing the consequences of his offensive assault on the Ben Ish Hai, Jacob Obermeyer sent letters of apology to both Hamaggid and Halevanon, but the editors refused to print them. Around the same time, he received a telegram informing him that his mother had passed away. Throughout the seven days of the shivah, not a single Jew came to his temporary home to offer condolences or make a minyan so he could recite kaddish.

In the end, Jacob Obermeyer came to Rabbenu's home to personally confess his wrongdoing and humbly beg his forgiveness. He was also forced to appear before the local bet din and publicly apologize to the Ben Ish Hai.

The experiences of Jacob Obermeyer demonstrate the widespread respect and reverence that Rabbenu earned among the Jewish communities in Baghdad and beyond, who refused to tolerate the insults thrown at him by his detractors.

The Community's Merit Comes First!

The weeks before Sukkot always brought a flurry of activity to the Ben Ish Hai's home. Rabbenu's family expended great efforts to find the highest quality arba minim. Back then, perfect arba minim were difficult to come by. Aravot were available in abundance, but the other three did not come easily. The family would import a special lulav from the banks of Euphrates River, and they would purchase hadasim from Eretz Yisrael. But the pride and joy of the rabbi's set of four species was his magnificent green etrog. The family, together with the local gabbaim, worked long and hard to find a perfect etrog for the Ben Ish Hai, dispatching several messengers to different countries. The goal was to find three perfect etrogim for the great rabbi.

Why three?

There were some Jews in Baghdad who could not afford arba minim, and many others who could purchase a lulav, hadasim, and aravot, but not a proper etrog. They therefore would come each day



HaLevanon on the 25th of Nissan 5636 /1876

of Sukkot to recite a berachah over the Ben Ish Hai's beautiful etrog. At sunrise on each day of Sukkot, throngs of Jews began assembling at Rabbenu's home to use his precious, exquisite set of arba minim. A large crowd of people, adorned with tallitot, mahzorim in hand, and the festive Yom Tov spirit on their faces, waited anxiously outside the rabbi's home. The group included young and old, scholars and laymen, rabbis and merchants, and they formed a long line that extended from Rabbenu's doorstep and snaked along the road. Hacham Saliman Mutzafi zt"l recalled that some people would come at 3 p.m., nervously looking at their watches and impatiently shifting their weight from one foot to the next, worried that they might not have the chance to fulfill the mitzvah before sundown.

The process took many hours, but Rabbenu stood in place, and patiently and lovingly handing his arba minim to each visitor, looking upon and speaking to each as though he were his only son. He smiled warmly at each Jew, his face radiating with satisfaction as he enabled countless Jews to perform this special mitzvah, and he encouraged the crowds to return again the following day.

This is why the Ben Ish Hai needed three etrogim. With so many people handling the etrog, it could easily become damaged and disqualified for the mitzvah. Rabbenu's gabbaim therefore ensured that there would be several etrogim to last for the entirety of the seven-day holiday.

On the final Sukkot of the Ben Ish Hai's life, a destitute talmid hacham who could scarcely support his family — let alone afford to buy an etrog — arrived in Baghdad. As he waited for his turn to use Rabbenu's arba minim, he asked the people around him how the rabbi could allow so many people to use his precious arba minim. If the etrog is handled by so many people, the scholar noted, there is a good chance that the Ben Ish Hai himself would be unable to fulfill the mitzvah on the final days of Sukkot.

His friend, who stood beside him, smiled and informed him that the Ben Ish Hai himself answered this question, in his book *Torah Lishmah*, in chapter 182, where he poses the following question:

If a man owns the most beautiful etrog, which he purchased with a large amount of money, is it preferable to use the etrog alone, or to allow others to fulfill the mitzvah, as well, if allowing others to use the etrog might result in damage and even blemishes that would render the etrog unsuitable?

After a lengthy discussion, Rabbenu concludes that bringing merit to the masses through a mitzvah is the most important factor of all: "He should allow others to have the merit, despite the possible harm to the etrog due to change of appearance, since it is his obligation to bring merit to the masses and not keep it to himself."

In the view of the Ben Ish Hai, there was no greater achievement than helping other Jews fulfill mitzvot. He felt that one should risk his etrog in order to help his fellow Jews — because the merit of the masses comes before one's own, personal merit. And it was this selfless devotion to his community that made him such an effective and revered leader, teacher, and guide.

לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי
ויקטור בן רחל

לעילוי נשמת אמי מורתני
שולאמית בת אזיזא

לעילוי נשמת
שאול בן חטון

לעילוי נשמת
יעקב בן חטון

לשפחת סוקור

Rabbenu's Special Powers

The Ben Ish Hai was one of those rare hachamim whose special level of holiness and connection to Hashem equips him with special powers to help Jews in need. Rabbenu was often called upon — or took the initiative — to resolve individual or communal crises through his special powers of prayer.

The Arab Who Fixed the Price of Lettuce

In his book Ben Ish Hai, amid his discussion of the halachot relevant to the first year of marriage, Rabbenu issues the following warning regarding the preparations for the Pesah Seder:¹

Women should carefully check hazeret [bitter herbs, usually romaine lettuce] and karpas [vegetables],

1. Parashat Tzav, ch. 27.

because one is liable to five [sets of] lashings for each insect that is [eaten]... So listen to my advice and throw away the leaves that need a lot of checking, and keep the stems, instead.

This passage is the source of the custom of the Jews of Bavel to only eat the stems of the lettuce on Seder night, and not the leaves. Because they ate only the stems, they needed a large quantity of lettuce in order to meet the minimum amount required to fulfill the mitzvah of marror at the Seder. Due to the considerable cost involved — especially in the case of large families that spent the holiday together — many Jews in Baghdad purchased lettuce from local Arab merchants who sold lettuce for just two coins a head.

One year as Pesah approached, the Arab lettuce merchants colluded to exploit the high demand for lettuce, raising the price by 1000%. They realized that the Jews would have no choice but to pay the exorbitant sum in order to fulfill their obligation on Pesah.

The Jews were shocked to learn that the merchants were now selling lettuce for twenty coins a head. The wealthier Jews paid the price, but most of the community's Jews were simply unable to afford to pay this kind of money. They were heartbroken at the prospect of being unable to fulfill the mitzvah of marror that year.

The Jews appealed to their great rabbi, the Ben Ish Hai, for help, and he wasted no time in addressing this grave situation. He immediately went to the market, proceeding directly to the Arab lettuce merchant. The rabbi asked the manipulative salesman how much he was selling his lettuce for, and the seller answered that each head cost twenty coins.

Rabbenu picked up a head of lettuce, glanced at it for a moment, and then showed it to the seller, asking, "Is this worth twenty coins?"

The Arab looked at the lettuce and recoiled in horror. The entire head was infested with insects!

Rabbenu then picked up another head and asked the same question: "Is this worth twenty coins?" The Arab saw that this lettuce, too, was overrun by insects. Rabbenu continued picking up heads of lettuce, until the entire stall was bug-ridden. The insects gradually began to infest all the merchant's vegetables, and then spilled onto the ground around him and started crawling up his legs and onto all the nearby stalls.

When the surrounding merchants saw what was happening, they shouted at the lettuce merchant, demanding that he lower the price before all their merchandise was destroyed. But he stubbornly refused to concede. The insects continued to multiply and threatened to destroy all the produce in the market.

Finally, the lettuce merchant realized that his infested produce was worthless, and so he shouted, "Take it all for free!"

Rabbenu replied that he would not move from the lettuce stall until all the lettuce merchants issued an announcement inviting the Jews to take as much lettuce as they wanted, free of charge. The announcement was made, and the word quickly spread among the Jews of Baghdad that there was infested lettuce available for free. Remarkably, as soon as a Jew lifted a head of lettuce, all the bugs disappeared, and the lettuce was fresh and clean for Pesah.



Rabbenu Yosef Haim

The Boy Who Desecrated the Synagogue

A Jewish boy was once fighting with an Arab boy outside one of the synagogues of Baghdad during the afternoon Minhah service. During

the fight, the Arab boy grabbed an iron rod and threatened to kill the Jewish boy. The Jew ran for his life into the synagogue and hid in a corner. He sat silently in order not to disturb the congregants who were praying Minhah.

The Arab boy waited outside the synagogue, wielding the iron rod. After a while, he grew tired of waiting and decided to show his disdain for the Jews' house of worship by relieving himself on one of the synagogue's walls. It was just then that the services concluded and the congregants began exiting the building. They were aghast by the sight of an Arab boy desecrating their holy bet kneset in such a revolting fashion.

The Arab boy, seeing the commotion he had caused and the anger he had aroused, tried to run away. To his astonishment, he could not budge; he was frozen in place! The Ben Ish Hai, who had attended the prayer service, walked past the boy without a glance and went home. Meanwhile, the boy remained frozen, unable to move or talk.

As time passed, the boy's parents began to worry. They searched the town, until finally they were advised by several Jewish townspeople to check the courtyard of the synagogue. When they arrived at the synagogue, they found their son, frozen solid like a rock, unable to move.

A Jewish passerby advised the frantic parents that only the city's rabbi was able to free their son from his mysterious trip. The parents ran to Rabbenu's home and tearfully begged him to release their son. Rabbenu informed the couple that this was G-d's punishment for anyone who desecrated the synagogue, and that the boy must remain there until he died.

The distraught parents fell to their knees and pleaded at Rabbenu's feet, promising to do anything he said if he would save their son. Rabbenu thought for a moment and then told them that if they built a fence around the synagogue, then their son would be released as soon as the construction was complete.

The parents immediately hired laborers to build a fence. They worked around the clock for three days, the frightening spectacle of the immobile boy driving them onward through exhaustion and fatigue. At the end of the third day, the fence was complete, and the parents ran to Rabbenu to inform him that their son still could not move. He told them to return to the synagogue, and they would find him starting to move. They rushed to the synagogue and found their son crying and nearly fainting from dehydration.

The boy told his parents the story, the news of which rapidly spread throughout the city, causing a tremendous kiddush Hashem.

"The G-d of the Jews Is the True G-d!"

A Jewish family once set off to visit the village of Azir, the site of the tomb of the Biblical sage Ezra. Along the way, as they crossed the Euphrates River, their boat capsized. Most of the passengers were saved, but several drowned, and despite extensive searching, their bodies were not found.

The survivors went to Rabbenu and implored him to visit the site of the tragedy and help recover the victims' remains.

Rabbenu stood by the riverbank and exclaimed, "O river! Tomorrow we must return to Baghdad. Eject the bodies of the drowned so that we can take them with us!"

No sooner had these words left Rabbenu's mouth, than several large objects were seen floating to the surface of the water. To everyone's astonishment, these were the bodies of the missing victims.

An Arab who witnessed this scene was so overcome by awe that he threw himself at Rabbenu's feet and kissed them, crying, "The G-d of the Jews is the true G-d!"

In Honor of Rabbenu

There was once a woman who was married for many years and was not blessed with children. She tried various treatments and

remedies, and eventually conceived. However, toward the end of the pregnancy, certain serious complications arose and her life was in danger. The doctors tried several treatments, but they were to no avail. They informed her that there was nothing else they could do to save her life.

The woman's distraught parents asked their friend Haviva al-Mashti, who was a regular visitor to Rabbenu's home, to run to the Ben Ish Hai and beg him to pray on their daughter's behalf. Haviva arrived at Rabbenu's home, and his servant offered her refreshments and asked her to take a seat and wait for Rabbenu to finish his studies. The woman politely asked the servant to make a special request to Rabbenu that he receive her immediately, as this was a matter of life and death.

The servant entered Rabbenu's study, but before he could open his mouth, Rabbenu handed him a slip of paper on which he had written a *segulah* (spiritual remedy), and said, "Run and give this to the woman. Tell her to go to the birthing woman and lay it on her belly." When Haviva received the slip of paper, she kissed it and then quickly ran to follow Rabbenu's instructions.

Soon thereafter, the woman gave birth to a healthy baby boy. A week later, at the *brit milah*, his grateful parents named him Yosef Haim, in honor of Rabbenu.

Hacham Agasi's Laundry Powder

The kabbalist Rabbi Shimon Agasi *zt"l* earned a living by selling laundry powder. Rabbi Shimon's powder was reputed to be a very effective cleansing agent, and his business thus enjoyed great success.

There was a certain Arab in town who despised Rabbi Shimon and resented the success of his business. In an attempt to ruin the rabbi's enterprise, the Arab decided to open a store directly opposite Rabbi Shimon's store, which sold, among other things, the same laundry powder, but at a cheaper price. It wasn't long before the Arab

began to attract many of Rabbi Shimon's regular customers, and his earnings took a sharp drop.

Rabbi Shimon, facing the prospect of financial ruin, consulted with Rabbenu, who advised him to continue running business as usual, guaranteeing that the problem would be solved soon enough.

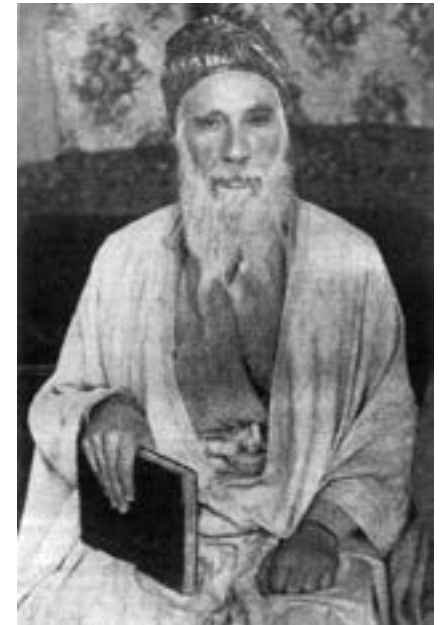
The next morning, when Rabbi Shimon went to open his store, he saw many people waiting outside his competitor's shop, most of them holding clothing in their hands. It turned out that the laundry powder they had purchased from the Arab had stained their clothes — even though it was the exact same powder that Rabbi Shimon had sold, which was well known for its high quality.

When the Arab arrived, he was inundated with complaints. He had no choice but to refund all the customers' money. Realizing that his misfortune was due to his sinister efforts to ruin Rabbi Shimon's business, he closed down his store that very day.

News of the story quickly spread throughout Baghdad, and everyone in the city once again stood in awe of their rabbi's extraordinary insight.

The Amulet That Lasted for Generations

A childless woman lived near the Ben Ish Hai's home. She had conceived seven times, but each pregnancy, tragically, ended in a miscarriage. When Rabbenu heard about the woman's plight,



Hacham Shimon Agasi

he summoned her and wrote a kamia (written amulet) which he instructed her to wear. From that day on, she experienced no further problems bearing children and enjoyed excellent health until a ripe old age.

Many decades later, after this woman moved to Israel, one of her great-granddaughters became critically ill and the doctors despaired from curing her. The old woman took off the amulet she had been wearing throughout the years and put it on her great-granddaughter's small, fragile body. The girl's condition rapidly improved, while the great-grandmother began to feel weak and ill. Eventually, the girl recovered, and the elderly great-grandmother immediately took back the kamia. Soon she regained her strength, and both credited Rabbenu with restoring their health.

A Healthy Baby

Hacham Rahamim Melamed Hakohen, rabbi of Shiraz, Iran, had one daughter. His wife was pregnant six times, but each resulted in either a miscarriage or death during infancy, except for this one daughter.

Rabbi Rahamim and his wife were heartbroken. His wife conceived for a seventh time, and during the ninth month of pregnancy, Rabbi Rahamim decided — against the protests of his wife and father-in-law — to join a group that was traveling to the



Jewish scribes at the Tomb of Yehezkel, 1914.
(Photo Credit: Stephanie Comfort – www.jewishpostcardcollection.com)

tombs of Ezra and the prophet Yehezkel in Baghdad to pray for the health of the child.

Along the way, Rabbi Rahamim fasted to atone for his sins. At one of the villages through which they passed, Rabbi Rahamim received a telegraph that his wife had delivered a baby boy. The rabbi was, naturally, anxious about the health of his wife and newborn child, and also disappointed that he was not at home to be with his family. He arrived with the group at the tomb of Ezra the Scribe, where he immersed, donned white clothing, prostrated himself at the tomb, and recited Tehillim with deep concentration until late into the night.

Rabbi Rahamim then turned to the scholars sitting near the tomb reciting the midnight service (Tikkun Hatzot), and asked them to recite Tehillim for him with a minyan, offering to pay them for their time. They asked him for the name of the newborn baby for whom they would pray, and he told them they could choose the name. They called him Ezra Tzion, in honor of Ezra the Scribe and his tomb. Rabbi Rahamim quickly sent a telegraph home with the chosen name. The group then continued to the tomb of the Yehezkel, where Rabbi Rahamim conducted the same service he had held at Ezra's tomb.

At one point during the forty days he spent in Baghdad, Rabbi Rahamim happened to meet a Jew



Yehezkel Hanavi's Tomb at Kifel, 1932. The area was mainly inhabited by Iraqi Jews.



Hacham Rachamim Melamed Hakohen

named Feraji, who prayed at the synagogue of Rabbi Yosef Haim. Feraji, who had already heard Rabbi Rahamim's story, decided to take him to Rabbenu's synagogue. Rabbi Rahamim wrote his story in a short letter, in which he embedded several allusions to the first and last letters of Rabbenu's name.

Feraji took Rabbi Rahamim to Rabbenu's house, where he introduced him as the rabbi and preacher of Shiraz. Rabbenu took the letter, read through it, and immediately stood, placed his hands on Rabbi Rahamim's head, and began praying for him. Rabbi Rahamim was embarrassed to sit while the great sage stood, and so he tried to stand. Rabbenu, however, did not allow him to rise, and he continued praying for fifteen minutes. When he completed his prayers, he sat down and blessed Rabbi Rahamim that this son would survive and reach adulthood.

Rabbi Rachamim wrote in his diary, "Thank G-d, his blessing was successful." Ezra Tzion grew to be a great rabbi, knowledgeable in



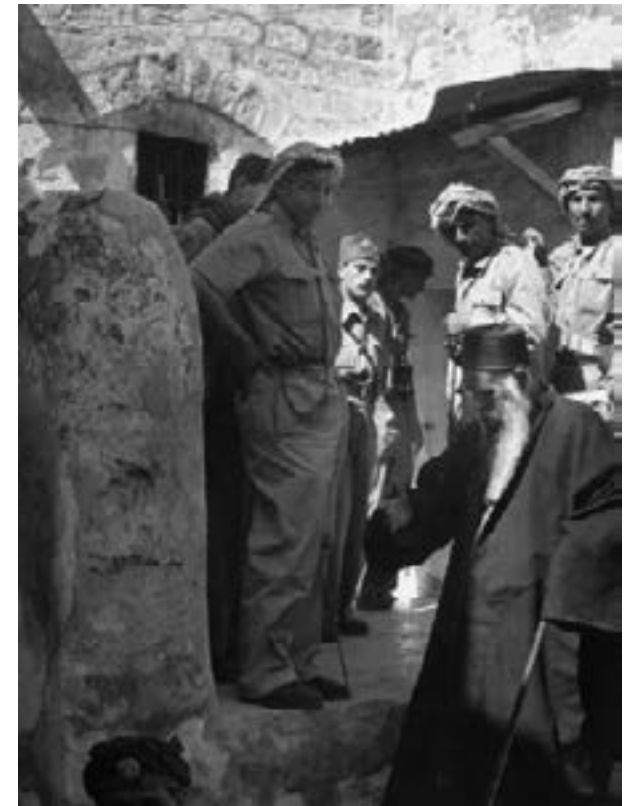
Left to right: Rabbi Zev Mintzburg and Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan are held captive by the Arab Legion in the Old City (1948).

Torah and general knowledge, and became especially famous for his Talmudic dictionary which is found in almost every study hall. Rabbi Rahamim was also blessed with two additional children, a son and a daughter.

Rabbenu's Enduring Merit

Rabbenu continued protecting and helping people even after his death — through the merits he accrued during his lifetime and in the form of dreams in which he appeared to certain hachamim after his passing.

During Israel's War of Independence in 1948, the Jordanian army captured the Old City of Jerusalem and systematically destroyed the Jewish Quarter. Three rabbis who lived in the Jewish Quarter, one of whom was the Ben Ish Hai's close disciple Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan, waved a white flag as a sign of surrender, hoping that the Jordanians would stop their assault. But the violent troops paid no attention, bent as



Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan leaving the territory of the Arab Legion, May, 1948.

they were upon destroying any vestige of Jewish life in Jerusalem's Old City.

Rabbi Ben-Tzion later recalled the extraordinary miracle through which his life was spared. The Jordanian soldiers burst into his home and began savagely beating him with the butts of their rifles. Miraculously, he describes, the fierce blows did not cause him pain; they felt as though he were being brushed with cotton wool. Eventually, the assailants stopped beating the rabbi and left. He determined that it was through the merits of his efforts to disseminate the teachings and the wisdom of his teacher, the Ben Ish Hai, that he was spared from death in such miraculous fashion.



Yeshivat
Hamekubalim
'Oz Vehadar'.
Left to right:
Hacham Yissachar
Abu Aziz; Hacham
Ephraim Menasahe
HaKohen; Hacham
Ezra Attiah; Hacham
Yitzhak Kaduri

Appearing in a Dream

Several years after Rabbenu's death, in 5701 (1941), the great Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Yehuda Tzadkah zt"l, who was but a young man, injured his hand. He suffered intense pain, but none of the doctors with whom he consulted could cure the wound. One night, his hand swelled and caused him intolerable pain. Rabbi Yehuda had no choice but to wait until the morning to seek help.

That night the Ben Ish Hai appeared in a dream to the great kabbalist Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani zt"l. Wearing black clothes

and sitting on the ground like a mourner, Rabbenu urgently called to Hacham Yehoshua and cried, "How can you sleep? Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah is ill! Get up and pray to Hashem on his behalf, that He shall heal him!"

Rabbi Yehoshua woke up and immediately went to Bet Midrash Shoshanim L'David. He opened the ark and poured out his heart to Hashem, begging Him to relieve Rabbi Yehuda's suffering. He then went to another synagogue, Maskil El Dal, where he opened the ark and prayed again.

In the morning, Rabbi Yehuda went to the hospital accompanied by his brother, Rabbi Ovadia Tzadkah. He received an injection, and screamed bitterly from the pain. But with the grace of Hashem, the wound gradually healed.

That same morning, Rabbi Yehoshua met Rabbi Yehuda's mother, and asked how her son was feeling. Rabbanit Tzadkah was surprised by the question, and asked Rabbi Yehoshua how he knew about Rabbi Yehuda's ordeal, which had begun late the previous night and was not told to anyone. Rabbi Yehoshua ignored the question, and instead repeated his inquiry about Rabbi Yehuda's wellbeing. Rabbanit Tzadkah replied that his condition had improved and the pain had eased, but she still wondered how Rabbi Yehoshua knew of the incident.

Rabbi Yehoshua reportedly said that Rabbi Yehuda Tzadkah bore a spark from the soul of Rabbenu. Despite his innumerable accomplishments, Rabbenu never taught Talmud in depth with its commentaries, and therefore a spark of his soul was reincarnated in the Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Yehuda, who devoted his life to teaching Talmud to countless students and grooming future Torah luminaries.²

2. Years later Rabbi Yehoshua revealed the dream to his son, Hagaon Rabbi Shelomo Sharbani zt"l, and instructed him never to repeat the story until he (Rabbi Yehoshua) has passed on to the next world.

In everlasting loving memory of the late
Judah Ephraim Benjamin O.B.M

And the late
Rose Victoria Najma Benjamin O.B.M.

יהודה אפרים בנימין בן חנה ז"ל

ויקטוריה רוז נג'מה בת לולו ז"ל

Dedicated by their children
Frank J. Benjamin e' Family
Joseph Benjamin e' Family

In everlasting loving memory of the late
Mordechai Hayim Sassoon O.B.M.

מרדכי חיים ששון ז"ל

Dedicated by
Victor Sassoon e' Family

In everlasting loving memory of the late
Isidore Mizrahie O.B.M.

איסאדור בן רגינה ז"ל

Dedicated by
Joyce Mizrahie and by Elie Mizrahie

The Special Ruah Hakodesh of the Ben Ish Hai

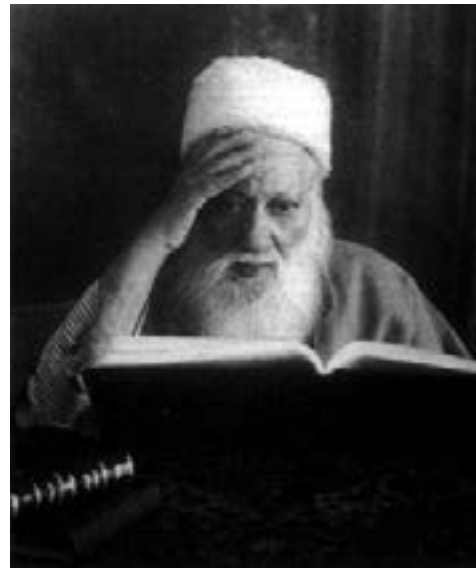
Rabbenu was endowed with special spiritual vision which enabled him to see and know things that were occurring far away, or concealed to everyone else. He reached a level of holiness where he was shown secrets through his special ruah hakodesh, which he used on many occasions to help people and protect them from harm, or to reveal important information to the people or to other hachamim.

The Spirit of Atzilut

Rabbi Shemuel Derzi zt"l (1920-2005), a renowned kabbalist, recalled that Rabbenu once hosted a festive banquet for the rabbis. At the affair, he announced that he decided to make this celebration because he was told in a dream that he had received a nefesh, a soul, from the Olam Ha'atzilut, a higher spiritual world.

Around the same time, Rabbi Yehuda Fetaya zt"l (1859-1942), who was then a young man, was visited by the soul of a certain tzaddik who informed him of the Ben Ish Hai's dream, adding that Rabbenu had actually received a ruah — an even higher level of soul than nefesh — from the Olam Ha'atzilut. Rabbi Yehuda Fetaya felt uneasy about approaching Rabbenu directly, and so he decided to approach Rabbenu's son, Rabbi Yaakov Haim, to inform him about his dream and ask that he convey the information to his father.

When Rabbenu heard that he had received a ruah, he was overjoyed and prepared yet another celebration for the rabbis. He decided to invite Rabbi Yehuda Fetaya, as well, despite the fact that he was much younger than the venerable sages in attendance. Rabbi Yehuda would often fondly recall the unique experience of being seated at Rabbenu's table during that special event.



Hacham Yehuda Fetaya engrossed in Torah study

The Time of the Redemption

Once, toward the end of the Ben Ish Hai's life, a fourteen-year-old boy passed by Rabbenu's home and saw a group of people gathered outside. It turned out that they were a well-respected family and were about to enter Rabbenu's home. The boy decided to join them, and he went inside.

The group asked the rabbi about a rumor that had been circulating to the effect that the Final Redemption would arrive the following year, 5670 (1910). The alleged prediction was based on the verse in

Tehillim (44:3), תרע לאומים ותשלחם ("You have broken the nations and cast them away"). Some people understood this to mean that in the year 5670 (תר"ע), G-d would visit retribution upon the enemy nations and send the Jewish people out of exile.

Rabbenu said that he did not agree with this interpretation, and then proceeded to tell them what had been revealed to him in a vision about the time of the redemption. He was shown that if there is a time when Jewish women and girls publicly act and dress in an exceedingly immodest fashion, and young Jewish men die in wars — these unfortunate phenomena indicate that Mashiah is coming soon.

The Ben Ish Hai's prediction remained etched in the young boy's memory throughout his life. Some sixty years later, in 5743 (1974), he recorded this incident in an article printed in the journal *Ohr Torah*.

Finding a Lost Bride

There was a young man in Baghdad who, after becoming engaged, discovered that his fiancée had a cataract in her eye. He promptly decided to break off the engagement. The girl felt very pained, and she ran away from home. Despite exhaustive efforts by her parents and the police, she could not be found. The girl's desperate parents decided to consult with the Ben Ish Hai, hoping that his legendary wisdom and insight could help them locate their beloved daughter and bring her back home.

When the parents reached Rabbenu's home, they told his servant the story and begged him to approach the rabbi and ask for his advice. Rabbenu heard the story and then said to his assistant, "Go tell them that their daughter is alive and well, at her aunt's house. Also they should know that soon she will be very happy." He even specified the address of the aunt's home where the girl was staying.

The parents proceeded immediately to the aunt's home, and, sure enough, they found their daughter. The aunt continued to host and care for the young girl until her emotional wounds were healed.

Shortly thereafter, the young man regretted his decision to break off the engagement, realizing that he in truth sincerely wished to marry the girl, despite her condition. He approached the family to apologize and make amends, and the couple decided to marry. As the Ben Ish Hai predicted, the girl was soon dancing joyously at her wedding.

With the Assistance of an Angel

The man also related another remarkable incident which he experienced in Baghdad involving the Ben Ish Hai. As a child, he would often play with and care for the doves that nested on the roof of his home. Once, as he played on the roof, he suddenly saw an elderly man with the most magnificent snow-white beard he had ever seen. The old man asked him why he did not recite the “Elokai Netzor” prayer which is printed in the siddur at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei. The boy replied that this paragraph is omitted in the Talmud Torah where he studied, and so he never grew accustomed to reciting it. The mysterious old man showed him the text of “Elokai Netzor” written word-for-word on his beard. The boy read the text, and the man then disappeared.

The youngster was terrified. Overcome by shock, he became gravely ill. He could not get out of bed, eat or drink. His mother frantically took the boy to the Ben Ish Hai.

As soon as they entered, before they even spoke a word, Rabbenu said to the boy, “From now on, say ‘Elokai Netzor.’ And don’t worry, it was just a good angel who came to help you!”

The Clock from Switzerland

Rabbi Shemuel Derzi zt”l related an incident involving a wealthy man who purchased a very expensive clock in Switzerland and brought it back to Baghdad. As there were only a few clocks in Baghdad at that time, the man erected his clock in the center of the city so that everyone would know the exact time.

When Rabbenu saw the clock and read the time, he told everyone around him that the clock was not accurate, as it was five minutes slow. But the wealthy donor publicly disputed the claim, and insisted that the state-of-the-art European clock was perfectly precise.

Several few months later, the wealthy man visited Switzerland again and returned with another expensive clock. When he brought it to Baghdad, everyone who saw it immediately recognized that the first clock was indeed five minutes behind the new clock.

The Foresight of the Ben Ish Hai

There was a man who lived in Persia (modern-day Iran) and would frequently travel to Iraq to visit the Ben Ish Hai. On one occasion, as he finished his visit with the rabbi, Rabbenu asked him when he was planning to return to Persia. The man informed Rabbenu that he had to rush home and was therefore scheduled to leave Iraq with the next caravan that set out for Persia.

Rabbenu, however, told the visitor to postpone his departure, warning that he should not travel with the next caravan. But the man was under great pressure to return home immediately, so he decided to take his chances and join the next caravan, despite the rabbi’s strict warning.

Along the journey, the caravan was attacked by bandits who stole everything, and the travelers barely escaped with their lives. It was only then that the man understood that Rabbenu, in his foresight, had warned him in order to protect his possessions.¹

“Avraham, Avraham!”

Hacham Efraim Menashe Hakohen zt”l once went walking with Rabbenu through the streets of Baghdad. Suddenly, to Rabbi Efraim’s sheer astonishment, Rabbenu turned around and began pleading,

1. This story was reported by the man’s son.

apparently to no one. He cried as though he were begging for his life, shouting, "Avraham! Avraham! Why are you doing this? Don't do it!" Rabbi Efraim looked behind them and saw there was no one there.

Upon returning home, Rabbi Efraim Hakohen found one of his friends, Rabbi Yom Tov Matzliah, waiting for him, and he told him about this peculiar incident. Rabbi Yom Tov turned pale and looked terrified.

"I just heard terrible news," Rabbi Yom Tov said. "I heard it just now, within the hour, while I was on the way here." He reported that a relative and follower of the Ben Ish Hai named Avraham suddenly died while eating watermelon. The doctors found that the watermelon was contaminated with a snake's venom. The Ben Ish Hai somehow sensed the imminent tragedy, and attempted to save his relative's life by protesting against the Angel of Death. Unfortunately, his efforts were to no avail.

The Book of Tehillim

A certain Jew once visited Rabbenu to seek his advice on a certain matter. Before the man left, Rabbenu gave him a small book of Tehillim and instructed him to read it on his way home.

The man left and hired an Arab wagon driver to bring him to his destination. During the journey, as they passed through an uninhabited, deserted area, the Jew noticed that the Arab kept glancing at him furtively, and he feared for his life. He started to read the book of Tehillim that he had received from the Ben Ish Hai, silently crying to Hashem to save him.

The driver noticed that his passenger was reading a book, and asked him what he was reading. The passenger replied that it was the book of Tehillim, which was written by King David. The driver immediately fell to the man's feet. He said that he had planned to kill him and steal his belongings, but now he was afraid that the soul of the great King David would avenge the Jew's blood.

The man realized that the Ben Ish Hai had saved his life by giving him the book of Tehillim!

Because She Went Bare-Headed

One Friday a group of fishermen in Baghdad caught an enormous fish, measuring some 80 cm long, and brought it to the market. A Jewish woman saw the fish and decided to buy it in honor of Shabbat. Knowing how proud her husband would feel being served such a large fish, the woman figured that she would cook it whole, rather than slicing it into pieces.

And so she placed the fish into the pan and lit the fire. As soon as the heat began to rise, the fish suddenly sprung to life and jumped out of the pan. Horror-stricken, the woman delivered several sharp blows to the fish's head, until it started bleeding. She then placed it back in the hot pan, but it again jumped out, its mouth rapidly opening and closing, as it fought for its life. This happened several times, until the woman was too terrified to touch the fish again.

The woman went to her husband and told him about this bizarre incident. He went to Rabbenu and asked him to explain why this had happened.

The rabbi said that this fish possessed the reincarnated soul of a great tzaddik. The family was not worthy of eating this fish and thereby making the necessary tikkun for this righteous man's soul, because the wife did not cover her hair, as required by halachah. Rabbenu instructed the couple to sell the fish to the hachamim of Yeshivat Bet Zilka, who were capable of giving the soul the tikkun that it needed. He then sent the hachamim a special prescription of Torah texts that they should study prior to eating the fish, in order to ensure that the tikkun was properly completed.²

2. This story was told by Hacham Shalom Ezra Zecharia, who served as one of Rabbenu's assistants.

How Rabbenu's Ruah Hakodesh Saved an Elderly Man

An elderly man once delivered a package to the Ben Ish Hai. The rabbi thanked him for the package and advised him not to return home along the same route on which he had come. Although the man had to rush home, Rabbenu urged him to take the longer, circuitous route, rather than follow the direct route he had taken on the way to the rabbi's home.

The man heeded Rabbenu's advice, and the next morning, he learned that at the time he left Rabbenu's home, a fight had erupted among several local Arabs on the road to his home. Gunfire was exchanged between the different factions, killing many of the Arabs involved in the fight. Rabbenu's ruah hakodesh saved the man's life!³

The Ben Ish Hai's Promise

The Ben Ish Hai arranged a group of Iraqi Jews who decided to leave their homes and live in Eretz Yisrael. This group was joined by another group of likeminded families of talmide hachamim who wanted to live in the Holy Land. The immigrants-to-be were well aware of the risks entailed in this journey, but were resolute in their desire to settle in the land of their ancestors.

Before leaving for Eretz Yisrael, the group came to the Ben Ish Hai to ask for his blessing that they should reach their destination safely. Rabbenu warmly bade them farewell and promised them that their trip would be safe and successful. After hearing the rabbi's guarantee, the group left for their journey, confident that there was nothing to fear along the way.

At one point, as they traveled through the desert, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a band of savage thieves.

3. The elderly man's son, who today resides in London, related this incident to the Ben Ish Hai's great-great-grandson, Rabbi David, who later told it to this author.

"Give us all your money, gold, and jewelry at once!" the chief bandit demanded.

The travelers were devastated. They had with them large sums of money, as well as gold, silver, and precious stones, which they had received in exchange for the houses they had sold in Iraq. They were relying on that money to begin their lives in Eretz Yisrael. But now, they had no choice but to surrender all their money, in order to save their lives.

As they began opening their luggage to take out their money, the leader of the thieves walked among them. Suddenly, he stopped and stared at the wife of Rabbi Eliyahu Mani. She trembled in fear.

"Tell me," the thief said, "are you from Baghdad?"

"Yes, we are," she answered.

"Do you have a brother in Baghdad?"

"Yes," nodded Rabbanit Mani.

The chief bandit continued his interrogation. "Is your brother, by chance, a goldsmith?"

"Yes," she replied, astonished.

The robber's face suddenly relaxed, and now wore a humane, gentle, sensitive look. "I thought you looked just like him," he said. He turned to his comrades and ordered, "Give everything back to them!"

The men couldn't believe their ears, so he repeated the order. "Return all the money and jewels you took from these people right away! I don't want to hear another word!"

The bandits looked at each other in surprise, and reluctantly gave everything back.

The chief then explained to them what this was all about. "When I was still a law-abiding citizen, I lived in Baghdad. Once, I urgently needed a certain sum of money, but I wasn't able to get it together. I approached all the people I knew in town, but no one agreed to lend

me the money. Not one person! I then went to the goldsmith whose shop was near my home. 'What should I do?' I asked him. 'To whom shall I turn?'

"The goldsmith took out a small box filled with gold coins. 'Take whatever you need,' he said. 'Don't be embarrassed. Anyone can fall upon hard times. Pay me back when you're able to.'

"I took ten gold coins, and never forgot that favor he did for me. Years passed, and today I'm the chief of this group of bandits. But I'm still indebted to that goldsmith, who is the brother of this woman. That's why I'm returning all the money to these travelers."

The travelers were relieved. They repacked their bags and resumed their journey — only now they were accompanied by several bandits, whom the chief had ordered to travel with them and serve as their guards.⁴

The news of the miracle reached Baghdad, and when Rabbenu heard the story, he recited the verse, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for in the course of days you will find it."⁵

4. Tales of the Tzaddikim, published in the journal B'ohr HaTorah in 1986. Reprinted with permission.

5. Kohelet 11:1.

This chapter is dedicated
in loving memory of
Yossef Benhaim zt"l

יוסף בן חיים זצ"ל

Uncle Yossef was a true role model who led by example. He taught us to conduct our lives in the way of Torah, *mitzvot*, and acts of kindness.

Our Sages teach:

אמור מעט ועשה הרבה
(*Pirkei Avot* 1:15)

Our Uncle Yossef was a quiet man, but uncompromising in his dedication to and support of his family, community, nation, and humanity.

The merit of the Torah studied by learning the lessons of our *tzaddikim* shall surely elevate his pure soul to the highest heights of Gan Eden.

With all our love and pride,

Elias and Adina Toby

Rabbenu's Last Days and the Passing of a Torah Giant

On Sunday 5 Elul, 5679 (1909), Rabbenu traveled to the tomb of the Yehezkel Hanavi¹ in the village of Kifl.² He visited this holy site several times in his lifetime, and composed his book *Mare'ot Yehezkel* on one of his visits. It was an arduous seventeen-hour³ journey in an ox-drawn wagon from Baghdad to the site of the tomb.⁴ After

1. Every year thousands of Jews would make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Yehezkel, the prophet who prophesied in Bavel during the Babylonian exile.
2. Kifl is a small town on the Euphrates River, between Najaf and Al Hillah, in an area that was once considered Babylonia, and is now southeastern Iraq.
3. Today the trip is a three-hour car ride.
4. The Ben Ish Hai spent a full week praying and preparing himself for Rosh Hashanah. He spent Shabbat in the village of Getz, where he addressed the town's Jewish residents, urging them to perform complete teshuvah in advance of Rosh Hashanah.

completing his stay in Kifl, he traveled to the village of Getz, situated about a three-hour ride from the tomb, to rest. It was there that he was stricken with the illness that took his life.

Early in the morning on 13 Elul, 5679 (August 31, 1909), Rabbenu Yosef Haim returned his soul to the Heavenly Court, as pure and holy as the day it came into this world. His students, who had accompanied him on the journey, carried the tzaddik's remains to the city of Al-Hanaya,⁵ from where they sent a telegram to Baghdad, announcing: יוסף אינגו ("Yosef is gone"). The news sent shockwaves throughout the community, and rivers of tears began to flow. The leaders of the community immediately set out for Al-Hanaya to bring Rabbenu's body to Baghdad. A large crowd of prominent leaders and family members accompanied the coffin, which reached Baghdad on 15 Elul, two days after his passing.

The entire city — from the oldest man to the youngest child, brides and grooms, and nursing mothers with their infants — came to greet the Ben Ish Hai's coffin, to show their final respects to their revered leader. Thousands of non-Jews from throughout Iraq also came to give honor to this legendary figure who had earned the admiration of people from all backgrounds and walks of life.

An enormous crowd⁶ assembled to hear the eulogy delivered by Rabbenu's disciple, Rabbi Moshe Shamash, which lasted four hours. Countless



Hacham Moshe Shamash

5. Al-Hanaya is a town in Iraq, on the Euphrates River.

6. Legend has it that the Ben Ish Hai's funeral was the largest, or one of the largest, funerals ever held in Baghdad since Talmudic times.

other eulogies were delivered the same day throughout Iraq. Families and groups of women gathered privately to eulogize the beloved sage. The tears flowed like waterfalls and people cried until they could cry no more.

On each of the seven days of mourning, a leading hacham eulogized the deceased tzaddik, as was the custom when a great leader passed away. These speakers included Chief Rabbi Hacham David Papo zt"l, Hacham Sasson Yisrael zt"l, Hacham Ezra Dangoor zt"l, the great kabbalist Hacham Shimon Agasi zt"l, and Hacham Yosef Haim Sarim zt"l, the emissary of the rabbis of Jerusalem, who delivered the final eulogy. The bet din of Baghdad issued a decree ordering all the city's Jews to suspend their professional activities and close their businesses for the entire week. Even non-Jewish residents of Baghdad closed their shops in the Ben Ish Hai's honor.

Hacham Yaakov Shaul Kassin zt"l (1900-1994) recorded the following remarkable incident that occurred at the time of the Ben Ish Hai's passing:



Hacham Sasson Yisrael (1820-1911) was one of Baghdad's leading Dayanim (Judges).
(Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive)

On the night of the thirteenth of Elul, after midnight, the kabbalist Rabbi Avraham Ades (1857-1925) was immersed in Torah study in his usual manner, when he suddenly fell asleep. In his dream, he saw Rabbi Avraham Laniado⁷ dressed in white. Rabbi Avraham Ades asked him where he was going, and he answered, "You should know that Rabbenu Yosef Haim has passed away in Bavel, and I am going to accompany him to Jerusalem." Rabbi Avraham Ades awoke, and then fell asleep again. In his dream, he saw Rabbenu's bier, a huge crowd that had gathered, and certain rabbis whom he recognized delivering eulogies. He awoke again. Obviously, no one in Jerusalem had yet heard about Rabbenu's passing.

Rabbi Avraham Ades understood that the events revealed to him in this dream were true. In the morning, he visited the hachamim of the Babylonian (Iraqi) community of Jerusalem and asked them if they had received any updates about Rabbenu Yosef Haim's health. They answered that they had heard he had fallen ill several days earlier. Rabbi Avraham remained silent and did not reveal anything about his dream.

Several hours later, a telegram arrived in Jerusalem from Baghdad announcing that Rabbenu had passed away at dawn on the thirteenth of Elul. Rabbi Avraham then revealed that he had seen in his dream that Rabbenu's bier had already been brought to Jerusalem. He told them which rabbis should eulogize him and in which sequence, as he saw in his dream, and this is precisely what they did.⁸

The Transfer of Rabbenu's Grave

Several decades after Rabbenu's passing, his remains were re-interred by Iraqi government officials. Rabbi Avraham Shabtai (1810-1889) wrote the following eye-witness account of the transfer of Rabbenu's coffin:

In 5709/1949, forty years after Rabbenu was called to the Heavenly Court, they [the Iraqi government] wanted to lay a road over the cemetery in Baghdad, and so they had to move several graves of Baghdadi rabbis, including the grave of our rabbi [the Ben Ish Hai].

When an Arab laborer came to unearth Rabbenu's grave, he lifted his hand and then found himself frozen in place, unable to move. He told the other people there to go to the hachamim of the city and ask what to do. When they spoke to the hachamim, they were told that they could disturb the grave only if they did so with great respect, accompanied by the prayers and supplications of a large crowd, as is befitting the honor of the Torah.

And so all the hachamim, including Rabbenu's grandson, Hacham David, gathered at the graveside. They recited the Minhah prayer and begged for forgiveness. The laborer's hand was then released, signaling that forgiveness had been granted.

The laborers then resumed digging, with a spirit of respect and awe, surrounded by a large crowd of Arabs. When they removed Rabbenu's holy body, everyone saw that he was covered in fresh shrouds, as though he had been buried barely an hour earlier. The news of this incident spread throughout the city, and caused a great kiddush Hashem.⁹

7. Rabbi Avraham Laniado zt"l (1876-1925) was an ancestor of Rabbi Rafael Shelomo Laniado, the current rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Porat Yosef.

8. Peri Etz Hagan p. 79a.

9. The government gave the people three months to move the remains of their loved

A Spark of Yosef

One of the rabbis who eulogized Rabbenu during the week of mourning was Hacham Shimon Agasi, who was not, at that time, a prominent figure in the Baghdad Jewish community. He had never before delivered a public address, and in fact he initially did not want to deliver a eulogy. It was only after the Ben Ish Hai appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to eulogize him that he agreed.

Hacham Shimon delivered a masterful eulogy.¹⁰ Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri zt"l noted that Hacham Shimon had spoken with a stutter until his public eulogy of the Ben Ish Hai — during which he spoke flawlessly, and after which he never again stuttered. In his address, he revealed hitherto unknown information about Rabbenu's soul. He said that Rabbenu shared a soul root with Yosef Hatzaddik, and for this reason he was destined to die in one place and be buried somewhere else, just as Yosef died in Egypt and was interred in the Land of Israel.¹¹ Furthermore, Hacham Shimon noted that Yosef

ones to the new cemetery in Baghdad before the old one was destroyed. Some sources say that Hacham David, the Ben Ish Hai's grandson, had Rabbenu's remains moved at that time, while others say that when the grave was dug up it was found empty, as his body and soul had gone to Jerusalem. In any event, the maps of the new cemetery in Baghdad do not show a grave bearing the name Rabbenu Yosef Haim or any signs of his grave. Yet a reliable source (who requested to remain anonymous) told this author that he knows exactly where Hacham Yosef Haim is buried in Baghdad, and that he is looking into bringing the tzaddik's remains to Jerusalem someday.

The question surrounding the Ben Ish Hai's body or soul transferring from Baghdad to Jerusalem remains a controversial one. The view of Rabbi Mordechai Elyahu, Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri, Rabbi Benayahu Shmuely, and many other great hachamim is that he is buried on Har Hazetim (Mount of Olives).

10. Hacham Shimon Agasi's eulogy is recorded in his book *Imremre Shimon*.

11. See Bereshit 50:26 and Yehoshua 24:32. There are also other points of resemblance between the Ben Ish Hai and Yosef Hatzaddik. As a young boy, Rabbenu once fell into a pit and miraculously survived, just as Yosef was cast into a pit and ultimately survived. Additionally, Rabbenu was tall and handsome, like Yosef, and he also spent time in prison due to false charges, just as Yosef was imprisoned as a result of the false allegations of Potifar's wife.

Hatzaddik represents the sefirah of Yesod — the “foundation” of the other sefirot — and Rabbenu was likewise connected to Yesod, as he was overflowing with wisdom, serving as a vessel for all the sefirot. For this reason, the hacham explained, Rabbenu named his books with titles that bear a kabbalistic allusion to Yesod, such as *Benayahu*, *Ben Yehoyada*, *Ben Ish Hai*, and *Rav Pe'alim*.

Hacham Shimon added that the great Tanna Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (“Rebbi”) was also connected to Yesod. Like Yosef and Rabbenu Yosef Haim, his remains were transported for burial after his death (from Zippori to Bet She'arim). The Sages teach that anyone who was present at the deathbed of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi is guaranteed a share in the World to Come, and Hacham Shimon asserted that anyone who was at Rabbenu's deathbed is similarly promised a portion in the eternal world.¹²

Hagaon Rabbi Yaakov David Wilovsky (the “Ridbaz,” 1845-1913) delivered a eulogy for Rabbenu in which he expressed the feelings that were felt by Jews around the world in response to the Sage's passing: “The rabbi of the whole Diaspora has been lost. Woe to those left behind! They cannot forget. The crowning glory of Israel has been taken away. Who can replace him? Who can stand in his stead? He has gone to eternal rest, and we are left bereft.”



Hagaon Rabbi Yaakov David Wilovsky (1845-1913), the Ridbaz

12. The Ben Ish Hai resembled Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi in that they both achieved unparalleled Torah scholarship, fabulous wealth, and positions of leadership that brought them widespread honor and respect.



Kever of Hacham Yosef Haim – Ben Ish Hai, in Baghdad, Iraq



Kever of Hacham Yosef Haim in Jerusalem

The Power of a Tzaddik

Rabbi Ben-Tzion Hazan wrote that untold numbers of Jews would frequent Rabbenu's gravesite and pray there. Every Friday, an estimated 50,000 people would visit the sacred burial site.

The grave was situated near an Arab neighborhood, and the local residents obviously noticed the enormous masses of people that would flock to the area every Friday. The word gradually spread around the neighborhood that the crowds would gather to pray at the burial site of their venerated rabbi.

There was one particular Arab who despised the Jews and was bent on showing his disdain for them and their deceased leader. One day he went to Rabbenu's grave and lifted his tunic in order to relieve himself on the Jewish holy site. Suddenly, he collapsed. Unable to stand, he dropped to his knees onto the ground and fell over in helpless incapacity. His peers, who stood nearby, saw what happened and trembled in fright. They eventually brought a donkey to carry him home, where he spent three days lying in bed in agony, and then died. From that point on, the non-Jews in the area showed great reverence to Rabbenu's grave. They would visit the site to light candles, make vows, and pledge charity.

Sometime thereafter, a young Jewish boy was stricken with a debilitating illness and lost his faculty of speech. His family heard the story of the Arab's failed attempt to defile Rabbenu's gravesite, and immediately recognized the special power of the tzaddik's grave. And so the boy's mother and sister took him to the burial site, where they prayed and cried, falling on the grave and putting its dust on their heads. They did not move from the holy site until the boy opened his mouth and began to speak.

Rabbenu's home was also considered a holy site, even after his death. Whenever a Jew encountered some kind of crisis, he would stand outside Rabbenu's home and pour out his heart in prayer, and the prayer would be answered in the merit of the great sage. Arabs

from the surrounding areas would also pray at the home when a family member fell ill. They adopted the custom of pledging donations to the Midrash Talmud Torah, which served as the Jewish orphanage in Baghdad, if the patient would be healed. The local Arabs would even kiss the mezuzot of the house, and there are many recorded incidents of Arabs whose prayers at this site were answered.

“Od Yosef Hai” — The Ben Ish Hai Still Lives

Once, as Hacham Ezra Attiah delivered a shiur in Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Jerusalem, he noticed a certain man walking by the yeshivah. To his students’ amazement, the hacham stood up in the man’s honor.

Hacham Ezra explained to his students that this man had served as the head of the Hevra Kadisha (burial society) in Baghdad. When he became a bar mitzvah, the Ben Ish Hai personally put tefillin on his arm and head. “Even after the Ben Ish Hai’s passing,” the hacham exclaimed, “I should stand up for someone who was touched by him!”¹³



Hacham Ezra Attiah

Obituaries

Havatzelet Newspaper
September 10, 1909
Jerusalem

A Prince and a Great Man Has Fallen in Israel

Another of the giants of our generation, of the righteous and holy men, has passed away: the rabbi of true brilliance; prince of the Torah

13. The story was told to the author by a great-great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai (a grandson of the Ben Ish Hai’s grandson, Hacham David).

and fear of heaven; a holy saint, Rabbi Yosef Haim from Baghdad, the capital of Iraq.

The giant, who has reached his resting place, was born in Iraq, the son of the righteous Rabbi Eliyahu, and grandson of the great Rabbi Moshe Haim, head of the rabbis of Baghdad. And Yosef Hatzaddik whose eulogy we are writing, refused to accept the role of rabbinat, and he was in Baghdad like a layman, sitting in the yeshivah and meditating on the Torah and the true wisdom, but every matter that was too big or difficult in religion or halachah, in Baghdad, or any Iraqi city, was settled by his word. All the rabbis turned to him with their questions, and he answered each one clearly, aside from the lecture that he delivered on Shabbat in the great synagogue in Baghdad for thousands of our Iraqi brothers. He spoke of Torah, mussar, and halachah. He authored many books in halachah and midrash, including the five-volume Ben Yehoyada on Talmudic stories, Ben Ish Hai, Ben Ish Hayil (lectures and halachah), Rav Pe’alim (three volumes), Benayahu, Imre Binah, and more. Of his last book, Od Yosef Hai, around ninety pages have been printed, and the remainder of the work has already been sent to the publishing house.

He was an elderly man, around eighty years old on the day of his death, but there is no measure with which to calculate Israel’s loss, for he was singular in all of Iraq.

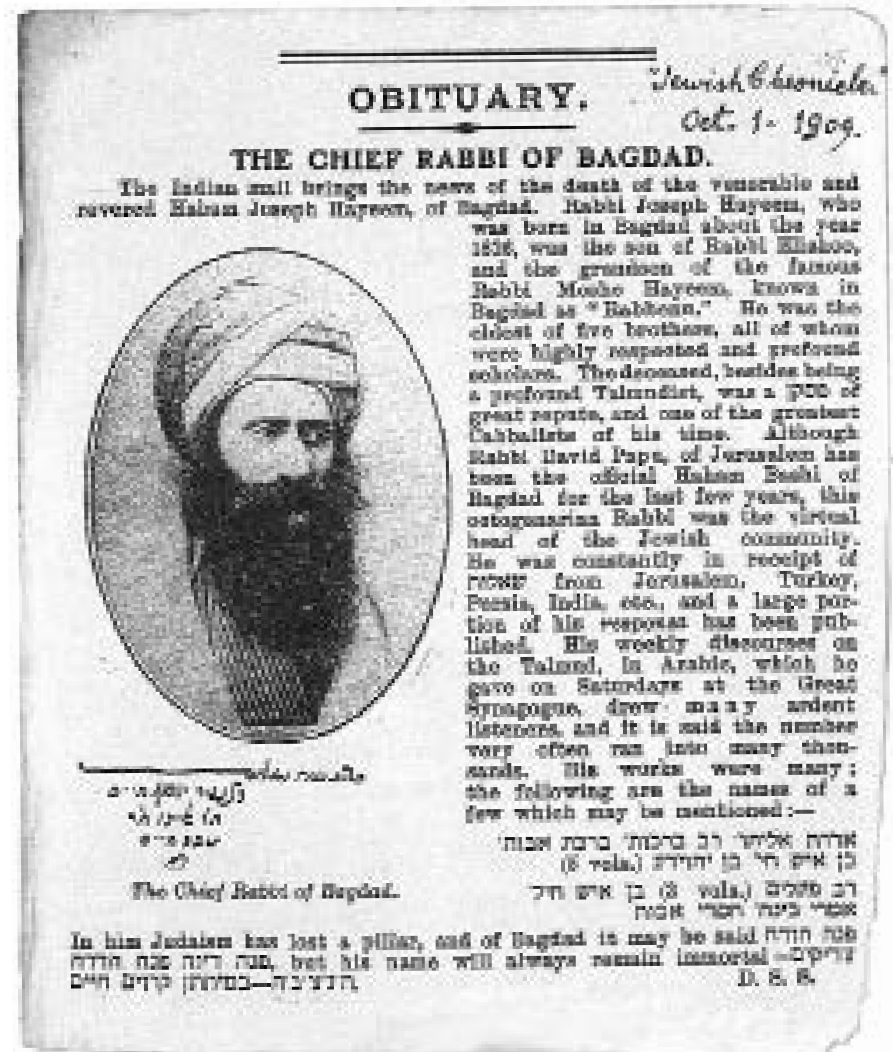
In our city ... this week, and no doubt the inhabitants of the rest of the cities of Israel will do so as well ... all the house of Israel will mourn the fire that Hashem has burned.

May his soul be bound in eternal life. And the Omnipresent will comfort his only son, who is sharp and knowledgeable in Torah and fear of Heaven, Rabbi Yaakov, with his holy brothers and all those mourning him, and in Jerusalem they will find comfort.

Baghdad — Our city has donned black, mourning the loss of its crowning glory. A prince of the Torah has passed on, the light of the world has been dimmed, and the holy elder has gone to the next world — the righteous man who is the foundation of the earth (tzaddik yesod olam), Rabbi Yosef Haim, may his memory be a blessing. He was born in our city, the grandson of Rabbi Moshe Haim, leader of the city's rabbinate. But Yosef Hatzaddik, even though he was the greatest of the rabbis and rabbis turned to him from all Iraqi cities with every difficult question, abhorred the position of the rabbinate and never wanted to use it as a personal crown, and would sit instead as a layman, meditating in Torah and delving into the depths of the hidden wisdom. And every Shabbath he would lecture before thousands in the great synagogue. He published a number of books in halachah and midrash: Ben Yehoyada (explanations on aggadot), Ben Ish Hai, Ben Ish Hayil (lectures and halachah), three volumes of Rav Pe'alim, and more. He was an elderly man, around eighty years old on the day of his death, but he left none like him in all of Iraq, for he was unique, and there is no one second to him in Iraq. May his soul be bound in the eternal life.



HaYehudi newspaper; London, England; September, 23, 1909



Jewish Chronicle, October 1, 1909

Dedicated to the memory
of the little *tzaddik*,
Yosef Chaim Serruya,
who merited to complete his
tikkun at a very young age.

May his righteousness be
a merit for his parents, his
brothers and sisters, and
all those he left behind.

Dedicated in honor of his parents,
by his loving grandparents,
Esther and Claude Zeitoun

Eulogies — Part One

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the leading hachamim of Baghdad, as well as a representative of the rabbis of Jerusalem, delivered public eulogies during the week following the Ben Ish Hai's passing. In this chapter, we present selected excerpts from these eulogies, in order to get a sense of Rabbenu's impact upon the community and the reverence which he earned among the greatest rabbis of his time.¹

1. The eulogies delivered by Rabbi Sasson Yisrael zt"l and Rabbi Yosef Haim Sarim have not been included here.

The eulogies presented here were written in poetic Hebrew. While attempts were made to retain the poetic style in translation, there are, naturally, certain literary qualities that could not be carried over into the English rendition.

Eulogy by Hacham David Papo zt"l²

A eulogy that I delivered in Baghdad on the first day of mourning for the great Rabbi Yosef Haim, author of Rav Pe'alim and other works, on the 15th day of Elul, 1909:

...It says in Midrash Shir Hashirim:

"Eshkol hakofer dodi li" ("My beloved is to me as a cluster of henna"). Rabbi Brachia said: The Assembly of Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: When You oppress me, You act as a lover, and You see one great man that can placate the attribute of judgment, and You take him as a pledge for me. This is what it means when it says "eshkol hakofer." Eshkol (אשכול) refers to one who has everything (איש שהכל בו) — Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Tosefta, and Aggadah. "Hakofer" (הכופר) — because it atones (מכפר) for the sins of the Jewish people. "B'charmei en gedi" (בכרמי עין גדי) — "in the vineyards of En Gedi" — these are the fathers of the world who were drawn after you like goats (גדי) and received blessings that are the eye (עין) of the world.

There is a holy obligation upon every Jewish person to mourn and eulogize the loss of our saintly and wise teacher Rabbi Yosef Haim, who was known as a G-dly man, and would spend his nights



Chief Rabbi of Baghdad
Hacham David Papo

as days, studying diligently, and was always writing Torah thoughts. Whenever the rabbis were unsure, they would ask him, and he would answer clearly. People from all over would send him their questions. But today, the heavens have hidden his light. Who can replace him as a teacher, a writer, and a wise man? For this reason, we cry and mourn for him today.

Eulogy by Hacham Ezra Reuven Dangoor zt"l³

It says in the Book of Devarim:⁴ "And the Lord said to Moshe: 'Behold, your days are nearing death.'" The midrash comments: "It is difficult for the Almighty to decree death upon the righteous, as it says, 'Death upon His righteous ones is harsh in the eyes of the Almighty.'⁵ Indeed, Hashem should have said to Moshe, 'Behold you are going to die,' but He did not say this, and instead said, 'Your days are nearing death.'⁶



Hacham Ezra Reuven Dangoor

Who could believe these tidings? On whom has the hand of Hashem been revealed! I have not come to lecture. For this beauty, which is now in the dust, one must surely cry. Woe to Bavel that it has lost the

3. Excerpted from The Scribe: The Journal of Babylonian Jewry, published by the Exilarch's Foundation (September 1995), no. 64, p.4. This rare document came to light during a recent visit to London of Rabbi Ezra Basri, head of the district Rabbinic Court in Jerusalem. What appears here is an edited version of the original translation from Hebrew by Rabbi Aharon Bassous.

4. 31:14.

5. Tehillim 116:15.

6. It was customary to introduce a eulogy by citing a passage from the Talmud or Midrash relevant to the passing of a great person.

2. Bene Meir, Derush 3, p. 56a.

Carrier of Books! A voice is heard from on high, our ears are ringing, and our tears flow, forming rivers of water. Whose eye can stop the tears! The multitude [of people] can be seen crying. And whose heart will not melt at such a tragedy! Call upon the wailing women. How suddenly we have sunken to such depths. We have lost the foundation stone of the world; Yosef has suddenly perished. The prince, full of understanding, has fallen, and the pillar of faith is broken.

My people, silence all rejoicing and raise one's voice in loud lament, all of us, with sighing and crying. Prophecy has been discontinued, and the source of blessing is closed. The pure soul has returned to its exalted place. The sun has set. We have been left alone in the valley and distress.

The horn of Israel is broken, the cedar tree is fallen, a righteous one has departed from the earth and we have lost our weapons of war. Who will speak up in defense of the remnant of the nation? Those in need of salvation cry, "Where is the place of His glory? Where is the light of healing? Where is the Master and His exaltedness?" All the earth's inhabitants cry bitterly. The upholders of the Torah crouch, crying and mourning. Lament for the one of many good deeds. Let the heavens cloud over and wear sackcloth for the death of the righteous one. His name is better than good oil — a holy and upright person! In all the gates his name was known. His rulings are discussed throughout the entire world. The beautiful spice, the shield and prince, head of the country!

Rend your hearts and clothes, and cry for the righteous one who cannot be compared to anyone on this earth, for the one from whose lips poured forth grace. How have you left your stronghold? My father, my life, how you have left us so quickly? Alas, our hopes have left along with you. Fortunate is the eye that beheld your splendor. While you were here, I knew that my days would be successful, but now, woe to me, for the Lord has made my lot bitter. We have become like lost sheep. Who will lead the flock? It is futile to try to compare anyone to him. Alas, the head of his people has fallen. There is none to

compare to him. Lament, daughter of Bavel, lament for this calamity, your beautiful, precious vessel is lost. The crown has fallen. Death has entered your window, and your splendor has been thrown asunder.

Who will teach knowledge? Who can sit on his seat? Who will fill his place? Mourn, O House of Jacob, lie in the dust, for the genius which has fallen. Raise your voice and shout, "I am crying for the light of our eyes which has gone to the land of the living." His portion is in the Garden of Hashem in an exalted part of heaven. The great genius — wisdom illuminated his face. The crown of the righteous — what a pious and humble man! All his efforts were to do goodness.

Harav Yosef Haim has gone to heaven. Who will draw for us wisdom? Who is as high on the ladder as you were? Who will lead the



Rabbi Ben-Tzion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953) and his entourage from Palestine visiting Chief Rabbi Hacham Ezra Dangoor of Baghdad and his court. Standing from left to right: security man; community advocate Yusuf Elias; Menashi Abraham Gurji; Eliahon Iny; Anwar Iny. Sitting left to right: Khadhouri Sasson, Community Secretary; Dr. Cohen, secretary to Rabbi Uziel; Chief Rabbi Hacham Ezra Dangoor; Rabbi Ben Tzion Meir Hai Uziel; Av Bet Din Hacham Khadhouri Sasson; Rabbi Dr. Piehman (Maimon); head of the Zionist organization; unknown. (Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive)

mistaken, straighten the crooked? The crown of light has been cast from your daughter, Bavel!

Mourn, my congregation, for the ark of the Torah which has been taken from you. He was the rabbi, the pride of the hachamim, and their source of honor. He led his flock in justice; he was their radiance and pride. He was a faithful shepherd.

The hearts of all who knew you are trembling. Please, my Lord, help me and strengthen me! Stand as my savior, so that my spirit should not be crushed. He listened to those who were oppressed, and advised and supported them. He abhorred pride and thus drew near the young and poor. He settled conflicts and stopped hatred. He sowed peace, love, and brotherhood. Our light shone, our candle was lit, and our head was raised high in the merit of the righteous one.

Hacham Yosef Haim, you did great things here. You constantly worked on good deeds. The pleasures of the world were foreign to you. You chose only the Torah. You turned your ear to the poor and destitute. You outstretched your hand to the widow and orphan, and an everlasting memory is thus etched in their hearts. You have acquired for yourself a good name and stature that will last forever. Your praises are sung in all the gates; your name is praised among those who perform goodness.

Your place is now in heaven, in the shadow of the Almighty. You have the merit of gazing at His Splendor. Your shadow has been taken from us, our shepherd has left us. The pride of our congregation — everyone grieves over your departure, but you rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

“Fortunate is he who grew up with a good name and died with a good name.” What does it mean to “die with a good name”? This refers to one who departs this world and does not need to return in gilgul, but proceeds directly to the place reserved for the souls, having fulfilled the Torah in its entirety. Just as the day does not return, his soul will also not return. The righteous Hacham Yosef Haim was

humble and spoke gently with the people, and the people, in turn, loved him. He will assuredly rise to ever higher levels in heaven and never have to return. Redemption will come in the merit of peace, as it says,⁷ “Hashem gives strength to His people” — referring to the Mashiah — “Hashem shall bless His nation with peace” (meaning, in the merit of peace they will be redeemed).

There are thus three ways to fulfill the entire Torah:

1) Through returning to this world in a gilgul.

2) Through unity with Klal Yisrael.

3) Through good intentions, whereby one is considered as having performed the deeds.

In conclusion, I pray: Please, Hashem, make peace and love among Your people, Israel. Look down upon us from heaven and have mercy on our remnant. Eliminate evil from among us and cause us no more worry. May Hashem soon wipe the tears from our faces, amen.

Eulogy by Hacham Shimon Agasi zt”l⁸

I turn to the Holy One with a plea: May it be Your will that death be devoured forever, and You will wipe away the tears from every face.⁹ The following is the eulogy and sermon that I delivered upon the passing of our rabbi and teacher, the crown of our heads, the great Rabbi Yosef Haim ben Eliyahu ben Rabbi Moshe Haim, on Monday, 20 Elul, 1909, which was the sixth day of mourning for him, may his merit protect us.

I discussed the verse, “And the Lord, your G-d, will bring you to the land which your forefathers have possessed and you shall inherit it,

7. Tehillim 29:11.

8. Rabbi Shimon Agasi’s eulogy is quoted at length in his book *Imre Shimon*.

9. Yeshayahu 25:8.

and He will provide you with goodness and multiply you more than your fathers.”¹⁰

It says in the midrash:

“Israel’s days neared death.”¹¹ Do days die? Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said: When the righteous die, their days are null, but they continue to exist, and this is what the verse means when it says,¹² “Let the saints exult in glory, let them sing for joy upon their [death] beds, the high praises of G-d are in their mouths, and a two-edged sword in their hands.” See, even in their deaths, they sing high praises to the Holy One. Similarly, it says, “And Benayahu ben Yehoyada, the son of the live man (ben ish hai).”¹³ Was only Benayahu ben Yehoyada the son of a live man, and everyone else the son of the dead? Rather, it means that even in his death he was considered alive.

We have lost our glory, our source of might, our father, our shepherd. You have abandoned your flock! Who will gather in the



Hacham Shimon Agasi with his son Ezra-Tzion (approximately 1910)

lambs after you? Who will teach your nation wisdom, and help them understand what they hear? Who can stand in your place? And who will garner the pearls from the sea of Talmud? Who will grasp the sharpness of judgment and the depth of halachah? And who will protect the generation? We are orphans without a father, now that our rabbi has fallen.

Your regular audience longs for your arrival, and the thousands who flock to hear your Shabbat lecture await a glimpse of your face. One to the other they will worriedly turn and ask, “What is delaying his footsteps?” But they will not again hear your footsteps. Please, rise and let them hear your princely voice! Let them drink from the sweet waters that flow from your lips,¹⁴ and satisfy them with your words, which are more tempting than honey.¹⁵ For your speech is pure — bright and shining. He who has discovered you has found life — Haim.

Is there anything new we can add about this G-dly man, whom everyone declares to be the holiest of holies? He is the crown of Torah, the strongest among us both in his sharp depth and expansive breadth. Yosef, the leader, who illuminated the earth and its inhabitants — his name is known to all from his precious works which shine like sapphires — Benayahu, Ben Yehoyada, Ben Ish Hai, Rav Pe’alim — and he is famous among the great men. He never stepped out of the tent of Torah; day and night, his mouth did not cease from his learning. He held the entire Talmud in his pocket.

Into and throughout his latest years, he never stopped cherishing his study, and spoke about Torah all day, turning it over and over to discover all that it contains. Like Rabbi Akiva, he could extract mountains of halachot from the crowns of the letters. This was a man who could move heaven and earth. And Hashem was with Yosef —

10. Devarim 30:5.

11. Bereshit 47:29.

12. Tehillim 149:5-6.

13. Shemuel II 23:20.

14. Tehillim 36:9.

15. Mishle 16:24.

halachah always follows his ruling. He ruled truthfully. Blessed is He Who has endowed him from His own wisdom. Nothing was hidden from him in any part of Torah — neither the revealed nor the hidden. His palate was full of sweet things,¹⁶ and he was absolutely beloved, his praises were sung by all. He was unique in his generation. His power of speech was a pearl on his neck¹⁷ that could draw a man's heart through his lucid homilies. Thus he was able to cure all spiritual ailments, healing every man from his suffering, to bask in the light of life — Haim.

Your brother's blood cries out¹⁸ from an embittered heart:
Our brother has died in the desert,¹⁹ taken from us.
And Yosef said to his brothers: Cry for Yosef your brother!
For death has broken the majesty of your strength,
And separated him from you.
And this brother shall not be redeemed.²⁰
Today you will not find him in the field.²¹
Until the many sleepers of dust will awaken,²²
As grass pokes out from the earth,²³
Then will you greet us alive — Haim.

I raise my voice in prayer, to G-d, Master of wondrous deeds:
Please, G-d, look with mercy upon Your nation Israel,
Have compassion on the sheep You lead to pasture.

16. Shir Hashirim 5:16.

17. This refers to the comment of the midrash that Avraham wore a pearl around his neck that miraculously cured ill patients.

18. Bereshit 4:10.

19. Based on Bamidbar 27:3.

20. Tehillim 49:8.

21. Shemot 25:16.

22. Daniel 12:2.

23. Tehillim 72:16.

Shine Your face on us²⁴

And silence the sounds of pillage and plunder;

Let no screams be heard in our streets.²⁵

Give us peace in our tents, tranquility in our buildings.²⁶

Devour death forever and wipe the tears from our faces.

Joy and gladness will reach us and sighs and groans will flee.²⁷

The beautiful soul [of the Ben Ish Hai] shall rise to eternal life.

The altar of atonement has disappeared from its lofty place

And a lone sheep²⁸ will atone for the community.

Great are the righteous in their deaths, to nullify decrees against us.

Bless us, our Father, all of us as one,

With clarity, and with the light of the living G-d — Haim.

The significance of weeping, and the connection between our eulogies and the departed, is written in the Torah, reviewed in the Prophets and Writings, and thrice written in the works of our Sages.

In the Torah, we find that our Patriarch Avraham “came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her.”²⁹ And for our Father Yaakov, “they conducted there a large, intense eulogy, and he made a mourning observance for his father for seven days,”³⁰ and “Egypt wept for him for seventy days.”³¹ The mourning periods for Moshe and Aharon are also mentioned.

24. Ibid. 46:80.

25. Ibid. 144:14.

26. Based on Tehillim 122:7.

27. Yeshayahu 25:8.

28. Yirmiyahu 50:17.

29. Bereshit 23:2.

30. Bereshit 50:10.

31. Ibid. verse 4.

In the Prophets, it says regarding the death of the prophet Shemuel, “Shemuel died, and all Israel eulogized him...”³² This was the case also for King Yoshiyahu and the other kings and prophets.

And [this is also mentioned] in the words of our Sages: “Three (days) for weeping, and seven for eulogizing.” And we indeed see regarding the Tanna'im and Amoraim in the Talmud, that they were eulogized properly. Moreover, we find that G-d Himself penalized King Saul's relatives for not eulogizing him properly, as the Arizal explains. And we see that one of Yehoyakim's punishments was that “they shall not lament for him: ‘Ah, my brother!’ or ‘Ah, my sister!’ They shall not lament for him: ‘Ah, lord!’ or ‘Ah, his glory!’”³³ And G-d promised Tzidkiyahu,³⁴ “You shall die in peace ... and they shall lament you, ‘Ah, lord!’”

“Rav said to Rav Shemuel bar Shilat: Invest effort in my eulogy, for I will be there.”³⁵ And it says in Sanhedrin (chapter 6), “They asked: Are eulogies for the honor of the living, or the honor of the dead?” Its conclusion is that they honor the dead.

Clearly, then, the departed gains great pleasure and benefit from being eulogized, even though we don't know what the actual purpose may be. But that itself makes it even more elevated and exalted.

With this understanding, we can return to our question about why we are permitted to mourn and weep for the departed, when this indicates a lack of faith in the soul's survival. And if you say we are not, G-d forbid, crying for the soul, but for the body, for its beauty that is swallowed in the earth — for how could such an honored figure be buried in rock and dust, hidden from view, despised and forgotten? This can be refuted on two levels, the first from a natural

perspective, and the second, from the perspective of our faith. On the level of nature, all that is will cease to be. And since loss is so natural, a person should not be embittered when a beautiful article of clothing becomes worn by age, or an expensive vessel breaks, since to begin with, it was made to break and was acquired with that knowledge, that it would be used only temporarily. Even if that object was of very high value, like a great palace whose foundations crumbled and its walls are caving in, or a mighty ship whose prime has passed, nevertheless, it is not appropriate to mourn for or eulogize it. So why, then, would we eulogize a body when it is worn, if death is natural, if everything that is will eventually cease to be, and death is inevitable from the day of birth?

The refutation from the perspective of our faith is this: Since we believe in the Resurrection of the Dead, that the body will be renewed with the vigor of youth, why should we be concerned about it?

Rather, the greatest loss is always for the soul. Even though we know the soul is eternal and returns to her father's house, nevertheless, who knows if it has been deemed righteous to be bound in eternal life? Perhaps it has been judged to destruction to endure eternal wandering, and for this I cry.

32. Shemuel I 28:3.

33. Yirmiyahu 22:18.

34. Ibid. 34:5.

35. Masechet Shabbat 153a.

In loving memory of
my dear parents
Joseph and Rachel Taieb

From
Dr. Sarah Taieb-Carlen

Eulogies — Part Two

Eulogy by Hacham Yitzhak Avraham Shelomo zt"l¹

"The kohen shall take the basket from your hand and place it in front of the altar of the Lord, your G-d."² It says in Tehillim,³ "Death upon His righteous ones is harsh in the eyes of the Almighty."

A voice proclaims from heaven, "A saintly man has perished from the earth⁴ and Yosef is no longer!"⁵ The man who led the congregation, who surrounded himself with Torah and illuminated the eyes of

1. Akim Et Yitzhak — Hespelim, 4.

2. Devarim 26:4.

3. 116:15.

4. Michah 7:2.

5. Bereshit 42:36.

scholars, has been called to the Heavenly Academy. He responded to all questions, and delivered sermons to his congregation and the larger Iraqi community. He was known as one whose lips did not cease from the study of Torah day and night, an exalted man who would deliver beautiful sermons every Shabbat to all in his city, laws and customs for every season. Now his congregation cries bitterly, “Where has he gone, and how has he abandoned his faithful congregation, who flocked to hear the words of Torah flowing from his mouth?” His sermons were clear, and it was the greatest of pleasures to listen to him. Our master, whom have you left for us? When a scholar dies, he has no replacement. Our father and shepherd, you have left us for the eternal light.

Yosef [literally, “continue”] — the people continue to cry. Alas, Iraq has lost a great man who has gone on to the next world with his Torah in his hand. He studied Torah from youth to old age, and composed responsa and rulings for the myriads who turned to him. The city is in an uproar,⁶ protesting in anger and fury to the One who sits in heaven: “Where are the holy ones on earth?⁷ They have passed on and been interred in the earth, the place of dust and worms and destruction, to sleep deeply through night and day!” May the Lord remove anger and fury, and his spirit and soul shall rise, to rest and be eternally bound to life — Haim.

Yosef — the voice continues to be heard, and his wife cries: “Where have you gone in anger? You were so very precious and beloved to me,⁸ all my sadness would pass when I saw your face. Now I see your place empty, the master is no longer in his home. He has left his place and moved away, and set out for the forsaken desert.”⁹ All joy has passed, all her days are painful, mourning the passing of her

6. Melachim I 1:41.
7. Tehillim 16:3.
8. Shemuel II 1:26.
9. Bamidbar 24:1.

husband — her glory. The woman is left bereft of her husband¹⁰ and cries, “What reason do I have to live — Haim?”¹¹

Yosef [the Ben Ish Hai] had a precious child;¹² sweet and wonderful. Yaakov [the Ben Ish Hai’s son] was a simple man, dwelling in tents of Torah.¹³ He screams and cries, “Father, father, chariot of Israel,¹⁴ you have gone so far away.” We have heard from a distance that your father has ascended to heaven. “Oh! Oh! I will lament and shed bitter tears. To whom have you left me, to whom have you abandoned me? Father has died and there is no replacement for him. A father in wisdom and advanced in age — oh! — in his place there now lies a gaping hole. What of his beauty, what of his goodness, his shining face and glorious figure? For this beauty that has been swallowed up by the earth I cry, night and day, as I remember my father, Yosef Haim.”

Yosef’s brothers cry bitterly, “How have you left us, how have you abandoned us? You are our eldest brother, woe that you are gone!”

[He was] one of the greatest, the leader of the congregation — let us deliver a eulogy. His mouth did not cease studying; Yosef is the ruler. His spirit shall rest in the Garden of the Lord. Please, G-d, protect the people who have remained behind.¹⁵ Death shall be devoured forever, and G-d shall wipe away the tears from every face,¹⁶ for eternal rest and peace.

10. Rut 1:5.
11. Bereshit 27:46.
12. Yirmiyahu 31:19.
13. Bereshit 25:27.
14. Melachim II 2:12.
15. Bereshit 32:9.
16. Yeshayahu 25:8.

Eulogy by Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka zt"l

When Rabbi Ben-Tzion Kuenka zt"l heard about Rabbenu's passing, he wrote the following, moving obituary about him in his journal Hame'asef:¹⁷

We have received the dreadful news from the city of Baghdad of the passing of the towering cedar, the immense gaon, the tzaddik yesod olam, who was renowned for his righteousness, his unparalleled scholarship, his piety and humility, his purity and wisdom, Rabbenu Yosef Haim zt"l, son of the great tzaddik Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, grandson of the great and renowned Rabbi Moshe Haim zt"l, who returned to his Maker.

Without him, the entire region is practically void of Torah, as everyone knows. The outcry of anguish from there alone is intense enough to shake the heavens, but added to it is the anguish of all the rabbis and hachamim of Jerusalem, both those who were fortunate enough to meet him in person and bask in the radiance of his countenance and hear precious hiddushim of Torah flowing like a spring from his pure mouth, and those who acknowledged him as one of the outstanding leaders of our generation, who illuminated the entire world like the sun.

Indeed, when I was fortunate enough to see him, and especially when I talked with him, I saw that he was even greater than they said. I understood that he was truly like Yosef, ruling the entire land. He was for the entire world the supreme source of Torah, wisdom, awe, humility, piety, in-depth and comprehensive knowledge, and halachic rulings. He never wanted to accept a rabbinic position or enjoy the benefits of a title. Nevertheless, his words were unanimously accepted by the entire region. He only needed to say something, even if it was just a piece of advice, and it was regarded as sacred and inviolable,

17. Year 14 (1909), section 2.

whether it was merely heard or written in one of his many wonderful books.

The writer of these columns was among those who met him in person. In the year 5659/1899, when I was in Baghdad, I was fortunate enough to behold his radiant and joyous countenance, to find shelter in his home and his Torah, and to taste the sweetness of his wisdom. More than ten years have passed since then, but his image is still alive before me, his beautiful words still ring in my ears, and the radiance of his face still captivates my heart.

Of course, even before then I had heard and I knew that he illuminated the land of the Azिया and the Hidekel like the sun, that they followed him faithfully, and that all acknowledged the immensity of his holiness and piety, as well as his greatness in Torah, wisdom, and humility. His dedication to Torah twenty-four hours a day was extraordinary. He allotted barely seven or eight hours to sleeping, eating, and attending to physical needs. Every other minute was dedicated to the study of Torah, halachah, and the commentaries, to contemplating and writing his many hiddushim. Nearly twenty of his books were printed in his lifetime, and he also left behind hundreds of responsa written by his own holy hand.

A Jug of Tears¹⁸

The holy, righteous, G-dly man, the renowned genius, our rabbi and teacher and leader, Rabbi Yosef, our eyes, the leader of all Diaspora Jewry — is no longer with us!

The tears have not been yet wiped from our eyes — our eyes are still pouring like a river of tears over the huge loss, the passing of the renowned sage of the Holy Land, Rabbi Shmuel Salant. And now, on the second of the month, we received the dreadful news from the great city of Baghdad, that death has surfaced there as well, and

18. Continuation of Hacham Kuenka's eulogy.

angrily felled a great and mighty cedar, a tremendous genius, the tzaddik yesod olam, the great and holy Rabbi Yosef Haim, who was renowned for his sharp wit and expansive knowledge, his saintliness and humility, and the depth of his holiness and wisdom. He was the son of the brilliant and saintly Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, and the grandson of the renowned giant, Rabbi Moshe Haim, who restored the crown of Torah to Baghdad. Without him, as we know, Torah would almost have been forgotten from Jews in that area.

This great tragedy is heart-wrenching enough on its own — and coupled with the first tragic news, it shook up the leaders and rabbis of Jerusalem, both those who had the merit to know him personally and appreciate what it meant to look upon his precious, holy face, and hear Torah novella from his own holy mouth which was like an endlessly flowing spring of his own words of Torah, as well as those who were not fortunate to have seen him, but knew him only from stories and from his wonderful books.

The author of these lines is part of the fortunate first category. In 1899 I was in Baghdad and was blessed to see his pleasant, radiant face, and to bask in the shade of his presence and his Torah, and the pleasure of his wisdom. More than ten years have passed from that time, and still his precious visage stands alive in my memory; his pleasant words and pure teachings yet ring in my ears; his shining face still steals my heart. I had heard prior to my visit that there, between the plains of Aziz and the Euphrates, the sun shines strongest, for one of the foremost leaders of our generation illuminates the earth and its inhabitants like the sun's brightest light.

I had heard this, but when I arrived there and saw him for myself, and listened to his Torah teachings, I realized that the reports were a mere fraction of the man. I understood then that Yosef is the true ruler of the earth, providing sustenance: Torah, wisdom, fear of Heaven, humility, saintliness, analysis, sharp wit, wide-ranging knowledge, and halachic rulings for everyone.

He never wanted to assume the mantle of leadership, or use the rabbinate for his own purposes. Still, he was a leader to everyone; all Jews in the area walked by the light of his words. Once a word left his mouth, even just as advice, it was considered sacred — holy of holies — and no one would veer to the right or left of it, because we all recognized the extent of his holiness and saintliness, together with the depth of his Torah wisdom and humility. His diligence in Torah was something extraordinary. He devoted almost none of the twenty-four-hour day to sleeping, eating or anything else — perhaps just seven or eight hours, while the rest was spent entirely on Torah, halachah, and poskim, innovating and writing novella by the thousands. He published nearly twenty books in his lifetime, including: Rav Berachot on Talmudic principles; Ben Yehoyada — five volumes on Talmud; Rav Pe'alim — three volumes of precious responsa on all sections of the Shulhan Aruch; Benayahu on Shulhan Aruch; Ben Ish Hai, Ben Ish Hayil, and others, including several volumes on the Torah and additional lectures. He also left behind hundreds of unpublished responsa on Talmudic and halachic issues.

It is remarkable that just one year ago, he began printing a large, new book, nearly a hundred pages, called Od Yosef Hai (“Yosef Still Lives”), and ninety pages were already printed. Several weeks ago, he sent the last segments to the publisher, and within thirty days, he passed away.

Our loss is enormous, for he left none like himself in all of Iraq. G-d will comfort all the mourners, specifically his special family, headed by his honorable son, my dear friend, an outstanding rabbi in all areas of Torah, known for his sharp wit and wide-ranging knowledge, Rabbi Yaakov Haim. May G-d fulfill for them the verse, “As a man whose mother comforts him, so will I comfort you and in Jerusalem you will find comfort.”¹⁹ Amen.

19. Yeshayahu 66:13.

Eulogy by Hacham Yaakov Haim (son of Hacham Yosef Haim)

My illustrious father was granted two gifts: He was great in Talmud like the moon at its fullest, and he was a master of piety.

From his youth, he was sanctified by Heaven in all areas. When he was young like the new moon, he was already destined for greatness. Go about and see if there is any man like this, full of the spirit of G-d, greater than a prophet, like one of the ancients, a holy angel from heaven, shining like Moshe himself, and a revealer of secrets. His head reached the clouds and he desired only the Torah of G-d from morning until evening. His lips did not cease studying, and he knew nothing other than the bread he ate [meaning, his Torah learning]. Love for Torah always guided him ... as though resting in his bosom. Even when he ate his meals, his heart thought only of his studies, and even until old age, he was up day and night. He hardly rested, and his hand would write his numerous Torah thoughts. He constantly said new ideas, like a river that does not run dry. He toiled in Torah with all ten fingers, and did not benefit from this world with even his smallest finger. He toiled in the Torah's secrets, studying the crowns of the letters, reaching the depths of every matter.

In all matters, he followed the Arizal, the father of knowledge. His name was great in Israel, a treasury of precious things. And where his greatness lies, there you find abundant humility. He spoke softly in a pleasant voice, and responded gently. He greeted every person, man and woman, with a shining face. And when he delivered harsh words to his holy flock, he did not attempt to scare them; he spoke of greatness, not of fear. He did not mention Purgatory or the tortures after death, but spoke instead in a learned manner, capturing the hearts of the Jewish people, assessing each member's actions and goals, their manner of living, and their business pursuits, each according to his own profession, as well as their work in the service of G-d and observing His commandments. Only then did he deliver his

words of rebuke, telling each one how to present himself before G-d. This melted the hearts of the people, and they said, "Let us turn our hearts toward Heaven." In this way he saved many from sin, and drew people in with his strength. The people thus loved him, despite the rebuke that he would offer them. They did not despise his rebuke, for as a father to a son he was beloved by his flock. This is only a fraction of the greatness and holiness of he who was, like a fiery angel, the leader of our exile, the learned scholar of prestigious lineage, the great Rabbi Yosef.

The day Rabbenu was called away, the heavenly yeshivah celebrated. The day the angels were victorious over us, mere flesh and blood, and the holy ark was captured — that day was darkened as though by thick clouds. The city was in upheaval, shouting in a bitter voice of sorrow and tragedy. From one end to the other, the nation burst into sobs — men and women, old and young — for our strong shepherd who had protected us and was now removed from our midst.

All majesty has left the daughter of Tzion, our sister in Iraq has been plundered, her radiance, her splendor has turned away from her. Let her cry like a maiden in mourning for the husband of her youth.

They bestowed great honor upon him at his death. The greatest Torah scholars walked before the bier, and after them, all the leaders, their faces devastated, and hundreds and thousands of our nation passed by. Even the young schoolchildren were bereaved and lamenting, and all were mourning. Such cries must have shaken the earth itself!

Thus they accompanied him to the cemetery, broken and spent. His body was carefully laid in its resting place and his pure soul soared upward to its resting place, and the angels came out to greet it and bring it to its home in Gan Eden.

Eulogy by Rabbi Rahamim Melamed Hakohen²⁰

“Yaakov left Beer Sheva and traveled to Haran.”²¹ Rashi’s commentary [to this verse] is well known: “It should have said simply, ‘He traveled.’ Why was it necessary to say that he left? Because the departure of a righteous man leaves its mark: its glory is gone, its radiance is gone, and its beauty is gone.”

This is certainly true when a tzaddik passes away, and even the sun and moon mourn the loss of the righteous man, as it says, “The sun shall be darkened when he goes forth, and the moon shall not let her light shine.”²² For the righteous man is the foundation of the world, as it says, “A saint was lost to the earth” and “the trustworthy are gone.”²³ Woe to us, who have today heard grave tidings out of Iraq that the great, humble, and righteous man, Rabbi Yosef Haim ben Eliyahu, has departed from the world. All Jerusalem’s inhabitants must eulogize him.

May it be G-d’s will that he will stand before the Throne of Glory and pray for us, and speak in our defense, to save the Shechinah from exile. Like Yaakov, he surrounded himself with the “stones of the place,”²⁴ the two tablets of stone, brilliantly shining sapphire, and now he rests near our forefathers, as he holds in his hand Torah and good deeds, precious stones and pearls, the “stones of the place.” His original Torah thoughts and halachot span a vast spectrum of subjects, all sweeter than honey. He was an honest and upright leader.

When a righteous man leaves a son in his place, we do not say that he died, but merely that he lay, as Yaakov said, “And I will lie with my

fathers.”²⁵ Regarding David, too, it says, “and he lay”²⁶ because he had Shelomo stepping into his place after him. Here, too, he [the Ben Ish Hai] is full of merit for all that he accomplished on his own, and for the merit he brought to the public, and all the more so as he has left a son to fill his place.

May the Holy One, Blessed is He, comfort us, send us our anointed one, and give us freedom from the nations and from their kings, and freedom from the evil inclination. And may his soul and the souls of all our righteous be bound in eternal life.

20. Kisei Rahamim, Parashat Vayetze.

21. Bereshit 28:10.

22. Yeshayahu 13:10.

23. Michah 7:2.

24. Bereshit 28:11.

25. Bereshit 47:30.

26. Melachim I 2:10.

In honor of

Rabbi Raphael Attias *zt”l*

May his *zechut* bring Am Yisrael
to the coming of Mashiach
in our days!

*Serge and Michelle Moyal
and Family*

The Legacy Continues

Hacham Yaakov (son of Ben Ish Hai)

Hacham Yosef Haim left behind two children—Yaakov and Rivka. Hacham Yaakov Haim was born in Baghdad on 10 Nissan, 5614 (1854) and grew to become a very holy, pious, and disciplined person, a knowledgeable kabbalist with an especially sharp mind. He enjoyed a close, loving relationship with his father, and Rabbenu mentions Hacham Yaakov’s hiddushim many times in his books. Hacham Yaakov inherited his father’s rabbinic post and served the Baghdad community in that capacity for twelve years. Every Shabbat, he delivered a lecture to a huge audience in the Meir Eliyahu synagogue. The crowd would sit spellbound and thirstily absorb his wisdom. Hacham Yaakov, like his father, was a capable and revered leader,

as well as a master of practical kabbalah who was rumored to have ruah hakodesh.

In 1904 Hacham Yaakov Haim published a work entitled *Tzitzim U'frachim*, a collection of discourses on the Torah based upon remez. The work was graced with a *haskamah* (letter of approbation) from the Ben Ish Hai. Three years later, Hacham Yaakov authored *Zechut Avot*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avot*. He also authored a book of questions and answers about his father's writings under the title *Yede Haim*. Many other manuscripts from Hacham Yaakov Haim were lost. His children made great efforts to publish Hacham Yaakov's commentaries to the aggadah section of the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, but, unfortunately, this work did not survive.

He and his righteous wife, Rachel, had four children: Hacham David, Hacham Yehuda, Aziza, and Rivka.

Hacham Yosef Haim's daughter, Rivka, married Hacham Ezra Gorji, the son of the philanthropist Yosef Ezra Gorji. They had three children: Haviva, Katon, and Yehezkel Meir.

Hacham Yaakov passed away on Motza'ei Shabbat, 12 Heshvan, 5681.

Ruah Hakodesh

Once, during a siyum celebration at Bet Midrash Eliyahu Reuven in Baghdad, Hacham Yaakov Haim took his tobacco box and moved it across the table, for no apparent reason. His attendant, Rabbi Menahem Zalah Yaspan, knew that even his rabbi's slightest and



Rabbi Yaakov (son of Ben Ish Hai)

relatively minor actions were laden with deep significance, and thus asked Hacham Yaakov why he had moved his box.

Hacham Yaakov initially tried avoiding the question, but when the attendant insisted on hearing the explanation, he said, "Very near here, on the Tigris River, there are several Jewish youths traveling in a boat. In the middle of their journey, the Arab oarsman tried to drown them in the river. When I moved the tobacco, I moved the boat back to shore."

The attendant immediately ran to the river, and found two terrified youths standing on the riverbank.

"What are you doing here?" he asked them.

They explained that they had been in a boat and an Arab had tried to drown them — precisely as Hacham Yaakov had described. The amazed attendant decided to take them back to the bet midrash, to show his rabbi the young men whom he had saved. As soon as they entered the room, even before the attendant could open his mouth, Hacham Yaakov said, "These are the boys from the river!"



Tigris River and Tomb of Ezra in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo Credit: Stephanie Comfort – www.jewishpostcardcollection.com)

A Son's Power

One day as Hacham Yaakov accompanied his father on the way to the bet midrash, they came to a particular street and saw Arab women sitting along the entire length of both sides of the street. Rabbenu said to his son that they should turn around and go another way, but Hacham Yaakov proposed that they wait several moments.

He muttered something under his breath, and then, suddenly, the women sitting on one side stood and went to the other side of the street, allowing the two sages to pass. Rabbenu remarked, "This is why they say that 'A son's power is greater than his father's.'"

A Not-So-Urgent Mission to India

Rabbenu's family had a successful business relationship with the ruler of India at the time. One day, the Indian ruler sent a message to Hacham Yaakov, summoning him to an urgent meeting in his palace. Hacham Yaakov traveled to the palace, where he was received with great honor.

He slept in the palace that night, and in the morning, the ruler asked him if he had seen anything unusual during the night. Hacham Yaakov did not understand what he meant, and so the ruler explained that a demon in the form of a she-goat roamed the palace — and this was the urgent matter for which he summoned the rabbi to the palace.

"I did not need to come all this way to deal with this problem," Hacham Yaakov said. "I could have gotten rid of it from my home!"

A Terrifying Account

There was a Jewish woman in Hacham Yaakov's neighborhood named Roza who was blessed with a magnificent voice and musical talent. She earned a living by singing and playing music for women at parties. With time, however, young men began attending these performances in order to hear Roza's beautiful voice, and these events led many Jewish men to sin.

Community leaders approached Hacham Yaakov and asked him to speak to this woman and convince her to stop singing in the presence of young Jewish men. Hacham Yaakov warned her several times to discontinue these performances, but she ignored him. The situation further deteriorated when she began to perform at mixed dance

parties. Hacham Yaakov issued yet another warning, but she again paid no attention, and continued involving herself in even graver forms of immodesty.

One Shabbat, in the middle of his weekly lecture, Hacham Yaakov interrupted his derashah and asked one of the community leaders in the audience whether Roza had complied with his order to discontinue her public performances. They answered that she ignored his warnings and even publicly cursed and degraded the rabbis. It appeared that she could not be influenced to do teshuvah.

The next morning, the Hacham handed a letter to his attendant, Rabbi Menahem Zalah Yaspan, and told him to place it in Roza's pocket. He warned him not to tell anyone about this mission.

"Please forgive me," Rabbi Menachem said, "but I am afraid. She might hit me or hurt me."

"Don't be afraid," Hacham Yaakov assured him. "She will not cause you any harm."

Rabbi Menachem went to Roza's home claiming that he was looking for something, and he saw her preparing her clothes. In an instant, he placed the letter among her clothing and ran for his life.

Several minutes later, Roza set out for the nearby bathhouse, and soon thereafter, shrieks of horror were heard. It was the matron of the bathhouse, who continued screaming until her husband came.

"Look!" she said, her voice trembling. "This Jewish lady has swelled, and she cannot pass through the door of the bathing room!" The couple had no choice but to hire a carpenter to cut out the doorframe so Roza could be pulled out of the bathing room. She died the next day. When Hacham Yaakov heard of Roza's passing, he instructed Rabbi Menachem to run to the undertaker and tell him not to bury her in the Jewish cemetery, but rather to bury her outside its fence.

News of this remarkable incident spread rapidly throughout the community. Even the local Arabs were awed by the spiritual power of Hacham Yaakov Haim, and many Jews were inspired to do teshuvah.¹

Special Vision

Hacham Yaakov's students witnessed countless instances of his ruah hakodesh. On one occasion, as Hacham Yaakov walked through the market with his students, he told them that he knew exactly how much money the man walking toward them had in his pocket, and he named the sum. His students, overcome by curiosity, approached the man and asked him how much money he was carrying. Sure enough, it was the precise amount mentioned by Hacham Yaakov.

The Cup of Wine

There was a certain young boy in Baghdad to whom Hacham Yaakov would often give a cup of wine to bring to his mother. One day as he walked through the market with the cup of wine for his mother, an Arab boy came toward him and pushed him to the ground. When the boy stood back up and lifted the cup that had been knocked from his hands, he was amazed to find that the wine was still in the cup. He went back to his mother and then returned the cup to Hacham Yaakov.²

Hacham David, Grandson of the Ben Ish Hai

After Hacham Yaakov's passing in 1920, the mantle of rabbinic leadership in Baghdad was transferred to his son, Hacham David. Born in Baghdad on 26 Heshvan, 5648 (1887),³ Hacham David

1. Rabbi Saliman Mutzafi zt"l used to tell this story every year on the anniversary of the Ben Ish Hai's passing.
2. The story was told to the author by Hacham David's grandson, the great-great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai.
3. According to some sources, Hacham David Haim was born in 1882.

studied under Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani and, later, under the great kabbalist Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya, in Bet Zilka. Both teachers were students of Hacham David's grandfather, the Ben Ish Hai. He shared the communal leadership responsibilities with his study partner, relative, and close friend, Hacham Nissim Kaduri, who held the official title of Chief Rabbi of Baghdad.

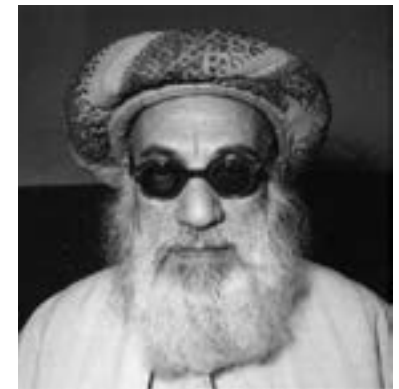
Like his renowned forebears, Hacham David was a spectacular darshan (orator). He also engaged and spoke with all kinds of Jews, from all different backgrounds, urging non-observant Jews to perform teshuvah and embrace their ancient traditions.

Hacham David corresponded with many great rabbis in Eretz Yisrael, including former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim zt"l (1896-1981). During this time, the Iraqi officials did not allow direct mail from Baghdad to Israel. Hacham David therefore corresponded with the rabbis in Israel indirectly, via his son, Yaakov, who lived in London.

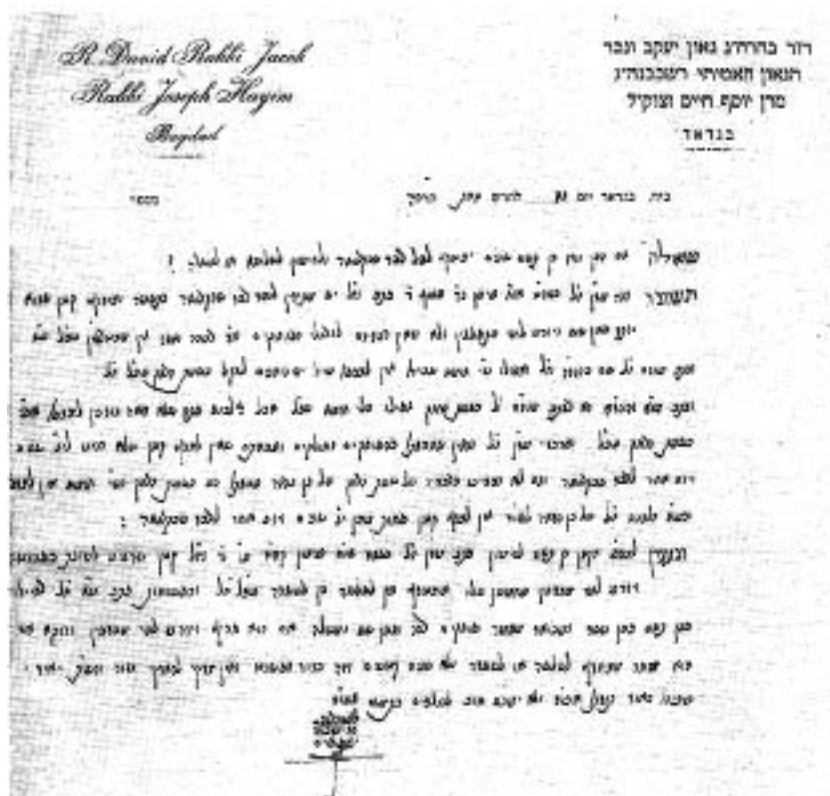
Hacham David moved briefly to London during the month of Kislev, 5731 (1971), and remained there for seven months, after which time he immigrated to Eretz Yisrael. He brought with him a treasury of books that he had inherited from his



Hacham David (grandson of Hacham Yosef Haim)



Hacham Sasson Kaduri (1890 - 1971), Chief Rabbi of Baghdad



A letter of response from Hacham David, grandson of Hacham Yosef Haim (excerpted from *Nachalat Avot*, page 389)

grandfather, including the original manuscript of the Ben Ish Hai's work *Torah Lishmah*, which had been discovered among Hacham Yosef Haim's manuscripts. The work was republished in Jerusalem in 5733 (1973). Along the journey from Baghdad to London, Hacham David recited two chapters of *Tehillim* (chapters 20 and 121) one thousand times, as a prayer that G-d should ensure the safe transfer of the Ben Ish Hai's priceless manuscripts and other artifacts.

Hacham David passed away in Ramat Gan on 6 Shevat, 5743 (1983), and was interred in the Bnei Brak cemetery. He left behind four children: Rachel, Yaakov, Yosef Haim, and Joyce. His children and grandchildren faithfully follow the holy traditions and legacy of

the illustrious family, perpetuating the glorious heritage of the Ben Ish Hai and his saintly forebears.



Hacham David (Hacham Yosef Haim's grandson) conversing with a bar mitzvah boy and his father.



Hacham David (Hacham Yosef Haim's grandson) putting tefillin on a boy.

A Berachah for Children

Hacham David was known for assisting countless numbers of people with his berachot. There was once a woman who, after many years of unsuccessful efforts to have children, decided to see Hacham David. She received the tzaddik's blessing, and, in the merit of his berachah, she had a boy within that year.⁴

Double Blessing

Rabbi Benayahu Shmueli⁵ once visited Hacham David and saw the cup that had belonged to the Ben Ish Hai. Rabbi Shmueli asked permission to drink from this holy cup, but Hacham David denied the request. Instead, he placed a sugar cube in the cup and gave it to Rabbi Shmueli, who then ate the cube. Hacham David then blessed him that in the coming year he would become engaged and be able to buy an apartment. Sure enough, both blessings were fulfilled that same year!

Obituaries for Hacham David

Hamodia

7 Shvat, 5743 (January 21, 1983)

Year 34, issue 9473

“And all of Israel will mourn the burning”

Shocked and shaken, we announce the passing of the saintly and humble hacham, the light of our nation, the last of a lost generation, the son of holy men who guided and led the Iraqi community for

4. The story was told to the author by Hacham David's grandson, the great-great-grandson of the Ben Ish Hai.

5. Rabbi Benayahu Shmueli is the student of Hamekubal Rabbi Mordechai Sharabi and today leads Yeshivat Nahar Shalom in Jerusalem.



Hacham David (grandson of Hacham Yosef Haim), obituary in Hamodia newspaper, 7 Shevat, 5743 (January 21, 1983) / Year 34, issue 9473

about sixty years, Rabbi David Haim, son of Yaakov, son of Rabbenu Yosef Haim, head of the Iraqi community.

The funeral procession will leave today, Friday, 7th of Shevat, 5743 from the Yesharim Synagogue, Dr. Cohen St. in Ramat Gan, at 11:00 a.m. And may the Almighty comfort us with the comfort of Tzion and Jerusalem and let us know no more pain.

Ben Ish Hai Institute
His students and admirers

The great scholar and leader, Rabbi David Haim, who served as rabbi of the greater Baghdad community, passed away yesterday in Ramat Gan, at age 101. He was the son of Hacham Yaakov, son of Rabbenu Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, may his merits protect us.

He sat on his father's chair in Baghdad for sixty years and led his community in glory.

Twelve years ago, he moved to Israel after many efforts to save the last Jews in Baghdad. He also invested much effort in saving his grandfather's rare manuscripts.

His Torah and acts of loving-kindness were performed modestly and he diligently published the Ben Ish Hai's writings.

He left behind generations of upright families.

May his soul be bound in eternal life.

Rabbi David Haim — Leader of Iraqi Jewry

A large crowd, led by Torah giants and roshe yeshivot, escorted Rabbi David Haim to his final resting place on Friday. Rabbi David Haim served as the leader of Iraqi Jewry, and was the grandson of Rabbi Yosef Haim, author of Ben Ish Hai. He was buried in the Ponevezh rabbinic section of the Bnei Brak cemetery.

The funeral procession departed from the Yesharim Synagogue in Ramat Gan, where he had prayed since his arrival in Israel from Baghdad in 1972. The coffin was placed beside the aron kodesh, as large crowds, including elders of the Iraqi community, filled the synagogue and wept bitterly for the loss of their beloved leader, who passed away at 101 years of age.

The first to eulogize him was Rabbi Meir Horesh, an elderly Iraqi rabbi, who described the personality of the departed and his greatness in Torah and fear of heaven, and called upon the crowd to learn from his good deeds and continue them. After him, Rabbi Yehuda Tzadkiah, rosh yeshivah of Porat Yosef, eulogized him with tears and cries, using



Hacham David (grandson of Hacham Yosef Haim), obituary

the verse, "And Yosef died and all of his brothers, and the entire generation." As long as Rabbi David was alive it seemed to anyone who met him that he had met the Ben Ish Hai, and today it was as if

they both passed away. He described the holiness and purity that the departed possessed, which testified that he was a descendent of holy people, and that his behavior stemmed from a holy source. He was beloved by the entire Iraqi community and served as a role model.

The rosh yeshivah described the Ben Ish Hai's glorious family tree, and claimed that it was embodied in the departed. He spoke fiery warnings about education, and particularly made a call for the Iraqi community and specifically the community in Ramat Gan where the departed lived, to be diligent in their obligation to educate their children, and to return the crown of Iraqi Jewry to its place.

He was also eulogized by Rabbi David Ades, a Sephardic rabbi from Bnei Brak, and Rabbi Yosef Nissan of Ramat Gan. Rabbi Shmuel Darzi made mention of the strong connection between the holy grandfather and his beloved grandson who was now being escorted to his final resting place. In his eulogy, he told about the significant role the departed played in the growth of the Iraqi community and particularly in shaping education in that community.


From the synagogue in Ramat Gan, the funeral procession continued to Bnei Brak, and there, near the Ohr Hahaim Synagogue on Rabbi Akiva St., a crowd of hundreds of Torah students waited, and they carried the coffin on their shoulders to the cemetery. In Bnei Brak, he was eulogized by Rabbi Shimon Badani, head of the Ohr Hahaim Kollel, who called on everyone of the assembled to fill the void left by the departure of Rabbi David. Rabbi Mansour Ben Haim recited the verse, "And all of Israel shall mourn the fire that G-d burned," and encouraged all present to do teshuvah.

The last to eulogize was Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, rosh yeshivah of Tiferet Teshuvah in Jerusalem, who published Rabbi David's grandfather's manuscripts through the Ben Ish Hai Institute. He described his visage and his humble manner, and the fact that he had led Iraqi Jewry for fifty years, through a period full of difficulties

and physical and spiritual dangers. About an hour before Shabbat, the coffin was buried in the rabbinic section of Bnei Brak's cemetery.



Left to right: Hacham David with Hacham Sasoon Kaduri



**List of
the works of
Rabbi Yosef Haim
— Ben Ish Hai**

In honor of our dear parents

Moses & Marie Elmaleh

From:

*Louis, Leon, Joe,
and Preci Elmaleh
& Families*

Bible Commentary

Even Shelomo — Commentary to
Megillat Shir Hashirim

Sefer Even Shelomo is the Ben Ish Hai's commentary to Shir Hashirim. The first edition was published during the Ben Ish Hai's lifetime, in 1880, along with a commentary to Esther and Rut. The Ben Ish Hai also prepared a second edition of his commentary, but did not live to see it published. The second edition was edited by Rabbi David Yehudayof, and it includes all the hiddushim to Shir Hashirim found in the Ben Ish Hai's handwritten manuscripts, followed by a copy of the original edition. The new commentary was printed alongside the corresponding text of Shir Hashirim.

The Ben Ish Hai named the book Even Shelomo "for reasons which are secret, revealed only to the Creator, Who knows all thoughts and

reveals all hidden things.”The commentary is based on both the pshat and remez levels of interpretation, and the hiddushim were originally presented in the Ben Ish Hai’s sermons.

Aderet Eliyahu — Commentary to the Torah and Haftarat

Aderet Eliyahu includes hiddushim, commentary, and sermons on the weekly Torah portions and haftarat. This was the Ben Ish Hai’s first book, and it contains remarkable hiddushim and insights.

The first edition was published in 1864 as a single volume. The book has since been reprinted in several editions. It was reprinted in 1962 by Kerem Shelomo Publications, and again in 1968 and then in 1971 by Rabbi Yosef Kaduri. In 1994, Siah Yisrael Publications printed Aderet Eliyahu in two volumes following a newsequence, along with comments and citations.

The material in the book was originally presented in the Ben Ish Hai’s sermons to his congregation each Shabbat, as the Ben Ish Hai describes in his preface: “There the congregation of Jacob gathered, the nation of Abraham’s



Title page of sefer Aderet Eliyahu

Lord, each Shabbat, to hear the holy Scriptures that are read to them each Shabbat, according to Torah commentators, in its time as it is good... I, too — G-d has assisted me in innovating, He has graced me by opening my eyes to see derash and remez, in His wonderful grace and mercy.”

The book was called Aderet Eliyahu in honor of the Ben Ish Hai’s father, Rabbi Eliyahu ben Moshe Haim.

Some of the commentaries and hiddushim are succinct, while others occupy an entire, lengthy sermon. Interpretation is offered on several verses from each parashah, and on one or two verses from the haftarah.

Em Hamelech — Commentary to Megillat Rut

Em Hamelech is the Ben Ish Hai’s commentary on Megillat Rut. The first edition of Em Hamelech was published during the Ben Ish Hai’s lifetime, in 1870, along with his commentary on Shir Hashirim and Esther. The second was prepared for print by the Ben Ish Hai, but it was not published until 1984. This edition includes all hiddushim on Rut found in the Ben Ish Hai’s handwritten manuscripts, followed by a copy of the original edition. It was edited by Rabbi David Yehudayof.

The book was called Em Hamelech because, as the Ben Ish Hai wrote, “Rut was the foremother of kingship, and E”M alludes to my ancestral heritage [my father, Eliyahu, and grandfather, Moshe], whose memory serves to protect me always.”

The commentary is based mainly on pshat and remez. The material was originally presented during the Ben Ish Hai’s sermons on Shavuot and other occasions.

Ben Ish Hai — Derashot and Hiddushim on the Torah

Ben Ish Hai — Derashot is a collection of sermons and hiddushim on the weekly Torah portions. These hiddushim were originally delivered during the Ben Ish Hai’s Shabbat sermons before a large crowd in

the synagogue. The book parallels Ben Ish Hai — Halachot. Each sermon contained hiddushim on both the Torah and halachah, but in preparing the material for publication, the Ben Ish Hai divided it into two sections — a section of halachah and a section of hiddushim on the Torah.

In his preface to the work, the Ben Ish Hai explains that he had begun incorporating halachah into his sermons in 1860. He added that “when G-d has graced me to think of a hiddush in pshat or derash, I would write it down,” and since one is obligated to publish his new Torah insights, “I was inspired to publish hiddushe Torah on derash and remez and on the five books, and I thought these should come before any other hiddushe Torah since it is the food of every man and can be shared by all, so it carries the merit of the masses...”

The book was originally published in 1898 in Jerusalem by Salaman Bros., and then again during the years 1904-1912 by Sallah Mansour.



Title page of sefer Ben Ish Hai

More recently, it was reprinted in Jerusalem by Bakal, in 1972, and again in 1985 by Siah Yisrael, also in Jerusalem.

Ben Ish Hayil — Derashot

Ben Ish Hayil — Derashot includes Shabbat sermons for special occasions: Shabbat Teshuvah, Shabbat Zachor, Shabbat Hagadol, and Shabbat Kallah. These sermons were delivered in front of large audiences over several years.

The first section of the book was printed in 1901, the second in 1910, and the remaining parts, with derashot for every Shabbat of the year, were printed after the Ben Ish Hai's passing.

In his preface to this classic work, the Ben Ish Hai explains when these derashot were delivered and expresses his deep feelings of gratitude to Hashem:

How can I repay Hashem? He has given me so much, He has honored me with the position of leading a great community in the house of G-d, to speak Torah, mussar, the fear of G-d, and halachah, and discuss them on four special



Title page of sefer Mashal V'nimshal

Shabbatot throughout the year: Shabbat Teshuvah, Shabbat Zachor, Shabbat Hagadol, and Shabbat Kallah. This is the place where my forefathers stood to speak, as is the custom of Israel everywhere, and as Moshe Rabbenu instructed that we speak the laws of each holiday on that holiday...

The derashot in this work are clear, lucid, and readily understandable. They provide the ideological basis for understanding the Ben Ish Hai's other writings.

The Ben Ish Hai discouraged the tendency of some to present overly complex and intricate derashot, as the primary message that a derashah seeks to convey is lost in the web of scholarly discourse. He writes:

I don't like pilpul [sophistry] and debate as is practiced in some places. The congregation of Ben Porat Yosef is not knowledgeable, and my words are not intended for the few who are, but rather for the masses. It must therefore be equal, understandable to all, young and old...

I learn from my elders, geniuses of the land, such as Bina L'itim and the Ya'arot Devash, who speak to the people. And you see that their books are passed from generation to generation; their Torah is taught in all of Israel. In contrast, those who practice pilpul and debate, their books are hidden in a corner and no one opens them, and they are never mentioned. All teachers should stop practicing pilpul and speak simply and in a straightforward manner, and should arrive at halachah through aggadah, so that people are clear about the path they must follow.

Rabbi Shimon Agasi, in his work Imre Shimon, described the Ben Ish Hai's unique talents in derush:

His mouth is sweet and he is full of beauty, praised in a nation of righteous people, unique in his generation, a precious jewel which draws every man with clear aggadah, healing the ill soul, and he healed each person according to his need.

Although his derashot were intended for the masses, he sometimes incorporated discussions of complex halachic issues. The halachic material in the Ben Ish Hai's derashot has been treated by many later scholars as an authoritative source of practical halachic guidance. Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, in his work Tehillot Yosef about the Ben Ish Hai, writes:

It is known that the derashot dealt with a number of deep subjects in the sea of Talmud, to clarify them for the purpose of halachah. We have known some great Babylonian rabbis in the previous generation who ruled by his analysis in these books.

The first volume consists of derashot from the years 1891-1894, while the derashot from previous years were compiled later. This volume also includes a section entitled Shene Eliyahu, a collection of derashot delivered in memory of the Ben Ish Hai's father. As the Ben Ish Hai writes, he would speak about his father each year on the anniversary of his passing: "Each year at the time of his death, all the talmide hachamim gather and study Talmud, and then I speak in honor of my father's memory." Since these discourses were presented to accomplished Torah scholars, the material in Shene Eliyahu is on a far more advanced level than the rest of the compilation, and is intended for learned readers, not for the masses.

The first volume also features a section called Neve Tzaddikim, a compilation of derashot in memory of several tzaddikim, including the Ben Ish Hai's father, Rabbi Abdallah Somech, and Rabbi Rephael Meir Fenizil.

The Ben Ish Hai prepared a second volume of his work and sent it to Jerusalem for printing. The great sage died, however, before the manuscript reached Jerusalem, and the publishing was overseen by his student, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan. The second volume discusses belief in hashgahah, the unity and brotherhood of Am Yisrael, and understanding the words of Hazal.

The third volume of Ben Ish Hayil — Derashot was published in 1976 by the Ben Ish Hai's nephew, Rabbi David, and edited by Rabbi Shaul David Hai. The fourth volume was published in 1979 and consists of derashot delivered between the years 1861-1873.

Ben Yehoyada — Torah Commentary

The Ben Yehoyada Torah commentary consists of derashot and hiddushim on humash, material on Hanukah, derashot for Shabbat Kallah, and a commentary on the Talmud Bavli and Talmud Yerushalmi.

The book was published in 2006 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem. The manuscript had not been properly preserved, and it was torn and damaged,



Title page of sefer Ben Yehoyada

making the process of deciphering exceedingly difficult. Additionally, since the manuscript was not prepared for print, many sources and citations were incomplete.

The book includes hiddushim and derashot for twenty-six parshiyot of the Torah. The hiddushim are generally brief. Several verses of each of the twenty-six parshiyot are discussed, and a number of commentaries on the haftarah are offered, as well.

The hiddushim are accompanied by mussar, parables, and stories that offer insight into how to properly conduct oneself toward G-d and toward other people.

The derashot in this work cite a wide variety of earlier books, including Yair Ozen, Bigdei Aharon, Homat Anach, Hovat Halevavot, Keli Yakar, and others.

Many of the derashot include discussions of kabbalistic concepts as well as explanations of different acronyms.

Benayahu — Torah Commentary

The book was published in 2004 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem. It includes derashot and hiddushim on humash according to Pardes.

The manuscript was not edited by the author, or properly preserved over the years, and the editors thus had to invest considerable effort to prepare the volume for publication. The sequence of the material was rearranged, and parts of the book were revised and rewritten. In the end, yet another invaluable work of the Ben Ish Hai was made available. The book presents innovative explanations of several verses in each parashah according to the different levels of Biblical interpretation.

Birkat Haim — on Haftarat and Navi

Birkat Haim includes interpretations on the haftarot read throughout the year, and explanations of verses in Nevi'im and

Ketuvim, according to Pardes. The book was initially edited by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, and then published in two volumes by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem, in Jerusalem.

The first volume includes hiddushim on the haftarot of Bereshit and Shemot, as well as the haftarot for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh, Hanukah, Shekalim, Zachor, and Parah. The second volume includes interpretations on the haftarot of Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim, and the haftarot for Shabbat Hagadol and the holidays. This volume also offers interpretations of verses from Nevi'im and Ketuvim. The hiddushim on the haftarot had originally been presented in the Ben Ish Hai's Shabbat sermons.

In his introduction, the author explains the need for a commentary to the haftarot: "Haftarot were not dealt with by learned men. While the parashah was read and discussed and analyzed thoroughly, the haftarah received no attention, and few books were written on the haftarot." As in so many of his works, the Ben Ish Hai made a point of devoting time and attention to the neglected areas of Torah.

The Ben Ish Hai began writing this book in 1859, and continued writing it until the year of his death.

The hiddushim on Nach that appear in the second volume were also found in a separate, handwritten manuscript, possibly remnants of an entire book on Nach.

The title of the book was chosen by Rabbi David, the Ben Ish Hai's grandson, for reasons he chose to keep private.

Among the verses discussed in Birkat Haim is Yishayahu's prophecy (58:14), "You will then delight in God ... and I shall feed you the inheritance of your Patriarch Yaakov." The Ben Ish Hai writes:

It should be understood [to mean] that there is no reward for mitzvot in this world; mitzvot were given ... by a messenger [Moshe]. If a worker gets paid through an emissary, this is not considered a delay in payment. But we are rewarded [in this world] for the fact that we

do not commit idolatry, for we heard "I am G-d" and "you shall not have another god upon Me" directly from G-d [and not through an emissary]. This is the meaning of "you shall enjoy G-d" — G-d specifically, not idols, and then — "I shall feed you the inheritance of Yaakov," referring to our reward in this world.

Divre Haim — Commentary to Kohelet

Divre Haim was published in 1988 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem; the text was edited by Rabbi David Yehudayof.

The commentary to Kohelet is similar to the Ben Ish Hai's other books, in that it offers mussar warning against surrendering to the evil inclination. Some of this advice is presented explicitly in Kohelet and requires no further explanation. In some contexts, however, the Ben Ish Hai utilizes the text as a basis upon which to offer additional mussar, incorporating stories and parables to elucidate the messages conveyed.

Commentaries in Divre Haim are offered to only a portion of the verses. It appears that the Ben Ish Hai wrote a comprehensive commentary to all of Kohelet, but portions of the work were lost over time. He prepared the book for publication, though he did not include a preface or even name the sefer. The editors called the book Divre Haim and added a preface in which they explain the name.

Haim V'hashalom — Commentary to Tehillim

This work presents Pardes interpretations on Tehillim. It was originally published by Ozar Hamizrah in 1978 and edited by David Yehudayof.

In his preface, the editor describes the various stages of this work's development. It appears that the Ben Ish Hai was in the process of writing this book throughout his life, laying the foundations during his younger years, and adding hiddushim later in life.

Many of the interpretations presented in this work came to the Ben Ish Hai while reciting Tehillim on Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot. He wrote down these insights immediately after Yom Tov, not necessarily following the sequence of the psalms. The Ben Ish Hai did not edit the manuscript for publication or give it a name; the name Haim V'hashalom was chosen by Rabbi David Haim. To assist the reader in understanding the commentary, the editor included the text of Tehillim in the publication. Kabbalistic explanations to the text appear separately, in small font.

The following is one excerpt from the book:

“And grace belongs to You, G-d, for You repay each man according to his deed.” This is similar to the notion that G-d does not convert a negative thought to an action, but instead judges people by their actual deeds. Alternatively, this [verse] alludes to the well-known fact that there are three partners in the creation of man. His father and mother cannot make their child [complete by] giving him spirit and speech; it is G-d Who provides the spirit, soul, and speech. This is the idea of the verse: “And grace belongs to You, G-d, for You pay each man by his deed” — You will complete a person and make him similar to his ‘creator’ — meaning, to his mother and father...

Nehamat Tzion — Thoughts on Echah

The commentary on Megillat Echah was published in 1988 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem, and edited by Rabbi Yehuda Adari.

The commentary is based on Pardes interpretations. The Ben Ish Hai follows a surprising approach to Echah, viewing this megillah, which laments the destruction of Jerusalem, as an upbeat, optimistic book which looks with hope to a brighter future for the Jewish people. The commentary offers not a simple interpretation of Yirmiyahu’s

words, but rather solace and consolation in the anticipation of our future redemption. The Ben Ish Hai’s words are comforting for anyone who reads Echah and yearns for the coming of Mashiah. The manuscript was entitled “Nehamat Tzion” and copied by a Baghdadi writer, and this copy served as a basis for its publication in 1988.

In his preface to this work, the Ben Ish Hai explains his methodology in approaching Echah:

All promises of comfort for Israel are encoded as a curse. As we read in the midrash: “If you are meritorious, I will turn your curses into blessings.” Even if the text appears to discuss a curse, it is a blessing in disguise. Echah is about evil and retribution, but in the future there is no need for such things, and so in future the true meaning of the text will reveal great blessings... Since we are believers in a full redemption, I sought to interpret Echah as a book of goodness and blessing, joy and comfort, for it carries seventy meanings.

In this preface, the author also explains his choice of the commentary’s title:

I named the book Nehamat Tzion, for I hope it brings comfort to mother-Tzion, that the mother of the sons shall rejoice with the return of her children, that Tzion shall rejoice in her sons. May we have the merit of rejoicing in Jerusalem. Take pleasure in her all those who love her; rejoice with her, those who mourn her. That you may nurse your fill from her comforting breast... As a man is comforted by his mother, so shall I comfort you, and you shall be consoled in Jerusalem.

The following is the Ben Ish Hai’s commentary to one verse in Echah (1:2):

“She has no comfort from all those who love her” — from the Sitra Ahara [“other side,” referring to the

gentile nations], for she is a common maidservant [in their eyes]. There is no one to comfort her from among the nations, for “all her friends” — the nations — “have betrayed her,” they shall come and convert, and many shall come under the wing of G-d, as the verse states, “Many nations will congregate to G-d on that day.” This is the meaning of “they have betrayed her” — that they no longer want to stick with her. To the contrary, “they have become her enemies” who hate the religion of the Sitra Ahara.

The text of Echa was printed in the book in order to make the interpretations more readily understandable.

Od Yosef Hai — Derashot

Od Yosef Hai — Derashot is a parallel work to Ben Ish Hai — Derashot. It includes hiddushim and derashot on the Torah, incorporating relevant halachot.

The relationship between Od Yosef Hai — Derashot and Ben Ish Hai — Derashot is



Title page of sefer Od Yosef Hai.

similar to that between Ben Ish Hai — Halachot and Ben Ish Hai — Derashot.

The book consists of four sections containing derashot on different topics. Some derashot are lengthy, incorporating stories and words of mussar. Each derashah explains a number of verses from the week’s parashah and interprets them according to the teachings of Hazal, kabbalah, and other sources.

The book was first published in 1910 by Frumkin Print in Jerusalem. This edition includes halachot relevant to the parashiyot in Bereshit and Shemot delivered during the first cycle of lectures. The Ben Ish Hai wrote in the preface, “If G-d, in His grace, allows me, I will print this after the halachot of the first and second years, which were not brought in this book.”

The edition includes an addendum entitled, “Kuntras Marot Yehezkel.” The Ben Ish Hai explains the background to this treatise in his preface: “This year (1908) G-d granted me merit to reach a town called Kfil, where the tomb of the great prophet Yehezkel stands. I sat there for three months, and during the day I lay upon the gravestone ... and I spoke hiddushim and clues which relate to his holy book.” These novellae were compiled into the “Kuntras Marot Yehezkel” appended to Od Yosef Hai — Derashot.

This volume contains another addendum called “Hut Hameshulash,” which consists of three halachic responsa from the book Sod Yesharim, a work on the festivals of the month of Tishrei by Rabbi Gershon Hanoach Henich of Radzin.

A second edition of Od Yosef Hai — Derashot was published as a two-volume set in 1958, with the halachic sections omitted. The first volume includes commentaries on Bereshit, Shemot, and Vayikra, and the second covers Bamidbar and Devarim, and also includes the Marot Yehezkel.

Yet a third edition was released in 1958 by Bakal Publications. Two newer editions were published in 1985, one by Siah Yisrael, the other by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

Keren Yeshuah — Commentary to Megillat Esther

The sefer presents Pardes commentaries to the Book of Esther. The work was first published during the Ben Ish Hai's lifetime, in 1870, along with the commentaries to Shir Hashirim and Rut. After the publication of this work, the Ben Ish Hai continued writing commentaries to the megillot, and these writings were added to later editions of the book. The second edition, which includes both the original commentary as well as the new material, was published in 1984 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem, and edited by Rabbi David Yehudayof. This edition included the text of Esther in the book.

The hiddushim in this book were delivered during derashot throughout the years. Most of the novellae are geared toward explicating the pshat (plain reading of the text), while some explain the text on the level of sod (subtle allusions).

The name Keren Yeshuah alludes to the Ben Ish Hai's name and the name of his father.

The following is one particularly novel passage from the book:

“Do not omit one thing from all you have spoken”:
This means that he [Ahashverosh] had to warn him, for Haman was old and had no teeth, so he did not speak clearly, specifically certain letters [which cannot be properly pronounced without teeth]. The king thus feared that Haman would mumble, “Thus shall be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor,” since difficult letters appear in this sentence, and the meaning might not be clear. Therefore, he warned, “Do not omit one thing from all you have spoken” — do

not omit any letters, make your speech clear. Although Haman did not speak the holy language, their letters have similar sounds.

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah
of our son

Mozie Elmaleh

From
*Leon, Denise, Miri,
and Danielle Elmaleh*

Parshanut Hazal

Orah Haim — Haggadah Shel Pesah

Orah Haim presents Pardes interpretations on the Pesah Haggadah, as well as the halachot regarding the month of Nissan, birkat ha'ilanot, sefirat ha'omer, the prayers for Hol Hamoed, and Shavuot.

The commentary to the Haggadah was copied from the Ben Ish Hai's handwritten manuscript, and added to the halachot of Pesah that appear in the works Ben Ish Hai, Od Yosef Hai, and Leshon Hachamim.

The editing of the Haggadah in preparation for print was done by Rabbi David Yehudayof, and the volume was published by Ohr HaMizrah in Jerusalem, in 1978. A second edition, which includes references and sources, was published in 1999 by Rabbi Yehoshua

Ben David Salem in Jerusalem. The editor noted that the Ben Ish Hai composed his commentary to the Haggadah over the course of many years, as each year he arrived at new hiddushim and insights.

The manuscript had not been edited by the Ben Ish Hai, and the editors thus had to invest considerable effort in preparing the work for printing.

The Haggadah text which was printed parallel to the commentary is the version reflected in the Ben Ish Hai's writings, and is based upon ancient editions of the Haggadah printed in Baghdad and Livorno, according to the tradition of the Babylonian Jewish community.

Most of the commentaries presented in Orah Haim follow the approaches of pshat and kabbalah, while others are on the levels of remez and derash.

The following excerpt from the book addresses the distinction between the innocent son ("tam") and the son who does not know how to ask ("she'eno yode'a li'sh'ol"):

"One is innocent, and another who does not know how to ask." We must distinguish between these two [sons], for they both lack understanding. It seems to us that we should explain, with the help of G-d, according to Hazal's comment on the verse (Tehillim 73:22), "I am foolish and do not know, I was like an animal." Meaning, there are those who are foolish but do not know it, and there are those who are foolish but self-aware. How so? A child has not yet studied humash, yet his father sends him to study Talmud. The teacher begins [with the mishnah] in Bava Kamma [that discusses the case of] a bull that gores a cow. He teaches him the mishnah and reviews it four or five times, but the child remains confused, despite the teacher's blows and instruction. When the son comes back to the father in the evening crying, the father asks why he was crying. The boy

replies, with sobs, "Because of the bull that gore the cow. I was not there, and I did not see the bull gore the cow, so why is the teacher hitting me because of the bull?" The boy didn't even know he was confusing the issue; he thought he was correctly repeating what the teacher had said, and was hit on account of the bull.

This situation is similar: the innocent son does not understand what is happening on the Seder night; he cannot explain any of it, but he also recognizes his ignorance, and so he asks, "What is this?" But the boy who does not know how to ask — he doesn't even feel the difference which necessitates the question, "What is this?" He is "foolish and does not know." This is one who does not know how to ask, who does not see a change which necessitates asking, "What is this?"

Ben Yehoyada — Commentary to the Talmud

Ben Yehoyada is one of the Ben Ish Hai's larger and more important books, offering commentaries, hiddushim, and notes on the aggadic portions of the Babylonian Talmud. The book includes four parts, the first two of which cover the sections of Zera'im and Moed, while the last two discuss the remaining sedarim, as follows:

Part I: Berachot, Shabbat, Eruvin.

Part II: Pesachim, Yoma, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkah, Beitzah, Megillah, Ta'anit, Hagigah, and Moed Katan.

Part III: Yevamot, Ketuvot, Gittin, Nedarim, Nazir, Sotah, Kiddushin, Bava Kamma, Bava Metziah, and Bava Batra.

Part IV: Sanhedrin, Makkot, Shevuot, Eduyot, Avodah Zarah, Horayot, Zevachim, Menahot, Hullin, Bechorot, Arachin, and Niddah.

The commentaries in Ben Yehoyada were originally presented during the Ben Ish Hai's daily class in En Yaakov which he delivered after the morning prayer service. En Yaakov is the classic 16th-century

compilation of the aggadic sections of the Talmud by Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Haviv and his son, Rabbi Levi Ibn Haviv, on which numerous commentaries have been written. Adorned with his tallit and tefillin, the Ben Ish Hai would sit each morning and explain the aggadot in the En Yaakov, adding his own hiddushim. Countless insights were presented over the years, and they were eventually compiled into a book and brought to Israel for publication. The work contains commentaries on the majority of the aggadic portions of the Talmud.

The following is an excerpt from the Ben Ish Hai's preface to Ben Yehoyada:

What can I say to G-d? He has bestowed upon me all His gifts, He has granted me the merit to understand parables and riddles, the words of the hachamim, through whom G-d's spirit speaks and on whose tongue is His word, in the vast and awesome sea of Aggadah which is called the Babylonian Talmud, which includes Scripture, Mishnah, halachah, and Aggadah.

The Ben Ish Hai also described the background to this monumental work:

Everyone knows that in our city we preserve the tradition of our fathers, the accepted, widespread tradition to devote time each day to the study of Torah after morning prayers. We study Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, and Orah Haim, and then we discuss Talmudic Aggadah compiled in En Yaakov, each day, under all circumstances.

Here in the famous synagogue in which my forefathers had prayed, my grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, used to study each day with a few people who came to sit before him. My father, Rabbi Eliyahu, followed in his footsteps, and now G-d has granted me the opportunity to take the place of my fathers, and I have done so...

How did this develop into a book on Talmudic Aggadah? And why did the Ben Ish Hai decide to print his hiddushim?

He explains:

All these years, G-d has granted me the ability to say hiddushim and interpretations on the aggadah, and I have compiled them into one book, which I entitled Ben Yehoyada ... and G-d has granted me the ability to publish the book, so that my hiddushim may spread throughout Israel to the delight of my Creator... We have heard many times from wise scholars that a man must spread his Torah novellae around the world; these matters are well known...

Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, in his book Tehillot Yosef, writes the following about the Ben Ish Hai's commentaries to Aggadah:

He generously revealed wonderful secrets and ideas which were hidden and implied, looking into Hazal's deep words which no one has deciphered; the road was lit before us to understand the words of Hazal and their riddles... He lit the way before us and created a road and opened a door so that we can taste the sweetness of their golden words...

Ben Yehoyada has earned widespread popularity. After the classic commentaries of the Maharsha and the Maharshah, Ben Yehoyada ranks among the most popular and important commentaries to aggadah.

The book was first printed in Jerusalem during the years 1898-1904. The first portion was printed by Salaman Brothers Press, and the remaining portions by Rabbi Yosef David Frumkin. In 1964-1965 the book was reprinted by Yeshivat Harabanim and the Synagogue of Ezra Hasofer (volumes 1 and 2) and later was reprinted (volumes 3 and 4). Shortly thereafter, in 1965, another version was published by Keren Hotza'at Sifre Rabbane Bavel, which includes the text of

En Yaakov parallel to the Ben Ish Hai's commentaries. In 1998 a new version of book was published in a new format, and with square lettering and corrected text, by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

Benayahu — Commentaries on Aggadah

Benayahu is a commentary on aggadic sections of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as some aggadic sections in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

The first edition, which contained commentaries on aggadic portions found in Berachot in both the Bavli and Yerushalmi, and in several tractates in Seder Moed, was published in 1905.

This book is a sequel to Ben Yehoyada on En Yaakov, as it, too, includes hiddushim that the Ben Ish Hai presented during the daily En Yaakov study session. The Ben Ish Hai completed the study of the entire Talmud every four years, and recorded each new insight. He writes, "It is a mitzvah to review the Talmud, beginning to end. I have done this, and written it all down in the book Benayahu."

In 1980 Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem published the first volume of a new edition of Benayahu, which offers hiddushim on Berachot, Shabbat, and Eruvin. These passages were copied from the



Title page of sefer Benayahu.

Ben Ish Hai's handwriting and then combined with the material that had been printed in his lifetime. In 1990 Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem edited and printed the second volume on Moed and Nashim. This volume also included the previously published hiddushim. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem completed the third volume, which presents commentaries on the Yerushalmi Zera'im and Moed in 1990.

Birkat Avot on Masechet Avot

Birkat Avot is the Ben Ish Hai's commentary to Pirkei Avot. In his preface, he explains the background to the book as well as its name, which literally means "Blessing of the Fathers":

What can I say to G-d? He has granted me all His gifts, He has granted me the privilege of arriving at hiddushim according to pshat and remez on Avot, and to speak about them each Shabbat from Pesah to Atzeret [Shavuot], for this is the custom at this time. I recognize that it is in my fathers' merit that I have been granted this, and so I have named the book Birkat Avot.

The innovative hiddushim in this work convey meaningful lessons in education and mussar, often enlisting stories and parables to enhance and clarify the ideas. In a number of passages, the Ben Ish Hai cites earlier commentators, and also inserts kabbalistic material in several contexts.

The book was published in 1865 by Eliyahu Ben Amuzag, and again in 1960 by Bakal in Jerusalem.

Hasde Avot on Masechet Avot

Hasde Avot is the Ben Ish Hai's second book on Avot. As in his preface to Birkat Avot, in his introductory remarks to Hasde Avot, he thanks the Almighty for granting him the privilege of teaching and discussing Pirkei Avot each Shabbat between Pesah and Shavuot:

What can I say to G-d? He has granted me all His gifts, He has given me the privilege to serve in the house of the Lord, where my fathers served, may they rest in peace, sitting each Shabbat, especially between Pesah and Atzeret [Shavuot], when it is customary to study Pirkei Avot as is the custom of the holy nation of Israel. G-d has granted me the ability to say hiddushim and interpret the words of Avot, and I have compiled them into a book and called it Hasde Avot, since it is about Pirkei Avot, words of wisdom and mussar from the mouths of ancient scholars.

The hiddushim in this work are based on close textual analysis of the mishnayot, and include numerous stories and parables. The insights to the mishnayot differ from those presented in Birkat Avot.

Commenting on Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Perachya's exhortation, "Make yourself a rabbi, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge each person favorably,"¹ the Ben Ish Hai writes:

It seems that we should explain, with the help of G-d, that anyone who has the ability to teach students should not wait for them to come and ask; rather, he should make an effort to find them and chase them so they come study with him. As Rabbi Akiva said to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, "More than the calf wants to nurse, the cow wants to feed." One should invest great effort in becoming a rabbi for others. However, do not take pride in the fact that you are teaching a student; pretend instead that he is your friend, and treat him with respect."

This innovative interpretation of the mishnah reflects the Ben Ish Hai's attitude toward the rabbinate and Torah education, the critical

importance of the role and the respect that a rabbi owes his students and congregants.

Hasde Avot was originally printed in Baghdad in 1906. The book was reprinted in Jerusalem in 1956 and again in 1980. In 1987 a new edition was published by Agudat Hasde Yitzhak.

Mosif Haim — Commentary to the Mishnah

Mosif Haim includes commentaries and hiddushim to the mishnayot in Moed, Nashim, and Nezikin. The material was edited for publication by Rabbi Yehuda Adari and published in 1992 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

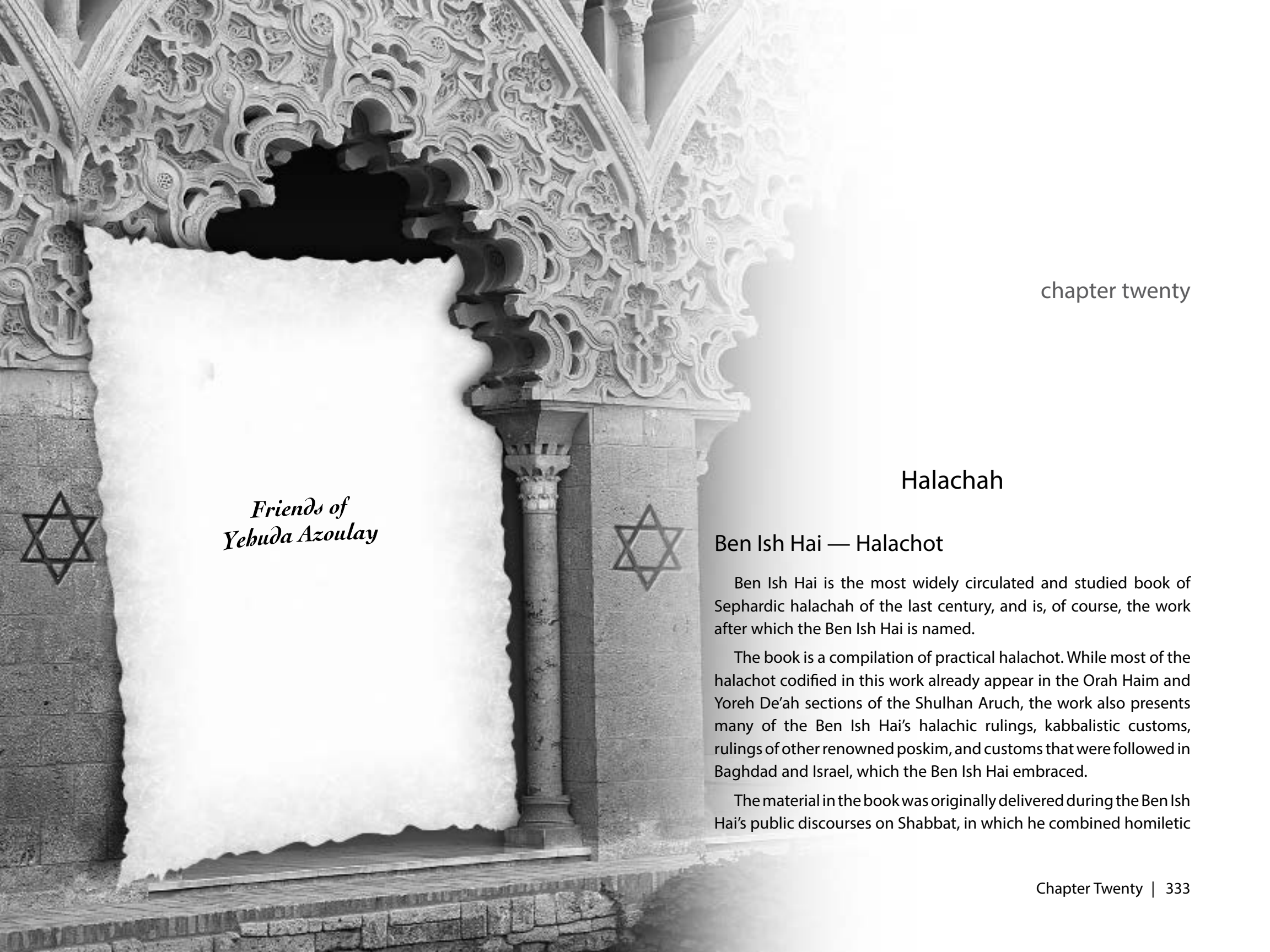
In his study of the mishnayot, the Ben Ish Hai relied heavily on the classic commentaries to the Mishnah: Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura, Tosefot Yom Tov, Remez, Shoshanim L'David, Zera Yitzhak, Hon Ashir, and Bet David. Over the course of his study, he penned his own comments and hiddushim. The manuscripts from which the work was written appear to comprise only a portion of the Ben Ish Hai's writings on the mishnah, and it seems that many of his hiddushim were lost.

The Ben Ish Hai did not edit the hiddushim for publication, and it appears that this work was done by his son or grandson.

The following is one passage from Mosif Haim:

"Rabbi Yishmael says: Milah is great, for 13 covenants were made over it." It seems to me that the sign of the milah is a sign for Israel which distinguishes them from other nations. The numerical value of 13 equals one [since the numerical value of the Hebrew word ehad is 13], thus indicating that Israel is one nation in the land.

1. Avot 1:6.



*Friends of
Yehuda Azoulay*

chapter twenty

Halachah

Ben Ish Hai — Halachot

Ben Ish Hai is the most widely circulated and studied book of Sephardic halachah of the last century, and is, of course, the work after which the Ben Ish Hai is named.

The book is a compilation of practical halachot. While most of the halachot codified in this work already appear in the Orah Haim and Yoreh De'ah sections of the Shulhan Aruch, the work also presents many of the Ben Ish Hai's halachic rulings, kabbalistic customs, rulings of other renowned poskim, and customs that were followed in Baghdad and Israel, which the Ben Ish Hai embraced.

The material in the book was originally delivered during the Ben Ish Hai's public discourses on Shabbat, in which he combined homiletic

discussions of the parashah and haftarah with halachic instruction. Over the course of two years, the Ben Ish Hai would cover all the basic halachot he believed every Jew should know. He would then begin a new cycle of discourses, reviewing the same halachot.

Accordingly, the book is divided into two sections: shanah rishonah, which presents the material covered in the first year of the two-year cycle, and shanah sheniyah, which contains the halachot taught in the second year. Each section follows the sequence of the parshiyot, from Bereshit until V'zot Haberachah. This format is intended to encourage readers to study the work according to a daily regimen, such that they complete it every two years.

The discourse for each parashah (or double parashah) deals with one halachic issue, and the laws of each holiday are introduced in the context of the parashah read during that time of year. Generally speaking, the halachot are presented very simply, clearly, and concisely, and in an organized fashion, with each halachah numbered. Before teaching the halachot, the Ben Ish Hai briefly addressed a topic in the parashah which relates to the ensuing halachic discussion. These insights into the weekly parashah are also included in the work.

The rulings in the Ben Ish Hai earned widespread acceptance throughout the Sephardic world, and led to the observance of kabbalistic practices by simple laymen. Many communities study the book each Shabbat, and others conduct a daily session studying Ben Ish Hai.

Hacham Ovadia Yosef wrote a voluminous work entitled Halichot Olam in which he analyzes, often critically, the rulings in Ben Ish Hai. Hacham Ovadia is of the opinion that Sephardim must follow the rulings of the Shulhan Aruch, and thus contested many of the Ben Ish Hai's rulings which are based on kabbalah, and not the Shulhan Aruch. Other Torah scholars wrote commentaries on Ben Ish Hai in an attempt to identify the sources for its halachic rulings and reconcile seeming discrepancies between different passages. The vast literature

that has arisen surrounding Ben Ish Hai testifies to its importance and impact, and to how highly it is regarded in the Torah world.

The book was first printed in Jerusalem in 1898, and again in 1904. It was published in Baghdad in 1912, and reprinted numerous times since, including in 1932 in Jerusalem, in 1952 by Bakal, and in 1957 by Sallah Mansour.

Ben Ish Hai has also been published together with other halachic writings. In 2005 Machon Harav Mazliah in Bnei Brak published a volume that combined Ben Ish Hai with Od Yosef Hai. In 1995 Rabbi Asher Ben-Haim produced a book on the laws of tzitzit and tefillin based upon the rulings in Ben Ish Hai.

Hod Yosef

This book contains halachic essays and letters that the Ben Ish Hai exchanged with other great scholars of his time. It also includes articles which were published in journals, as well as essays copied directly from the Ben Ish Hai's handwriting. The book was printed in Jerusalem in 1983.

Yede Haim — Halachic Essays and Responsa

The book Yede Haim is a collection of halachot, questions and answers, and derashot relating to the halachic subjects discussed. It also features a collection of brief responsa. The handwritten manuscript was not prepared for publication as a book, but rather as a brief compilation of some of the Ben Ish Hai's rulings on various different halachic matters.

The book was published in 1998 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem. The editor, David Yehudayof, speculates that this manuscript was part of a larger work. In his preface to the publication, he writes:

I think these pamphlets are remains of a book called Mekabtziel, which disappeared when the Ben Ish Hai died. This is a great work of halachic deliberation that

contains the final conclusions and rulings, derashot and commentary, and hints according to the order of the Shulhan Aruch, which shows the great strength of the Ben Ish Hai over other poskim.

Yede Haim also includes seventy-seven responsa which appear in other of the Ben Ish Hai's writings, as well. Additionally, the work presents a number of halachic responsa that were not included in the published collections of the Ben Ish Hai's responsa, including a question he received from Rabbi Yaakov Haim Sofer (author of Kaf Hachaim), a letter from Rabbi Saliman Menahem Mani, and a letter from the Ben Ish Hai's son, Rabbi Yaakov Haim.

The name of the book — "Yede" — alludes to the names of the author (Yosef), his son (Yaakov), and grandson (David).

In one passage in Yede Haim, the Ben Ish Hai discusses G-d's angry response to the prophet Eliyahu when he condemned Am Yisrael, lamenting, "for Israel has abandoned Your covenant," whereupon G-d commanded Eliyahu to appoint Elisha as a prophet in his stead. The questioner asked the Ben Ish Hai why G-d did not react this way when Yishayahu spoke harshly about the Jewish people, bemoaning, "Oh, sinful nation, evildoing seed, destructive sons." The Ben Ish Hai responded as follows:

You should know that in my book Aderet Eliyahu, I mentioned another difficulty regarding Yishayahu, who was punished for saying, "I am sitting among an impure nation" but was not punished for his words, "Oh, sinful nation, evildoing seed, destructive sons." And I answered that all the things Yishayahu said about Israel were not said of his own volition, but were rather G-d's words. But when he said, "I am sitting among an impure nation," these were his own words directed at G-d, and for this he was punished, since he had no excuse to call them that unless G-d told him to do so.

Od Yosef Hai — Halachot

The rulings found in Od Yosef Hai parallel those that appear in Ben Ish Hai. The halachot in both compilations were presented in front of large audiences along with insights on the weekly parashah. The book also includes many halachot which do not appear in Ben Ish Hai, and considerably more kabbalistic material.

The original edition of Od Yosef Haim, which was published in Jerusalem in 1910, included both halachic and homiletic material. In 1940 however, the book was reprinted and divided into two separate sections — derashot and halachot.

The book covers only the halachot presented in the context of the parashiyot in Bereshit and Shemot. Haham Yosef Kaduri once asked Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan why the halachot from the other three books of humash were not included in Od Yosef Hai. Rabbi Ben-Tzion explained that the Ben Ish Hai had sent him the manuscripts by sea, but the ship carrying them was attacked. Only the sections on Bereshit and Shemot were saved from the wreckage, and Rabbi Ben-Tzion printed that material. He sent a message to the Ben Ish Hai informing him of the lost manuscript. The Ben Ish Hai was deeply saddened by the news, and, unfortunately, did not have the time to rewrite the lost material.

A third edition was printed in Jerusalem in 1961 with sources and cross-references to other writings of the Ben Ish Hai. This volume was edited by Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi and published by Siach Yisrael.

Rav Berachot — Hiddushe Halachot V'he'arot B'divre Torah

Rav Berachot contains intricate essays on various halachic issues. The material is on a very advanced level, drawing upon a wide range of sources, and is intended for seasoned Torah scholars. The essays are arranged according to alphabetical order, based on the names

of the topics (e.g. Biryah, Bar Mitzvah, Bedikat Hametz, Gezel Hagoi, Devarim She'balev).

The book includes two halachic rulings by the Ben Ish Hai's grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Haim, concerning an agunah ("chained" woman, who did not receive a get from her husband). These essays appear under the title Devar Moshe.

The book was initially printed in Baghdad in 1868. A second edition was published in 1962, and a third by Rabbi Yosef Kaduri in 1971.

Rav Pe'alim — Halachic Responsa

Rav Pe'alim is the largest, and likely the greatest, of all the Ben Ish Hai's published works. The book contains hundreds of halachic responsa covering all topics of halachah. It was published in four parts, each of which covers one of the four sections of the Shulhan Aruch. Each volume ends with a collection of questions and answers on matters of kabbalah, entitled "Sod Yesharim."

Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, in his book Tehillot Yosef, gives the following description of Rav Pe'alim:

In this book, the rabbi shows the full glory of his wonderful greatness, his remarkable



Title page of sefer Rav Pe'alim.

knowledge of the Talmud and poskim, Rishonim and Aharonim, responsa and general books of different kinds, his depth of thought and sincerity of study, his talent in solving dilemmas, his creativity, his ability to relate one issue to another, to determine one matter by studying another ... always looking to clarify halachah to teach those who seek his counsel what they should do and how they should act. His answers are edited tastefully and clearly. Although he studies every book there is — even those of his contemporaries — he will not suffice with a collection of words. Rather, he is innovative and creative and writes from the depths he has reached in his study... He is definitive and confident of his opinion, his tongue is clean, he answers softly and respectfully when engaged in a war of Torah... His works are sourcebooks for the best students, who seek to study the ways of teaching; from his books they learn to answer questions, reach halachic rulings, study and learn halachah.

In his preface to Rav Pe'alim, the Ben Ish Hai notes the different styles that are used in responsa literature:

There are those who do not delve into the Aharonim in any matter, and only turn to Rishonim, and write what they think on a given issue by their own opinion and thought... This is the style of the majority of Ashkenazic rabbis.

The Ben Ish Hai opposed this approach: "A thousand apologies to their greatness, but they are not doing the right thing, for the Torah is acquired only in public ... and the great even need the small..."

The Ben Ish Hai ends with the following note:

It should be known that the Aharonim make many mistakes despite the fact that they are learned and great

in Torah... Therefore, one should not be too humble to challenge the gedolim... for this is no hiddush and does not take away from the grandness of the gedolim, who are so preoccupied today with issues of the time, and the hearts are weaker. But one should challenge only on law and halachah... and his words should be spoken humbly and with derech erez, his intention l'shem Shamayim, not to pride himself on his achievement.

The Ben Ish Hai thus advocated a delicate balance between boldness and humility, as he endeavored to reach the correct conclusion, even if this required disagreeing with other sages, while at the same time remaining humble and respectful.

The section on Orah Haim contains a total of 188 responsa; the Yoreh De'ah section contains 169; Even Ha'ezer, 73; and on Hoshen Mishpat, 48. The book contains 50 responsa on matters related to kabbalah.

The questions addressed in Rav Pe'alim came not only from the Iraqi Jewish community, but from the entire Jewish world. In fact, many of the questions came from India, where a large Baghdadi community had settled.

The section of responsa on kabbalistic subjects is unique to Rav Pe'alim, and has no parallel throughout the rest of responsa literature. The following is a list of some of the issues addressed in the kabbalistic sections of Rav Pe'alim:

- Yehudim in the heavens on Shabbat and Yom Tov; the significance of the different time zones, whereby day and night, and Shabbat and weekdays, occur at different times in different regions.
- Should women recite Tikkun Rachel and Tikkun Leah each night, or are women exempt from Tikkun Hatzot altogether?

- If one achieves a tikkun ("rectification") by studying Torah, performing mitzvot and praying, can this atone for Adam's sin as well?
- The propriety of daytime sleep.

A new edition of Rav Pe'alim was published by Siah Yisrael in 1994, in which all the responsa related to each section of the Shulhan Aruch were collected into one volume — one on Orah Haim, one on Yoreh De'ah, and so on. This format enables the reader to more easily find responsa on a given topic. In his preface, the publisher explained the decision to assume this heavy task of rearranging the sequence of Rav Pe'alim:

This innovation was not done of our own volition, G-d forbid, and we did not change one word in our rabbi's writings. This was approved by Rabbi Yehuda Sedaka, a descendant of the sage, the author, who was overjoyed and encouraged the new sequence.

The first edition was printed during the period of 1901-1912 in Jerusalem. The fourth section of this edition was published posthumously. In 1961-1964 the book was republished by Keren Hotza'at Kol Sifre Rabbanei Bavel. A third edition was published in 1970 by Sallah Mansour.

Dedicated in loving memory of
Rachel Berachah
bat Messouda Bohbot a”h
Shlomo & Tanya Bohbot



In loving memory of
Messod & Hassiba Dadoun z”l

May their *neshamot* rest eternally
in Gan Eden, amen!

Morris & Gloria Dadoun

Mussar

Ot Haim — Derashot for Bar Mitzvahs,
Weddings, and Other Topics

Ot Haim includes forty-nine derashot: thirty-one for bar mitzvahs, fifteen for weddings, one on the subject of education, one about the importance of synagogues, and one discussing the concept of education in the home.

The book was copied from the Ben Ish Hai’s handwriting and published in 1998 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem, who also chose the name of the work, for the reason he gives in his preface:

The book is called Ot Haim, which alludes to the content of the book. Ot is an acronym for ot tefillin [“the sign of tefillin,” symbolizing the occasion of a bar

mitzvah], and the numeral value of Ot Haim is identical to the numeral value of the word hatunah [wedding]. Education is alluded to, as well, for the first and last letters of “Haim” are the first and last letters of hinuch yeladim [educating children].

In the derashot appearing in this book, the Ben Ish Hai describes his immense love for his son, Yaakov:

The tenth of Nissan, 1867, b’siman tov. In the name of G-d, we shall succeed. This is a derashah I have written for the apple of my eye, my love, my darling son, Yaakov, may G-d grant me strength to attend his wedding and see his Torah. May he become a great hacham who is G-d-fearing, and may I have the merit to see his sons and grandsons.

The book also includes a derashah written for the Ben Ish Hai’s grandson, Yehuda, “who became bar mitzvah in 1892 on the third of Kislev, may we all rejoice at his wedding.” The book also includes a derashah the Ben Ish Hai prepared for his nephew, and an insight he heard from Rabbi Abdallah Somech.

In one passage in Ot Haim, the Ben Ish Hai discusses the famous verse, אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה (“A light is planted for the righteous, and joy [is planted] for the straight of heart” — Tehillim 97:11). He writes:

This is the meaning of אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה: With each mitzvah a light is created, and G-d plants it in the next world. The person eats from this fruit in the next world, on condition that the righteous are happy, for then we can say they deserve this reward...

Huke Hanashim (Kanun Alnissa)

The book contains halachot, prayers, discourses on Jewish faith, words of mussar, and general advice for girls and women.

Whereas most of the Ben Ish Hai’s works were written in Hebrew and Aramaic, this book was written in Judeo-Arabic,¹ since it was intended for women who were generally uneducated and incapable of reading standard rabbinic Hebrew.

The book was published in Baghdad in 1906, three years before the Ben Ish Hai’s passing. It has since been reprinted a number of times and translated into Hebrew, Spanish, French, and English.

The book includes fifty-eight chapters, each covering a particular area of Torah life, such as modesty; honoring one’s husband and family; a mother’s responsibility to educate her children; the mitzvot of niddah, hallah, and candle lighting; laws of kashrut; and laws of weddings and marriage.

In his preface, the Ben Ish Hai explains the book’s intended purpose:

Women need to be knowledgeable in some mitzvot so that they will know how to act and understand their obligations. Therefore, I have written this book, which discusses mussar, tocheha [rebuke], and dinim [practical laws], as well as other matters pertaining to women, and I have called it Huke Hanashim.

He adds that women are urged to read through this book at least once every six months.

In his preface to the Hebrew translation of Huke Hanashim, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi writes that women in Baghdad would read the book in groups on Shabbat, and at their leisure during the week. It was customary for women to gather on Hol Hamoed Pesah and Sukkot at the home of the head of the family, and each woman would

1. The Judeo-Arabic languages are a collection of Arabic dialects spoken by Jews living or formerly living in the Arab world. The term also refers to more or less classical Arabic written in the Hebrew script, particularly in the Middle Ages.

read one chapter or one page aloud, such that they completed the entire book each holiday.

The Ben Ish Hai writes in his preface that the book does not contain “flesh-cutting swords or hot fires,” but rather words that “light up the darkness” and “shine like sunlight in the afternoon.” He believed that the book would significantly influence the Baghdadi women: “I would not have written this book had I not had the confidence that you would accept my advice and hear my words... I would not have written the book, which consists of advice and admonishing words...”

Huke Hanashim includes prayers for different occasions, such as for visiting the grave of a tzaddik, for the day the world was created, and for Erev Rosh Hashanah.

This book reveals a different side of the Ben Ish Hai from that which we see in his other writings. In Huke Hanashim, he emerges as a sensitive leader who sought to share his wisdom with not only the scholarly elite, but even with the simple laymen and the women, who were not educated. He firmly believed that the Torah was the shared heritage of all members of Am Yisrael, and each is to be taught and guided on the level that is appropriate for him or her.

Addressing the subject of modesty and a wife’s obligation to her husband, the Ben Ish Hai writes:

The women of this strong and noble nation, when I give you chapters on spirituality, which taste sweet as honey, to strengthen the body in and out, be joyful in your hearts. Welcome, welcome! Come here so I can feed you. Purify your thoughts, straighten your hearts, and lend your ears, and hear my helpful words for you and your sons and daughters.

Here is a hidden woman who is modest — G-d bless her, may she live long! But among her family she is lenient, and not careful to see that her neck is exposed, her robe open, her hair down, or she walks around with

her shirt off, thinking that in her house she does not have to be modest.

She should not play checkers, chess or cards and the like, since these games destroy the people who play them and they become addicted. They prefer them over food and drink, and they thirst for more, like drinking salt water. These games are the source of demise and ruin, especially when girls and boys, men and women, play together. This lights a fire in their hearts and it leads them to dark places... We had here in Baghdad people who were honorable and rich, and the game destroyed their homes, and so here we agree that neither men nor women should play such games.

Ladies, do not be tempted to play just for an hour or just once, [thinking to yourselves,] “What could happen?” These words are the words of Satan. She will play once and then be lured into playing for days with women, then with men, and Satan shall control her. Who knows what will then ensue? Can a man hold a coal but not burn himself? Can he walk on fire and not be hurt? Can he carry fire in his vessels and not burn them?

A woman’s glory before her husband is in cleanliness and order, so that he does not despise her. She must be immaculate in her dress and always clean. It is better to wear simple, clean clothes than fancy, grubby ones. A long robe of cotton is better than a short robe of gold.

A woman must watch the way she acts in front of her husband. She should beautify herself even if her husband does not look for these things. When she wakes up she should wash her mouth and face, cover her hair completely, and make sure she is dressed perfectly.

A woman who does her own housework must be careful to keep clean. If she dealt with onion and garlic, she should wash her hands so she doesn't smell, and if she smokes, she should then chew on something sweet to remove the taste and smell.

Hear me, women of G-d! Efficiency is important, but haste is bad; haste leads to regret. If you run, you will not avoid the obstacles. A woman should be efficient in her work, but not hasty. She should always look and make sure she is doing a good job, so that her husband will always like her.

Laziness and haste are sisters, and a woman needs to avoid both. Sometimes she is quick to finish her housework, and she would be praised, but that is wrong, since she worked hastily out of laziness. She should have began two hours earlier and given herself plenty of time to do a proper job.

Mayim Haim — Mussar

The title page of *Mayim Haim* explains that the book is intended “to bring those who repent closer to our Father above, in the paths of teshuvah and fear of G-d, [with] words spiced with verses, words of Hazal, and sweet riddles and honey.” The book was published in 1993 in Jerusalem by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

The original manuscript contained essays on mussar which the Ben Ish Hai wrote on different occasions, as well as essays which he used as source material for his sermons. These essays were edited and compiled to produce this volume.

Mayim Haim consists of five chapters:

1. Warnings of the devastating consequences of following the evil inclination.
2. Teshuvah.

3. A discourse on mussar and teshuvah.

4. The benefits of teshuvah.

5. “My sin is before me always” — the importance of remorse and contrition after sin.

The mussar in *Mayim Haim* is presented through a combination of innovative interpretations of verses, passages from Hazal and the Zohar, and citations from prominent scholars of mussar. Additionally, the book includes some fifty parables and stories — more than any of the Ben Ish Hai's other books. Much of the mussar is written in a direct and personal way, as though the author stands right in front of the reader and speaks to him. In one passage, for example, the Ben Ish Hai writes, “Be careful and watch your soul, and return to G-d; hurry to hear His words and stick with Him.” Elsewhere in the book he makes comments such as, “Be careful, brother, be careful, for this is the advice of the yetzer hara,” and, “and you, my friend, do not look to see it.” The Ben Ish Hai stresses his affection and even “familial” relationship with the reader, conveying the message that he offers his words of mussar not out of disdain, but rather out of genuine love and concern for the reader's spiritual well-being.

The Ben Ish Hai also ensures throughout the work to express his humility, as though to remind the writer that his presentation of stern words of mussar should not be mistaken for arrogance. Thus, for example, he writes about himself, “I am His servant, I came as a flea before the great lion.”

In this book, the Ben Ish Hai occasionally makes reference to other works, including his own *Ben Ish Hai* and *Birkat Haim*. In one instance, he cites an interpretation from a scholar named Ben Sasson.

In *Mayim Haim* the Ben Ish Hai touches upon a number of important philosophical questions, such as whether or not suffering brings atonement if the individual does not believe that his suffering has been brought upon him by the Almighty, and mistakenly thinks

that it results from natural causes. In another especially dramatic passage, the Ben Ish Hai describes the punishment for sinful thoughts:

Thinking of sin is equivalent to sin. Anytime one thinks such thoughts — even if he did not sin the entire month, or has only sinned once the entire month — he has in fact sinned several times in thought, since each time he thinks, this is a separate sin. His tikkun [rectification], if he did not repent, is that he is taken down to purgatory, where he sees lions and bears of fire, which burn the evil in hell. And if he has fear and trepidation, he will realize that he will be judged and not go to heaven, and this is the atonement for his evil thoughts, for all of G-d's ways are just.

In loving memory of our
dearly missed grandparents:

**Georgette Keslassy
Jacob & Rachel Benaim
Isaac Benguaich**

& in tribute to our grandparents:

**Haim Keslassy
Miriam Benguaich
Isaac & Rica Cohen**

Dedicated in honor of our parents:

**Max and Mercedes Keslassy
Moe and Sarah Benaim**

For all the love and care they have given
and continue to give us and our children.

& in honor of our family:

**James, Limor, Jacob, Erin, Tamar,
Joshua, Jonah, Judah Keslassy
Jonathan & Renat Keslassy
Michelle Benaim
Jack Benaim**

Ian, Rachel, Talia, and Matthew Keslassy

Tefillot V'tikkunim¹

Ohr Zarua — Order of Study at
the Grave of Rabbi Akiva

The book Ohr Zarua contains portions of text to be recited and studied at the grave of the holy Tanna Rabbi Akiva in Tiberias, Israel. These texts are comprised mainly of Rabbi Akiva's own words and teachings.

The book was originally published in Baghdad in 1874. It was published anonymously, but the kabbalistic essays at the end of the

1. The Hebrew word tikkun means "correction," or "repair." It is used in reference to prayers and practices that, according to kabbalistic teachings, have the capacity to repair the adverse metaphysical effects of sin.

volume were clearly identifiable as the Ben Ish Hai's handiwork, both through its unique style and by its content, much of which appears elsewhere in his writings.

The book's title, *Ohr Zarua*, is taken from the famous verse in *Tehillim* (97:11), אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה. It was selected as the name for this work because the final letters of the words in this verse spell ר' עקיבה, and the title *Ohr Zarua* thus alludes to Rabbi Akiva.

The concept of reviewing the teachings of a Torah scholar at his gravesite emerges from a passage in the Talmud (*Yevamot* 96b-97a). The Gemara cites a tradition that David Hamelech said to G-d, "Master of the universe! May it be Your will that they will say words in my name in this world!" David Hamelech prayed that his words and teachings would be studied after his death, recognizing the impact this study would have on his soul. Similarly, the Gemara cites Rabbi Yohanan's statement in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, "Any Torah scholar in whose name words [of Torah] are spoken — his lips are moving in the grave."

Accordingly, the Ben Ish Hai compiled numerous sayings of Rabbi Akiva as well as stories told about the great sage, culled from the literature of Hazal, the entire corpus of Talmud and Midrash. *Ohr Zarua* also includes a number of prayers to be recited at the gravesite, a clarification of Rabbi Akiva's special significance according to the kabbalistic teachings of the Ar"i, and the text that should be recited when praying at the grave. The preferred occasions for frequenting and praying at Rabbi Akiva's gravesite is Erev Rosh Hodesh, the 15th of every month, and on Yom Kippur — the day Rabbi Akiva surrendered his life *al kiddush Hashem* (for the glorification of the Divine Name). Even those who do not visit his grave should study the text in *Ohr Zarua* on Yom Kippur, on behalf of Rabbi Akiva's soul.

The book was reprinted in 1957 by Itah Publishing, and then again in 1980 by Rabbi Yosef Kaduri. In 1988 *Ohr V'derech* published a new

edition that was reedited by Rabbi Yosef Haim Mizrahi to correct mistakes in the text.

Emunat Itecha

This book is a compilation of prayers and tikkunim to be recited on various occasions during the year. It was first published in 1963 based on a manuscript in the library of Rabbi Eliyahu Saliman zt"l.

Hillula Raba — Order of Learning for Lag B'Omer

Hillula Raba presents a text to be recited on Lag B'Omer, consisting of sayings and teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai from the literature of Hazal and from the various sections of the Zohar (*Tikkune Zohar*, *Zohar on the Torah*, *Idra Zuta*, and others). This volume also features a number of piyutim (hymns) that relate to the great Tanna Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, whose *yahrtzeit* is commemorated on Lag B'Omer.

The book was first printed in 1877 in Livorno, Italy, and then again in Jerusalem in 1884. Rabbi Ezra Dangoor published another edition in Baghdad, in 1908. More recent editions were published later in Jerusalem — in 1956 by Bakal Publishing and in 1973 by Mansour publishing.

Hakafot L'Simhat Torah

This booklet contains prayers, hymns, songs, and praises that are to be recited on the holiday of Simhat Torah. It was first published in Livorno in 1875 and has since been reprinted many times.

Keter Malchut — A Book of Study for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hoshanah Rabbah

The book *Keter Malchut* (not to be confused with Ibn Gabirol's famous hymn by the same name) contains praises of G-d for His

beautiful creation, as well as prayers and supplications, all based upon kabbalistic concepts. This material, which includes emotional, desperate pleas for G-d's mercy and compassion, is intended especially for the Days of Awe — Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hoshanah Rabbah — the days when we beseech G-d for forgiveness and a favorable judgment.

This small treatise was first printed in Baghdad in 1897, and a second edition was published nine years later in 1906 in Jerusalem. In 1938 this compilation was incorporated into Rabbi Matitya Menahem Cohen's work Remazim U'Gematriyot. Rabbi Cohen's book was printed in the Sallah Mansour edition of the mahzor, as well as in later editions of the mahzor. A new edition of Keter Malchut, edited by Rabbi Yosef Mizrahi, was printed in 2001 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

The following is one of the prayers presented in Keter Malchut, which beautifully expresses our sense of absolute dependence on the Almighty for our basic sustenance:

The way of the creatures is to request their livelihood and all their needs from You, Almighty, and You, in Your goodness, provide them with all their needs, as it says, "All eyes look longingly to You, and You give them their food in a timely manner; You open Your hands and satiate all living beings to their contentment."

And we are Your servants; before You, O G-d, we will pour forth our prayers. To You we will pray, to You we will beseech, to You we will call out, to You we will cry out, for You we will wait, to You we will look in anticipation, for You we will hope. From You we will ask our questions and make our requests, and from You we will desire our needs and the needs of our families, for You are our G-d, our Master, our Father, our King.

Leshon Hachamim — Tefillot V'Tikkunim

Leshon Hachamim ranks among the most unique works of the Ben Ish Hai, and in fact has no parallel in all of Torah literature. This book presents hundreds of texts of prayers, segulot, and tikkunim for different occasions, such as ordinary weekdays, Shabbat, and holidays, after the transgression of certain sins, and before the performance of certain mitzvot. The Ben Ish Hai drew upon his vast knowledge of halachah, Bible, and the literature of Hazal in formulating these prayers, which are laden with references to a wide range of different Torah sources. And, as a towering scholar of kabbalah, he incorporated profound kabbalistic concepts into the text and structure of these prayers.

Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, in Tehillot Yosef, notes the particular importance of Leshon Hachamim in our time:

How necessary this [work] is in these times, when the hearts are so dim, and when we have no knowledge of how to prepare a prayer service [to recite] before the



Title page of sefer Leshon Hachamim

great and awesome Almighty. But hope is not yet lost, for anyone who obtains the book *Leshon Hachamim* will find a source of calm for his soul. From there we have a wellspring, and a light has shown a path, an order, and a way to fulfill the Creator's commandments, in the correct and desired sequence ... a way to dedicate our actions to His great Name, to fix the world in the kingdom of Sha-dai, because the purpose of the section of "Lshem yihud" is to excite the hearts in a great fire of the love and fear of G-d, to observe His commandments with fear and trepidation in the correct and expected manner, and to awaken the thought to focus it on the deep reason and purpose of the commandments and the great tikkunim that they achieve in the higher spheres, to clarify them and to enlighten them until they become a chariot to kindle the light of life, the soul of all, the eternal light. May He be blessed... And if not for this treatise, we, in our orphaned generation, would almost not feel the meaning of the commandments.

The first part of *Leshon Hachamim* was printed in 1905 by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan, a disciple of the Ben Ish Hai. This part contains seventy-nine sections of prayers and study material, including prayers to be recited before washing one's hands for a meal, before shofar blowing, after Rosh Hashanah, before lighting Hanukah candles, before telling the story of the Exodus on Pesah, on Hoshanah Rabbah, before placing s'chach on the sukkah, and before a haircut. There is also a prayer to be recited in place of Tikkun Rahel on days when that prayer is not recited.

The second part of the book was published posthumously, by the Ben Ish Hai's son, Rabbi Yaakov Haim, in 1915. This part contains forty-nine sections, including both study material and tikkunim, such as Tikkun Hayesod for someone who fears he will have no rest in the next world, a prayer for children, a prayer for sickness and for mental

difficulties, a service for tashlich, a prayer for the fast of the firstborn observed on Erev Pesah, and prayers to be recited at the gravesite of a tzaddik. This portion of the book also includes a section of prayers and segulot for livelihood and atonement for sins, and prayers for the day of a brit milah.

The first part of *Leshon Hachamim* was reprinted in 1928 by Rabbi David Tzion Laniado, and the second part was republished 1947 by several Iraqi scholars in Jerusalem. Both volumes were reprinted in 1961 by Sallah Mansour. A newer edition of the entire work was published in 2001 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem in Jerusalem. The publisher wrote that this edition is based upon "older editions and manuscripts," and that the text is "cleaned of errors, with vowels added very precisely, with beautiful readable lettering, with comments and references." But most importantly, this edition includes an entirely new volume containing prayers that do not appear in earlier editions of *Leshon Hachamim*, and that were collected from "all that was printed in other books of our teacher — new and old — and from his holy manuscripts." The three volumes were edited by Rabbi Yosef Haim Mizrahi.

Leshon Hachamim includes the famous Tikkun Hayesod prayer which many people have the custom of reciting during the days of שבועות (the weeks from Parashat Shemot through Parashat Tetzaveh) and on other occasions. Many other prayers in this work have also become standard prayer texts recited on certain occasions, such as when visiting the graves of tzaddikim.

Rabbi Haim Shaul Dweck Hakohen, a renowned scholar of kabbalah and rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Rehovot Hanahar, describes the Ben Ish Hai's unique ability to compose prayers:

...because the aforementioned rabbi, the Ben Ish Hai, was a great scholar of kabbalah, and, with his remarkable knowledge, he arranged and organized special tikkunim and prayers, as well as the correct intentions that

belong to those tikkunim, and he adorned them with verses and prayers so that also the simple people could recite them, since they are all founded upon the words of the Ar"i zt"l.

Many of the prayers in Leshon Hachamim have been included in standard prayer texts. Siddurim that are based upon the Ben Ish Hai's customs and rulings incorporate tikkunim and prayers related to the daily prayer service, and several mahzorim include tikkunim and prayers relevant for the holidays.

Malach Habrit

The book *Malach Habrit* discusses concepts relevant to the mitzvah of brit milah. It contains essays and Torah insights related to this topic, as well as warnings to men involving the sanctity of the milah.

This book was first published in 1976 in Jerusalem.

Mamlechet Kohanim — The Order of Study at the Graves of Yehezkel Hanavi, Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, and Ezra Hasofer

Mamlechet Kohanim presents the learning material, prayers, and piyutim that should be studied and recited when visiting the graves of the prophet Yehezkel, Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak (the Kohen Gadol at the beginning of the Second Commonwealth), and Ezra Hasofer (religious leader at the beginning of the Second Commonwealth). According to ancient traditions, these prominent Biblical figures are all buried in Bavel. The book is called *Mamlechet Kohanim* ("Kingdom of Priests," a phrase taken from Shemot 19:6) because these three men were all kohanim.

Elsewhere in his writings (*Leshon Hachamim* 1:25), the Ben Ish Hai notes that reciting these texts is valuable even if one cannot frequent the gravesites of these tzaddikim. He writes, "And though we are far from his cave, we are certain that our cries will be accepted and



Ezra's Tomb on the right bank of the Tigris River is a holy place for Jews. (Photo Credit: Stephanie Comfort – www.jewishpostcardcollection.com)

will reach his holy place to awaken his holy soul to stand and pray before G-d for us and for all of Am Yisrael." However, notwithstanding the value of reciting these prayers in any location, the Ben Ish Hai emphasizes in his introduction to *Mamlechet Kohanim*, the unique importance of praying and studying the Torah of tzaddikim specifically at their gravesite.

This book was first printed in 1873 in Baghdad. The Ben Ish Hai chose to publish this work anonymously (as he did when publishing *Seder Hayom*, *Refu'at Hanefesh*, *Ohr Zarua*, *Hillula Raba*, *Emunat Itecha*, and others), but the other rabbis of the time realized that he had authored the volume and withheld his name out of humility.

A second edition was printed in 1976 by Rabbi Yosef Kaduri, and a third edition, which was edited by Rabbi Yosef Mizrahi, was printed by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem in Jerusalem in 2001.

The book contains verses from Tanach and passages from Hazal about each of the three tzaddikim, as well as prayers and hymns in honor of these distinguished figures.

Menuhat Hanefesh — Order of Learning for the Night of an Azkarah

This book presents the material that is customarily studied on the night of an azkarah (anniversary of a family member's passing) each year. This material consists mainly of a list of the 613 Mitzvot and short explanations of each; midrashic passages that speak about the human soul; discussions regarding the human being's role and purpose in the world; sections of Gemara that include words of mussar about death, the soul, the body, and related subjects; Saba D'mishpatim and other sections from the Zohar; and hashkafot.

Menuhat Hanefesh also provides brief explanations of the passages cited from the Midrash and Gemara, by Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Rabbi Moshe Tzedakah, and Hacham Moshe Amaar.

This book was first published by Rabbi Ezra Dangoor in Baghdad in 1913, and then again in 1950 by Sallah Mansour. A third edition was produced two years later by Ezra Bakal in Jerusalem.

Mishmeret Hahodesh — Order of Learning for Erev Rosh Hodesh

Erev Rosh Hodesh, which is called "Yom Kippur Katan" ("Minor Yom Kippur"), is a very significant occasion for repentance and atonement, and is observed by many as a day of Torah learning and special prayers. In the introduction to Mishmeret Hahodesh, the Ben Ish Hai emphasizes the importance of studying Torah on Erev Rosh Hodesh:

This custom is worthy and correct for many compelling reasons that have been mentioned in the holy books. It is known that the moon alludes to the Shechinah, and when one sees the moon in its incomplete form, as it is at the end of the month, it is as though the Shechinah at this time needs support from the Torah and good deeds of Am Yisrael, as it says,

"Give strength to G-d," and it says, "In our G-d, we will do valor." It is an obligation for every Jew to share in the distress of the Shechinah, because they caused this calamity. And if one does not wake up now, in this time of distress, when will he? One who gives charity to a poor man when things are easy is not comparable to one who gives charity to a poor man when things are difficult.

Therefore, Erev Rosh Hodesh, both at night and in the day, is the appropriate time for the Jewish people, the sons of Rahel, to participate in the distress of the Shechinah and to support it and strengthen it, as it were, with three strong pillars — קול צום במדון [prayers, fasting, and charity], whose full numerical value is equal to the word ואת that alludes to the Shechinah. They are the voice of Torah, prayer, and praises; the fast today takes the place of a korban; and the charity is the money given to the charity collectors.

It should be noted that it says, "Arise and sing at night." The primary time for the "singing" of Torah is at night. And, specifically, since the Shechinah's essence is night, it has therefore been said that "the night was created in order to learn."

The Ben Ish Hai instituted an order of learning and prayer for this occasion, which includes: vidui (confessions); prayers; mishnayot from Rosh Hashanah, Ta'anit, Avot, and other tractates; and sections of Gemara, Midrash, and Zohar.

The book was printed three times during the Ben Ish Hai's lifetime. A fourth edition was printed in 1954 by Ezra Bakal, and he published a fifth edition in 1955 and yet another in 1976.

Seder Hayom — A Daily Order of Learning

This booklet includes verses from the Torah that deal with topics that should be remembered each day, such as Shabbat, the manna, Amalek, the Revelation at Sinai, the blessings of Bilam, and Miriam's punishment. The daily program outlined in this book also contains confessions, prayers, piyutim, kavanot, the verses of the ketoret (incense offering in the Temple) and the explanation of its contents, sections from the Zohar, and the entire Shema.

Seder Hayom was first printed in Baghdad in 1870, and then again in 1894, also in Baghdad. The book was later reprinted in Jerusalem in 1955, 1957, 1966, 1976, and several other times.

Refuat Hanefesh

Refuat Hanefesh is a booklet containing a tikkun to be recited for one's soul from previous existences (gilgulim). Six original piyutim appear in this work. The booklet was first published in Baghdad in 1870.

Sha'are Haim — Commentary to the Avodah Section of the Yom Kippur Prayer Service

The book Sha'are Haim contains a commentary to the avodah section of the Mussaf prayer on Yom Kippur, and to Rabbi Shelomo Ibn Gabirol's "Reshut L'seder Ha'avodah." It was first published in 1988 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem and edited by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi.

In the introduction, the editor describes the manuscript from which the book was edited:

We found this book among the manuscripts of our teacher of blessed memory, written in two booklets, each thirty-six pages, in total seventy-two old, fraying pages, where it is clearly recognizable that the author added crowded explanations in between lines at a later

date, in the margins along the width and length of the pages. We have attempted to be precise in copying it and to uncover what was written in some difficult places on the margins where the paper is fraying and torn and the writing is progressively smaller.

The publishers chose to name the book Sha'are Haim ("Gates of Haim") as an allusion to the occasion of Yom Kippur, when the gates of prayer and the books of life are open before G-d. The title also alludes to the author: שער עבודת רבינו יוסף חיים.

The Ben Ish Hai's commentary elucidates several difficult passages in the Yom Kippur services. For example, in the Reshut L'seder Ha'avodah, we find the following enigmatic passage:

עגמתי בלחצי ומחצי, פרוך ביד קורצי ופורצי צפתי לאומצי ועולצי כי הוא יוציא.

The Ben Ish Hai offers a straightforward translation and commentary to this difficult sentence:

עגמתי — I worried

בלחצי — in my despair due to the lack of money and the difficulty of livelihood

ומחצי — and in other travails, referring to physical illness

עגמתי בלחצי ומחצי — one as a result of the Babylonian exile after the First Temple, and one as a result of the Edomite exile after the Second Temple.

The commentary also unearths the depth and meaning underlying the Yom Kippur service. Commenting on the passage in the Mussaf prayer, "The service of the day is done in white clothes," the Ben Ish Hai writes:

This is a favorable sign representing the fact that "if your sins are red like scarlet they will be whitened like snow." Additionally, there is a need for white clothing to teach us that we merit the service of Yom Kippur as a result of our relationship with our Patriarch Yaakov,

who was given three names: ישראל, יעקב, ישורון. The last letters of these names form the word לבן (white).

Tikkun Hayesod — An Order of Study and Tikkunim for Tikkun Hayesod

The book Tikkun Hayesod contains study material, prayers, and tikkunim that are effective for the process of Tikkun Hayesod,² especially during the period of שבב"ם (the weeks from Parashat Shemot through Parashat Tetzaveh).

The book has been published in several editions, most recently in 2000 by Rabbi Benayahu Yissachar Shmueli of Yeshivat Nahar Shalom.

In his introduction, Rabbi Shmueli discusses the importance of this work, specifically in our time:

Our teacher, the Ar"i, revealed to us that this tikkun is actually achieved through forty fasts, for the sin of kerī [involuntary nocturnal emissions], and eighty-four fasts for the sin of hotza'at shichvat zera l'vatalah [intentional emissions]. Today, however, due to our sinful ways, weakness has descended upon the world, and it is difficult for everyone to observe the series of fasts that the Ar"i prescribed. We are thus grateful to G-d for sending us the Ben Ish Hai who arranged the procedure of teshuvah and tikkun in a practical way that is in place of the fasts, for those who do not have the spirit to observe the fasts that the Ar"i prescribed. Instead, they have a special order of study and prayer, and the prayers and study material allude to all the secrets and intentions that are contained within the tikkunim in their lofty root.

2. The term tikkun hayesod refers to repairing the damage caused to the sefirah ("emanation") of yesod, generally as a result of sexual offenses.

Toward the beginning of Tikkun Hayesod, the author gives instructions for those undertaking this tikkun. The book also includes mishnayot from various sources, selected portions of the Idra Raba and Idra Zuta, verses from the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim, and the actual text of the tikkun.

Tikkun Tefillah

Tikkun Tefillah is a booklet that lists practices and prayer texts from the writings of the Ar"i and the Rashash, many of which appear in various Sephardic editions of the siddur.

In memory of
Yehuda ben Ephraim Fattal
May his *neshamah* be remembered
by all his loved ones!

Leah, Menahem, and Ephraim Iny



Donated in memory of
David and Zohra Shriqui

In honor of
Maurice and Rochelle Shriqui
and children
David, Jack and Sarah

Kabbalah

Benayahu — Commentary on Tikkune Zohar

The book Benayahu presents brief explanations to numerous passages in Tikkune Zohar.¹ It is a running commentary on the entire length of Tikkune Zohar, though it does not comment on every passage.

In his introduction to this work, the Ben Ish Hai briefly relates the history of the publication:

Last year I was contacted by the middle man, who is good to others and loved by the Heavens, who runs

1. Tikkune Zohar is a compilation of essays on kabbalistic thought attributed to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. It is a separate volume from the Zohar, the basic text of kabbalah written by Rabbi Shimon.

after mitzvot ... and he told me that there are those who work very hard in the printing profession in Jerusalem who wish to print the book of Tikkunim in large print. When it came to their attention that I — the small, meager servant — have a small compilation called Benayahu, simple explanations and clarifications on the Zohar and Tikkunim, they generously offered to pay for the printing of a small portion of it into the book of Tikkunim that they were working on.

I, the young one, responded affirmatively to their request and gave them my compilation which is clear for simple people (this refers to people who are familiar with the basic fundamentals of the wisdom of kabbalah), and sent it to my friend, the aforementioned middle man, in order to hand it over to the printers to be printed in the holy book of Tikkunim.

The Ben Ish Hai then added a prayer for a future publication of another work:

I pray that G-d may continue to assist these pure-hearted people who are working in this printing, to also print the entire Zohar Hakadosh in large, squared, attractive print, and may I earn the merit to have my book Benayahu be printed with the Zohar Hakadosh.

The Ben Ish Hai here reveals that he intended to write a commentary on the Zohar — also called Benayahu — and hoped that if the printers would produce a new edition of the Zohar, his commentary would be included in that publication. Unfortunately, however, we did not merit the publication of such a commentary.

The book Tikkune Zohar with the Ben Ish Hai's Benayahu commentary was first printed in 1903 in Jerusalem. It was subsequently reprinted several times in identical fashion.

In 2005 Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem prepared a new edition of Tikkune Zohar with the Benayahu commentary. In this edition, the numerous textual errors in the previous editions are corrected, full words are written in place of difficult acronyms, and punctuation was added to facilitate easier reading and comprehension.

Da'at U'tevunah — Fundamentals of Kabbalah

Da'at U'tevunah is a collection of selected portions of articles written by Rabbi Haim Vital, the most illustrious student of the Ar"i zt"l, as an introduction to the wisdom of kabbalah. The articles were organized in a manner that enables the novice to gradually gain proficiency in the field of Torat Hasod (kabbalistic thought).

The Ben Ish Hai was widely acknowledged as the foremost scholar of kabbalah in his generation. In this book, he paved the way for the study of the "hidden" sections of Torah by untold numbers of Jews.

This book was first published after the Ben Ish Hai's death in 1911 by his student, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan, in Jerusalem.

In his introduction to this volume, the Ben Ish Hai briefly discusses his selection of passages, and his purpose in this compilation:



Title page of sefer Da'at U'tevunah

I chose to collect and take from the holy book of our teacher (the Ar"i zt"l) ... the introductions to topics that constitute the roots of the true wisdom (hochmat ha'emet), and I divided them into chapters. One who studies it should do so on a regular basis and review it at least fifteen times (and then) ... they will be remembered and organized in his heart ... and then he can begin studying the book Etz Haim.

Da'at U'tevunah contains three introductions and seventy-five chapters. The Ben Ish Hai emphasized the importance of the material presented in the three introductions:

All who enter this wisdom must learn the introductions seven times. There is an allusion to this in the verse, "She built her house from wisdom, and hewed for it seven pillars." Thereafter, he may begin studying the following words of our teacher, the Ar"i zt"l, that are written in the chapters copied in this book and have been organized in the correct order.

The book also contains an introduction written by the author's son, Rabbi Yaakov, including an appraisal of the greatness of the Ben Ish Hai and his life's accomplishments, as well as a brief summary of all his works that were printed in his lifetime. Rabbi Hazan's essay, "The Abridged Story of the Ben Ish Hai," was also added to the publication.

The book was called Da'at U'tevunah ("knowledge and understanding") because, as the Ben Ish Hai explained, "The book was organized with knowledge and understanding, as will be apparent to those who understand and study it from beginning to end."

Rabbi Yaakov Hillel, a contemporary scholar of kabbalah, describes in his work Tehillot Yosef the significance and brilliance of Da'at U'tevunah (pp. 34-35):

Through his expertise in this wisdom, he arranged this compilation in a remarkable fashion, always

copying the necessary introduction from the places in the writings of the Ar"i zt"l where the material was elucidated very clearly and at length. It is known that "the words of Torah are poor in one place and rich in another place," and this is especially true in the holy writings of Rabbi Haim Vital zt"l. Occasionally, in order to cover a topic in its entirety, so that it would be understood in all its detail, he collected formulations on the same topic from many places that were spread throughout the writings of the Ar"i zt"l and connected them into one long and clear essay. The topic was thus clarified, and, as a matter of course, many questions and difficulties were solved.

Occasionally, he mentions and cites the words of the more recent giants of kabbalah, specifically from our teacher the Rashash zt"l and his primary disciple, Rabbi Haim Dila Roza, author of Torat Hacham. [The Ben Ish Hai cites] words that pertain to the particular topic, to enlighten the eyes of the students so they will understand it completely...

The book offers great benefit and is of utmost necessity. Certainly in our times, it is inappropriate for someone approaching the study of kabbalah to proceed directly to the writings of the Ar"i zt"l without first studying Da'at U'tevunah. And then, without doubt, in the merit of the fear of heaven within it, even when he swiftly moves forward — he will not falter!

A copy of the first edition was reprinted by Mekor Haim Printing House in 1965. A new edition was published in 2001 by Siah Yisrael (a publishing house founded by Rabbi Yaakov Cohen shlit"a). In this edition, which was edited by Rabbi David Avitan, the sequence was rearranged and titles were given to each section.

Dedicated in loving memory of

Shalom Lahmany *a”h*

Beloved husband, father, and grandfather

The Labmany Family



In honor of

Jack, Yadin, and Keira

Miscellaneous

Imre Binah — A Collection of Riddles

The work Imre Bina is mainly a collection of riddles and “mind exercises” that the Ben Ish Hai wrote for the purpose of sharpening the reader’s mind and intellect. The book contains four chapters, entitled Oseh Peleh, Hidud B’divre Torah, Hidud B’milei D’alma, and Ketzat She’elot U’teshuvot Sichliyot.

In his introduction to Imre Binah, the Ben Ish Hai explains the nature and purpose of this unique book:

I will freely tell my fellow Jews: This is how I am since my youth — I enjoyed parables, the words of hachamim and their riddles, in order to become wiser from their logic, their minds, and their wisdom...

Therefore, for the benefit of children and yeshivah students, in order to sharpen their minds with Torah and wisdom, I have compiled from the hachamim of the Mishnah and Talmud, the great sea of the Babylonian Talmud, and from the wisdom of commentators, words that make the heart wise and sharpen the mind, and I have added with them derashot said in a hidden and mysterious manner that require one to delve into them in order to understand their clues. I also added some riddles in worldly matters and questions and answers in matters of intelligence.

In this introduction, the Ben Ish Hai refers to this work as the first volume, implying that there would be a second, but no subsequent volumes were published.

In his introduction to the first chapter of Imre Binah, the Ben Ish Hai explains the importance of sharpening the mind through riddles and parables, as explicitly mentioned by King Shelomo in the beginning of Mishlei (1:4-6):

לתת לפתאים ערמה לנער דעת ומזמה. ישמע חכם ויוסף לקח ונבון תחבלות יקנה.
להבין משל ומליצה דברי חכמים וחידותם.

“To provide the fools with shrewdness; youths with knowledge and cunning. The wise person shall hear and increase wisdom, and the intelligent one shall acquire skill — to understand parables and metaphors, the words of the sages and their riddles.”

One of the methods of teaching is to engage the students’ minds through interesting, exciting, and complex stories that develop their thinking skills. The Ben Ish Hai employed this technique very often during his public discourses, captivating his audience through intriguing stories and sharp riddles. These mental exercises not only piqued their interest and kept them attentive, but also honed their analytical skills and sharpened their minds.

The Ben Ish Hai describes how the prophets and great hachamim employed the strategy of analogy and riddles, noting the tendency of the sages “to hide within a parable and riddle, the secret of wisdom, and to conceal their words of understanding, to cover it from all men, to be revealed only to great scholars who have the ability to solve them.” One of the reasons for doing so, he writes, is the desire “to sharpen the minds of the students so that they will make great efforts in order to find solutions.” As an example of the sages’ use of parables, the Ben Ish Hai mentions the series of puzzling and mysterious stories told by Rabba Bar Bar Hannah in Bava Batra. He writes, “All these stories, and similar ones, can be understood by even a small child; thus one cannot understand them at face value and must conclude that they were said as a parable and riddle.”

The Ben Ish Hai adds that this method of presenting ideas through subtle allusions and parables is not unique to the Jewish people. “The wise men of the ancient nations, too, would traditionally talk with riddles and parables.” He justifies this method by observing that “many of the earlier Torah giants wrote midrashim in the style of riddles and called them “Midrash Peli’ah” (“The Baffling Midrash”), and most of these midrashim were brought in books of darshanim and everyone explains them based on their opinions.”

The first chapter, which is called Oseh Pele, contains, as the Ben Ish Hai describes, “words of Torah and some other matters presented in the form of riddles in order to sharpen minds.” The second chapter, Hidud B’divre Torah, presents “questions and answers in a logical manner and through the use of intelligence ... that I have collected from the sea of the Talmud ... and from these I would sharpen the minds of my family members, during and after the meal... I thought it would be wise to write it down to be remembered so that it could be available to the teachers to sharpen their students’ minds, or for peers to sharpen each other’s minds.” He adds that some of these riddles are intended for great Torah scholars, others for mediocre students, and some are suitable for young children.

We present here two examples of riddles from this chapter.

Question: One man said that a particular scribe wrote in one day 400 Torah scrolls, and was not lying. How is it possible not to lie, given that it is impossible to write 400 Torah scrolls in one day?

Answer: He meant that the scribe wrote the actual words, "400 Torah scrolls."

Question: It is prohibited to immerse a vessel in a mikveh on Shabbat and Yom Tov — but if the vessel is used for something, it can become permissible. How?

Answer: If the vessel is used to take water from the well or mikveh for the purpose of washing, then the vessel has been immersed and is therefore permissible for general use.

The third chapter, *Hidud B'milei D'alma*, contains general questions and answers to sharpen the minds of both young and old, each according to his level. "I would test them [his children] with riddles," the Ben Ish Hai writes, "either newly created ones or old ones that I had previously heard." The following is an example of a riddle from this chapter:

Question: Someone said to his son, "Bring me a food item that initially is two separate kinds that are attached to each other, both are edible, and each has its own color and flavor." The son brought it. What did the son bring?

Answer: He brought an egg that has a white part and a yolk. Both are edible, and both have their own color and flavor.

The fourth chapter, *Hikrei Lev*, includes eighteen inquiries into halachic subjects, difficult passages in Tanach, kabbalah, and other questions with answers.

The book concludes with two derashot that were delivered at the inauguration of the Bet Midrash Talmud Torah.

This unique work demonstrates the Ben Ish Hai's remarkable breadth and versatility as a scholar and teacher. Despite his intensive, round-the-clock involvement in the highest levels of Torah study day and night, he still found time to produce material that would engage the youth and sharpen their minds (just as he made a point of producing learning material for women in his book *Huke Hanashim*).

The book was first printed in Jerusalem in 1908. In 1931 it was reprinted as part of the book *Pri Eitz Hagan* written by the renowned kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Kassin zt"l. This volume also included answers to the Ben Ish Hai's questions authored by Rabbi Avraham Harari-Rafal and by Rabbi Kassin zt"l, towering scholars who felt that the subjects discussed in this work should be addressed and studied. *Imre Bina* was printed a third time by Kahl Publishing in 1961.

Mashal V'nimshal

This book includes parables collected from the Ben Ish Hai's writings by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mordechai Hazan, his close disciple who edited a significant number of his works. This book



Title page of sefer Mashal V'nimshal

was published on the heels of the publication of Nifla'im Ma'asecha (see below), a collection of stories from the Ben Ish Hai's writings. The success of Nifla'im Ma'asecha encouraged Rabbi Hazan to collect the Ben Ish Hai's insightful parables into a separate volume. Rabbi Hazan felt that these parables would be beneficial to all readers, but especially for the darshanim who could incorporate them into their public lectures as part of their effort to teach and inspire the people.

Mashal V'nimshal contains eighty-three parables with explanations, incorporating verses from Tanach and derashot of Hazal in developing the ideas.

The book was first published in Jerusalem in 1913. It was reprinted in 1982 by Siah Yisrael Publishing, and then again in 1988 by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem.

Among the analogies presented in this work is a story told by the Alshich to explain the Sages' comment that Jerusalem was destroyed as a result of the Jews' failure to study Torah. The Sages infer this theory from the verse, "Why was the land destroyed... Because they forsook My Torah" (Yirmiyahu 9:11-12). The Rishonim raise the question of why specifically the sin of neglecting Torah study rendered the Jews worthy of calamity, but not their violation of the cardinal sins of idol worship, adultery, and murder.

The Alshich answered this question by suggesting an analogy to an expert violinist who played pleasing music for the king, but also engaged in various kinds of criminal behavior outside the palace. The king heard of the musician's misconduct, but he refused to have him punished, as he wanted the violinist to continue playing his sweet music in the palace. One day the violinist slapped someone in the face, and that person responded by severing the violinist's hand with a sword, effectively terminating his musical career. At that point, once the musician was no longer able to serve the king, the king ordered that he be executed for his crimes. The musician's violent act

of slapping somebody thus resulted in his execution for his earlier offenses.

As long as the Jews studied Torah, the Alshich explained, their learning brought pleasure to G-d, and He therefore could not punish them for the grievous sins they had committed. But once they stopped learning Torah, He destroyed the Mikdash and drove them into exile on account of those severe sins.

Nifla'im Ma'asecha — Stories and Parables

The Ben Ish Hai incorporated into his derashot many stories with profound educational messages. These stories are a reflection of his remarkable creativity and rhetorical skill. Three years after his death, Rabbi Hazan — his close student who edited many of his writings — compiled 164 stories that the Ben Ish Hai had told in his derashot and which were subsequently published. Rabbi Hazan published these stories under the title, Nifla'im Ma'asecha.

In his preface, Rabbi Hazan explained the motivation behind producing this volume:

Since I saw that many people sought and showed great enthusiasm for the stories of our master zt"l ... I mustered



Title page of sefer Nifla'im Ma'asecha

the strength to collect stories from all his holy books... I am certain not only that this will book be bought by the masses and laymen, but also that darshanim, maggidim, and mohihim will bring this blessing into their homes and into their study halls, and this book will be a tremendous help in their holy work.

In many instances, Rabbi Hazan included the educational message that the Ben Ish Hai sought to convey through the story, "so that the readers will know and recognize why this story was written and what pleasure and benefit they can derive from it."

The stories in this volume were culled from the following works: Benayahu (15), Ben Yehoyada (29), Ben Ish Hai — Halachah (26), Ben Ish Hai — Derashot (13), Od Yoseph Hai (69 stories), and Hasde Avot (12 stories). They include original stories written by the Ben Ish Hai, stories from the writings of Hazal, stories from other literary sources, and commonly-known stories.

Nifla'im Ma'asecha was first printed in 1912 and enjoyed widespread popularity and a large circulation. The second edition, published by Bakel, included a large biographical section describing the Ben Ish Hai and his outstanding achievements. The work was reprinted in two volumes in 1986 by Yehoshua Ben David Salem. In 1988 a new edition was published by Siah Yisrael, which included vowels and illustrations, as well as thirty-eight of the Ben Ish Hai's stories that were not included in the earlier editions.

Ateret Tiferet U'pla'ot Rabot — Questions and Answers in Kabbalah and Aggadah

Ateret Tiferet consists eight different sections:

- Ateret Tiferet — A collection of eighty-three riddles, the majority of which deal with topics in kabbalah. For example, one passage in this section reads, "I was asked: Who testifies that hesed is under hochmah? And I answered: Its name does."

This refers to the fact that the numerical value of the word hochmah (73) is one number higher than that of hesed (72), and in kabbalistic teaching, the attribute of hesed is situated just below the attribute of hochmah. Thus, the word "hesed" itself — by virtue of its lower numerical value — alludes to its being under hochmah.

- Pela'ot Rabot — A compilation of 217 questions and answers. For example, the Ben Ish Hai cites a midrash commenting that in the verse, "This is the gate to Hashem — the righteous enter through it" (Tehillim 118:20), the "gate" refers to Torah. The Ben Ish Hai writes:

One student said — what is the source for this? He answered that the Aramaic translation of sha'ar (gate) is בַּבַּיִת... which is an acronym for Bereshit Bara Elokim... And since the Torah begins with those words, it is called a "gate," and regarding this gate it was said that the tzaddikim — specifically, the Jewish people — enter through it.

- She'elot U'teshuvot — Two responsa on matters relating to kabbalah.
- Shemot Hakodesh — 140 discussions about the holy Names of G-d.
- Derushim Al Derech Hasod — Essays on matters involving kabbalah.
- Hidud B'milei D'alma — Questions and answers on general matters intended for the purpose of sharpening the mind.
- Keter Malchut — A collection of prayers, customs, kavanot, advice, and segulot for a variety of different occasions and needs. This section discusses subjects like the intentions one should have while eating apples; advice for a woman who is having miscarriages; segulot for pregnancy; jobs that a wife should do for a husband, and more. In one passage, for example, the Ben Ish Hai writes, "When one eats

pomegranates he should think that the word rimonim has the numerical value of ratzon, notzer, tzanur, and makor. It is proper to eat pomegranates at the third meal of Shabbat and have this in mind.”

- Bakashot V'tikkunim — A collection of prayers for specific needs, such as a prayer for success and a good livelihood, and a prayer for a woman during pregnancy.

One of the prayers printed in Ateret Tiferet is a prayer which the Ben Ish Hai composed as a modified version of Ana B'koah Gedulat Yeminha, a prayer attributed to Rabbi Nehunya ben Hakaneh (one of the Tanna'im).

The book was edited from original, handwritten manuscripts in 1981 by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, and published by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem. A number of isolated compilations and short books were found among the Ben Ish Hai's manuscripts, including small pieces of paper containing notes on kabbalah. These papers were torn, crumpled, and worn — some intentionally and others due to the natural effect of time. Virtually all the papers were missing some sections, but it was nevertheless decided that they should be published so that the material that had survived could be preserved.

Additional Miscellaneous Books

- Nachalot Avot — A compilation of different hand-written documentation of the Ben Ish Hai was preserved from the Sasson family. Furthermore, Nachalot Avot has teshuvot compiled from the Hacham Yosef Haim, Rabbenu Yaakov, and Rabbenu David (Ahavat Shalom Publications — Rabbi Yaakov Hillel).
- Sifte Haim — Derashot on the four Shabbatot — Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem — Iyar 5770.
- Teshuvah Mi'Haim — Shabbat Teshuvah derashot — Rabbi Yehoshua Ben David Salem — Elul 5770.

- Shabbat Malketa — Derashot given on Shabbat Kallah (Shabbat before Shavuot)
- Meir Bat Ayin — Collection of halachot that are read on the hillula of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes — printed in Baghdad in 1865.
- Shirah Hadashah — Collection of songs in order of the hakafot of Simhat Torah — printed in Baghdad in 1874.



Biographical Sketches of Personalities

This chapter has been dedicated to

Naima Mathalon,

who is the great-granddaughter of the Ben Ish Hai. Naima was born in Baghdad and moved to Beirut in her late teens.

She moved to Switzerland, and then, in the mid-1950's, to Montreal, Canada, where she currently resides.

Her approach to life, tolerance, and hopefulness have always been tied into the main set of beliefs espoused by the Ben Ish Hai.

*Alvina Wesfield
and Solomon Mathalon
(Naima's children)*

HachamAvrahamAdes/HachamShimonAgasi/HachamEzraAttiah/
HachamHaimYosefDavidAzoulay(MaranHaHida)/HachamAharon
BenAzriel/HachamEzraReuvenDangoor/HachamMordechaiEliyahu
/HachamSalimanEliyahu/HachamYaakovShaulElyashar/Hacham
YehudaMosheFetaya/HachamEphraimMenasheHakohen/Hacham
EzraYehezkelEliyahuHakohen/HachamRahamimMelamedHakohen/
HachamBen-TzionMordechaiYehezkelHazar/HachamOvadiaHedaya
/HachamYaakovMosheHillel/HachamSassonKaduri/Hacham
YitzhakKaduri/HachamBen-TzionAvrahamKuenka/Hacham
YitzhakLuria(Arizal)/HachamEliyahuSalimanMani/HachamHaim
HizkiahMedini(SedeiHemed)/HachamBen-TzionMutzafi/Hacham
SalimanMutzafi/HachamHaimFalagi(Habif)/HachamDavidPapo
/HachamShalomMizrahiShar'aby(Rashash)/HachamYehoshua
Sharbani/HachamBenayahuShmueli/HachamYaakovHaimSofer
(KafHahaim)/HachamAbdallahSomech/HachamYehudaTzadkah
/HagaonRabbiYaakovDovidWilovsky/HachamOvadiaYosef

Hacham Avraham Ades zt"l (1857-1925): Born in Aleppo, Syria, Hacham Avraham moved to Jerusalem in 1895 and was appointed to city's Sephardic bet din. He also co-founded the kabbalist yeshivah Rehovot Hanahar in Jerusalem's Bukharan quarter. He taught many future Torah giants, including Hacham Ezra Attiah.

Hacham Shimon Agasi zt"l (1851-1914): Hacham Shimon was born in Baghdad and learned in Midrash Bet Zilka. Later, he studied under Hacham Yitzhak Mordechai Sasson, one of the great hachamim of Baghdad. He taught numerous students who emerged as leading scholars, including Hacham Eliyahu Hava, Hacham Yehoshua Moshe (who became head of the Yeshivat Oleh Bavel), Hacham Yaakov Mutzafi, Hacham Salaman Hugi Abuddi, and other illustrious Torah giants.

Hacham Ezra Attiah zt"l (1887-1970): Hacham Ezra was born in Aleppo, Syria, but when he was ten years old his family immigrated to Eretz Yisrael. In Jerusalem, he became one of the foremost students of Hacham Avraham Ades, one of the greatest kabbalists at that time. During World War I, Hacham Ezra moved to Cairo, where he established Yeshivat Ahavah V'ahvah and Kollel Keter Torah, and raised the standard of Torah knowledge and practice in the Cairo community. In 1923 he returned to Jerusalem to lecture in Yeshivat Porat Yosef, and two years later he was named the prestigious institution's rosh yeshivah, a position he held for forty-five years.

Hacham Haim Yosef David Azoulay zt"l ("Hida," 1724-1806): Born in Jerusalem to a prominent family of scholars, Hacham Haim Yosef David was delivering Torah lectures already at the age of thirteen, and wrote his first book at the age of sixteen. He was among the outstanding students of the renowned Yeshivat Bet-El in Jerusalem, and later served as an emissary for the communities of Eretz Yisrael, traveling throughout the Jewish world to raise funds for the struggling Jews of the Holy Land. Over the course of his lifetime, Hacham Haim Yosef David authored over eighty-five scholarly works, spanning the spectrum of the fields of Torah scholarship. Sixty of these texts

have been published, while the others have been lost. He is widely recognized as one of the pre-eminent Torah sages of the 17th-18th centuries.

Hacham Aharon Ben Azriel zt"l (1819-1879): Hacham Aharon served as the Av Bet Din (chief rabbinic judge) for Jerusalem's Sephardic community, and later was appointed rosh yeshivah of the esteemed Yeshivat Bet-El. He was the son-in-law of Hacham Eliezer Papo (1785-1826), author of the famous work *Pele Yoetz*, and he authored several important works, including the well-known work *Kapei Aharon*.¹

Hacham Ezra Reuven Dangoor zt"l (1848-1930): Hacham Ezra Reuven was born in Baghdad and attended Yeshiva Bet Zilka under the guidance of Rabbi Abdallah Somech. He emerged as one of the great scholars of Baghdad, and served as the city's Chief Rabbi. In 1904 he established a printing press that produced siddurim, humashim, and other religious texts for the Jewish community. His work *Adi Zahav* was published posthumously in 1987.

Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l (1929-2010): Hacham Mordechai was born in Jerusalem to the renowned Baghdadi kabbalist, Rabbi Saliman Eliyahu, whose wife was a relative of the Ben Ish Hai, and they raised him in accordance with the Ben Ish Hai's teachings and customs. He studied under some of the great sages of his time, including Hacham Ezra Attiah and Hacham Sadka Hussin, and he later learned in the yeshivah of Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim zt"l. At the age of twenty-eight, Hacham Mordechai became the youngest man ever to serve as a rabbinic judge in Israel, and he served as Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel from 1983-1993. Hacham Mordechai is credited with demonstrating how the traditions and halachic rulings of the Ben Ish Hai can be applied to modern-day realities and issues.²

1. Hachme Hamizrah pp. 186-188.

2. Community Magazine, Tammuz — Av 5770/ July 2010, pp. 34-40.

Hacham Saliman Eliyahu zt"l (1872-1940): Hacham Saliman was born in Baghdad and showed signs of brilliance at a very young age. His father wanted him to study in the University of Oxford in London, but Hacham Saliman chose instead to remain in Baghdad and learn Torah at the prestigious Midrash Bet Zilka. He maintained a close relationship with the Ben Ish Hai, who admired his knowledge and understanding of kabbalah. Hacham Saliman later moved to Jerusalem, where he was recognized as the city's greatest scholar of kabbalah. He authored a famous work entitled *Kerem Shelomo*, among other volumes, and was the father of Hacham Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l.³

Hacham Yaakov Shaul Elyashar zt"l ("Yisa Berachah," 1817-1906): Hacham Yaakov Shaul was raised by his stepfather, Rabbi Binyamin Mordechai Navon (1788-1852), author of *Bnei Binyamin*⁴ and head of the rabbinic court in Jerusalem. He was appointed as a member in the Sephardic bet din of Jerusalem in 1853, and in 1869 he was named head of the bet din. In 1893 he was named Hacham Bashi — Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire, a position he held until 1904. Hacham Yaakov Shaul worked tirelessly on behalf of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael, frequently traveling abroad on various missions. Hacham Yaakov Shaul authored a large corpus of Torah literature covering all areas of Torah. His works include *Simlah L'ish*, *Ma'aseh Ish*, *Shoel Ish*, and *Ish Emunim*.

Hacham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya zt"l (1859-1942): Hacham Fetaya learned in Midrash Bet Zilka in Baghdad under Hacham Shimon Agasi and Hacham Abdallah Somech, and Hacham Abdallah granted him rabbinic ordination when he was just seventeen years old. He was recognized as one of the great sages of Baghdad at that time,

3. *Orhot Tzaddikim* (vol. 3, p. 309).

4. This work was actually published by Hacham Yaakov Shaul, after Rabbi Binyamin Mordechai's death. In the introduction, Hacham Yaakov Shaul expresses his deep sense of gratitude to his stepfather for raising and educating him.

and he authored numerous works, including several commentaries to the Zohar and *Etz Haim*, as well as *Minhat Yehuda*, in which he documented his experiences with earth-bound souls and exorcisms.

Hacham Ephraim Menashe Hakohen zt"l (1885-1957): Hacham Ephraim Menashe was born in Baghdad and as a young boy established an especially close relationship with the Ben Ish Hai, who invited him to come visit him at any time. He studied in Midrash Bet Zilka, and in 1924 he moved to Jerusalem and enrolled in Yeshivat Porat Yosef, where he studied with the Hacham Haim Shaul Dweck Hakohen.

Hacham Ezra Yehezkel Eliyahu Hakohen zt"l (1824-1924): A student of Hacham Abdallah Somech and son-in-law of Hacham Eliyahu Mani, Hacham Ezra Yehezkel was one of the great Torah leaders in Baghdad during the time of the Ben Ish Hai, and a member of the city's rabbinic court. He led the Adonenu Yehezkel Hanavi Kollel until his death at the age of one hundred.⁵

Hacham Rahamim Melamed Hakohen zt"l (1865-1932): Hacham Rahamim was the rabbi of the Jewish community of Shiraz, Iran, and hailed from a family that produced eight generations of Torah teachers and lecturers, accounting for the name "Melamed" ("teacher").⁶ He was a brilliant speaker who had committed much of Torah to memory and cited a dazzling array of sources as he spoke. Hacham Rahamim was instrumental in leading the Jewish community of Shiraz through a deadly pogrom in 1910. He authored several works, the most famous being his *Kisei Rahamim*.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Mordechai Yehezkel Hazan zt"l (1876-1952): Hacham Ben-Tzion was one of the most prominent students of the Ben Ish Hai, and established a uniquely close relationship with him, to the point where he was referred to as נאמן ביתו — "the faithful

5. *Ketz Hayamin* p. 111.

6. Introduction to Hacham Rahamim's *Zichron Rahamim*.

one of his home." He was appointed by the Ben Ish Hai to establish and run Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Jerusalem, which quickly emerged as a leading center of Torah learning, and remains so even today. Hacham Ben-Tzion preserved and published many of the Ben Ish Hai's manuscripts, as well as collections of stories and teachings of his great teacher. It is largely to his credit that so much of the Ben Ish Hai's material has been made available in print.

Hacham Ovadia Hedaya zt"l (1890-1969): Hacham Ovadia was born in Aleppo, Syria, but his family immigrated to Jerusalem when he was five years old. He attended Talmud Torah Doresh Tzion, and then Yeshivat Hesed Abraham and Yeshivat Tiferet Yerushalayim. He earned a reputation as an accomplished scholar with an extraordinary memory, and established close relationships with leading Sephardic rabbinic figures in Jerusalem such as Hacham Ben-Tzion Kuenka and Hacham Moshe Ibn Sasson. After spending the years of World War I in Syria, he returned to Jerusalem and was soon appointed as a judge in the Sephardic bet din. Several years later, he was appointed rosh mesivta in Yeshivat Porat Yosef. He later served as Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikva, and then as a judge on the Senior Appeal bet din in Jerusalem. He exerted tireless efforts to revitalize the study of kabbalah which had declined with the destruction of Yeshivat Bet-El and Yeshivat Porat Yosef in 1948. Hacham Ovadia wrote a work of responsa called Yaskil Avdi.

Hacham Yaakov Moshe Hillel (contemporary): A scion of a distinguished Baghdadi rabbinic family, Hacham Yaakov Moshe serves as rosh yeshivah of the prestigious Yeshivat Hevrat Ahavat Shalom in Jerusalem. He has authored dozens of books and hundreds of essays, and is an exceptionally inspiring speaker. Hacham Yaakov Moshe is acknowledged as one of the greatest contemporary scholars of kabbalah.

Hacham Sasson Kaduri zt"l (1890-1971): Hacham Sasson was born in Baghdad and attended the famed Midrash Bet Zilka. He studied

under the great scholars of Bavel, but mainly under Rabbi Abdallah Somech. In 1927 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Baghdad.⁷

Hacham Yitzhak Kaduri zt"l (1894-2006): Hacham Yitzhak was born in Baghdad, where he learned in the Midrash Bet Zilka under Hacham Yehuda Fetaya and the Kaf HaHaim. He also enjoyed a close relationship with the Ben Ish Hai, and when he was a young boy, the Ben Ish Hai often gave him the job of bringing him the books that he needed from the shelves in the bet midrash. According to legend, the Ben Ish Hai blessed him as a young boy that he should live a long life, and, indeed, he lived to the age of 112. Hacham Yitzhak moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1911, and for most of his life, he worked as a bookbinder. He read through every book brought to him for binding, committing most of them to memory. Eventually, he became known as an expert in the writings of the Arizal and the kavanot of Rabbi Shalom Shar'aby (Rashash), which he knew practically by heart.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Avraham Kuenka zt"l (1867-1936): Born and raised in Jerusalem, Hacham Ben-Tzion was the founding publisher of the Hame'asef newspaper, rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Tiferet Yerushalayim, and a member of the Sephardic bet din in Jerusalem. He also published several important Torah works.⁸

Hacham Yitzhak Luria zt"l ("Arizal," 1534-1572): Rabbi Yitzhak, better known as "the Arizal" or "the Ari Hakadosh," is widely recognized as the greatest scholar of kabbalah. Already as a teenager he spent years studying and mastering the Zohar and living in seclusion to meditate and achieve lofty levels of holiness. It is reported that the prophet Eliyahu revealed himself to the Arizal to teach him the most profound secrets of the kabbalah. He settled in Safed where he taught a select group of students, the most prominent of whom was Rav Haim Vital. Rav Haim and the other disciples collected their notes from the

7. Arze Halevanon (vol. 4, p. 2261).

8. Arze Halevanon (vol. 1, p. 355).

Arizal's lectures, from which numerous works were produced, most prominently the eight-volume *Etz Haim*, which became a standard text of kabbalistic study.

Hacham Eliyahu Saliman Mani zt"l (1824-1899): Hacham Eliyahu was born in Baghdad and learned in Midrash Bet Zilka. At the age of thirty-two, he moved to Hebron where he served as leading rabbi of the town's Jewish community, and established a yeshivah, hostel, and synagogue. He was a close colleague of the Ben Ish Hai and corresponded with him frequently.

Hacham Haim Hizkiyahu Medini zt"l ("Sedei Hemed," 1834-1905): Born in Jerusalem, Hacham Haim Hizkiah moved to Istanbul after his father's passing in 1853. It was there that he published his first work, *Michtav Me'Hizkiyahu*, and, later, the work for which he is best known — the legendary Talmudic encyclopedia, *Sedei Hemed*. He later served as rabbi in Karsobazar, Crimea, and in 1899, at the age of sixty-five, he settled in Hebron. Soon after his arrival in Hebron, he was appointed as the city's Chief Rabbi, and he established there a yeshivah named *Yeshivat Sedei Hemed*.

Hacham Ben-Tzion Mutzafi (contemporary): Son of the famed kabbalist Rabbi Saliman Mutzafi from Baghdad, Hacham Ben-Tzion studied in *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* and now serves as rosh yeshivah of *Yeshivat Bnei Tzion* in Jerusalem. He is renowned as a halachic authority, kabbalist, and orator, and delivers dynamic speeches across Israel.

Hacham Saliman Mutzafi zt"l (1900-1975): A scion of an illustrious scholarly family that settled in Baghdad after the expulsion from Spain, Hacham Saliman was born and raised in Baghdad, and relocated in Jerusalem in 1934. He was an accomplished scholar of kabbalah, and it has been said that the power of his prayers saved the Jewish people on numerous occasions. Hacham Saliman often said that the greatest influence upon him as a child was that of the Ben Ish Hai, whose lectures he attended every Shabbat.

Hacham Haim Falagi zt"l ("Habif," 1788-1868): Hacham Haim was born in Izmir, Turkey, and served as the city's Chief Rabbi for many years. He wrote his first sefer when he was sixteen, and he completed his last sefer a day before he died. Hacham Haim also served as rosh yeshivah of *Yeshivat Bet Yaakov Rebbi*. At the age of sixty-eight, he received the royal title of "Nissan" from Sultan Abdul Majid, rendering his rulings legally binding upon the Jews of Izmir.

Hacham David Papo zt"l (1848-1927): Born in Istanbul, Hacham David served in several prominent rabbinic posts in Turkey before moving to Baghdad in 1899, becoming one of the city's leading rabbis. He later moved to Jerusalem and was immediately appointed as one of the official rabbinic leaders of the city's Sephardic community. Hacham David authored a book of derashot entitled *Bnei Meir*, and a work of halachic responsa, *Pene David*.⁹

Hacham Shalom Mizrahi Shar'aby zt"l ("Rashash," 1720-1777¹⁰): Born in the city of Shar'ab, Yemen, Hacham Shalom is widely recognized as one of the greatest kabbalists that ever lived. He moved to Jerusalem where he studied in the famous *Yeshivat Bet-El*, under the renowned sage Rabbi Gedalyah Hayun. Though he humbly tried to conceal his extraordinary knowledge, he was eventually recognized as one of the yeshivah's most outstanding students, and later he was named the rosh yeshivah, a position in which he served for thirty years, until his death. Many of his students became leading rabbis and scholars, including Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulay, Rabbi Yom Tov Elgasy, Rabbi Haim de la Roza, and Rabbi Gershon of Kitov.

Hacham Yehoshua Sharbani zt"l (1870-1973): A disciple of the Ben Ish Hai, Hacham Yehoshua was recognized as one of the great kabbalists in Jerusalem. He studied at *Midrash Bet Zilka* in Baghdad, and enjoyed a close relationship with the Ben Ish Hai, with whom he

9. *Ohale Shem* p. 496.

10. According to other accounts, the Rashash died in 1782.

studied personally. Upon resettling in Jerusalem, Hacham Yehoshua studied kabbalah in Yeshivat Rehovot Hanahar under Hacham Haim Shaul Dweck Hakohen, and later in the Yeshivat Oz V'Hadar. He co-founded Yeshivat Shoshanim L'David together with fellow Iraqi immigrants Hacham Yaakov Haim Sofer and Hacham Yehezkel Ezra Halevi. In his later years, he moved to the Baka neighborhood in Jerusalem and served as the community's rabbi. He developed a close friendship with the Baba Sali, who was his neighbor for a brief period of time.

Hacham Benayahu Shmueli (contemporary): A student of the great kabbalist Rabbi Mordechai Sharabi, whom Hacham Benayahu succeeded as Rosh Yeshivat Nahar Shalom in Jerusalem.

Hacham Yaakov Haim Sofer zt"l ("Kaf HaHaim," 1870-1939): Hacham Yaakov Haim was born in Baghdad and studied under the Ben Ish Hai and Rabbi Abdallah Somech. In 1904 he traveled to Eretz Yisrael and then decided to settle there permanently. He first studied in Yeshivat Bet-El, and in 1909 he moved to the newly-founded Yeshivat Shoshanim L'David, where he wrote most of his books. Hacham Yaakov Haim is best known from his work Kaf HaHaim, a commentary to the Shulhan Aruch that combines halachic rulings and traditions of kabbalah.

Hacham Abdallah Somech zt"l (1813-1889): Hacham Abdallah originally worked as a merchant in Baghdad, but, seeing the dearth of Torah learning in Iraq, he opened a small bet midrash and taught a group of students without pay. He eventually became the rosh yeshivah of Yeshivat Midrash Abu Menashe, which would later expand and become the famed Midrash Bet Zilka. Hacham Abdallah was one of the greatest halachic scholars of his time. He studied under Hacham Moshe Haim, the Ben Ish Hai's grandfather, and, interestingly enough, later became one of the Ben Ish Hai's primary mentors. Despite being his teacher, Hacham Abdallah showed great respect and reverence to the Ben Ish Hai, and attended his weekly lectures on Shabbat. He authored an important work of halachah entitled Zivhe Tzedek.

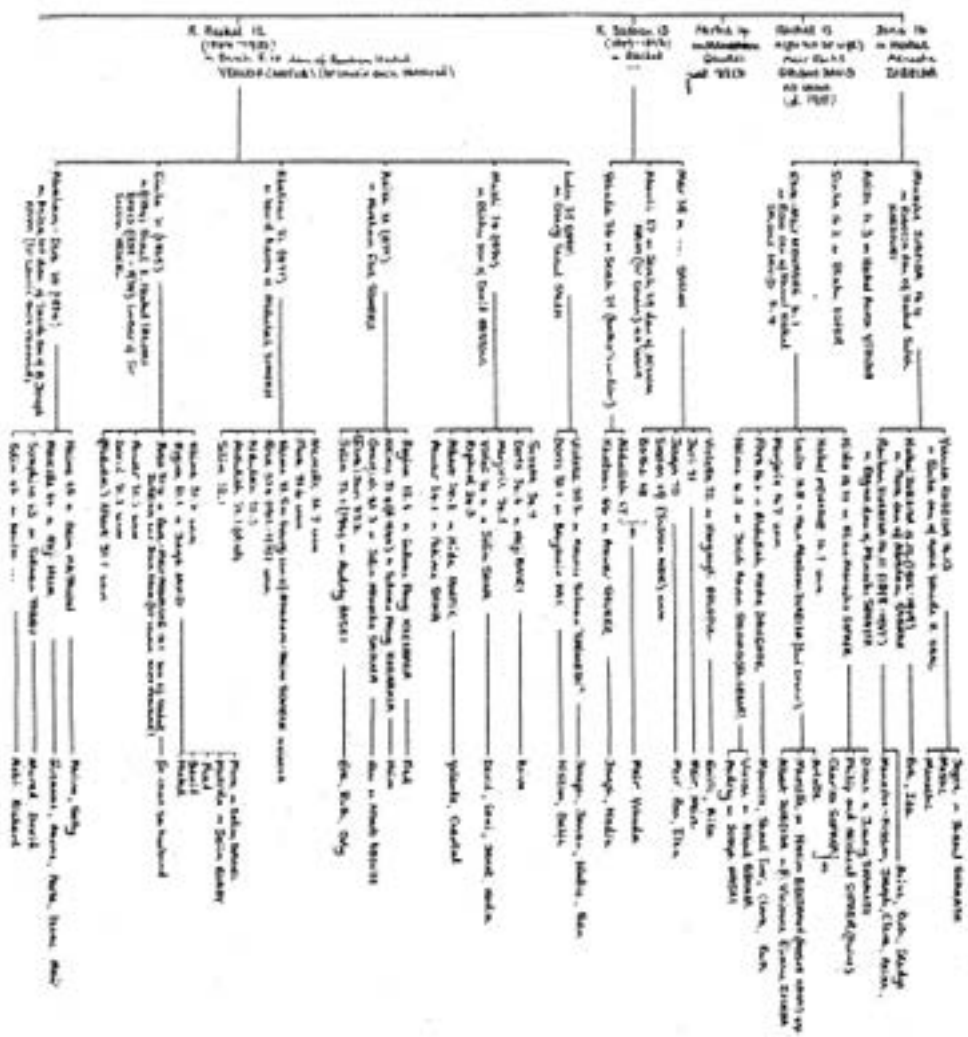
Hacham Yehuda Tzadkah zt"l (1908-1991): Hacham Yehuda, a great-nephew of the Ben Ish Hai, was born in Jerusalem and enrolled in Yeshivat Porat Yosef at the age of twelve. He developed a close relationship with Rabbi Yaakov Ades and Rabbi Ezra Attiah, and later became rosh yeshivah of Porat Yosef. He authored several works, including the well-known Kol Yehuda commentary to the Torah.

Hagaon Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky zt"l ("Ridbaz," 1845-1913): Rabbi Wilovsky was a renowned rabbi, Talmudic commentator and educator, who held rabbinic posts in Izvolin, Bobruisk, and Vilna, before becoming Chief Rabbi of Slutsk in 1890. After a brief, unsuccessful stint as rabbi of the Russian-American congregations in Chicago, he moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1905 and lived in Safed, where he founded Yeshivat Torat Eretz Israel. He was known by the name "Ridbaz," an acronym for his name "Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Ben Zev."

Hacham Ovadia Yosef (contemporary): Hacham Ovadia is recognized as one of the greatest halachic authorities in the world today, particularly among Sephardic communities. Born in Basra, Iraq, Hacham Ovadia moved to Jerusalem with his family when he was four years old. At the age of ten, he enrolled in Yeshivat Porat Yosef and was acknowledged as a rare prodigy, combining extraordinary diligence, quick comprehension, and a phenomenal memory. He authored his first Torah essays at the age of seventeen, received rabbinic ordination at the age of nineteen, and was appointed a rabbinic judge at the age of twenty-three. In 1947 Hacham Ovadia moved to Cairo to lead Yeshivat Ahava V'ahvah and the city's bet din. After three years, he returned to Israel and served in several distinguished positions, including Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Tel-Aviv, before being named Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel in 1973. He has authored dozens of scholarly halachic works which reflect his unparalleled breadth of Torah knowledge. These books are generally considered the foundation of contemporary Sephardic halachah.

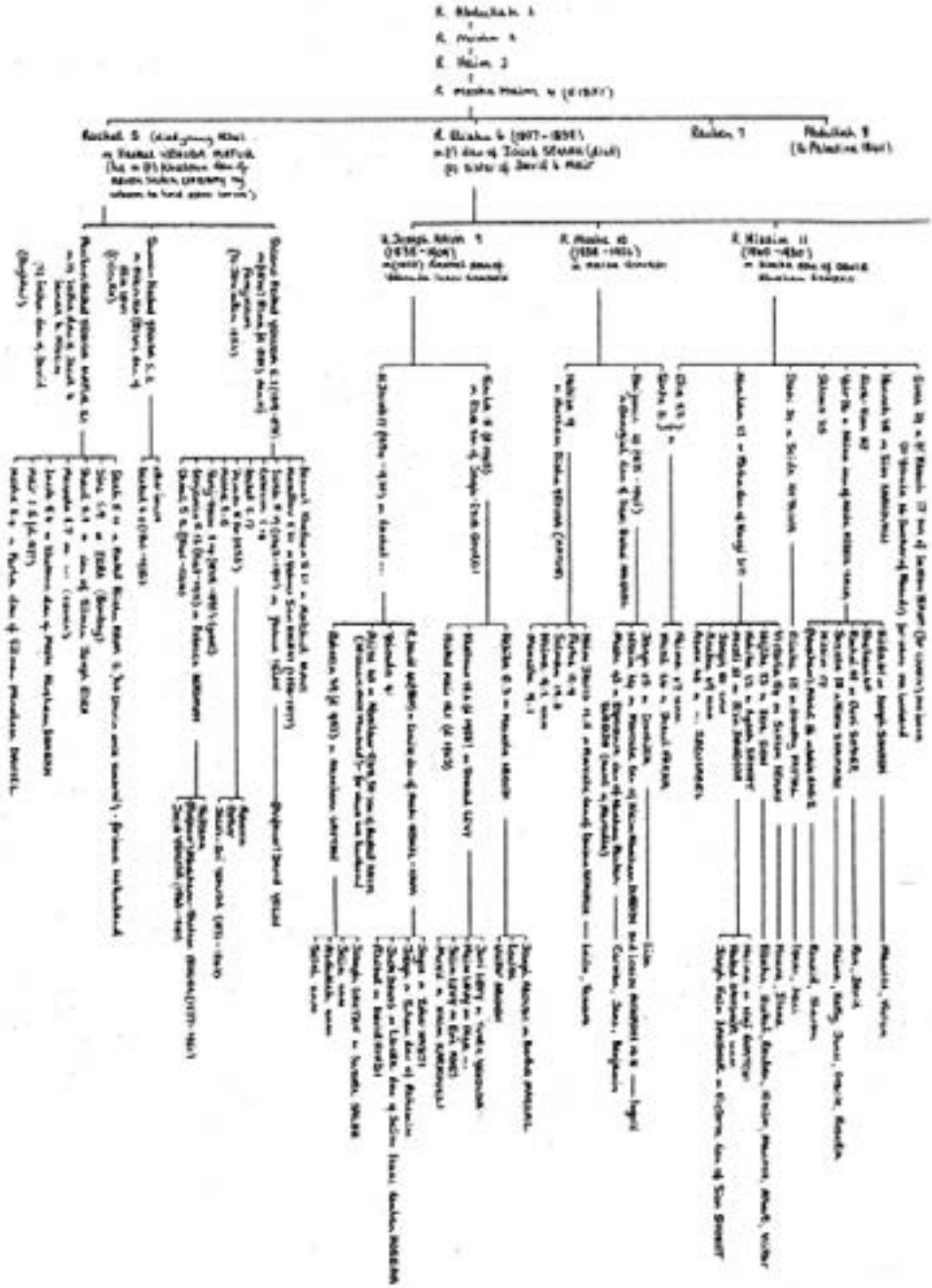
בית אלחכם - ענף עץ אבות

Hakham Moshe Haim Family Tree 'Beit al-Hakham'



Based on information supplied by Marcelle Haim and Jack David with additions

Chart prepared by Lydia Collins



העץ המשפחתי נוצר על ידי החוקרת ד"ר אילנה קוליקט מאוניברסיטת
 תל אביב. החוקרת בחקר משפחות ספרדיות בארצות
 בעבודתה היא הסתמכה על בני משפחת ה"ח"ת.

In honor of our son
Yehuda Azoulay
May Hashem give you the strength
to continue all your wonderful
goals within your institute —
the Sephardic Legacy Series.

Love,
Your Parents
Joe e' Esther Azoulay



In honor of
Yehuda Azoulay
Your works are dynamic, informative,
and truly inspirational.

Keep up the great work!
Joe Dwek

Aggadah: homiletic and non-legalistic exegetical texts in classical torah literature, particularly as recorded in the talmud and midrash. These passages combine folklore, historical anecdotes, moral exhortations, and practical advice regarding a wide variety of areas of life.

Agunah: "anchored" or "chained" woman, used in reference to a jewish woman who is separated from her husband but unable to remarry because she has not obtained a bill of divorce from her husband

Aharonim: "later ones," referring to torah scholars and poskim who lived after the era of the rishonim.

Ahavat Yisrael: love of fellow jews

Al Hanissim: paragraph inserted in the prayer service and grace after meals on hanukah and purim

Al Kiddush Hashem: term used to describe death for the glorification of g-d's name, such as when one surrenders his life to avoid abrogating his faith

Amidah: "standing," referring to the daily shemoneh esrei prayer, which must be recited while standing in place

Amora'im: torah scholars who lived during the two centuries following the era of the tanna'im and finalized the discussions known today as the gemara

Amud Ha'shahar: first morning light

Anivut: humility
Arbit: daily nighttime prayer
Aron Kodesh: ark in the synagogue where the torah scrolls are kept
Aseret Hadibrot: hebrew term for the ten commandments
Ashkenazim: jews who originate from the northern and eastern regions of europe and russia
Av Bet Din: head of a rabbinic court
Averah (averot): sin(s)
Avinu: "our father."
Avodah: "service," usually referring to the service of g-d
Baal Tzedakah: charitable person
Baalei Batim: laymen
Baalei Teshuvah: jews who have returned to religious observance
Bahur: unmarried student
Baruch Hashem: "blessed is g-d," or "thank g-d."
Bat Kol: heavenly voice
Batei Kenesiyot: synagogues
Battim: boxes of tefillin
Bavel: babylonia, modern-day iraq
Bechor: firstborn child
Be'ezrat Hashem: "g-d willing."
Ben Torah: student of torah, used colloquially to refer to a person seriously devoted to torah learning and religious observance
Berachah: blessing
Bereshit Bara Elokim: the first three words of the bible ("in the beginning g-d created")
Brit Milah: circumcision
Bet Din: rabbinic court
Bet Din Hagadol: highest rabbinic court
Bet Haknesset: synagogue

Bet Hamidrash: torah study room
Bet Hamikdash: the holy temple
Bet Yosef: seminal halachic work by rabbi yosef karo, author of the shulhan aruch
Bikur Holim: visiting and aiding an ill patient
Bimah: elevated area or platform in a synagogue where one stands when conducting the public torah reading or leading the prayer service, often called "tevah" in sephardic communities
Birkat Hahamah: special blessing recited over the sun when it completes its cycle every 28 years, returning to its position when the world was created.
Birkat Hamazon: blessing after meals
Bitahon: trust in g-d
Blatt: page of gemara
Daf/dapim: page/s
Darshan: lecturer, specifically one who delivers sermons
Dayan(im): judge(s)
Derashot: sermons
Din Torah: case tried before a rabbinic court
Dinei Mamonot: jewish monetary law
Divre Torah: talks on topics relating to a section (parashah) of the torah, typically the weekly torah portion
En Yaakov: compilation of aggadic material in the talmud with commentaries, produced by rabbi yaakov ibn haviv (1460-1516) and (after his death) by his son, rabbi levi ibn haviv 1480-1545)
Emunah: faith
Emunat Hachamim: trust in the authority of the torah sages
Eretz Yisrael: land of israel
Eshet Hayil: "woman of valor," based on mishlei 31:10, a common description for a pious jewish woman
Esther Hamalkah: queen esther

Etrog: citron fruit, which is among the four species used for the special ritual on the holiday of sukkot

Eved Hashem: devoted servant of g-d

Even Ha'ezer: section of the shulhan aruch halachic codes dealing with the laws of marriage, divorce, and related issues

Gabbai (gabbaim): person who oversees the functioning of the synagogue services, sometimes an assistant to the rabbi.

Gadol: "great," the term often used in reference to the leading torah sages of the generation

Gadol B'torah: torah giant

Galut: exile

Gaon (geonim): title given to the leaders of the two great rabbinic colleges of sura and pumbedita, babylonia during the early medieval period, who were generally considered the spiritual leaders of world jewry

Gedolei Yisrael: the religious leaders of israel

Gemara: word used interchangeably with "talmud."

Gematria: system of assigning a numerical value to each letter of the hebrew alphabet

Gemilut Hasadim: acts of kindness

Get: halachic bill of divorce that is given from the husband to the wife, thereby effectuating the divorce

Geulah: redemption

Goyim: non-jews

Hacham(im): rabbi(s)

Hacham Bashi: turkish translation of "chief rabbi," and title of the official rabbinic leader of turkish jewry

Haftarah: congregational reading from the nevi'im ("prophets") on shabbat and festivals

Hakadosh: "holy one," a term added to the names of certain rabbis to emphasize their unique stature of piety

Hakdamah: introduction

Halachah: jewish law

Halachic: relating to halachah

Hallah (hallot): special bread customarily eaten on shabbat

Hamekubal: "the kabbalist," often used as an honorific before the name of a distinguished scholar of kabbalah

Hametz: leavened products that may not be eaten throughout the holiday of pesah

Har Hazetim: mount of olives in eastern jerusalem, the site of a large, historic jewish cemetery

Hashem: "the name," the term commonly used in reference to g-d

Hashem Yitbarach: "g-d, may his name be blessed."

Haskamah: letter of approbation for one's work that authors customarily receive from distinguished scholars to express approval of their book

Hatan: groom

Havdalah: blessing recited at the conclusion of shabbat and holidays

Havruta: study partner

Hazal: acronym representing the phrase, "hachamenu zichronam livrachah" — "our sages of blessed memory," referring to the sages of the talmud

Hazzan: cantor

Hechal: ark in the synagogue (used synonymously with "aron kodesh")

Heder: elementary school for torah study

Hefsek: forbidden interruption, such as in the middle of a blessing or prayer

Hesed: loving kindness

Hesed Shel Emet: "true kindness," referring to kindness shown to a deceased person by tending to the burial needs

Hesped (hespedim): eulogy (eulogies)

Hevra Kadisha: jewish burial society

Hiddushim: original torah insights

Hillul Hashem: defaming g-d

Hillula: anniversary of a hacham's passing

Hinuch: education

Hok l'yisrael: regimented study program followed by many jews around the world, based on the teachings of the arizal, whereby a person studies each day particular sections of the bible, talmud, and kabbalah

Hoshen Mishpat: section of the shulhan aruch code of law dealing with the laws of finance, financial responsibility, damages (personal and financial), and the rules of the bet din

Humash: pentateuch

Idra Rabbah/Idra Zuttah: famous works of kabbalah.

Kabbalah: field of study consisting of the esoteric and mystical aspects of the torah

Kaddish: prayer recited several times during the daily service declaring the greatness and sanctity of g-d

Kallah: bride

Kashrut: term used in reference to the jewish dietary laws

Kavanot: intentions, especially thoughts of kabbalistic concepts that scholars of kabbalah contemplate during prayer and performance of mitzvot

Kavod: respect

Kedushah: sanctity; the term also refers to one of the most important parts of the prayer service, recited during the hazzan's repetition of the amidah prayer

Kehillah: congregation, or community

Kever: grave

Ke'zayit: talmudic unit of volume approximately equal to the size of an average olive

Kiddush: blessing recited over wine or grape juice in honor of shabbat and holidays

Klal Yisrael: term commonly used when speaking of the entire jewish nation

Kol Nidre: aramaic declaration that begins the yom kippur service in the synagogue on yom kippur eve

Kollel: yeshivah program for married men

Kotel: the western wall in jerusalem's old city, which is part of the ancient wall that surrounded the temple mount and considered a holy site

Lashon Hara: "evil speech," such as gossip and slander

Lashon Kodesh: "holy language," a term used in reference to hebrew

Maggid: lecturer or preacher

Maggid Shiur: rabbi who delivers advanced talmud lectures in a yeshivah

Malach(im): angel(s)

Malbish Arumim: giving clothes to the needy

Masechet(ot): tractate of gemara

Mashiah: messiah

Matzah: cracker-like flatbread made of white flour and water which is eaten in place of ordinary bread on pesah, when leavened products are forbidden

Me'arat Hamachpela: tomb of the patriarchs in the ancient city of hebron, a holy site for both jews and muslims

Mefarshim: commentators

Megillah: scroll, often used specifically in reference to the book of esther

Mekubal (mekubalim): kabbalist(s)

Melamed (melamdin): schoolteacher(s)

Mesirut Nefesh: self-sacrifice

Mezuzah (mezuzot): scroll containing certain segments of the bible that must be affixed to the doorposts in one's home

Middot: character traits

Midrash: term used in reference to the homiletic literature of hazal, or to a particular passage therein

Mikveh (mikvaot): ritual bathhouse(s)

Minhag (minhagim): custom(s)

Minhah: afternoon prayer service

Minyan: quorum of ten jewish men required for certain parts of the prayer service

Mishnah: halachic text that constitutes the earliest transcription of the oral torah, which serves as the basis of the talmud

Mitzvah (mitzvot): religious command(s), sometimes used to refer to any good deed.

Mohar Habetulot: assisting poor brides

Mohel: person who performs circumcision

Motza'ei Shabbat: saturday night

Muktzeh: "set aside," referring to certain objects that may not be moved on shabbat or holidays.

Mussaf: special prayer added to the prayer service on shabbat and holidays.

Mussar: works or discourses focusing on religious admonition, urging the readers/listeners to improve themselves spiritually

Neshamah: soul

Niftar: a deceased person

Nigleh: "revealed" sections of the torah, such as talmud and halachah, as opposed to kabbalah

Nisim: miracles

Nistar: "concealed" areas of the torah, referring to esoteric, kabbalistic material

Olam Haba: world to come

Orah Haim: section of the shulhan aruch halachic code dealing with the laws of prayer and synagogue, shabbat, and holidays

Parashah (or Parashat Hashavuah): weekly torah reading

Parnassah: livelihood

Parochet: curtain that hangs on the front of the aron kodesh in the synagogue.

Pasuk: verse from the bible

Pe'at Hashulhan: halachic work by rabbi yisrael ben shmuel ashkenazi of shklov (1770-1839), focusing on the laws that apply only in the land of israel

Perushim: group of disciples of the vilna gaon (rabbi eliyahu of vilna, 1720-1797) who left lithuania toward the beginning of the 19th century to settle in the holy land.

Pidyon Haben: obligatory "redemption" of a firstborn son by paying a sum of money to a kohen

Pidyon Nefesh: redemption of the soul

Pikuah Nefesh: halachic principle suspending most torah laws when this is necessary to save human life

Posek (poskim): halachic authority (authorities)

Rabbanim: rabbis

Rabbanit: rabbi's wife

Rabbenu: "our rabbi," a term used affectionately in reference to a rabbi by his students, congregants or adherents

Resh Galuta: official leadership position in the babylonian jewish community.

Responsa (responsum): english term for "she'elot u'teshuvot," used in reference to a book containing a collection of a rabbi's written responses to halachic queries

Ribbono Shel Olam: "master of the world," a poetic reference to g-d

Rishon l'tzion: "the first of tzion" (based on yeshayahu 41:27), the title of the position of sephardic chief rabbi from 1665 until the early 20th century

Rishonim: "the first ones," referring to the medieval halachic scholars upon whose works and rulings the halachic system is based

Rosh Hamekubalim: "leading kabbalist."

Rosh (roshe) Yeshivah: official title given to the rabbi(s) who leads a yeshivah

Ruah Hakodesh: divine inspiration, a form of low-level prophecy

Safek Terefah: a food product or utensil which has a questionable kosher status and is thus forbidden

Sandak: person who holds the baby during the circumcision

Seder: "order," used in reference to a section of the mishnah, and in reference to the special meal conducted on the night of pesah which follows a particular sequence

Sefat: city in northern israel, considered among the country's holiest cities

Sefer (sefarim): jewish religious text(s)

Sefirat Ha'omer (sefirah): daily counting conducted each night during the seven weeks between pesah and shavuot

Segulah: “charm,” or means of accessing special spiritual powers to fulfill a certain wish or achieve a certain goal

Selihot: special prayers recited on certain occasions — such as before and during the high holiday season — asking g-d for forgiveness

Semichah: rabbinical ordination

Seudah: meal

Seudah Shelishit: third shabbat meal, usually eaten in the late-afternoon hours on shabbat

Shabbat: period from sundown on friday through nightfall on saturday, when many forms of constructive activity are forbidden

Shalom Bayit: domestic peace, usually referring specifically to marital accord

Shamayim: heaven

Shammash: term used for a caretaker of a synagogue, and for a rabbi’s attendant

Shas: word used synonymously with “talmud,” formed by the acronym for “shisha sedarim” (“six sections”)

Shechinah: divine presence

She’elot U’teshuvot: “questions and answers,” collections of responses given by a halachic scholar to the queries posed to him, often referred to by the acronym “shu”t.” These works comprise a large and critical segment of halachic literature

Shehitah: special procedure required for slaughtering an animal so its meat is permissible for consumption

Shema Yisrael: “hear, o israel,” the first two words of a section of the torah that is a centerpiece of the morning and evening jewish prayer services.

Shemirah: protection

Shene Luhot Habrit: the two stone tablets upon which the ten commandments were inscribed; this term also refers to the book entitled shene luhot habrit authored by rabbi yeshaya horowitz (1565-1630).

Shevatim: tribes, used mainly in reference to the twelve tribes of israel that descended from the twelve sons of the patriarch yaakov

Shiluah Haken: the obligation to send away the mother bird before taking her eggs or chicks from the nest

Shir Hashirim: song of songs, or song of solomon, a poetic, allegorical depiction of the love between g-d and the jewish people authored by king solomon and canonized as part of the ketuvim section of the bible.

Shiur: torah class or lecture

Shivah: seven-day mourning observance for a departed family member

Shohet (shohtim): ritual slaughterer(s)

Shulhan Aruch: authoritative halachic code authored by rabbi yosef karo in the 16th century

Shuvu Banim: term used to describe the “return” of children of non-observant jews to torah observance

Siddur: prayer book

Sifre Torah: torah scrolls

Sofer: scribe who writes torah scrolls, tefillin, and mezuzot in the specific manner required by halachah

Sukkah (sukkot): hut(s) in which jews are required to reside during the holiday of sukkot

Taanit: fast day

Taanit Dibbur: a voluntary period of refraining from all speech except for prayer and torah study

Takanah (takanot): special enactment(s) issued by a rabbi or group of rabbis, or other communal leaders

Tallit: prayer shawl

Talmide Hachamim: torah scholars

Talmud Bavli: babylonian talmud, a colossal record of religious and halachic discourse and debate compiled by babylonian scholars in the 5th century ce, which forms the basis of halachic scholarship

Tanach: acronym for “torah, nevi’im, ketuvim,” used as the hebrew word for “bible.”

Tanna'im: torah scholars during the century before and the century after the destruction of the second temple, who are the authors of the mishnah and other primary halachic texts

Tefillah (tefillot): prayer(s)

Tefillin: phylacteries, which must be worn by jewish men each weekday

Tehillim: hebrew word for "psalms."

Terumot u'maasrot: series of tithes that must be given from agricultural produce in the land of israel

Teshuvah: repentance

Teva: nature

Tikkun: repairing, or perfecting, often used in reference to the spiritual effects of certain prayers and religious acts as taught by kabbalah

Tikkun Hatzot: midnight prayer mourning the destruction of the temple and petitioning for its restoration

Torat Hasod: "secret teaching," another term for kabbalah

Tosafot: talmud commentaries by medieval french and german scholars

Tzaddik (tzaddikim): righteous man (men)

Tzadeket: righteous woman

Tzedakah: charity

Tzelem Elokim: "image of g-d" in which all people are created

Tzet Hakochavim: halachic nightfall, the point when three medium-size stars are visible, signifying the onset of nighttime as defined by halachah

Vatikin: morning prayer service at dawn, the most preferred time for reciting the morning service

Yerushalayim: hebrew word for "jerusalem."

Yeshivah: school of torah study

Yetzer Hara: evil inclination

Yirat Shamayim: fear of g-d

Yishuv: settlement, used in the early 20th century in reference to the jewish population in palestine, and nowadays in reference to small jewish towns in israel

Yisrael: hebrew word for "israel."

Yom Tov: jewish holiday

Yoreh De'ah: section of the shulhan aruch code dealing with ritual laws such as kashrut, conversion, mourning, and family purity

Zechut: merit

Zohar: primary text of kabbalah, commonly attributed to the tanna rabbi shimon bar yohai

Zt"l: acronym for "zecher tzaddik livrachah" — "may a tzaddik be remembered for blessing."

In honor of
Rabbi Reuven Semah
of Congregation Magen Abraham
in West Long Branch, New Jersey

A true servant of Hashem who
continuously ensures that we
have a place of Torah, *mitzvot*, and
Sephardic tradition.

May he live a long life and be
showered with constant blessings.

Michael Missry e' Moshe Dayan

Select Bibliography¹

- Rabbi Binayahu Shmueli, Adonenu HaBen Ish Hai, Yeshivat Nahar Shalom (Jerusalem 5770/2009).
- Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Ari Mibavel, Yerid Hasefarim (Jerusalem 5770/2010).
- Rabbi Shimon Wanunu, Arze Halebanon, Yefei Nof (Jerusalem 5766/2006).
- Rabbi Menachem Gerlitz, B'ikvot Rabbotenu.
- Rabbi Yosef Katchuri, introduction to Ben Ish Hai.
- Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, Doresh Tov L'amo (Jerusalem 5769/2008).
- Rabbi Shraga Weiss, Hachme Hamizrah (Jerusalem 5742/1982).
- Rabbi Avishai Bar Osher, Hare'ah Hatov (Jerusalem 5770/2009).
- Rabbi Gidon Gilkrov, He'ir Hamizrah (Jerusalem 5762/2002).
- Rabbi Shimon Agasi, Imre Shimon (Baghdad 5674/1914).
- Kol Sinai vol. 1, issue 10 (Elul 5722/1962).
- Rabbi Eliyahu Marak, Ma'asim Shel Hachme HaSephardim.

1. In addition to the sources listed here, many other materials collected in the Sephardic Legacy Series archives were used for this project, and the author conducted extensive interviews with family members of the Ben Ish Hai to extract information that was not available in print and to receive a more personal history of this unique rabbinical figure.

- David Solomon Sassoon, *Travels in Bavel* (translated by Meir Benayahu, Jerusalem 5715/1955).
- Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi, *Olam Shel Tzaddik* (Jerusalem 5736/1976).
- Rabbi Daniel Moshe Elul, *Orah Tzaddikim* (Jerusalem 5764/2003).
- Rabbi Aharon Sorasky, *Orot Mimizrah*.
- Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel, *Otzrot Yosef — Tehillot Yosef*, Ahavat Shalom Publications (Jerusalem 5749/1989).
- Rabbi Zev Paretsky, *Reservoirs of Faith — The Yeshivah through the Ages*, Feldheim (New York 1996).
- Tales of the Tzaddikim, B'ohr HaTorah* (1986).
- Rabbi Rachamim Melamed Hakohen, *Zichron Rachamim* (Jerusalem 5690/1930).
- Rabbi Abdallah Somech, *Zivhe Tzedek*, Frumkin Press (Baghdad 5650/1890).

Archives, Museums, and Rare Documentation

- Early Hebrew Newspapers, The Jewish National and University Library of Israel.
- Halevanon, 25 Nissan, 5636 (1876).
- Halevanon, 17 Iyar, 5636 (1876).
- Hame'asef, issue 35.
- Hamodia, 7 Shevat, 5743 (January 21, 1983).
- Havazelet, September 10, 1909.
- Hayehudi, September 23, 1909.
- Jewish Chronicle, October 1, 1909.
- The Museum of Babylon Jewry, Ohr Yehuda.
- The Oster Visual Documentation Center Beit Hatfutsot — The Museum of the Jewish People.