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What One Learns in Far-Away Places, 1962.

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WHAT ONE LEARNS IN FAR-AWAY PLACES

DR. ABRA HILLEL SILVER

THE TEMPLE

On our vacation this year, our wandering feet took us to Morocco and Majorca -- places where we had not been before. We were in search of sun and rest and we found both, and much interest besides.

Morocco, you may recall, is at the north-west tip of Africa. It was from here that the Moors, long ago, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and invaded Spain. It is today an independent monarchy, having achieved its independence six years ago. Until 1956, it was a protectorate of France and Spain, with Tangier as an international zone. Morocco has a population of about eight million, nearly all Mohammedans, largely illiterate. It is an agricultural and pastoral land, with little industry, rich in mineral deposits, little of which, however, has as yet been exploited. The United States Government has built a few military air-bases at great cost in Morocco, from which it has now been invited to withdraw.

We spent some three weeks in Morocco, visiting its principal cities of Casablanca, Rabat, the capital, Salé, Marrakech, Fez and Tangier. Being a Rabbi, and therefore on a busman's holiday, I was especially interested in the Jewish communities of Morocco and in their history. There are some one hundred and sixty thousand Jews living in Morocco today. There had been, until recently, some three hundred and fifty thousand. Nearly two hundred thousand have left for other countries -- France, South America, Canada, and especially Israel. Many more ~~of them~~ wish to leave.

Jews have lived in Morocco since before the Common Era, before it became a Roman province and was known as Mauretania or Barbary. Following the failure of the two revolutions against Rome in 70 and 135 A.D., many Jews from Palestine



migrated to other lands. By the fourth century, Jews were to be found everywhere in North Africa from Egypt to Morocco. We have records that some of the native tribes of Morocco, known as Berbers, were converted to Judaism. Many Berber tribes bear unmistakable traces of their Jewish origin. In the seventh century, the Arabs invaded Morocco in their imperial sweep across North Africa. They encountered the resistance of these Berber tribes, many of whom professed Judaism. It is recorded that a Berber Jewess, by the name of Daliyah, led them into battle.

The original Jewish settlers, plus these Berber converts, were joined from time to time by many Jews who fled from Visigothic persecutions in Spain in the centuries before the Moslem conquest, especially during the reign of Sisebut who, in 612, ordered all Jews to leave the country unless they consented to baptism. By and large, the Jews got along pretty well with their Arab rulers *in Morocco*. They had, of course, to pay the required tribute of all non-Moslems. They resided in separate quarters in the cities which were known as Mellahs, though they were free to settle elsewhere. They engaged in agriculture, trade and commerce, and some of them held important posts in government. They built synagogues and Yeshivot, and carried on a lively correspondence with the Rabbinic schools in Babylonia -- Sura and Pumpedita -- which had become the religious centers of world Jewry. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Moroccan Jewry produced scholars of note, such as the foremost Talmudist and codifier of his day, Isaac Alfasi -- that is, ~~Rabbi~~ <sup>Rabbi</sup> Isaac of the city of Fez, and the pioneer Hebrew grammarians and philologists, ~~Dunash~~ <sup>ibn</sup> ~~don~~ Labrat and Judah Hayyuj. Moses Maimonides lived in Fez for five years. Our Jewish guides pointed out to us the place where he had lived. Morocco was one of the important centers of Jewish life in the early Middle Ages.



A disastrous change in the fortunes of Moroccan Jews came in the middle of the twelfth century when the ultra-orthodox, bigoted and fanatical Moorish dynasty of Almohades came to power. The Almohades subjugated not only the whole of Morocco, but Southern Spain as well. They gave both Jews and Christians the desperate choice of embracing Islam or leaving the country. Many Jews fled to Spain and Egypt. Others embraced Islam, though they still lived as Jews in secret. These Jews, newly converted to Islam, were, nevertheless, compelled to wear a special costume, with a yellow cloth for a head-covering -- the prototype of the Jew-badge of later times in Christian lands.

When the power of the Almohades was broken in the thirteenth century, the position of the Jews who returned to Morocco, or who in later centuries immigrated there in large numbers from Spain, <sup>because of</sup> following the Spanish persecutions of 1391, the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and from Portugal in 1497, did not improve very much. Moroccan Jewry never recovered from the crushing blows of the Almohades. A pattern of persecution and degradation had been set. <sup>for future generations</sup> Under succeeding dynasties, their position remained subject to the whim of the rulers, their demands and extortions, and subject also to the scorn and contempt of the populace. They were reduced to the most menial occupations and were forced to live exclusively in the crowded and filthy Mellahs. Frequently they were attacked, robbed and massacred. From the eighteenth century, the following account reaches us about the position of the Jews of Morocco:

"The Jews possess neither lands nor gardens, nor can they enjoy their fruits in tranquillity. They must wear only black, and are obliged, when they pass near mosques, or through streets in which there are sanctuaries, to walk bare-foot. The lowest among the Moors imagines he has a right to ill-treat a Jew, nor dares the latter defend himself." <sup>condition</sup> This continued with only slight amendment throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



As a result of these cruel persecutions and their <sup>degraded</sup> ~~miserable~~ political and economic status, the intellectual life of the Moroccan Jews stagnated. Their level of education sank very low. Superstition was and continues to be rife among them. Belief in charms, amulets, and saints is wide-spread. The Arabs of Morocco worship saints at their tombs or marabouts which dot the countryside. There are several <sup>similar</sup> ~~such~~ shrines, or sacred tombs to which the Jews of Morocco make pilgrimages. We visited one, the tomb of a saint named Samuel Hannes. From all parts of Morocco <sup>Jews</sup> ~~they~~ come to pray at his tomb and to kindle tapers. There is a <sup>very</sup> famous shrine at Ouezzane, the tomb of the miracle worker, Abraham Monanes, which is visited on his special anniversary day, called <sup>(1/10)</sup> by some ten thousand pilgrims, including Mohammedans. The Moroccan Jews were among the most zealous of the followers of the false Messiah, Sablatai Zevi, in the seventeenth century. In fact, they produced a pseudo-Messiah of their own in 1674, in the wake of the Sablatian movement, one Jeseeph ben-Zur, in the city of Meknes.

Their synagogues are, as a rule, very small, no larger than a class-room, poor, tucked away somewhere in the narrow alleys of the Mellahs, neglected-looking, in many instances private homes fitted out for worship. The walls are covered with Cabalistic prayers and symbols, and from the low ceilings are

suspended dimly-lit, age-incrusted oil-lamps. *On any day of the week you will find some aged Jews sitting there, praying and chanting Psalms in Arabic.*

An attempt was made in the middle of the nineteenth century to improve the position of the Jews of Morocco. In 1883, Sir Moses Montefiore, supported by the British Government, went to Morocco and demanded of the Sultan that the Jews there should be protected, that no person should molest them, and that they should enjoy the same privileges as all other subjects. Montefiore was successful. In 1884, an edict was published granting equal rights of ~~justice~~ to the Jews. The local magistrates, however, in most instances, ignored these



edicts and similar ones which followed them. A definite improvement took place when the French occupied Morocco in 1912. The Jews were confirmed in <sup>their</sup> full civil rights. Six years ago, the French with-drew. Morocco is again a sovereign Moslem state. The Jews are again experiencing certain political pressures. The rising nationalism among the Moslem population and the efforts of the government to Arabize all Jewish schools have added to their sense of insecurity. Emigration, especially to Israel, is prohibited, though not uniformly enforced.

The economic conditions of the Jews of Morocco, except for a very small well-to-do upper class, are appalling. There are some wealthy Jews, as there are some wealthy Arabs, but there is a frightening contrast between the rich and the poor. The majority of <sup>Jews</sup> ~~them~~ live in unspeakable squalor and are engaged in the humblest of occupations. Many of them have no occupations at all but live on begging and charity. It is pathetic to visit the Jewish market-places and stalls in the narrow, winding alleys of the Mellahs of Casablanca, Marrakech, Fez or elsewhere and look at the small stock-in-trade of some of these so-called merchants -- a handful of asparagus, a dozen eggs, or a <sup>tray</sup> ~~paper~~ full of salt and pepper, a few oranges, a bag of figs and dates, or some second-hand clothes -- while <sup>the merchants</sup> ~~they~~, themselves, are in rags.

A hundred years ago, the Alliance Israelite Universelle was founded by French Jews to protect the political rights and furnish educational opportunities to backward Jewish communities in the world. It interested itself especially in the Jews of Morocco. It founded <sup>there</sup> the first school for Jewish children in 1862. Since then, it has established seventy-five such schools where some thirty thousand Jewish children receive a secular, as well as a Jewish education -- an education which would otherwise <sup>have been</sup> ~~be~~ denied to them. Other Jewish organizations have established



schools for Jewish boys and girls, such as the Ozar Hatorah, an organization devoted to the promotion of religious and secular education in the Middle East and North Africa, and the Lubavitcher Schools, a Hassidic sect with headquarters in Brooklyn, which conducts a program of religious education in North Africa and elsewhere. Over twenty modern kindergartens, expertly supervised, <sup>and</sup> attended by nearly four thousand children, are in operation. The O.S.E., a health service, has established clinics and dispensaries and is carrying on a remarkable health program among Moroccan Jews, children as well as adults. It is bringing to these people, among whom disease is prevalent and epidemics frequent, new concepts of hygiene, cleanliness and nutrition. The Ort, an organization for rehabilitation through the training of youth in useful trades and occupations, has four thousand young people enrolled in its courses.

All of these vital institutions which <sup>constitute</sup> ~~contribute~~ the one bright spot in an otherwise very somber picture, <sup>then</sup> many of ~~which~~ I visited and ~~whose programs~~ <sup>their programs</sup> observed, are supported by the American Joint Distribution Committee -- that is to say, by the generosity of American Jews, by the contributions which you make annually through the United Jewish Appeal.

Every Jewish child in Morocco, except those who come from self-sustaining homes, receives in these schools breakfast, a hot meal at noon <sup>carefully</sup> planned by dietitians, and a snack in the afternoon before returning home. I was amazed when I was told that the total cost for food per child was \$1.60 a month...A whole generation of Moroccan children is thus being saved from hunger, ignorance and hopelessness, by fellow-Jews in other lands who care, who have not forgotten the ancient Jewish code: <sup>ובל יסור פנים יתומים</sup>. Many of the young Jews are leaving Morocco. They do not believe that there is any future for them there. Many of the business-men have left or would like to leave. I spoke to quite



a number of them. The poor and the aged, too, would like to go. Most Moroccan Jews would like to go to Israel. Morocco is a member of the Arab League, and that, the Jews suspect, does not bode well for them. When Colonel Nasser recently visited King Hassan II of Morocco, there were riots against the Jews.

From Tangier in Morocco, which is no longer a free port and is <sup>therefor</sup> declining, we flew to Madrid, the capital of Spain.

We had been there some five years before. There is much to regale the eye of the tourist in this very modern and very attractive city which compares favorably with the impressive capitals of Europe. Here again, as a Rabbi, I was particularly interested in the Jewish life of the city. There is very little of it, but more than there was five years ago. The Jewish community has grown. It now numbers some five to six hundred souls. There was a time, and that not so long ago, when there were ~~practically~~ no Jews in Madrid. Since the expulsion ~~of~~ the Jews in 1492, there remained no Jews in Spain except, of course, the Crypto-Jews, or the Marannos, who, in the course of times, and under the pressure of the Inquisition, were completely absorbed in the population and disappeared as Jews. While no official herem -- no ban -- was ever instituted by our people against Jews ever returning to Spain, Jews, nevertheless, throughout the centuries avoided Spain. In the early part of the twentieth century, there was only an insignificant number of Jews in that country, and no organized Jewish community.

Early in the twentieth century, the Spanish government adopted a friendly and welcoming attitude towards the return of Jews to Spain. A Jew, Professor Abraham Yahuda, orientalist and Biblical scholar, was appointed to a Chair of Hebrew Studies at the University of Madrid. An organization called "Union Hispano-Hebrea", composed of prominent Spaniards and Jews, was founded, whose aim was to foster friendly relations between Spaniards and Sephardim everywhere, whose



ancestors had been expelled from Spain in 1492. King Alfonso XIII accepted its honorary presidency. Sephardim everywhere along the shores of the Mediterranean were now referred to as "the lost sons of Spain". A special law was published which facilitated the obtaining of Spanish citizenship by Sephardi Jews outside Spain. Jews felt themselves particularly comfortable under the Republic which was established in 1930. In ~~1931~~, <sup>the</sup> government issued a statement declaring that the expulsion edict of 1492 was null and void. In 1935, Spain officially celebrated the one thousandth anniversary of the birth of Moses Maimonides. A public service was held in Cordova, his birth-place -- the first since the expulsion -- and special commemorative stamps to mark the anniversary were issued by the government.

When the Republic was over-thrown by Franco in the <sup>Spanish</sup> Civil War, the Jewish community of Spain <sup>Franco was</sup> disintegrated. Under Nazi influence, ~~whatever synagogues then existed~~, were closed. Sharp measures were taken against the Jews. As many of them as could fled. The refugees who escaped into Spain from Vichy, France, were interned in jails or camps.

In more recent years, with the defeat of the Nazis, a friendlier attitude has been manifested by the government towards Jews and Judaism. Catholic Church leaders have taken steps to improve ~~the~~ relations between Jews and non-Jews. An organization called "Amistad Judeo-Christiana" was founded in Madrid -- very much like our "Conference of Christians and Jews" -- which meets regularly and its meetings are attended by Christians and Jews alike, at which ways toward better understanding and cooperation are explored. The tolerant attitude of the new Pope John has undoubtedly been helpful in this regard. Pope John, in 1960, declared:



"True, there is a great difference between one who accepts only the Old Testament and one who joins to it as supreme law and guide the New. This distinction, however, does not suppress the brotherhood that springs from their common origin, for we are all sons of the same heavenly Father; among us all there must ever be the brightness of love and its practice."

We visited the synagogue of Madrid called Bet-Zion . It is on the second floor of a large office building. It carries no sign on the outside of the building -- for no church, <sup>other than Catholic</sup> and that holds true for Protestant churches as well -- is permitted to display their identity on the outside of their buildings. It is not very large, but it is attractive. On Sabbaths and holidays, we were told, it is crowded with worshippers. They are planning to build a larger edifice soon. In the corridor we saw large cases of Matzos which had already arrived from London in anticipation of Passover. *They have or get no Kabb. Each month a cake is brought to Madrid from Munkacs and Kohnen is kept in deep-freeze.* The President of the Jewish community of Madrid, with whom we dined, was very encouraged by the friendly attitude of the government and very sanguine about the steady return of Jews to Spain, even under the ruthless dictatorship of Franco. He regarded it as a significant event in Jewish history. Hope springs eternal in the Jewish breast!....

From Madrid we flew to Majorca.

George Sand, who had a tryst with Chopin in Majorca and wrote, you may recall, "Winter in Majorca", said of the island: "In Majorca alone I finally saw the sea of my dream, clear and blue as the sky." Chopin, who composed some of his loveliest "Preludes" there at Valldemosa in the Carthusian Monastery, from which the monks had been expelled by a revolution, called it "the loveliest spot on earth". The ancients called it "The Golden Isle". It is fast becoming a popular tourists' resort, especially Palma, its principal city. *This is not a commercial...*



Here, too, you walk historic ground, and here, too, there is much submerged Jewish history. Jews settled in Majorca in Roman times. From the fifth century, we have records of Jewish persecution in Majorca, at the hands of some intolerant Bishops. In the eighth century, Majorca was conquered by the Moors. They remained in possession of it for four hundred years. Jews prospered during that time. From the twelfth century we have records of three synagogues in Palma.

Early in the thirteenth century, James I of Aragon conquered Majorca from the Moors. The Island became Christian. The Jews were for a time unmolested, although we read of a certain Bishop of Majorca who imposed a heavy fine upon the Jews and curtailed their privileges because they were accused of having converted two Christians to Judaism. The Jewish community, nevertheless, continued to grow and prosper. In the fourteenth century, it numbered more than a thousand families, and it carried on extensive trade with North Africa and the Orient.

It seems to have enjoyed also a vigorous intellectual life. The Jews of Majorca were the most famous cartographers of their day. They made the most important maps which were prized by the great navigators of that period, who were setting out on their epochal voyages of discovery and exploration. A Majorcan Jew, Gabriel de Vallsecha, made a map of the world in 1439 which was used by Amerigo Vespucci, who gave his name to the Americas, just as Christopher Columbus carried with him the astronomical tables of the Spanish Jew, Abraham Zacuto, on his voyage of discovery of America. "There is strong historical evidence", writes Robert Graves, who has lived in Majorca for many years, "for supposing that Christopher Columbus (who never signed himself in any other way but as Christobal Colon) was a Majorcan Jew; his surname is still common in the island." The Spanish-Jewish origin of Columbus is now no longer questioned by historians.



The change in the fortunes of the Jews in Majorca came after 1391 -- a catastrophic year in Jewish history. Incited by fanatical clergy, a wave of persecution, terror and massacre swept over the Jewish communities of Spain. Beginning in Seville, where the Jewish quarter was mobbed, and those who refused to be baptized were killed or sold as slaves, the terror spread over the whole of Spain. Numerous Jewish communities were destroyed. A large number of Jews became Christians in order to save their lives. These "conversos" came to be called Marannos -- swine. The Jews of Majorca shared a similar fate. Three hundred were killed by frenzied mobs and the rest were forcibly converted. These converted Jews came to be known as "Chuetas" -- probably a corrupted form of "Judios". They, too, were looked upon as outcasts. Secretly, some of them continued to practice Judaism -- like the Marannos, their counterpart on the mainland in Spain.

To ferret out the neo-Christians who secretly practiced Judaism after ~~the~~ conversion, the Inquisition was established in Spain in 1480 and continued to operate for three hundred years. It operated also in Majorca. In 1658, twenty Chuetas were burned at the stake <sup>for practicing Judaism</sup> and their possessions were confiscated by the Royal Treasury.

How many Chuetas there are today in Majorca, it is difficult to say. Some estimate their numbers to be some two <sup>to</sup> or three hundred families. Others much higher. Some maintain that all Majorcan tradesmen and business-men are of Jewish descent.

The Chuetas today are, of course, devout Catholics, but they still constitute a distinct social group, a close-knit community, and are concentrated in two of Palma's streets and remain goldsmiths.



Last May, a Chueta woman from Majorca, whose father was a general in Franco's army, by the name of Isabel de Monyuz, arrived in Israel and asked to be converted to Judaism. She was converted and returned to Palma as Elisheva Yamin-Oz. She placed a Mezuzah on the door of her apartment, and has been endeavoring to persuade other Chuetas to reconvert to Judaism. This, as you may well imagine, has created something of a sensation on the island.

In the Palma Cathedral, there are two chandeliers hanging from the ceiling which, <sup>Christian</sup> our guide told us, came originally from an old Jewish synagogue in Palma. In the <sup>Treasury of the</sup> Cathedral Treasury, I saw two maces such as are carried in church processions, <sup>their</sup> whose tops were formed out of two <sup>old</sup> beautiful Rimonim, that is, Torah crowns, on which one could read the Hebrew inscription <sup>ענין ד' 13/70</sup> *ענין ד' 13/70*. In the structure of the Montesion Church in Palma, there is incorporated part of an old Jewish synagogue which dates from before the conquest of the island by the Spaniards.

And so, after a few interesting weeks abroad, in places which are today no longer such far-away places, we returned home, having refreshed ourselves and our knowledge of Jewish life and history. We are grateful to be back in a land where Jewish annals are not filled with so many dark shadows of the past, and where life generally is so rich in the blessings of freedom.

Sunday Morning

March 11, 1962