

Sunday, December 16, 2018

פרחה ששון עם בני משפחה בגדאד 1910



## REMEMBERING BAGHDAD

*Iraqi Jewish Heritage  
at Shearith Israel*

365th ANNIVERSARY  
ה'תרס"ה  
ה'תש"ט  
5779 • 5414 •  
CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
*Year of Years Campaign*

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*Year of Years Campaign*



Cover:  
 Photograph of Flora Sassoon  
 and Family in Baghdad,  
 1910. Courtesy of Mahon  
 Ohel David Sassoon.

This booklet has been  
 prepared in memory  
 of Cecile Zilkha.



## REMEMBERING BAGHDAD

### *Between the Tigris and the Hudson:* *Celebrating Iraqi Jewish Heritage at Shearith Israel*

**RECEPTION** | 6:45 pm | Levy Auditorium (Downstairs)

***For Pre-Registered Guests.***

Tasty Iraqi appetizers and desserts catered by Aodi  
 Zilkha of Beth Torah Caterers.

**MAIN PROGRAM** | 7:30 pm | Large Synagogue (Upstairs)

- Greetings by Zachary Edinger
- Introduction and video interview of Ezra K. Zilkha by  
 Professor Henry A. Green
- Conversation with Ezra K. Zilkha and David Dangoor
- Short Film: *What We Left Behind*
- Presentations by Carol Basri, David Dangoor, and  
 David Lavipour
- Film Trailer: Letters from Baghdad

**DESSERTS** | 9:30 pm | Levy Auditorium (Downstairs)

*Thank You to Ezra K. Zilkha  
 for his support and participation in this special program.*

*Thank you to all those who submitted entries for our special  
 event booklet with apologies to those whose entries were unable  
 to be included before print.*



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## GREETINGS FROM RABBI MEIR SOLOVEICHIK



The Jews of Iraq – what was once known as Babylonia – are the heirs to the most important Diaspora community in the history of Judaism. There the Babylonian Talmud was composed, which more than any other rabbinic work impacts the way we live our lives as Jews. Its academies, in *Sura*, *Pumbedita* and *Neharda'a* perpetuated the Torah that we learn to this day. We speak with reverence of the *Gaonim*, the rabbis who led these immortal schools, and maintain our faith in the messianic house of David, which was embodied in the office of the Exilarch for so many centuries.

According to the Talmud, there is a blessing to be recited when one saw the ruins of the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, remnants of which can still be seen today. By this the Rabbis meant to express the eternity of the Jewish people; the king who created the first Judean exile is long gone, but Judaism endures. Iraqi Jewry thus, in a unique way, embodies the very eternity of Judaism itself, and this is a legacy that we at Shearith Israel are so privileged to celebrate. We at Shearith Israel are grateful to Ezra Zilkha for supporting this event – and to all the Iraqi Jews whose traditions, heritage, and culture, have been such an important part of the magnificent mosaic that is our community.

## GREETINGS FROM DAVID DANGOOR



Dear Members of Congregation Shearith Israel, Guests, and Friends,

In my capacity as a member of the Board of Trustees, I want to welcome you to this very special evening celebrating the Iraqi Jewish community here at Shearith Israel. And, in particular, we celebrate the life achievements, history and generous contributions of our esteemed and longstanding member, Ezra K. Zilkha.

It is such an amazing privilege to be a member of this historic Sephardic congregation, which is also the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. Like so many Jews from Iraq that came to our city from the greater Sephardic Diaspora, including parts of the Middle East and North Africa, I also quickly found my synagogue at Shearith Israel. Not only is the basic Siddur what we are accustomed to, but also the beautiful traditional formality and respect represented in the liturgy of our services. And add to this the friendliness, inclusiveness and hospitality we are used to.

Happily, today our member community has evolved into being represented by so many diverse Jewish backgrounds and colors making our Congregation a wonderful model of modern timeless orthodoxy. Tonight is one more example of the opportunity we have to celebrate our varied backgrounds and history.

On behalf of our board of trustees I hope you will enjoy the evening.

Sincerely,

David E. R. Dangoor



*Picture of Ezekiel's tomb*

## GREETINGS FROM RABBI RAIF MELHADO



Rabbi of Kahal Joseph Congregation, a Baghdadi synagogue in Los Angeles.  
He is also a member of Congregation Shearith Israel.

In 1850, Anglo-Jewish painter Solomon Alexander Hart submitted a canvas to the Royal Academy of Arts entitled *The Feast of the Rejoicing of the Law*. Presenting a vivid interior scene of the Portuguese synagogue at Leghorn, it has become a cherished image in the Sephardi and general Jewish communities, and would be instantly recognizable to Shearith Israelites. In foreground, an older man in resplendent Levantine robes looks out over the procession of Sifre Torah with authority. You can well imagine my surprise at learning that this fellow is alive and well in the 21st century, proudly serving as Hazan Emeritus of Kahal Joseph Congregation!

I exaggerate, but my first contact with Hazan Sassoon Ezra really made me feel as if he had just stepped out of this painting, robes and all. He is an embodiment of the tenacity with which Iraqi Jews have cherished their unique heritage in this country, giving it pride of place even when the greater Jewish community did not understand it as part of their own narrative. His self-assured Indian mannerisms and unshakeable sense of being in the moral right have helped ensure that Iraqis are now a recognized, normal element of the Jewish landscape in Los Angeles.

Like their Portuguese brothers, Iraqi Jews once lived in an extensive maritime diaspora that was deeply intertwined with the English and Dutch colonial worlds. With their spiritual center in Baghdad, they branched out to an ever-widening circle of satellite communities around Asia, from neighboring Iran all the way to India, Singapore, Indonesia, China, and even Japan. Bonds of commerce and kinship helped fashion them into a sophisticated civilization so compelling that nearly all Arabic-speaking Jews east of Iraq adopted the “Baghdadi” identity. At their best, they were key contributors to Jewish and gentile public life from London to Shanghai, including secular and rabbinic literature, artistry and music, professions and business, philanthropy, politics, and national development.

An unfortunate consequence of decolonialization was the rise of adverse conditions and pressures for Jewish communities across Asia. The Baghdadi network that took generations to build imploded in just a few decades, launching mass population shifts and the shock of collective dispersion. Settling in Israel, Holland, and a host of English-speaking countries, they brought memories of their warm Indo-Iraqi culture with them and started afresh. With their resolute temperaments and inability to accept the lot of victimhood, they have rebounded from this trauma with astonishing success.

Without question, American Jewry is enriched by their presence. They carry with them the collective consciousness of profound Jewish experiences that would otherwise be forgotten. They apply this knowledge to how they engage with, and lead, our institutions here in the US and in Israel. They are again contributing to all aspects of public and cultural life in the Jewish and gentile community. And they most certainly deserve to be recognized as integral to the way that all Jews in this country tell the story of who we are. It is my pleasure to work among them, and I humbly thank Shearith Israel for giving me the opportunity to sing their praises.

Rabbi Raif Melhado  
Kahal Joseph Congregation  
Los Angeles, California







# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN IRAQ

*From a Guide to the Tamar Morad,  
Dennis and Robert Shasha Collection of  
Iraqi Jewish Oral Histories at the American  
Sephardi Federation*



*Baghdad and Tigris River c. 1920*

The Iraqi Jewish community is one of the oldest in the world. The region of modern-day Iraq was known by the Greeks as Mesopotamia and is identified with biblical Babylonia. The community traces its roots back to the episodes of captivity brought about by Nebuchadnezzar II in 597 BCE, and, again, in 586 BCE, with the destruction of the First Temple. The site was subsequently a great center of Jewish learning, where the Babylonian Talmud was compiled. After the rise of Islam and the Arab conquest of the region in the 7th century CE the land became known as Iraq. The city of Baghdad, founded in 762, eventually became the home of the greatest concentration of Iraqi Jews. In 1258 the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols precipitated a long period of general economic decline.

From 1534 until World War I Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire, except for a brief interlude under the Persians in the early 17th century. Under Ottoman rule, just as under the earlier caliphates, Jews, as well as Christians, as non-Muslims professing a monotheistic faith, held the protected legal status of 'dhimmi,' which gave them the right to worship, and a certain amount of self-administration, but also entailed certain restrictions that reflected subordination to the Muslim majority. The well-being of the community depended on the attitudes of particular rulers, with some periods of persecution.

The Jewish population of Baghdad in 1824 was estimated at 1,500 families. According to one source in 1848, the city had 3,000 Jewish families, and nine synagogues. By 1860 the number of Jewish residents had risen to 20,000, amounting to slightly more than one quarter of the population. There were also many smaller Jewish communities scattered throughout northern Iraq, the largest being at Mosul. Due to shifting economic factors in the late 19th century, following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1862, many Jews, like others in the country, moved to the south. From that time through World War I, the Jewish community at the southern port city of Basra grew significantly.

Traditionally Iraqi Jews spoke Judeo-Arabic, which was based on Arabic but written in Hebrew characters, with the incorporation of Hebrew vocabulary, as well as words from Turkish, Persian, and Aramaic. They also spoke Arabic and participated in Arabic culture, including literature and music. Significant developments in the 19th century included the establishment in Baghdad of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school for boys, in 1864, the first modern Jewish elementary school, as well as a similar school for girls, in 1893. This trend within the Jewish community toward secular education, including instruction in European languages, led to greater occupational

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opportunity in business, finance, and government.

In the early 20th century the Young Turks movement spurred reforms including the declaration of equal rights for non-Muslim minorities under the Ottoman constitution of 1908. World War I brought the occupation of the region by the British and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The borders of the modern state of Iraq were determined in the postwar treaties, with the proposal of a British Mandate for Mesopotamia (i.e. Iraq) leading eventually to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under King Faisal I, in 1921.

According to British figures, there were 87,488 Iraqi Jews in 1919, making up approximately 3% of the total population (2.85 million). At that time approximately 50,000 Jews lived in Baghdad, constituting 20% of the city's population. Thanks to the modernizing influence of the British and Faisal's tolerant policies, the Jewish community in Iraq enjoyed prosperity and relative security in the 1920s and early 1930s, a period remembered by some Iraqi Jews as a 'golden age.' Sir Sassoon Eskell served as the first minister of finance under Faisal, from 1921 to 1925, the only Jew ever to hold a cabinet-rank position in the Iraqi government.

Iraq achieved independence in 1932. The situation of Jews in the country

deteriorated in the course of the 1930s. Faisal's son Ghazi, who ascended to the throne in 1933, was less tolerant than his father, and there was infiltration of Nazi influence through propagandistic undertakings of the German ambassador. Some Jews were dismissed from government posts in 1934 and an unofficial quota system began to prevail in the civil service. The Arab revolt in Palestine in 1936 fueled pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist, as well as anti-Jewish sentiment in Iraq, as elsewhere in the Arab world.

After a pro-Nazi coup in April 1941, the British occupied the country, and the brief Anglo-Iraqi war ensued, in May 1941. In the vacuum of leadership and security following the British victory, violent anti-Jewish riots broke out in Baghdad. This pogrom, known by the Arabic term 'Farhud,' meaning 'violent dispossession,' resulted in the murder of 179 Jews, the injury of many more, and the looting or destruction of hundreds of businesses and homes.

Following the Farhud the Jewish community recovered; the majority still saw their future as loyal Iraqi citizens. However, in the following years some young Iraqi Jews became engaged in the Zionist underground, and others in the Communist underground.

In the wake of the United Nations resolution on the partition of

Palestine, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the subsequent Arab-Israeli war (Israeli War of Independence) there was a charged anti-Jewish atmosphere in Iraq, with Jews increasingly experiencing abuses and subject to restrictions. In September 1948, the public hanging, after a brief trial, of a wealthy Iraqi Jewish businessman, Shafiq Adas, of Basra, who was charged with selling military equipment to Israel, shocked the Jewish community.

In 1949 some Iraqi Jews fled Iraq illegally over the Iranian border, aided by Zionist emissaries. In response to the situation, in March 1950 the Iraqi government passed the Citizen Revocation Law, which enabled Jews to emigrate by revoking their citizenship. Tens of thousands of Iraqi Jews registered for this right – 105,000 Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel by July 1951. The Iraqi government froze the assets of many Jews attempting to leave after March 1951. Around that time Israel mounted an airlift to assist the emigration. The airlift, or the mass emigration in general, later came to be known as "Operation Ezra and Nehemiah," after the biblical figures who led the Jewish people out of the Babylonian exile back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple in the 5th century BCE.

According to estimates based on the official Iraqi census, there were approximately 118,000 Jews in Iraq

in 1947, comprising 2.5% of the total population (some sources speculate that the number was closer to 135,000, or even higher). After the mass emigration approximately 6,000 remained.

Jews continued to flee the country over the next decades. In 1968, when the Ba'ath Party came to power for the second time after a period of political turbulence, there were approximately 3,000 Jews still living in Iraq. Under the Ba'athist regime discriminatory and oppressive measures that had affected Jews since the Six Day (Arab-Israeli) War of 1967 intensified, including detentions, firings from jobs in the public and private sector, expulsions from social clubs, revocations of business licenses, being restricted in travel within Iraq, having telephone service cut off, and having bank accounts frozen. In January 1969, nine Jews (as well as several Muslims and Christians), falsely accused of being spies for Israel, were publicly hanged in Baghdad. In the period from then until April 1973 a total of 46 Iraqi Jews were killed, or kidnapped, or simply disappeared; and many were imprisoned. The number of Jews remaining in Iraq was approximately 350 in 1975, and 120 in 1996. As of 2007, fewer than a dozen Jews were believed to be living in the country.





*Somekh Family*

## *The Aboodi / Somekh Family*

By the Aboodi Family



*From the wedding of Victoria  
Somekh and Sassoon Aboodi*

Victoria Somekh and Sassoon Aboodi were born and grew up in Baghdad. Both of their families had been merchants and bankers for generations. The family lived in Baghdad but frequently spent their summers in Basra. Baghdadi Jews lived in a cohesive community that prospered and took care of one another; many families were connected and related to each other by marriage. This way of life became difficult to maintain as conditions for Jews deteriorated and as more and more Jews left Iraq.

Sassoon and Victoria were married in Baghdad, and lived for a time in Nice. They had an inclination toward Zionism however, and soon moved their young family to Palestine, ultimately settling in Jerusalem in the 1930's. Sassoon continued working in banking and finance during the early days of the State of Israel and their family grew. As their children grew up they pursued their education in England and the United States. Victoria and Sassoon Aboodi ultimately came to New York to be closer to their children and became members of Shearith Israel.

Victoria and Sassoon were actively involved in the Shearith Israel community. Mrs. Aboodi was especially dedicated to the Sisterhood and their various activities, including sewing cloaks for the Sifrei Torah. Many of our long time members still remember her setting up the kiddush week after week, giving cookies to the children and passing out wine to adults. Her humble manner, and quiet dedication to tradition, family, and community, were a way of life that had been passed down to her from her parents, and from her great uncle the Hakham Abdullah Somekh, a Rosh Yeshiva in Baghdad and author of several important Halakhic works. She passed these traits on to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who continue to be members at Shearith Israel today.





## *The Abraham Family of Shanghai*

By David Abraham and Hannah Abraham Carl

Joseph Hayim and Liza Abraham were born and raised in Shanghai and both had similar origins, coming from Iraq and India. Liza's father Ezra I. Jacob was born in Baghdad and moved to Shanghai in 1906, where he was employed by David Sassoon and Co. He married Sophie Reuben who was born in Bombay and arrived in Shanghai with her family. Joseph's grandfather, David E.J. Abraham was born in Bombay and came to Shanghai in 1888 with his wife Moselle and their 6-month-old baby, Reuben.

David E. J. Abraham and his son Reuben Abraham were leaders of the Shanghai Jewish community. They founded and supported synagogues that followed the Iraqi *minhagim*. They also founded a Jewish school which taught Torah, *tefilot* as well as secular subjects. Iraqi Jewish life in Shanghai required a great deal of self-reliance. Men learned how to perform *shechita*, wine was made at home, and *matzot* for the *seder* were baked in a community oven. The Abraham family had an *etrog* tree in their garden to provide *etrogim* for the community. There was one Rabbi in Shanghai, Rabbi Ashkenazi, who made religious decisions for both the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic communities.

Life for Jews in Shanghai changed dramatically during the years following Pearl Harbor. Iraqi Jews with British-India passports were considered to be enemy nationals and were interned for the duration of the war and all of their property confiscated by the Japanese. Those with Iraqi passports were given the status of non-belligerent enemy and were not interned. Joseph was interned in the enemy-national camp during World War II whereas Liza was not. Shanghai became a safe-haven for Jewish refugees during the war and the Iraqi community was integral in welcoming them. In fact, the synagogue built under the guidance of the Abraham family became the residence of the Mirror Yeshiva after escaping to Shanghai.

Joseph and Liza were married in Shanghai after the war in 1948 and lived in Shanghai until the fall of Chiang Kai Shek and the rise of Mao Tse Tung. As the communist armies were making progress the Shanghai Jews were evacuated by the American Joint Distribution Committee. Liza's family left Shanghai in 1948 and made Aliya, eventually immigrating to the United States many years later. Joseph's family remained in Shanghai until 1956, not leaving until they were assured that every member of their community that wanted to leave Shanghai could leave, and then moved to Hong Kong.

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## *The Abraham Family of Shanghai*

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Joseph and Liza left on the last flight out of Shanghai, as the Communists were entering the city. They arrived in New York in June 1949 with all of their possessions in one simple bag. They chose Manhattan as their new residence, with Shearith Israel as their synagogue and community. They were devoted members of Congregation Shearith Israel and the Synagogue was the center of their lives as well as for their children. They served the Congregation in a variety of capacities including as Trustee, President of the League, *Token' (Shofar)*, *Hatan Torah*, and President of the Hebrew Relief Society.

As a final note, in 1965 the last two *Sifre Torah* were brought out of Shanghai and these two *Sifre Torah* are currently in use at Congregation Shearith Israel. Reuben Abraham asked that the following inscription be placed on the Etz Chaim:

*This is a brand saved from the fire*  
**הרי זה אוד מצל מאש**

How true this is for the entire Iraqi community that became part of Congregation Shearith Israel.



*Jacob family in Shanghai*





*Naim and Violette Aghassi in Bagdad, 1947*

## *The Aghassi Family*

By William Aghassi

My name is William Aghassi and my parents are Naim Aghassi and Violette (ne: Sulman) Aghassi. My mother's father came from Basra, so I am likely related to Anwar Suleiman. I was conceived in Bagdad but born in NYC. Though I was born in the US, I heard many stories about life in Bagdad so I feel like I know it well.

Both my parents grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in old Bagdad in homes along the Tigris River built during the Ottoman period. My father was one of 5 brothers and my mother was one of two sisters. Life in Bagdad was fairly easy even for those Jews who were not wealthy. My father's father, Yeheskel Aghassi, managed date farms, a common occupation for Jews at the time, and died in 1914, leaving a widow with 5 young boys and a baby on the way. Somehow she managed with the aid of my father's brother Abdullah who became their surrogate father.

The Tigris was the focus of recreation for the boys and my father was a powerful swimmer who often swam across the Tigris and back. The Tigris being about 1 mile across at Bagdad. My father had a large rowboat which he enjoyed together with his brothers and Shamoon cousins.

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*Left: Yeheskel Aghassi  
Above: Rowboat on the Tigris*

## *The Aghassi Family*

*(continued)*

My father had a Model T Ford which he once drove from Bagdad to Jerusalem and back. You would need a tank to make the same journey today!

In 1936, my father emigrated to NYC by ship through Ellis Island. They were about to deport him as he arrived with no money, but was bailed out at the last minute by his brother George (Gourgey) who had a successful business in NY. Once there, his carefree existence ended. He peddled bow ties on the street corner to learn English. He worked 6 days a week, 10 hours per day in his shop for the rest of his life without complaint. He died in 1969.

Speaking of George, he was the fourth of the five brothers and the only one to attend college. He attended the American University of Beirut for one year when his cousin, Raymond Shamooun, who was alone in NYC and lonely started writing him letters to come to America "because the streets were paved with gold!" Meanwhile, Raymond was making a modest living as a radio repairman. George took the bait and moved to NYC at the tender age of 19 and became a successful businessman! We used to love his visits as he would bring us expensive toys that our parents wouldn't buy for us!

The oldest brother was Salim, who was the head of the household once his father died. He was a successful businessman in Iraq, a high government official, and personal friends with the King. He also immigrated to the US in 1947 to be with his family. He had trouble adjusting to NY and was planning to go back to Iraq in 1951 when the King was assassinated in a coup. That ended his plan, and Salim died a few months later.



My mother was born in 1925. She attended and graduated from the Alliance School where she learned Arabic, French, and English. Hebrew and Judaic studies were suppressed after Iraq gained independence and students had to learn these subjects at home from private tutors. Unlike the boys, the girls did not swim or ride bikes; their recreation consisted of visiting friends in each other's homes.

My mother lived through the Farhud in 1941. Her family was saved because a rich Moslem neighbor had his body guards close off her street to protect his Jewish neighbors as well as his own house. My father's cousin, Salim Sassoon wasn't so lucky. He wound up in a Moslem hospital where miraculously he wasn't murdered. After he recovered, he moved to the US where in exchange for asylum he joined the US Army and fought in Europe during 1944-45.

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## *The Aghassi Family*

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After the war, my father returned to Bagdad in search of a bride, and a marriage was arranged with my mother. They moved to NY in December, 1947. Shortly after they arrived, NYC was engulfed in the blizzard of '47 and my mother, heavily pregnant with me, had not yet obtained winter clothing or closed toed shoes! Welcome to NY, Violette!

My Aunt Hannah, Violette's sister, left Iraq in the airlift to Israel, and spent several years in a *Ma'aborah* where she met her husband, also an Iraqi refugee. She was the first to not have an arranged marriage.

As for me, growing up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in the 1950's, we were subject to a lot of prejudice from the local Puerto Rican population as they were still preaching *Jew as Christ killer* in the churches in those days. We were also subject to a lot of prejudice from the local Austrian Jewish community who didn't believe we were Jewish!

As I started school at PS87, my mother enrolled me at the Hebrew school at West Side Institutional. The reason being it was a block from PS87 and all my class mates were going there. Needless to say, they did not much appreciate my presence, and I did not appreciate being there. I felt that my identity as a Jew as being dismissed by their effort to force me to conform.

On shabbat, I would sometimes go alone to Shearith Israel. CSI did not much appreciate the presence of an unaccompanied dark skinned minor, and I got thrown out a lot. To make a long story short, after my marriage to Marian Weston, we went synagogue shopping and CSI was the most agreeable. We spent 36 marvelous active years in the CSI community before we left the congregation.





## *The Ainetchi and Rabbie Families*

By Isaac Ainetchi

The Ainetchi family had been in Baghdad for centuries. They were a successful merchant family. My grandfather, Yehezkel Ainatchi, owned a block of retail stores in a prominent section of old Baghdad. My father, Jacob Ainetchi, was a successful import/export merchant. My mother, Marcelle Rabbie, passed away last year. She was also born in Baghdad. Her father, Ezra Rabbie, was a Rabbi and a merchant.

My parents were married in Baghdad and had 5 children. They fled after the *Farhud* in 1941. Actually, what happened was quite dramatic and tragic. During the *Farhud* a stray bullet penetrated our home, struck and killed a baby cousin of mine while he was in the arms of my uncle. This tragedy deeply shocked my family. My parents, fearing further violence and anti-Semitism, packed up my siblings and arranged for an Arab driver to drive the family through the mountains to Teheran, Iran. They left everything as it was – and only packed the barest of essentials, before fleeing. My grandparents and other family members left Iraq at about this time as well.

My maternal grandfather, Ezra Rabbie, died not long after arriving in Iran. His wife, and their still young children (my uncles and cousins) left Iran for the United States about 1949. They lived for a time, here on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I believe that at that time, they prayed at an Iraqi minyan which met in the Ansonia Hotel! Later, they moved to Montreal, where my cousins still live.

My parents started to rebuild their family and business in Iran during the 1940s. This is where I was born. My father was very smart and resourceful, he had a drive to succeed. Together with a *Bahá'í* partner he secured the sole distributorship for Volvo automobiles and imported cars and trucks to Iran. He later manufactured these vehicles in Iran in partnership with members of the Shah's own royal family. These factories employed thousands of people. I believe they are still manufacturing cars today in these same factories, but now for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

My family left Iran a few years before the Islamic Revolution. My father's business partner (a member of the Government) told him of the increasingly hostile environment toward the West and toward Jews that continued to grow and was a threat to the Shah's regime. About Passover, 1974, while I was studying in college in the US, my father,

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## *The Ainetchi and Rabbie Families*

*(continued)*

sold his stake in the business to his partners, and moved our family to Israel. Having lived through the *Farhud*, my father's main concern was the safety of his family. He sold his business for "pennies on the dollar". We packed what we could, but left most things in Iran as they were. Despite these conditions, we all were safely in Israel before the Iranian revolution occurred in 1978.

Once again our family had to build a new business, this time in Israel, and now mainly led by my brothers. My father passed away in 1981. We started manufacturing Jewelry in Israel. I moved to the United States about 1991 and was soon introduced to my wife, Harriet, by David Taufek, a relative of mine. In the US, I entered the construction business. I am very proud of my Iraqi heritage, and we maintain close connections with the Iraqi community here in American and in Israel. We are also proud of our connection with Rabbi Kaduri – with whom were especially close. He even came to the United States to attend our wedding!

We became members of Shearith Israel shortly after my daughters were born in the mid 1990s. My wife for many years was a trustee of the congregation. Recent changes and synagogue "politics" have affected us to be sure, but Shearith Israel is still our home, and we love our many friends in the synagogue and programs like this one.





## *The Cohen and Hillel Families*

By Yvonne Hillel Cohen

I was born in Calcutta, India to a Baghdadian family. My great grandfather was Haham Abraham Hillel who was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad. My grandfather came to India in the late 19th century where my father, Ernest Hillel, was born in Bombay.

When he was young, my father worked for E.D. Sassoon & Co. in Bombay and later, he moved to Calcutta with his family. An artist and photographer, he managed L.A. Stronach and Co., a British advertising company. Later on he started and ran an advertising firm for B.N. Elias & Company, Ltd. called The Advertising Corporation of India.

In Calcutta he met my mother, Flora Solomon, who also came to Calcutta from Baghdad with her family in 1925. My maternal

grandfather, Menashi Solomon, was sent to England for his schooling at age 10. After graduating from Cambridge University, he went to Shanghai to join his uncles who were in business there and returned to Baghdad some years later. My grandfather had several businesses in Baghdad, one of which was the manufacturing and exporting of ice to Eastern countries. He was also involved with the newly developed irrigation business. My maternal grandmother was Aziza Sopher and her family also came to Calcutta from Baghdad where two of her brothers were prominent stock brokers.

In the early 1920's, some of my grandfather's British friends who were in politics advised him to leave Baghdad. He was told that the British could no longer protect the Jews from Arab unrest which was just beginning. My grandfather took their advice, sold his property and left Baghdad with family for India where he had been invited to manage the Sassoon estates in Calcutta.

I was brought up in Calcutta and studied at Loreto House, a Catholic convent. The girls at the school were from diverse backgrounds, including of course, a small contingent of Jewish girls. My memories of India are happy and care-free ones of friends and family. In Calcutta we attended the beautiful Magen David Synagogue. There were five synagogues in Calcutta at the time.

I met my husband, Abraham (Barry) Ezekiel Cohen, in 1954 when he returned to Calcutta from Japan. He and his parents were also from Baghdadian families. His mother was Hannah Jonah who was born in Calcutta, but his father, Ezekiel Abraham Cohen, was born in Rangoon, Burma where there were many families from Baghdad and Aleppo, as there were in Calcutta.

Barry had been at the American School in Tokyo from the age of 12 and finished high school there. Prior to going to Japan, he had

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## *The Cohen and Hillel Families*

*(continued)*

studied at St. Xavier's in Calcutta and St. Joseph in Darjeeling, both Jesuit schools. In Tokyo, Barry's father was doing business in steel and tobacco. During the course of those years, his father met General Douglas MacArthur and between the two, Japan's first tobacco contract with India was brokered.

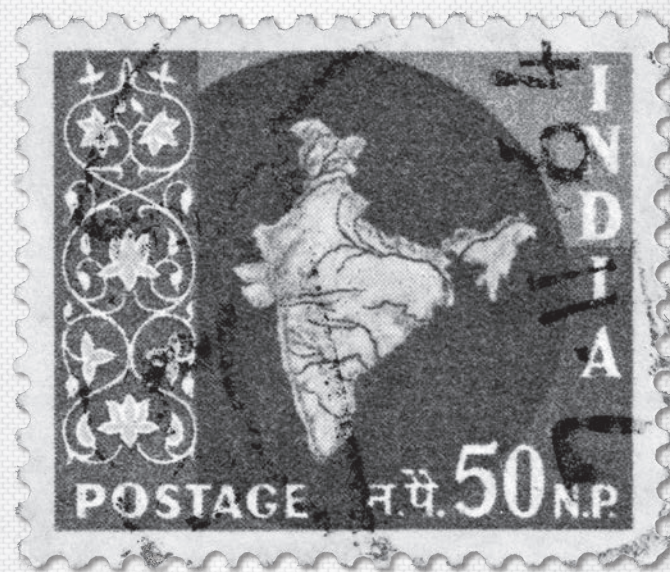
In Burma, Barry's grandfather, Abraham Cohen, was a successful trader and along with his wife, Ramah, they were leaders of the Jewish community of Rangoon. One of his businesses included selling exotic animals to Barnum and Bailey. Of course, with the invasion of Burma by the Japanese during WWII, everyone fled to Calcutta.

In 1956, I left India for London and in 1957, Barry left India for New York. We were in constant contact until we married in 1958. Barry worked for Merck & Co., which was quite small in those years. He helped to build its international business and was with Merck for 35 years. Over the years, our family had lived in many different countries and enjoyed all the varied experiences. After retiring from Merck in 1992, Barry joined and actively contributed to many boards around the world, among them AkzoNobel in the Netherlands, Teva in Israel and Chugai in Japan.

Barry's passing in 2012 was a tremendous loss for all of us, but he and I were blessed with three wonderful children and three wonderful grandchildren who have brought us both much happiness. All three of our grandchildren became bar and bat mitzvah at Shearith Israel. We were introduced to the synagogue by Ruth Blumberg of blessed memory when we first moved to New York in 1986. Shearith Israel has played an important part in our lives ever since.



*Yvonne Hillel Cohen as a young girl seated front left, at the wedding of her aunt in 1939*



*Map of India postage stamp, 1957*

# *The Dangoor Family*

By David E.R. Dangoor

My Great-Grandfather, Hakham Ezra Reuben Dangoor, was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad. He was a rabbi and scribe working with the Bet Din of Baghdad in the late Nineteenth century. He left Baghdad to become the Chief Rabbi of Burma, but returned to Baghdad shortly thereafter. Upon his return, he opened Baghdad's first printing press, printing Arabic and Hebrew books. He later served as Baghdad's chief rabbi in the 1920's. He passed away in 1930. My grandfather, Eliahou Dangoor, greatly expanded his father's printing business and became known as "Melek al Waraq" (The "king of paper") and was for a time, the world's largest printer of books in Arabic.

My father, Selim Dangoor, left Iraq in the early 1930's and finished school in England. He then studied at the American University in Lebanon and spent the war years in Bombay, India. He went to Teheran, just before the end of the war and there, he met Ruth Lehr (Lerner), a Jewish refugee from Austria. They married and after I was born they traveled to Sweden in early 1951. This partially because my father's business was in the paper industry at the time. My parents quickly took a liking to Sweden and, unplanned, we ended up living in Stockholm. My father being perhaps one of the only persons from the Middle East then, built a way of life that made their home into a center for diplomats and businessmen from all corners of the world and especially from Iran, the Arab world and Israel. This was made easy because my father was fluent in many languages including Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, French, English and Swedish. And my mother was

fluent in German, English, French, Persian and Swedish. My parents loved life in Sweden. They were generous people who frequently assisted individuals and charities without seeking fame or credit. My father passed away in 1998, and my mother passed away in 2013.

I made my early career as an executive with the Philip Morris company, starting in Switzerland in 1976 living and working in 5 countries. And I was lucky enough to live several years in London and Montreal getting close with the strong Iraqi Jewish communities there and many relatives. I finally came to NY with Philip Morris/Altria in 1987. I married my wife Ida (Ide) with a similar background to my mother, in 1992 – we have 4 wonderful children. I retired from Philip Morris in 2002 and joined a Swedish public biotech company of which I was a co-founder much earlier. I have served as chairman for many years and I have also served on the boards of several international and domestic US companies. During 6 years when Sweden had closed their diplomatic consulate in New York, they appointed me Honorary and Acting Consul General, which I did pro bono and with a small additional staff.

I am also involved in many charitable causes. One of the causes closest to me is Sephardic Jewry. I am deeply committed to the American Sephardi Federation serving as their President since 2003. I am Vice Chairman of the Board of the Center for Jewish History and I serve on the board of ISEF. I am also on the board of Shearith Israel, the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue in New York. (This sometimes causes some confusion with my cousin David A. Dangoor, who is deeply involved with the Spanish & Portuguese synagogue in London and many other Jewish and educational causes there and in Israel.) I am also very involved in preserving the heritage of Iraqi Judaism and together with my cousin serve on the board of the World Organization for the Jews from Iraq. I am proud to continue this family tradition of advocacy for Babylonian Jewry, and my family till this day maintains the Iraqi Jewish cuisine at home.





## *The Dellal and Ardy Families*

By William Dellal

My father, Moshi Dellal, and mother, Agnes Dellal, were both of Iraqi descent. They had three children, myself, William, and my sisters Wilma and Arlene. All three siblings now live in the United States.

My mother was born in Khoramshar, Iran. Her parents Sion and Naima Murad Ardy came from Baghdadi families and her father was a rabbi for the Basra/Khoramshar Jewish families. She was one of eight children, 5 girls and 3 boys. The siblings were Louise, David, Agnes, Joseph, Albert, Madelaine, Margo, and Ilana.

If you ever eat a date in Israel, remember her family. Her father, after he emigrated to Israel, helped smuggle in date trees from Baghdad since the Arab boycott would allow the Israelis to buy date trees. There is a kibbutz in the Kinnert where this started and he is remembered.

She went to school in Baghdad, Lebanon, and Tehran. She was in Baghdad during the Farhud pogrom. But she also always remembers the just Moslem neighbor who took in her whole family and protected them as the mobs ran through the streets that night. She survived the Iranian Revolution with aplomb and ingenuity and many an interesting tale. In 1980, after the revolution she and my father landed in Los Angeles where they lived for many years. They moved to New York in the late 1990s when my father was ailing.

My father was born in Baghdad to a large Baghdadi family. Dellal means broker in Arabic. His parents were Joseph and Farha Dellal. He had one brother and four sisters. The siblings are Moshi, Khatoun, Naima, Violet, Victoria, and Naim. Oral tradition has it that the family came to Iraq with the Babylonian Diaspora but there are branches that joined following the

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## *The Dellal and Ardy Families*

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expulsion of Jews from Spain with the Inquisition. There is also a Jewish physician from Vienna who joined the family when he moved to Iraq in the 19th Century.

His parents moved to Kermanshah in Kurdish Iran on the border with Iraq prior to WWII. He went to the Alliance Francaise in Baghdad and attended school in Beirut. He then started his medical studies at the Sorbonne on a scholarship sponsored by the Iraqi government but had to drop out and return to Iran to support his family. The family moved from Kermanshah to Tehran right after WWII.

My mother and father met in Tehran and married there. All the children were born in Tehran. The children attended an American School in Tehran where my mother also completed her high school education. After high school, all the children came to the United States for our college and postgraduate studies. My parents joined us in the United States after the Iranian Revolution.

My parents had 5 grandchildren. William is married to Susan Ehrman Dellal. Their sons are David and Daniel. Wilma is married to Howard Persky and has a son Robert. Arlene is married to Ferydoon Safizadeh. Their sons are Cyrus and Dara.

*Rows of date palms in Israel*







## *The Gourgey and Nahom Families of Baghdad*

By Annette Gourgey

My father, Albert Gourgey, was born in Baghdad in 1912. The next twenty years were a good time for Iraqi Jews as they were given many opportunities to participate in civic life under the British caretaker government after World War I. The elders in his family became community leaders and were among the first to join the Zionist movement. His father Sion was a member of the Jewish Lay Council, which petitioned the British government for citizenship in 1918, though unsuccessfully.

My father's great-uncle, Sir Elly Kadoorie (b. 1865 in Baghdad), a self-made businessman who traded in India and China, built schools and hospitals for both Jews and non-Jews throughout the Middle East and

Western Europe, including the first schools for girls. His brother and his sons were also businessmen and philanthropists and founded the Kadoorie Agricultural School in Hong Kong. Sir Kadoorie developed a relationship with the Hashemite King Faisal I, who was very tolerant of the Iraqi Jews till his death in 1933. My father described cordial relations with Arabs during that time, though they remained in separate communities.

My father attended the Alliance Israelite School in Baghdad, which gave him a lifelong love for French language and literature. The eldest son, in 1932 he went to live in Paris. When Paris became Nazi-occupied in 1940, Christian friends took him into their home in unoccupied France; from there he moved further south to Marseilles, until he received a visa in 1942 to come to the United States on a ship sponsored by HIAS. Almost alone in New York, he joined Shearith Israel and the Iraqi-American Society, the organization for Iraqi Jewish émigrés which eventually founded Congregation Bene Naharayim in Queens in 1980. He met my mother in that group in 1946 and they were married at Shearith Israel by Dr. Pool in 1947.

My father's family remained in Baghdad till 1951 when they immigrated to Israel under Operation Ezra-Nehemiah. Since the 1930s Iraq had become increasingly dangerous for Jews. I don't know how my father's family survived the Farhud. A letter from my grandfather to my father in 1948 (when Jewish businessman Shafiq Adas was executed on false charges of sending weapons to Israel) expressed despair and fatalism at the final disintegration of relations with the Arabs: "Things were never so bad between the Muslims and the Jews as they are now. There is no peace between Muslim and Jew, between Sunni and Shia. There is no love in their hearts, each has his own idea, there is no understanding. This is from God..." When the family was finally able to leave Baghdad for Israel, it was not only a relief but a religious fulfillment of their Zionist dream.

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## *The Gourgey and Nahom Families of Baghdad*

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My mother was born Louise Nahom in Baghdad in 1923. Both she and my father recalled life in Baghdad in an extended family which lived in adjoining houses around a courtyard and celebrated Shabbat and holidays together. Men would shop while women and children prepared the meals. My mother recalls picnics on the Tigris river, a ceremony in which a bride's hands were painted with henna for good luck, and parties with bands playing Iraqi music that guests would dance to. I remember a few of these parties in my childhood in New York.

My mother remembers increasing hostility toward Jews in the 1930s, especially from Shiite Muslims (whose parades celebrating the Arba'een, the martyrdom of Hussein, she recalls vividly). Her three uncles, Nahom (Jack), Heskell (Harry) and Selim (Sidney) Jacob, ambitious and taken with the American Dream, vowed to come to the United States. They arrived in 1927 with Victor Shebairo and Abdullah Rabih (who took the name Albert Hayes and founded the Albert's Hosiery franchise), built themselves up in business, and sent for the family. My mother was eager to come in 1934 when she was ten.

Her parents remained with an elderly relative in Baghdad for the next ten years, while my mother lived with her grandparents and uncles. Her parents and the youngest child were in Baghdad during the Farhud. They were saved by their Muslim neighbor, who stopped the mob at their door by telling them, "My brother-in-law lives here, you can go away," while they hid in the basement. Most of her remaining family members came to New York by 1944, with the last few immigrating to Israel in 1950. My mother's family was active with the Iraqi American Society, where she met my father in 1946, and later with Congregation Bene Naharayim.



*Nahom family in Baghdad, c. 1937*



*Albert Gourgey (right) Baghdad c. 1920.*





## *The Iny Family*

By Leigh Lindenbaum

The Iny family has been in Baghdad since the destruction of the Temple and the family name is mentioned in the Book of Ezra as one of the families that choose not to leave the City and go back to Israel because they had amassed great wealth. My grandparents, Salim and Daisy Iny left Baghdad with their children (Cecile (Iny) Zilkha, George Iny, Henry Iny and Linda (Iny) Lindenbaum) before the Farhud in 1941 when they were warned by their Muslim friends to leave the city and went to Tehran for about 7 years before coming to

America in 1948. Salim and Daisy shared in many happy occasions and Holidays as part of the Sherith Israel Community. My parents were married in the Synagogue by Rabbi Pool in 1964. Salim passed away in 1987 and Daisy passed away in 2001. They are both buried in the Iraqi section of the New Montifiore Cemetery.

My grandmother, Daisy (Djedda) Iny, in the introduction of her book, *The Best of Baghdad Cooking with Treats from Tehran*, wrote:

*Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, lies on the Tigris River. According to the legends, the Garden of Eden was on the fertile plain that lies between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Later this plain was called Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization. In the 8th century A.D. Baghdad was the most beautiful city in the world. The great Calif Haroon-al-Rashid, poet and scholar, made it the center of art and learning, and it came to be called "The Glorious City." There is a saying in Arabic "Baghdad Set-el-Belad," – Baghdad is the ancestor of all countries." A picnic to the Guahouriyah will bring to mind Scheherazade spinning her one thousand and one tales.*

*These recipes were handed down from antiquity orally and visually and many of the dishes are prepared in the same way they were when the tale of Aladdin and his magic lamp was first told. Because Baghdad was a major center in ancient times and has continued to be so into modern times, its food has acquired an international character through the many nations that have held sway over the city and left their mark upon the culture.*

*I was born in Baghdad and spent some years in Teheran, Iran and later a few years in Beirut, Lebanon. Throughout these years I enjoyed basically the same cuisine because political boundaries do not erase cultural, especially culinary, ties. Each area, of course, does retain certain distinctive characteristics. Baghdad, as a world*

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## The Iny Family

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*in a microcosm – where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together -- was a place whose inhabitants ate much the same kind of food, though each group followed its traditions and prescribed ways of certain dishes.*

*During my early years when I lived in Baghdad servants and cooks were easily available to the reasonably affluent family, and many housewives hardly had the chance to try their hand at cooking, except for a few minutes a day spent doing kitchen inspection or taking note of the cook's daily shopping. Only in planning menus was she closely involved in the preparation of meals.*

*When I was a girl, my parents had a cook, well known in Baghdad whose name was Abraham al Tabbakh, which translates simply as Abraham the cook. Later, when I was married and lived in Persia, we enjoyed the services of Mirza Agha, a celebrated chef in Teheran.*

*Food is one of the most important parts of living. The basis for health and energy. It is the delight of the senses of sight, smell, and taste."*





# The Israel(i) Family

By Ruthie Israeli



The Israeli family originated in Iraq, settling in the city of Bagdad. Family tradition dates our presence in Iraq to the rule Nebuchadnezzar in the 7th century. The family remained in Iraq until forced to leave under duress in the 1950's.

The name *Israeli* has endured several changes. Originally the family name was *Rivka* and was later changed to *Israel*, and

ultimately then to *Israeli*. The Iraqi tradition was to use the name of a wise or well-known family member as the last name. Our family like many others adopted this tradition, but perhaps they were ahead of their time in choosing the name, Rivka, a feminine name. Rivka was known as the *Gabbait* of Bagdad, which meant she held the role of matchmaker, connecting single men and women with one another and preparing them for marriage. At some point, it no longer seemed feasible for the family to keep a feminine last name, so the name was changed to Israel, before ultimately changing to Israeli after the family's immigration to Israel, for which adding the Hebrew let Yud, to the end of the name, signified God's name and their gratitude to joining their people in the holy land.

Abraham Israel and Marcelle Levi fell in love at first sight. Marcelle was cleaning chickens, after *Kaparot*, when Abraham walked into the home of his friend and laid eyes on Marcelle. He wanted to marry her immediately, but despite his eagerness, Marcelle was only 16 years old, and Abraham aged 18 was mandated to serve in the compulsory army service for the Iraqi army. It was considered unusual for Iraqi Jews to serve in the army as they usually managed to pay their way out of service. Sadly, Abraham had lost his father Reuben at a young age, killed during the *farhud*. This left the Israeli family bereft, and without a source of income, forcing Abraham to forsake his education to support the family.

While Abraham went off to the Iraqi army, Marcelle was left but to only daydream of her future husband. As time passed, Marcelle could no longer contain her eagerness to marry Abraham, she convinced her father to commission a payoff to the Iraqi army for his early release. They married in Bagdad, and shortly thereafter suffered the loss of their first daughter, who died of Tuberculosis as an infant. Her name was Zahava, named after Golda Meir, a figure who was already known in the Jewish community of Bagdad. They went on to have 5 more children, Reuben, Yitzhak, Yaffa, David, and Yaakov, with the last three being born after they immigrated to Israel. Abraham worked as a shoe maker in Iraq, melding the family gold into the soles of the shoes before immigrating to Israel. Sadly, the Israeli's knew Iraqi Jews were known to do this and the gold was stolen from their soles.

After being forced out of Iraq and moving to Israel they were placed in displacement tents where they lived until they were able to find housing and work. Abraham went on to support his family selling Pitot (Pita bread) for over 50 years in the *Shuk* of Tel Aviv. Marcelle passed away in the 1993, and Abraham currently lives on the boarder of Bat Yam/Jaffo where he is surrounded by his fellow Iraqis speaking in Arabic, and drinking sweet tea.



## *The Lavipour Family*

By David Lavipour

David Lavipour was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1944 to Berta and Gourджи Lewi. David's mother and sister Laila live in NYC and a younger brother Ehsan lives in London. David's father, one of nine children, took over the family lumber importing business in Baghdad. In 1949, as persecution of Iraqi Jews intensified, David's family escaped to Iran, undocumented and arriving by a row boat across the Karun River, which marks the southern border between the two countries.

The family surname was changed to Lavipour when they obtained Iranian citizenship, although the family continued to be known as Lewi in the tight Iraqi Jewish community to this day.

In 1950 David and his sister Laila were sent to Israel alone for schooling and lived in a kibbutz for three years. They were finally reunited with their family in Teheran in 1953. David, his siblings, and many of the children of Iraqi Jews in Teheran attended the Community School, an English-speaking school associated with the American Presbyterian mission. Over time, the Iraqi Jews prospered and began to feel rooted in Iran. Under the Shah, the Iraqi Jews had a good life. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 changed that abruptly, forcing all of them to leave. This represented their second emigration in one lifetime, this time to the United States, Canada or Western Europe.

The last member of David's family to stay in Iran was his mother Berta, who left in 1981, crossing the border into Turkey with fake documents. Sadly, David's father was killed during the first few months of the Revolution, because of his close connection with Israel.

In 1962 David came to the United States and attended Lafayette college in Pennsylvania. Subsequently, he received his MBA from the Wharton Business school of the University of Pennsylvania. There he met his wife Marcia, who is a psychotherapist in NYC. In 1975 David began his career as a real estate lending officer at the Chase Manhattan Bank. In 1980 he started his real estate development company which focuses on development and redevelopment of existing shopping centers in which he remains active.

He has three children: Sara, 39, is a global product manager for a major international company; his son, Michael, 36, is a partner at a real estate hedge fund; and his youngest daughter, Rachel, 33, is a business development manager for a beauty business company.





## *The Moalem Family*

By Julia Moalem Cohen

I was born in Baghdad in 1951. Normally, when a baby is born it is a cause for joy and celebration. This was not the case for my father on the day that I was born - on that day he couldn't even look at me!

My father, Yehezkel Moalem, was born in Baghdad where my family had been for generations. He had a successful business in Baghdad and owned a store that sold appliances and other large household items. My mother, Naomi Mahlab, was also born in Baghdad to

an old Baghdadi family. She was one of seven children born to my grandparents. Unfortunately, my grandfather, who had been quite wealthy, died when my mother was young. That left my grandmother to raise seven children on her own, without any significant income. So, even though my mother's family had once been wealthy, she grew up under difficult circumstances.

My parents were married in 1948. My father's successful business was a relief for my mother. Even though the situation for Jews in Iraq was deteriorating around them, for my parents, it was a good time. My sister was born in 1949 and I was born two years later in 1951.

This was the tail end of the *Taskit* - when Iraq was actively trying to get all the Jews to leave Iraq. On the very same day that I was born, my father's store was vandalized and he was beaten up and bloodied by thugs. His was just one of many Jewish businesses that were attacked on that day. My father got the message. He felt an urgent need to leave Iraq. Coming home from this horrible day, my father was given the news that he had a new baby daughter to take care of. My father was so depressed he couldn't even look at me, his new daughter. My mother tried to coax him - "just look at her, she is a beauty, fair skinned and blue eyed" she said, but my father couldn't bring himself to look. "Well she needs a name!" said my mother. At that moment, Queen Juliana of the Netherlands was on the radio. So my father said "name her Julia" and just like that I was given a name. I wasn't even given a Hebrew name, just Julia.

Today, it is hard to imagine a father not wanting to even see his new daughter. The intense pressure my father felt at that moment must have been overwhelming. He had been physically assaulted, his store vandalized, and he realized that he would have to leave his ancestral home for the unknown. The rules of the *Taskit* were that Jews leaving Iraq couldn't bring any money or assets with them - just one suitcase

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## The Moalem Family

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and nothing else. How was he going to survive and support his family? Now, he had a new daughter to care for. But my mother had lived through hard times before. She knew what needed to be done.

My family immigrated to Israel when I was 3 months old – part of the mass exodus of Jews from Iraq during *Operation Ezra and Nehemia*. Since we could only take one suitcase with us, my mother had special tall heeled shoes made for her – with a secret compartment concealed inside the heel. Inside each shoe she put some valuable jewels. And, we left Iraq – after untold generations, we now left with almost nothing to forge a new life in Israel.

At first we lived in a *Ma'abarah*, a refugee camp, with other Jews who had fled Iraq. Life was difficult, leaving the relatively decent life we had lived in Baghdad to live in very poor conditions in the *Ma'abarah*.

Later we moved to Ramat Gan where there was a large Iraqi Jewish community. I moved in 1974 to join my sister in New York. I met my husband, Yair Cohen, and we were married in 1983.

Yair at the time worked for the Rudin Management Company, and the Rudin family were prominent members of Shearith Israel. So, we too became members of Shearith Israel. Life has taken me many places, from Baghdad, to Israel, to New York, but no matter where we go I will always remember where I came from. My father later told me that he wished he could have five more daughters like me, but it is my name, given to me on the sad day that my family realized we must leave our home, that will always remind me of the difficult circumstances under which my family had to leave Iraq.

Julia Moalem Cohen was born in Baghdad, Iraq, as the second of four children. When she was three months old, her family immigrated to Israel. In her twenties, she moved to the United States and married Yair Cohen.

Julia and Yair now have four children, Ariel, Natalie, Ben, and David, and two grandchildren, Oliver and Peri. They have been members of Shearith Israel for 10 years.

## Kichery

by Julia Moalem Cohen

My kids love Iraqi food, so I practice a lot with it. I am going to share with you one easy recipe called kichery—also spelled “kitchari,” “khichri,” or “khichdi”—which normally was cooked on Thursday before Shabbat. Kichery, a hearty rice stew, is easy and quick, and it is also the only Iraqi dish that I know of that has garlic in it. If you ask any typical Iraqi person if they like garlic, the answer will always be, “Noooo!!!”

## CULINARY CORNER

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 stick of butter (you can substitute 3 tablespoons of olive oil)
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 1/2 cups basmati rice (rinsed well)
- 1 cup red lentils (rinsed well)
- 1 1/2 teaspoons of cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 cups of water



### PROCEDURE:

Sauté the garlic, butter, and cumin.

Add the tomato paste, sauté for a few minutes, then add the rice, lentils, salt, and water.

Bring it to boil, and let it cook until all the water gets absorbed.

Reduce the heat to very low, mix the rice and cover the pot until the rice is soft (about 15 to 20 minutes).

Typically, we prepare a side dish of mixed yogurt with sour cream and chopped pieces of cucumber. You can also serve the kichery with fried eggs.

Enjoy!

*If you would like to submit a recipe for a future bulletin, send it to Tikva Ostrega at [tikvaostrega@gmail.com](mailto:tikvaostrega@gmail.com). In addition to the recipe, please include a short back-story describing the origins of the dish and why it is special to you.*

*In Shearith Israel's Winter 2017-2018 Bulletin, Julia Moalem Cohen shared her recipe an Iraqi dish her family enjoys.*





## Jacob Obermeyer

By George D. Frankel

My great-grandfather was the scholar and author Prof. Jacob Obermeyer. He lived in Baghdad, married a local Iraqi girl, and established a family there before being put in *Herem* whereupon he was forced to divorce his wife, abandon his family and return back West, where he re-married and fathered another family (including my grandmother).

Jacob Obermeyer was born in 1845, in Bavaria. He had a thorough Judaic and Talmudic education, with many of the leading rabbis of

German Orthodoxy. In 1868, he traveled through North Africa from Morocco to Egypt and crossed the whole of Palestine and part of Syria to Damascus. In 1869 he was summoned to Baghdad to be a teacher in a school of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. After three years, while still in Baghdad, he was hired to be a teacher and educator in the house of the exiled Persian pretender Naib al-Saltana, the brother of Nasir ad-Din, Shah of Persia.

In the winter of 1875-76, Obermeyer was chosen by the Persian prince Abbas Mirza Mulkara, the grandson of Abbas Mirza, to accompany them on a hunting trip. He was completely indifferent to the hunt. But he was most interested to see the land in which the *Amoraim* of the Talmud had lived. As a member of the hunting party, he attempted to find connections of the local landscape to geographical features described in the Talmud.

During his years in Baghdad, Obermeyer, published a series of articles in the monthly journal *HaMaggid* which severely criticized the renowned Kabbalist and leader *Haham* Yosef Hayyim (known as the *Ben Ish Hai*.) Obermeyer was particularly critical of his use of Kabbala. Obermeyer was then excommunicated for his views about the Zohar and Kabbala. The *Herem* was read publically in all the synagogues in Baghdad, and changed the course of his life. He was forced to divorce his wife and leave his family in Iraq to return to Germany!

After his return to Europe, he received an invitation to come to Vienna as a teacher of Arabic and Persian language and literature at the College of Oriental Languages, where he was active until 1915. He published several important books based on his experiences in Iraq. Particularly important is his book on the geography of Babylonia.

He later re-married and had a second family, from which I am descended.





## *The Sassoon Family*

By Nathan Sassoon



The name Sassoon is of course the Arabic pronunciation of Hebrew Sason (Arabic lacking the vowel sound O). David Sassoon, patriarch of the modern family, was born in Baghdad in 1792. The Pashah in charge of Baghdad in the 1820's seems to have been a troublemaker all round. Eventually the townspeople reported him to the Sultan who had him removed. But that came too late for David Sassoon whom this tyrannical Pasha had arrested on false charges. Once out of jail, David fled to India via Persia.

Settling in Mumbai (Bombay) he soon resumed his international trade, growing it manifold. He was impressed by the British system which he called fair and their government he described as compassionate rulers (*malkhei hesed*). He is remembered not only for his financial acumen, but more so for his munificence and especially his support for the institutions of the Jewish community and the wider Mumbai population. Monuments to him and his activities survive to this day.

Of his many children, his son Solomon took the lead in communal affairs. After Solomon's death in 1894, his wife Flora took over where her husband had left off – both as regards the business as well as the philanthropic endeavors. She was also a noted Talmudist. Halakhic questions she would address to major rabbis of the day, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic. She never stopped studying Torah and general knowledge for which she found time amidst her array of duties. Some have called her “a feminist ahead of her time,” but she is unlikely to have known the term. It should be recalled that many Baghdadian families had Hakhamim visit their homes to teach their children Torah – sons and daughters alike. Hakham Kinnoosh Z”L reminisced about the classes he would give in private homes that were attended by all the children as a matter of course.

Judging by Flora Sassoon's massive correspondence it would appear that she never dropped a friend but continued to make new ones.

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## *The Sassoon Family*

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After moving to London, she would hold an open house for tea on shabbath. Among the diverse mixture of guests, were retired military men whom she and her husband had met half a century earlier back in India. In 1910 she finally visited Baghdad with a large entourage including, of course her son David (named after his grandfather) and her daughters Rachel and Mozelle. Hakham Yosef Hayyim Z"L, with whom the family cherished a close relationship, had been pressing them for years to make the trip.

Sadly, by the time the trip materialized, Hakham Yosef Hayyim was no more, having passed away in 1909. Nevertheless, they made the acquaintance of Hakham Yosef's son, Hakham Ya'aqob as well as other rabbis. They were all avid diarists which helps give a flavor of the excitement they felt at reconnecting with their roots. Baghdad and its special traditions were never forgotten but rather passed down faithfully from generation to generation until the present.

Rabbi Isaac Sassoon is a great grandson of Flora Sassoon described above, he is also an active member of Shearith Israel.

*Nathan Sassoon is the director of the Ohel David Sassoon Institute in Israel. He is a nephew of our member, Rabbi Isaac Sassoon. Photos used with permission from מכון אהל דוד ששון.*





## *The Shahmoon Family*

By Barbara and Sassoon Shahmoon

My father in law, Ezra Shamoon was born in Baghdad in 1896. He was a businsman and an investor, but he was also quite well known for his views on healthy eating and Biblical foods. He even created a ginger mixture that to this day many older Iraqis have on their shelf. Ezra's mother was Sarah Somekh, also a Baghdadi family.

Ezra married Lydia Hayyim, from an Iraqi family in Bombay, India. They were married in India in 1933, spent a honeymoon in China and then spent several years living in Jerusalem, in British Mandate Palestine.

Sassoon was born in Jerusalem in 1934, and was soon joined by his sisters, Rebecca and Diana who were also born in Jerusalem. The family spent a few months in England before arriving via a ship convoy during the War to New York City in 1941. The family made a short



stay in Montreal before settling in New York. (Ezra later returned and made some investments there – today, Sassoon and I live mostly in Montreal). My family is American for a few generations. We met in the happy hunting grounds of East Hampton – a merger of opposite ends of the Jewish spectrum.

Sassoon and I have kept our links to Shearith Israel since his parents Ezra and Lydia's association with it back in the days of Rabbi Gerstein, Hazan Abraham and Irma Cardozo (dear friends), Judah Guedalia and Arnie Goldfarb, before we moved to Montreal. We celebrated our wedding here with Rabbi Marc Angel and our son David's brit which took place on a Shabbat Yom Kippur 1984.

We love our connection to this special and unique synagogue. It has a deep place in our hearts and in our family's history. We have maintained our membership (and our apartment) and come whenever we come to the city, which grows in frequency lately since our children David and Lydia have left the nest. Please do say hello to us when we come to services. We'd like to reconnect!







# The Shohet Family


By Tikva Ostrega

Both my parents were born in Baghdad. My Father, Ezra Meir Shohe was born in Baghdad in 1917. My mother, Caroline Hamza Shohet was also born in Baghdad. Her parents were Yosef Hamza and Regina Somekh. All were from the Bagdadi community.

My mother is actually a cousin of Sir Naim Dangoor. Here is a picture of her at his wedding in Baghdad, in 1947. She is seated at the bottom right of the photo.

My parents left Iraq and moved to Israel where I was born. I also have 5 siblings. We later moved to the United States and lived in Long Island. Today, I am very active at Shearith Israel and am sorry that I will not be able to make it to this event!

Kousa Mahasha is a typical Iraqi holiday dish, beloved because of its rich colors and flavors and use of native vegetables. Your guests will be impressed, but it is Tikva's favorite meat recipe for the holidays because it is deceptively simple to prepare.



## CULINARY CORNER

### KOUSA MAHASHA

By Tikva Ostrega

**Mehshi** means "stuffed" in Arabic. Dolma, is the Turkish equivalent but we use the term Dolma for stuffed vine leaves only.

*Makes 16 portions*

**INGREDIENTS**

8 cougettes (zucchini)

**The stuffing**

1 pound of minced lamb or minced chicken breast or minced beef

1 onion, finely chopped

3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint

3 tablespoons finely chopped Italian parsley

1 tablespoon olive oil, if you are using minced chicken breast use 3 tablespoons of olive oil (otherwise it will taste too dry)

Salt and pepper to taste

**The sauce**

1 small onion, finely chopped

2 large tomatoes, finely chopped

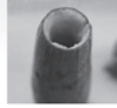
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint

1 bay leaf

8 ounces of water

2 lemons, juiced

1 tablespoon sugar



**ABOUT TIKVA**

*Tikva Ostrega is a devoted Shearith Israel member and was recently voted in as an Elector, a privilege bestowed in our most committed members.*

Tikva was born in Israel, the eldest of six siblings with family ancestry that can be traced back to the early 1600s in Iraq. She emigrated to the US from England in 1989 and it has been our great fortune that she, together with her husband Irwin, immersed themselves in our community.

We are also pleased to announce that Tikva has agreed to coordinate our quarterly Culinary Corner starting in our Spring 2016 edition. Don't be surprised if Tikva asks you to submit a treasured family recipe, a kosher restaurant review or your favorite parveiyot of specialty foods or ingredients.

If you would like to submit a recipe, send it to Sarah Sus London at [sarah@suslondon.org](mailto:sarah@suslondon.org). In addition to the recipe, please include a short back story describing the origins of the dish and why it is special to you.

Wash tops and cut off the tails of the cougettes. Cut in half to end up with 16 pieces but take care to not cut right through leaving one end closed. Using a spoon, scoop out the flesh from center.

Set aside the coured cougettes and the scooped out flesh.

**THE SAUCE**

In a deep saucepan large enough to hold all the stuffed cougettes in a single layer, combine the scooped out flesh with the sauce ingredients, except for the sugar and the lemon juice. Bring to a boil then simmer for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile mix the stuffing ingredients and loosely stuff the cougettes.

Arrange the stuffed cougettes in the simmering sauce, adding more hot water if necessary to cover them half-way. Boil for 3 minutes, then reduce to a simmer, cover and cook for 15 to 20 minutes.

Mix the sugar with the lemon juice and pour over cougettes.

Taste to adjust the flavor. Cover and simmer for 10-15 minutes.

Serve hot with rice.

Tikva Ostrega curates the Culinary Corner section of Shearith Israel's Bulletin, which features recipes contributed by members. In the Fall 2015 edition, she shared her own recipe for an Iraqi holiday dish.



## *The Smouha Family*

By Jean Naggar

Joseph Smouha, the eldest of two sons, was born in 1878 in Baghdad, to Ezekiel Smouha and Hanina Djeddah. Joseph Smouha's ancestors had served as honorary British consuls and couriers for the British government for several generations, and in return for those services, they had been awarded British citizenship for themselves and their families.

Ezekiel Smouha's eldest son, Joseph, left Iraq in 1892. Like so many young men of legend, he left Baghdad at the turn of the century to travel and seek his fortune. He settled in Manchester, England, where he became a textile industrialist, and met and married Rosa Ades from Damascus, who had come to Manchester to keep an older married sister company.

Because of his family's long-time service to the British government, and because 1917 saw a dramatic drop in the value of the pound sterling in the Middle East, he was assigned by the British government to go to Egypt, where he was housed in the British Embassy in Cairo, to help stabilize the currency situation. For three months he worked with Arab leaderships and with Lawrence of Arabia, and he succeeded in reestablishing the value of the pound sterling in the Middle East before returning to his work and his family in Manchester. Other government assignments followed, and this resulted in him moving to Alexandria, Egypt, with his growing family after the first World War.

He was known as a modest upright generous man, a visionary and a great philanthropist. The Egyptian King Fuad, exiled by then, said at the death of the Iraqi-Jewish cotton trader who drained the mosquito infested Hadra Lake in Alexandria at his own expense and turned it into the most exclusive neighborhood in Alexandria, "He was the only foreigner who came to the country, brought his own money and did good to the country."

Joseph Smouha had wanted to name his development Fuad City, but the King refused and insisted that it be named Smouha City, which it remains to this day. Joseph Smouha donated much of his property to schools, hospitals, and other institutions. He was a great philanthropist, but following the Jewish tradition in which he had been raised, he believed that true charity should remain private, known only to the giver and the recipient. Consequently he left behind no hospitals or

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## *The Smouha Family*

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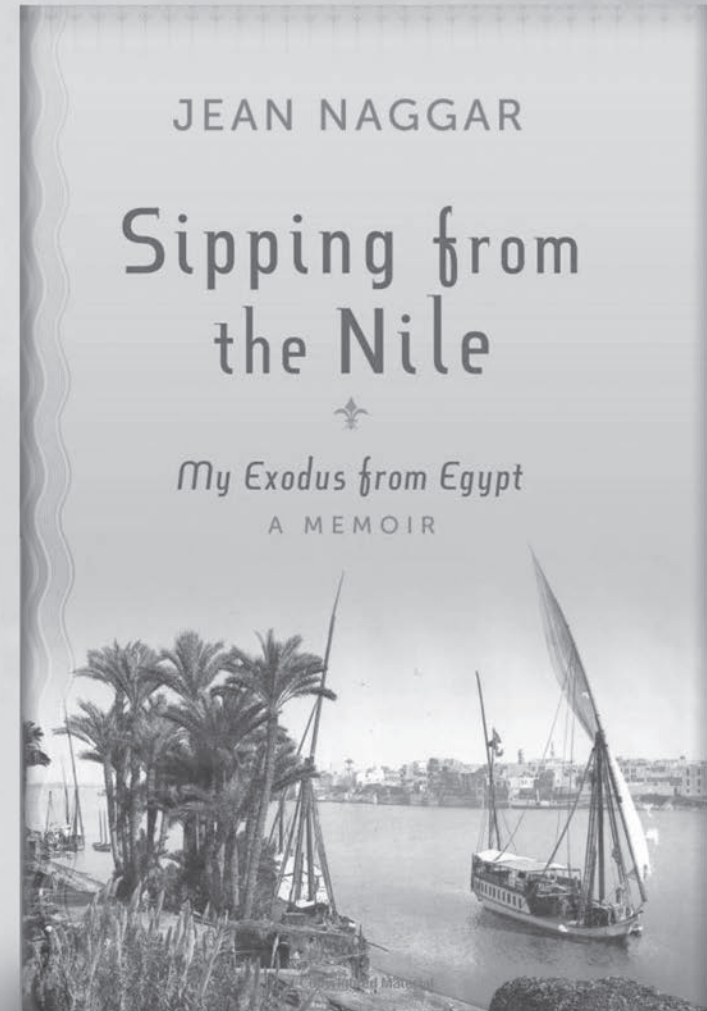
museums with his name on the door, but he left a multitude who blessed his discreet intervention in their lives.

A rare visionary who was firmly rooted in values and tradition, he transformed himself from a young man applying a Middle Eastern sensibility to a new life in England, to one who established a new life in the Middle East which he infused with a British sensibility.

Our lives in the Middle East ended with the Suez crisis of 1956, and Joseph Smouha's land and possessions were taken over by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Joseph Smouha's descendents are scattered widely now, in Europe, Asia, Israel and America. A grandson, Jeffrey Mosseri, and two of Joseph Smouha's granddaughters, Viviane Bregman, and Jean Naggar, have ended up at Shearith Israel in New York with their families.

An excerpt from *Sipping From the Nile*, a memoir by Jean Naggar:

*Grandpa Smouha, the only grandfather I knew and loved, seemed a somewhat formidable figure towering over a little granddaughter, particularly since I sensed that all the other adults who dominated my young life deferred to him. [I remember him as] an old man with an arresting ascetic face, deep-set piercing eyes on either side of a narrow nose, a white mustache that pricked my cheek when he picked me up for a hug, and a head of beautiful white hair. He smelled deliciously of Roger & Gallet Eau de Cologne.*



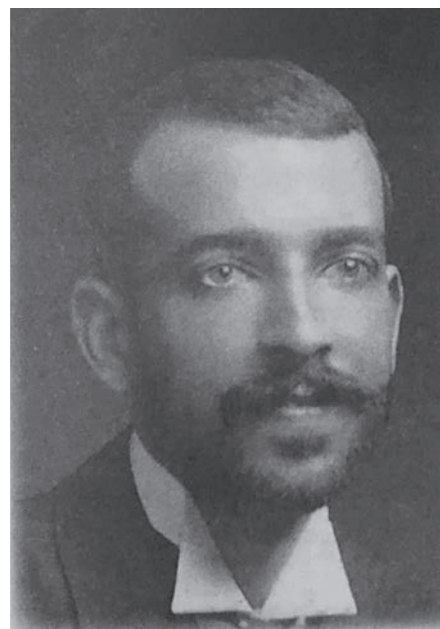


*Dad – David Meyer Sofaer – on the Sofaer bench, Burma Synagogue*

## *The Sofaer Family*

By Judge Abraham Sofaer

Both sides of my family are Jews from Iraq who emigrated to Burma and India in the late nineteenth century. My father, David Meyer Sofaer, was born on May 15, 1906, in Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar). His father, Meyer Abraham Isaac Shlomo Sofaer, was born in 1880 at Thaetmyu on the Irrawaddy River, on the family's trek to Rangoon from Baghdad. Meyer's father Abraham and mother Aziza were both from Baghdad. His wife Hanna was born in Rangoon of Baghdadi Jewish parents.



*Above left and right: Granpa and Granny in Rangoon.*

The Sofaers in Rangoon were importers and merchants. My grandfather, Abraham, and his older brother, Isaac Sofaer, built the Sofaer Building in downtown Rangoon, and Isaac had built several other prominent buildings. Isaac mortgaged the family properties and when his brother Abraham was in London renewing trading contracts, the banks called all the mortgages at the same time. Sofaer's building was sold in bankruptcy in 1916 and Meyer decided to move his family to Calcutta (now Kolkata). Meyer and Hanna had 10 children.

My father met my mother, Mozelle Ezekiel, on a visit to Bombay (now Mumbai) and married her soon thereafter. He went to work for E.D. Sassoon & Co., and among other things set up their retail sales operation throughout India. He spoke several Indian languages as well as English and Arabic. He visited the UK and US after WWII, and was able (due to his birth in Rangoon) to move the family to the US in 1947. We returned to India in 1948 for four years, during which David was involved in an unsuccessful litigation to reclaim his properties in

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Bombay. We all moved back to the US in 1952. David continued in business until he retired near San Rafael, California. He died in 1994 at 86 after an accidental fall.

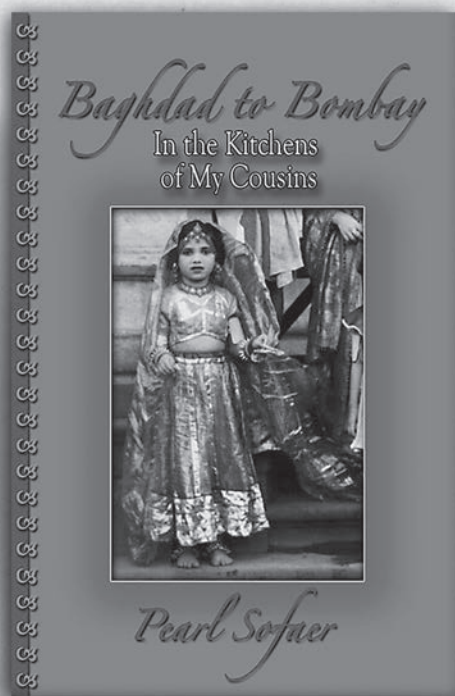
My mother Mozelle (Mazal Tov) Ezekiel was born in Bombay on July 3, 1915. Her father, Ephraim Yedidiah Yehezkiel, was born in Kirkuk in northern Iraq and sailed with his family from Basra to Bombay. Yehezkiel was a merchant who fabricated and sold fez hats and textiles from his store and workshop in Bhindi Bazaar. Her mother Pearl (Lulu) came to Bombay from Baghdad to marry Yehezkiel in an arranged marriage after his first wife died. The marriage became an adoring relationship. My grandfather had 11 children, 5 of whom were from Lulu, who died in childbirth when my mother was 9 years old. My grandfather Ephraim Yedidiah died of cancer when my mother, Mozelle, was 11 years old, leaving her an orphan.

My mother's brother, Joseph, moved as a young man to New York to work for his half brother Jack Ezekiel in the lace business. He joined the U.S. Army when war was declared on Germany and was stationed in Pearl Harbor on the night of the Japanese attack, which he survived because he wasn't in the barracks at the time of the attack. He was later assigned to the OSS and received many awards for heroic service (some behind enemy lines in Burma), including the Bronze Star.

My mother was brilliant but her father asked her to drop out of high school to help care for him when he got sick. She married at 16 and had her first child a year later. She had 5 children with my father, 4 of whom are still alive.

She was a fabulous cook specializing in Indo-Iraqi Jewish cuisine. My sister, Pearl, has published a book, *From Baghdad to Bombay: In the Kitchens of my Cousins*, containing some of Mozelle's recipes and family stories.

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My wife, Marian Bea Scheuer Sofaer, is descended from European Jews who immigrated to New York in the nineteenth century. I have 6 children: Daniel (with Anna Sofaer); and (with Marian) Michael, Helen, Joseph, Aaron, and Raphael, along with six grandchildren.

I was born in Bombay on May 6, 1938. At age 7, immediately after WW II, I was sent with my sister Pearl and my brother Isaac, to a boarding school in England for one year. We then spent a year in the US and returned to India for four years, during which time I attended primarily Anglican schools.

At age 14, in 1952, my entire family migrated to the US. I graduated high school in 1956 and enlisted in the US Air Force. From 1959 to 1962 I attended Yeshiva College, from which I graduated with a degree in US Intellectual History. I attended NYU Law School from 1962 to 1965, and served there as editor in chief of the law review. I clerked for US Circuit Judge J. Skelly Wright from 1965 to 1966; and for Associate Justice William J. Brennan from 1966 to 1967. From 1967 to 1969 I was an Assistant US Attorney under Robert M. Morgenthau in the Southern District of New York. From 1969 to 1979 I was a professor of law at the Columbia University School of Law.

From 1979 to 1985 I served as a US District Judge in the Southern District of New York, after which I went to the US State Department to work as Legal Adviser to Secretary George P. Shultz and then to Secretary James Baker. From 1990 to 1994 I was in private practice at Hughes Hubbard & Reed. In 1994 I was appointed the George P. Shultz Senior Fellow in Law and International Diplomacy at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, where I continue to serve.. I have written several books and articles on such subjects as the law related to the use of force, international affairs, Iran, and terrorism.

I have had several connections to Shearith Israel. In 1952, when we moved to the US, we attended services at the synagogue for several months before we moved to Queens. My sister Pearl was married there, and I remember well that all of us in the wedding party were required to wear tails and top hats. During my career as an attorney in New York City I became an admirer and friend of Fred Nathan, who played a major role at the synagogue and who invited me to join as a member. I remained a member for several years, even after moving to Washington, D.C.





## *The Suleiman Family*

By Anwar Suleiman

I was born in Basra in 1944, the fourth of five siblings. My father, Nissim Reuben Suleiman, was also born in Basra. He was from an affluent family, was well educated, and actually trained as a lawyer. Ultimately, however, he entered business and built a very successful import/export business shipping goods from the Far East to England. His father, Reuben Suleiman was a wealthy land owner who owned several date orchards. The home I grew up in was purchased by him. It was a large estate that was once the home of the Greek Consulate. It had a large mansion with many rooms, a large garden, a vineyard, and even had a barn with dairy cows. Brucellosis (also known as Malta fever) was prevalent in the cows of Basra – so our family made and pasteurized our own milk!

My mother, Sophie Jiji, was born in Basra as well. Her father, Menashe Jiji was from a Baghdadi family. When the British came to Iraq at the end of World War I, his home (in Basra) was taken and converted for use as a hospital for British soldiers. It was later returned to him, but now his home had a sink in every room!

The memories of my youth are of a community that was steadily declining as Jews left Iraq. Basra had two synagogues and a Jewish school run by the Alliance Israelite. The school was closed after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. So, I attended a Christian school that honored Shabbat. My grandmother hired a tutor to teach me Hebrew and Jewish subjects, but the tutor left for Israel shortly after our classes had begun. So, I never really learned much more than the *Shema* and a few prayers. Later, when I was an adult in New York, I sat in on Hebrew classes taught at the Safra synagogue. The class was for children and I was the only adult, but I was determined to make up for the Hebrew education that was interrupted during childhood in Basra.

I recall attending synagogue every week on Shabbat, but it seemed that almost every shabbat there were fewer and fewer people in the synagogue as families emigrated to Israel and elsewhere.

My parents sent my older siblings to England for schooling in 1953. Then I was sent, along with my sister, to attend a school in Illinois in 1956. My parents joined us and reunited the family in Evanston, Illinois in 1960. My father then began a new career trading commodities at the Chicago Board of Trade.

I became a veterinarian. My wife Barbara and I moved to New York in 1987. We joined Shearith Israel in 1993 and became very involved in the Shearith Israel League. We have three lovely children and enjoy spending time with our grandchildren here and in San Francisco. We left the congregation in 2016, but still have many friends and fond memories of Shearith Israel.



## *The Zilkha Family*

By Ezra K. Zilkha



My father, Khedouri Zilkha, was born into a successful merchant family in Baghdad. He left school at a young age and started a bank when was just 15 years old! His dream was to have bank branches all over the Middle East. Very early on, he traveled to Istanbul and began trading in precious metals, especially gold, between Istanbul and Baghdad, all the while building his bank. He was able to grow his business by relying on the strength of personal relationships and his strong commitment to ethics.

My mother, Louise Bashi was born into a prominent Baghdadi family. She married my father in 1912. I was born in Baghdad in 1925, the sixth child of seven siblings. My parents had gone to pray at the tomb of Ezra the scribe in Basra - so when I was born they named me Ezra. In the 1920's a criminal gang, "the Black Hand," extorted money from several wealthy Baghdad families and threatened our family. As a result, my father moved our family to Beirut when I was very young. I grew up mainly in Beirut. During the 1930's as my brother's grew up, they entered into my father's banking business and the firm grew. The Zilkha bank expanded significantly during this time and had branches in Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Alexandria and Cairo.

In 1938, my father became nervous about the prospects of war in Europe. He very presciently transferred a significant sum to a New York bank. During the War years I, together with my siblings and parents, relocated temporarily to New York. We traveled to South Africa and from there came to America in 1941. For my first nine months in America, I was in the "National Hospital for Speech Disorders" to help treat a stutter. Afterward I attended a preparatory school and then attended Wesleyan University for college.

In 1946, after the war, my father returned to the Middle East and I went to work in Hong Kong. But, in 1947, my father realized that the end of British Mandate Palestine and the creation of a Jewish State

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would dramatically impact our family's banking business. He returned to New York and told us that we should build our lives in the US and leave the Middle East behind us. My father was right of course. Our bank in Baghdad was expropriated in 1951 and the government of Iraq jailed our employees in order to extort money for their release. Then the Syrian government expropriated our Damsacus bank in 1954. Egypt expropriated our Cairo branch in 1956. Finally in 1957 we sold the Beirut bank and left the Middle East completely.

I met my wife Cecile at a Baghdadi wedding in New York in 1950. We danced together and were immediately taken with one another. We were married not long after! The Iny family was a prominent Baghdadi family that had relocated to Teheran in the 1930's, where my wife was born. Cecile came to the US together with her family in 1948. Both the Zilkha and Iny families became members of Shearith Israel. In those days, Shearith Israel was the only Sephardi synagogue in Manhattan, and many Baghdadi Jews came to Shearith Israel at that time. In particular I remember the Hakkak family who were later influential in the creation of the A.A. Society. Of course there were many other Sephardic Jews from throughout the Middle East who came to Shearith Israel during this time as well.

Cecile and I were active in many charities including, Wesleyan University, The Metropolitan Opera, and the Hospital for Special Surgery. We have also been proud of our connection to Shearith Israel, where I arranged for the donation of two special Torah scrolls from Iraq some years ago. I attend services mainly on the high holidays and to commemorate the anniversary of the passing of my relatives. Sadly my wife, Cecile passed away in 2017. Now, as an older man, I look back and am proud of the banking business that my father built, of his dedication to his clients and his reputation for high ethical standards. I have always tried to emulate these ideals. I am proud of the philanthropic endeavors that my wife and I have been involved in, the family we built together, and of course of our Iraqi Heritage.

# IRAQI JEWS: SOME ONLINE RESOURCES

Compiled by Annette Gourgey

## Information Centers

<https://www.bjhcenglish.com/>  
<http://www.isragen.org.il/siteFiles/1/211/4785.asp>  
Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, Or Yehuda, Israel

<http://www.dangoor.com/scribe.html>  
The Scribe, Journal of Babylonian Jewry Online

Congregations in the New York Area

<http://iraqijews.org/>  
Congregation Bene Naharayim, Jamaica Estates, NY

<http://www.midrash.org/>  
Midrash Ben Ish Hai, Great Neck, NY  
Links to articles, publications, events

## Articles

<https://www.facebook.com/Iraqi-JewsJews-Of-Babylon-%D7%99%D7%94%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%91%D7%9C-162156113861386/>  
Iraqi Jews (Jews of Babylon): photos, videos, posts

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-iraq>  
Jews in Islamic Countries: Iraq

[http://cojs.org/the\\_jewish\\_community\\_in\\_baghdad\\_in\\_the\\_eighteenth\\_century-\\_zvi\\_yehuda\\_nehardea-\\_babylonian\\_jewry\\_heritage\\_center-\\_2003/](http://cojs.org/the_jewish_community_in_baghdad_in_the_eighteenth_century-_zvi_yehuda_nehardea-_babylonian_jewry_heritage_center-_2003/)  
The Jewish Community in Baghdad in the Eighteenth Century

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/remembering-last-jews-iraq/>  
Remembering the Last Jews of Iraq, November 22, 2017

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-expulsion-that-backfired-when-iraq-kicked-out-its-jews/>  
The Expulsion that Backfired: When Iraq Kicked Out its Jews, May 31, 2016

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-independence-iraq-jews/with-jews-largely-gone-from-iraq-memories-survive-in-israel-idUSKBN1HP1ID>  
With Jews Largely Gone from Iraq, Memories Survive in Israel, April 18, 2018

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.829282>  
Decades After Fleeing, Iraqi Jews Plan to Return to Their Homeland, Dec 17, 2017

## The Farhud (pogrom on Shabuot, 1941)

<http://www.midrash.org/article/historical/farhud>

<http://www.thetower.org/article/remembering-the-destruction-of-iraqi-jewry-farhud/>

[https://www.rferl.org/a/Remembering\\_The\\_Farhud\\_The\\_Pogrom\\_That\\_Ended\\_Iraqi\\_Jewish\\_Life/2058848.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Remembering_The_Farhud_The_Pogrom_That_Ended_Iraqi_Jewish_Life/2058848.html)

## Music and Video

[https://www.amazon.com/Hodu-Jewish-Rhythms-Baghdad-India/dp/B0020Z1XCW/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1541693879&sr=1-1-mp3-albums-bar-strip-0&keywords=rahel+musleah](https://www.amazon.com/Hodu-Jewish-Rhythms-Baghdad-India/dp/B0020Z1XCW/ref=sr_1_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1541693879&sr=1-1-mp3-albums-bar-strip-0&keywords=rahel+musleah)  
Audio CD: Hodu: Jewish Rhythms From Baghdad to India  
Rahel Musleah, March 16, 2009

*(continued)*



## *Iraqi Jews: Some Online Resources*

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There are more documentary videos and music selections on YouTube than can be listed here; here is a sampling. (Search Iraqi Jewish music, history, etc.)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gIMyeH\\_b7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gIMyeH_b7s)  
From Exile to Exodus: The Story of the Jews of Iraq (documentary)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIDLK3LqAWw>  
Rosh HaShanah Prayers in the Meir Tweig Synagogue, Baghdad, Mid-1990s

The popular Motzei Shabbat song El Eliyahu:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1EnvSsYgrY&index=3&list=PL4GFY9tjWWKtglyXtn8xCpC1Id2NR6xv6> Solo singer  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfHf4RNw\\_eM&list=PL4GFY9tjWWKtglyXtn8xCpC1Id2NR6xv6&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfHf4RNw_eM&list=PL4GFY9tjWWKtglyXtn8xCpC1Id2NR6xv6&index=4) Ensemble with instrumental band

Hazan Moshe Habusha of Israel has many traditional religious and secular melodies of Iraqi Jews on YouTube, including the following:

Selihot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckWgXXGcq4g>

Passover: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6ap\\_ldDWDM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6ap_ldDWDM)

Eicha: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUF-jtLNdK0>

Hebrew: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHhxUN3zuKI>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH-AhLC49-I>

Arabic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLp8UoBHnIw>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfH\\_hYj3-LY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfH_hYj3-LY)

*Rene Dangoor, "Beauty Queen" Iraq, 1947*







*Iraqi American Dinner Dance – 1946 courtesy of the Sacks/Shakeredge family*

