

Kol Mevasser

TU B'SHVAT

12 Shevat 5768

January 19, 2008

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Who is Sallah Shabbati?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia

*Rabbi Ovadia continues January 12th's review of **Sallah Shabati**, our last selection for the Sephardic Winter Film Series at Kahal Joseph. Our next movie, **My Fantasia**, will screen on January 27th at 6:00 pm.*

With all the good intentions of Kishon, though, he caused almost irreparable damage to Mizrahi identity, especially in America, where this movie was viewed almost as a documentary. For starters, Sallah's body language is exaggerated and grotesque. He can barely walk. His legs are crooked; he lacks balance and grace, and you can always hear his shoes clicking as he drags his feet. When he talks, his whole face contorts in strange expressions, and he sometimes uses sign language. He raises his voice and screams with no reason, and he will not miss an opportunity to curse in Arabic at an unsuspecting Ashkenazi.

The Mizrahi Jew, through Sallah, is described as an irresponsible family man. He doesn't know how many children he has, drags his youngest son dangling from his hands like a monkey, and has no idea why the old lady Julia is with them, but finally concludes that she must be a relative. He yells at his pregnant wife that she must deliver a boy. In fact, his children tell the social worker that every time their mother is about to give birth, they hide for fear of his rage. The following dialog is typical:

Bat Sheva (Social worker): Did you have brothers and sisters?

Sallah Shabati: Yes, of course.

Bat Sheva: How many?

Sallah: It's hard to tell, there were many and some died.

Bat Sheva: But any way, how many?

Sallah: Anyway, a lot.

Bat Sheva: When did you get married?

Sallah: A long time ago.

Bat Sheva: How old were you?

Sallah: Very Little.

Bat Sheva: But any way, how old?

Sallah: Any way, little, that's how we do it!

Sallah is not a great bread winner either. He is lazy, has no profession, and even when assigned to forestry—which was a way to keep the immigrants busy—he manages to do nothing and eventually get fired. Not only he, but other Mizrahi immigrants are not skilled or educated laborers either. The director assigns to a Moshe Haboosha (Iraqi) the profession of a shoemaker while Kalman Binstock is a high ranking official.

As if not working was not enough, Sallah takes his children's salaries in order to get drunk at the Maabara coffee shop, the Café where the Maabara residents spend most of their time. When the politicians look for the Maabara's strongman they ask someone in the street 'Where is everybody?' And he answers, 'Where else, in the café.' In one scene, upon entering the Café, the camera zooms in on Sallah in his

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesdays Nights at, 7:30 pm

Orthodox, Conservative or the Sephardic
Alternative: Traditional, Flexible Judaism

Sunday, January 27th

Rabbi Musleah Gathering, 2:00 pm

Sephardic Winter Films: *My Fantasia*, 6:00 pm

Friday, February 1st—RSVP Required

Friday Night Dinner

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pajamas, playing on another stereotype—that Iraqi’s never wear clothes, just stay in their pajamas. As a matter of fact the Iraqis never wore pajamas outside their homes, but their striped clothes were mistaken for such.

In the café, Sallah is constantly drinking and playing the game he loves, backgammon or Shesh-Besh. This game has such a central place in his life that the first thing he often does when we see him is play the game. When his daughter tries to tell him that she wants to marry Ziggy, Sallah claims that one cannot stop a backgammon game in the middle. He even takes the board with him to the synagogue. He plays for money and usually cheats his innocent Ashkenazi neighbor Goldstein. To sum it up, for Sallah Shesh-Besh is more important than family, work, religion and ethics.

Adding insult to injury, Sallah, according to Kishon, is a total ignoramus. He can barely write and cannot read at all. He doesn’t know anything about cuckoo clocks, elections, faucets, machinery, mailboxes, or modern furniture. His speech is primitive and slurred and most of his sentences follow the formula: ‘This is... this is!’ For example: ‘This is a big dog, this is,’ or ‘This is a good sausage, this is.’

Furthermore, his accent cannot be identified as belonging to a specific country or place, as is the case with his general character. Where is he from? Kishon created an amalgam, an All-Mizrahi character, maybe to fend off critics. And indeed the Moroccans saw him as Iraqi and vice versa. Topol’s rendition of his accent, praised by the media, is additionally distorted, and ignorant of the actual, proper pronunciation, because he mixes the letters het and hei, ayin and aleph. Finally, the dress code of the family is a mixture of Iraqi, Moroccan, Kurdish and Tunisian elements, topped off by a vest a-la Tevye the milkman, making Sallah no more than a miserable caricature of a man.

The greatest distortion of the movie, though, is the idea of the main plot that Sallah’s daughter will be offered to whoever pays the most. When Ziggy, the Kibbutz member she falls in love with, tries to protest, Sallah’s daughter Habuba answers: this is our custom. It is sad and ridiculous to hear that. In fact, the criticism is misdirected, since the one community in which girls are still sold to the highest bidder is that of ultra-orthodox, Ashkenazi society.

It is hard to believe that this is how Mizrahi Jews were viewed by the Ashkenazi establishment. For many years, I thought it was the product of ignorance. Only lately, especially after teaching a course on Jews of the Mediterranean at the American Jewish University, did I realize that the propaganda was part of a PR campaign meant to keep Mizrahi Jews at bay and to raise sympathy and funds abroad for the brave young state of Israel that had to absorb such low quality human material. To Be Continued

PRAYER SCHEDULE

SHABBAT BESHALAH

11 Shevat / Friday, January 18th

Minhah & Arvith.... 10 minutes after candlelighting
Candlelighting4:51pm

12 Shevat / Shabbat, January 19th

Shaharith..... 8:30 am
Minhah & Arvith.....4:30 pm
Motzei Shabbat.....5:50 pm

13 Shevat / Sunday, January 20th

Shaharith..... 7:30 am
Talmud Torah..... 10:00 am
All TT students invited to a Tu B'Shvat Activity.

Monday through Thursday

Shaharith..... 6:30 am
Talmud Torah, Tue/Thu.4:00 pm
Tu B'Shvat is on Tuesday, January 22nd

SHABBAT YITRO

18 Shevat / Friday, January 25th

Minhah & Arvith.... 10 minutes after candlelighting
Shabbat Candlelighting4:58 pm

PARASHA & HAFTARAH

Beshalah Hertz p. 266, Haftara Hertz p. 281

THANK YOU

Alice & Maurice Zekaria
for your generosity in supporting our
adult education lecture series
“Orthodox, Conservative, and the
Sephardic Alternative”

Refuah Shlemah

Please include the following people in your prayers for health and recovery.

Khayah Noa bat Sara
Matilda Louisa
Victor ben Pauline
Haim ben Mordechai
Shaul Chai Gavriel ben Sara
Shamuel Eliyahu ben Hannah

To add or remove names from this list, send an e-mail to dafna@kahaljoseph.org.

Thirty Days Memorial

*The memorial for Aliza Iny, z"l
the mother of Yoel, Abe, Eli & Benny
will be held on
Monday, January 21st
at 4:30 pm*

In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the 12th of Shevat (January 19, 2008) to Shabbat, the 19th of Shevat (January 26th, 2008). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services in honor of loved ones. *Entries with an asterisk lack contact names, to add information please call 310-474-0559.*

Shabbat / 12 Shevat

Abraham Shalom Mordechai Yitzhak Hacohen
Matatehu ben Shmuel
Moshe ben Saleh Kadoorie
Rachel bat Masooda

Sunday / 13 Shevat

Alex Sassoon
Nanejan bat Hacham Mola Rebbi*

Monday / 14 Shevat

Shaul ben Shimon Haim
Avdala ben Eliyahu Saltoon

Tuesday / 15 Shevat

Yehezkel ben Abdullah Yehezkel*
David ben Ezra

Wednesday / 16 Shevat

Yehudah Hai Yehudah
Menashe ben Yousef Sarraf
Yehudah ben Mordechai

Thursday / 17 Shevat

Shimon ben Eliyahu

Friday / 18 Shevat

Raphael Hai ben Eliyahu Mordehai Mizrahi

Shabbat / 19 Shevat

Doris bat Kahela

Kiddush

*is cosponsored by
Evelyn Azar
in memory of
Joseph Azar, z"l*

Kiddush

*is cosponsored by
Mahin Saberi & Family
in memory of
Shaul ben Shimon Haim, z"l*