

# KOL MEVASSER

## Religious Authenticity and our "Tribes"

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

A while ago, a member of our Institute sent me an email. Here are his comments, although I've deleted the name of the rabbi to whom he referred.

"Does it bother anyone else that Sephardim have begun wearing the funeral dress of Ashkenazim- the black hats, suits, and other "garb" of Eastern European Jews ? Even Rabbi X, a well-respected Sephardi Hakham, has succumbed to this. I fear for the future of Sephardi customs and traditions !!"

This phenomenon has been bothering me for quite a few years. It isn't a new reality, but has been going on for a long time. When I was President of the Rabbinical Council of America (1990-1992), I met with the then Rishon leZion, Rabbi Mordecai Eliyahu, and asked that he encourage Sephardic rabbis not to dress like counterfeit Ashkenazim. The Jewish people need various models of proper rabbis, and the rabbinate should not be squeezed into one particular mold. While Sephardic rabbis don't need to don turbans and kaftans, they could dress as good "Modern Orthodox" and "Religious Zionist" rabbis--in a variety of garbs. The more diversity, the better our ability to attract a wider segment of the population to religious life.

Rabbi Eliyahu responded: the Ashkenazic garb has become the "standard" garb for Talmidei Hakhamim. Sephardic rabbis won't be taken seriously enough if they don't dress according to this fashion. When I said that the situation might be turned around if he and other Sephardic leaders made an issue of it, he said it wasn't worth it and it wouldn't succeed.

I've spoken to many Sephardic rabbis who come to New York to raise funds for their institutions. I've asked them why they dress like Hareidi/Lithuanian rabbis? Invariably, they answer: this is how rabbis are expected to dress.

In the United States, it has become fashionable--even in so-called Modern Orthodox circles--to show one's piety by donning a black hat, black suit, white shirt--and wearing tsitsith hanging outside. This has crept into the Sephardic community, especially when students have studied in Ashkenazic yeshivot. Even Sephardic rabbis have adopted the "black hat" look, as a way of conforming to and identifying with a more extreme version of Orthodoxy.

This is a distressing tendency, because ultimately it fosters unhealthy values: a) it promotes conformity to external standards; b) it undermines Sephardic, Yemenite and other cultural/religious identity and tradition; c) it negates the rich diversity which is a vital source of strength to Judaism and the Jewish people; d) it sends the message that to be a good religious man, you must dress in a particular fashion, otherwise your religiosity is suspect.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## KJ Schedule

### Parashat Devarim

#### Erev Shabbat Hazon

**Friday, July 12**

Shaharit .....	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim .....	6:45 pm
Minha & Arvit .....	7:00 pm
Candle Lighting.....	7:48 pm

#### Shabbat Hazon

**Saturday, July 13th**

Shaharit .....	8:30 am
Class with Rabbi Batzri .....	6:20 pm
Ladies Tehillim .....	6:20 pm
Minha/Arvit .....	7:05 pm
Shabbat Havdallah .....	8:32 pm

**Sunday, July 14th**

Shaharit .....	7:30 am
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#### Erev Tisha B'Av / Eve of 9th of Av Fast

**Monday, July 15th**

Shaharit .....	6:30 am
Fast Begins.....	8:04 pm
Arvit .....	8:00 pm
Eikha/Lamentations & Kinot.....	after Arvit

#### Tisha B'Av / 9th of Av Fast Day

**Tuesday, July 16th**

Shaharit .....	6:30 am
Minha, Torah Reading, Birkat Cohanim / Priestly Blessing and Arvit.....	7:30 pm
Fast Ends for Sepharadim .....	8:26 pm

*(Continued on page 4)*

Torah Portion in Devarim 736 to 749  
Haftara 750 to 754

*(Continued from page 1)*

It would be a very positive development if Sephardic rabbis did not take on the look of Ashkenazic/hareidi rabbis. It would be a positive development if Sephardic congregations asked their rabbis not to put themselves into the "black hat" mold. It would be excellent if Sephardim who send their children to study in Ashkenazic yeshivot and seminaries would give their children the confidence to avoid the pitfalls of conformity.

Is it realistic to expect these things to happen? Rabbi Mordecai Eliyahu thought the battle wasn't worth fighting--or that it was already lost. I have respectfully disagreed with his analysis. The only problem is that reality seems to bear out the truth of Rabbi Eliyahu's position, and the futility of mine!

In this week's Torah portion, we read the admonitions that Moses gave to the Israelites, in anticipation of his nearing death. As in other parashiyot, the people of Israel are referred to as "shevatim," tribes. The twelve tribes of Israel represented the foundational structure of Israelite society, with each tribe having its own land and its own leaders.

A Kabbalistic teaching informs us that each of the tribes had its own distinctive character, its own unique pathway to God. Although all the Israelites formed one people, yet each tribe maintained its own special insights and traditions. The glory of Israel was that each tribe had its own distinctive contribution to make to the spiritual life of Israel. Instead of a homogenized religious life, the ancient Israelites fostered diversity and individuality.

Each "tribe" of the Jewish people today also has its own distinctive features, its own particular way of relating to God and fellow human beings. We not only have Sephardim and Ashkenazim, but so many subdivisions within these groupings, and so many other Jewish civilizations that constitute the glory of Israel e.g. Babylonian, Yemenite, Persian, Italian, Romaniot etc. Each of these groups has its distinctive traditions and insights, and each plays a role in the overall vitality of Jewish life. However, when there are pressures to homogenize the groups into one conforming pattern, then the entire Jewish people lose out. Paths to the Almighty are forced shut, and we are constricted to narrower and narrower confines.

Each "tribe" of the Jewish people has a sacred task of maintaining and vitalizing its unique pathway to the Almighty. This is important not from a feeling of "ethnic pride," so much as from a feeling of responsibility for the overall vitality and spiritual dynamism of the Jewish people as a whole. Religiosity shows itself in many valid and beautiful ways; we need not abandon our distinctive traditions in order to conform to this group or that group.

To abandon one's distinctive traditions is to become inauthentic. It doesn't bring us closer to God. To allow valid religious pathways to fade away is to betray the history and traditions of our "tribe" and the history and traditions of all Israel.

It is to betray one's own authenticity.

And that is a terrible thing.

## In Memoriam

We remember these yahrzeit anniversaries for July 13th to 20th, 2013. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, and attend services the preceding Shabbat.

### 6 Av / Shabbat, July 13th

Eric Morris *Itzhak Rahamim ben Abdullah Moshe*

### 7 Av / Sunday, July 14th

Suzanne Azincott  
Looloo Khazzoom

### 8 Av / Monday, July 15th

Albert Jacob *Abdullah ben Avraham Haim Yaacov*  
Sally Meyer Judah *Salha bat Aziza*

### 9 Av / Tuesday, July 16th

Alice Acoca *Alice bat Esther*  
Aziza Jacob *Aziza bat Farha*  
Amalia Mussry *Amalia bat Rahel*  
Mary Nathan *Mariam bat Bolisa*

### 10 Av / Wednesday, July 17th

Ramon Zakoo *Yehyah Ramon ben Ezra HaLevy*

### 12 Av / Friday, July 19th

Aziza Elias *Aziza bat Rachel*  
Hacham Moshe *Yaacov Masliah*  
Hayat Sarraf *Hayat bat David*

## Refuah Shlemah

Yocheved bat Rachel      Mazal bat Malka,  
Dan Herdoon      Mazal Tov bat Salha Matana  
Moshe ben Ezra      Vera Levi  
Sasson ben Rahel/Sassoon Moses  
Penina bat Henia      Dov Ber ben Sonia  
Maurice Ovadia / Moshe ben Noosha,  
Pnina bat Esther      Yossef ben Jamila  
Ruth bat Aliza      Dina bat Simha  
Shoshana Goury/ Shoshana bat Rahel  
Gerry Meyers / Ezra ben Yosef Aharon  
Yehoshua ben Channah

*To update this list please call 310-474-0559*

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## National Archives Unveils Iraqi Jewish Artifacts Exhibit

*Exhibit explores Iraq's Jewish past & showcases National Archives' preservation expertise*

On Friday, October 11, 2013, the National Archives will unveil a new exhibition, "Discovery and Recovery: Preserving Iraqi Jewish Heritage." The exhibit details the dramatic recovery of historic materials relating to the Jewish community in Iraq from a flooded basement in Saddam Hussein's intelligence headquarters, and the National Archives' ongoing work in support of U.S. Government efforts to preserve these materials. Located in the Lawrence F. O'Brien Gallery of the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, "Discovery and Recovery" is free and open to the public and runs through January 5, 2014.

In both English and Arabic, the 2,000 square foot exhibit features 24 recovered items and a "behind the scenes" video of the fascinating yet painstaking preservation process. This exhibit marks the first time these items have been on public display.

### Background

On May 6, 2003, just days after the Coalition forces took over Baghdad, 16 American soldiers from Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha, a group assigned to search for nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, entered Saddam Hussein's flooded intelligence building. In the basement, under four feet of water, they found thousands of books and documents relating to the Jewish community of Iraq – materials that had belonged to synagogues and Jewish organizations in Baghdad.



The water-logged materials quickly became moldy in Baghdad's intense heat and humidity. Seeking guidance, the Coalition Provisional Authority placed an urgent call to the nation's foremost conservation experts at the National Archives. Just a week later, National Archives Director of Preservation Programs Doris Hamburg and Conservation Chief Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler arrived in Baghdad via military transport to assess the damage and make recommendations for preservation of the materials. Both experts share this extraordinary story and take you "behind the scenes" in this [brief video](http://tinyurl.com/IraqiJA) [http://tinyurl.com/IraqiJA]. This video is in the public domain and not subject to any copyright restrictions. The National Archives encourages its use and free distribution.

Given limited treatment options in Baghdad, and with the agreement of Iraqi representatives, the materials were shipped to the United States for preservation and exhibition. Since then, these materials have been vacuum freeze-dried, preserved and photographed under the direction of the National Archives. The collection includes more than 2,700 Jewish books and tens of thousands of documents in Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic and

English, dating from 1540 to the 1970s. A special website to launch this fall will make these historic materials freely available to all online as they are digitized and catalogued. *This work was made possible through the assistance of the Department of State, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Center for Jewish History.*

The Jews of Iraq have a rich past, extending back to Babylonia. These materials provide a tangible link to this community that flourished there, but in the second half of the twentieth century dispersed throughout the world. Today, fewer than five Jews remain.

### Display highlights include:

- A Hebrew Bible with Commentaries from 1568 – one of the oldest books in the trove;
  - A Babylonian Talmud from 1793;
  - A Torah scroll fragment from Genesis - one of the 48 Torah scroll fragments found;
  - A Zohar from 1815 – a text for the mystical and spiritual Jewish movement known as "Kabbalah";
  - An official 1918 letter to the Chief Rabbi regarding the allotment of sheep for Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year);
  - Materials from Jewish schools in Baghdad, including exam grades and a letter to the College Entrance Examination Board in Princeton regarding SAT scores;
  - A Haggadah (Passover script) from 1902, hand lettered and decorated by an Iraqi Jewish youth ; and
  - A lunar calendar in both Hebrew and Arabic from the Jewish year 5732 (1972-1973) - one of the last examples of Hebrew printed items produced in Baghdad.
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Classes Start Sunday  
September 8th  
**\$60 month for members**  
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**KJ Children's Room Open**  
this Shabbat 10 am to 12 pm



**David S. Kelly Youth Choir  
Summer Break**

The Youth Choir is on vacation! We'll resume on August 25th. We thank our kids, parents, devoted volunteers, and Rabbi Batzri who all put so much into this program to make it great.

**Enjoy your summer!**

**Books about Iraqi Jewish Literature  
Now Available at Kahal Joseph**



We are pleased to offer a selection of books exploring the history and significance of Iraqi Jewish literature and religious writings. Written by UCLA Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Lev Hakak., these books offer careful analysis and refreshing insights into our heritage. For more information or to purchase contact Sarah in the office at 310.474.0559.

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**Weekdays**

**Wednesday to Friday, July 17th to 19th**  
Shaharit.....6:30 am

**Erev Shabbat Nahamu  
Friday, July 19th**

Shaharit.....6:30 am  
Shir Hashirim.....6:45 pm  
Minha & Arbit.....7:00 pm  
Candle Lighting .....7:44 pm