

The SCRIBE

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Board of Deputies

The third triennial elections for the five seats allocated to the Iraqi Jewish Community in the UK on the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to hold office until April 1994, took place on 14 May.

Nominations closed on 7 May and produced six candidates. It was suggested in the interval that one candidate should stand down so that the other five can be returned unopposed. But Elias Dangoor, one of the candidates, wisely recommended that the election should proceed as an exercise in democracy. In the event, as is often the case in life, he had to pay the price of his wisdom!

186 members of the community attended the meeting which also provided a successful social gathering which lasted till midnight.

Professor Eric Moonman, Senior Vice-President of the outgoing Board, paid an early visit and sealed the ballot box. The meeting was capably chaired by Percy Gourgey, MBE, a prominent son of Babylonian Jewry, who, incidentally, is running for the office of Vice-President of the new Board.

The election, which was ably conducted by Maurice Khalastchi, Hon. Secretary of the community, was free from controversy, which marked the previous two elections.

The winners were: Naim Dangoor (108), Edwin Shuker (90), Moshe Kahtan (73), Avihu Ben-David (68) and Jack David (57). Votes were given on past performance rather than on promises.

The winners represent a wide spectrum of ages and hope to work as a team and move forward to address the urgent needs of the community after 40 years in the wilderness, since the mass emigration of 1951.

Dr. Davide Sala, who had a big hand in the Board's recognition of our community, declined to be nominated. In a letter to Mr. Dangoor he wrote, "I already have so many commitments within the community, and really am looking now to cut down on some of these rather than increase them. I am very touched and flattered that you should have approached me, and I do hope that you understand my position".

The Board expects to receive a voluntary levy of up to £15 per annum from every member of our community.

Shaul Shuker, who was an Iraqi Deputy on the outgoing Board, has now been elected to represent Woodside Park US.

Our Deputies can play a decisive role in the deliberations of the Board●

A special binder to hold 60 issues of A4 journals is available from *The Scribe* at £6.

Oil for water

Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states have agreed to send observers to a Middle East peace conference and to negotiate directly with Israel on arms limitation, pollution control and water rights. They have no interest in the Palestinian problem.

Wait a minute!

What about oil? The petrobillions have been the root of all evil in the region and a fair redistribution of that commodity would bring peace and stability to all concerned.

As for water, Israel has been buying it from Turkey by supertanker loads. Water is becoming very scarce in the region and Arab countries must not expect water to run from Turkish mountains down the rivers free of charge. Oil must form part of any water agreement to be negotiated.

After 70 years of hostilities during which the Arabs repeatedly tried and failed to stifle the Jewish state, the purpose of any Middle East peace conference can only be to divide the region and its natural wealth between Jews and Arabs, and to recognise the legitimate rights of the Kurds and other nationalities.

There can be no role for the Palestinian Arabs unless there is a similar role for Jews from Arab lands. All parties concerned are becoming increasingly aware of this principle●

Where are the Jews of Iraq?

The Iraqi Jews around the world and in Israel seem unseen, unknown. Traditionally, they preferred to be passive in political affairs in Iraq to avoid further persecution and harassment.

This trend was evident during the Scud missiles attack on Israel by Saddam Hussein. The Scuds hit almost only the Iraqi Jews and their properties in Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan. Many European Jews were quick to condemn the attack by interviews with reporters of the press and TV. Prime Minister Shamir compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler and European Jews compared the attack to the Holocaust.

But not a single Iraqi Jew raised his voice and linked the attack to the Farhud of 1941 in Iraq. It is as if the Iraqi Jews do not exist!

Please speak louder. I cannot hear you!●
Great Neck, Prof. Albert Khabbaza MD
N.Y.

I enjoyed reading the last issue of *The Scribe* which was sent to me by my brother who lives in Canada. It reminds me of good old times. I would appreciate you putting me on your mailing list●
Carmel, California Dr. Sadok Masliyah

Katalani Wa Baka, Sabakani Washtaka

by Moshe Kahtan

He beat me and wept, then went ahead of me and complained.

This is an old Arabic saying, the application of which we see only too often these days.

During April, when Saddam Hussein (the devil you know who is better than the one you don't) was massacring the innocent Kurds in Northern Iraq in order to restore the stability under which the region was basking previously, the media here did not miss a chance to slip in on many occasions several PLO members and sympathisers who demanded that the Palestinian Arabs in Israel be given protection by the UN as was being done for the Kurds. But protection from what? They were the ones who were knifing and stabbing people in the streets, in the name of Allah of course, and then they call for protection. If anybody needed protection it would be the Israeli population who has for far too long tolerated what no state, community or even a group of people would put up with. Whilst democracy may be dear and sacred, the abuse of it should not be.

It is to be noted with interest that the Allies refrained from preventing Saddam's onslaught on the Kurds because they would not dream of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs. Presumably their troops in the North now have all obtained their Iraqi visas and approval of their work permits from the sovereign government in Baghdad●

During my recent visit to my beloved Uncle Aslan Aslan, Cherry Hills, New Jersey, I had the opportunity to read your August issue of *The Scribe* and was thrilled with the detailed information related to my heritage and background in Iraq.

After graduating from high school in Basra, avoiding Iraqi persecution, I illegally made my way to Iran and from there I emigrated to Israel. I came to the United States three decades ago and specialised in the field of Jewish Education and Hebrew Culture.

I would be much obliged if you would be kind enough to place my name on your membership list and send me *The Scribe* at your convenience.

I look forward to being part of your association and hopefully in the future I can contribute to your publication from my own experience.

Good luck for a job well done●
Forest Hills David Baron
N.Y. (Sasson David Jiji)

Reflections on Shavuoth

Abridged from an article by Dr. Abraham H. Gottesman, which appeared in the Summer 1989 issue of *Dor Le Dor*, the Jewish Bible Quarterly published in Jerusalem.

Shavuoth traditionally celebrates the giving of the Torah, which is one of the greatest events in the history of the Jewish people. This extraordinary event marked the beginning of the Jewish people as a disciplined nation, providing it with law and order, morals and ethics. It would seem almost self-evident that such an event would be commemorated in a style worthy of its significance. Surprisingly, this is not the case. The observances are generally unpretentious. Even more remarkable is that in the Bible the event of the giving of the Law is not even declared as a holiday. That event is referred to as *Yom Ha-Kahal*, the Day of Assembly (Deut. 9:10, 10:4). Why was it not declared in the Bible as a holiday?*

In the Bible *Shavuoth* is described only as one of the three agricultural festivals, and the people celebrated the wheat harvest. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the entire religious worship, even the religion itself, was in jeopardy.

The rabbis endeavoured to remedy this situation. For example, the Temple sacrifices are replaced in importance by a whole series of non-sacrificial rituals. The shank bone is a reminder of the paschal lamb; the egg is a reminder of the pilgrimage festival sacrifice. Even before the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis were vitally interested in the time of the giving of the Law. They felt that it was the *raison d'être* for the Exodus from Egypt: The Exodus was not complete without the giving of the Law. Passover was the beginning of freedom, but there was no true freedom until the moral law was proclaimed at Sinai. They called the day *Azzeret Shel Pesach*, the concluding day of Passover. After 70 C.E., with the agricultural aspect of the festival now doomed, *Shavuoth* became the holiday of the giving of the Law. The rabbis determined from the Bible that both the date of *Shavuoth* and the date of the giving of the Law were the same, the sixth of Sivan, so they proclaimed *Shavuoth* as the day of the Law-giving.

In this manner, they created a new holiday with an old name. The Written Law, i.e. the Bible, is considered as the foundation of Judaism, while the Oral Law is the superstructure built on the foundation of Written Law. People live in the superstructure, i.e. their contemporary history, and the Oral Law reflects the changing circumstances of history.

Now it would appear that applying the name *Shavuoth* to a new holiday was an act of brilliant religious expediency; but there are intimate links between *Shavuoth* as an agricultural festival and *Shavuoth* as the giving of the Torah – both from an historical as well as from a contemporary point of view.

Shavuoth celebrated the harvesting of wheat, which completed its ripening approximately fifty days after the earlier harvesting of barley, celebrated at the feast of unleavened bread. The religious celebration consisted of offering to God the choicest sheaves of the wheat, the grain on the stalks. Accompanied by prayers, the sheaves were "waved" before God.

This waving was no simple ritual of thanksgiving, but an offering to God of the choicest wheat, a renewal of the covenant with God, in which man acknowledges his dependence on God's beneficence. The covenant was that since God provides the land, the seeds, the sunshine and the rain, man provides the labour. The offering of the sheaves of wheat was considered a token payment to God for His part of the agreement.

First there was the offering of the sheaves of wheat, then followed the practice of offering only the choicest kernels of wheat, which were strained through seven sieves so that only kernels of uniform size were offered. Subsequently, the kernels were ground to meal, a portion of which was mixed with oil and frankincense and thrown on the altar for burn-

ing, similar to the animal sacrifice. Finally, the last stage was to make dough from the meal and bake it into two loaves, called the showbread, which was placed on the altar. The two breads were later baked in two pans of six sections each, making a total of twelve loaves, each representing one of the tribes of Israel.

This latter stage of baking the two loaves of bread might be considered a major step in the development of religious concepts. Wheat itself is the noblest of the grains. Physiologically it provides the highest quality of amino acids essential for optimal growth and nutrition. Its protein in the form of gluten enables it to trap gases and permits the dough to rise, which makes for a most pleasing leavened bread.

The discovery of these complex processes of converting raw natural grains into a cultured product, bread, may be considered as a major achievement of humankind.

The agricultural aspect of the ritual of *Shavuoth* can be understood to dovetail with the traditional understanding of *Shavuoth* as the giving of the Torah. For as men and women offer their best agricultural creation, bread, to God, so God in His infinite generosity offers man the Torah, the extraordinary intellectual and spiritual equivalent of bread.

As Moses says (Deut. 8:3), Man does not live by bread only but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

As bread satisfies hunger, provides pleasure, engenders feelings of self-esteem, it also frees him of anxiety and depression and helps in his physical growth and development. Similarly, the Torah, as the source of mental and spiritual nourishment, offers him pleasure, increased self-esteem, freedom from anxiety and depression, and an opportunity for growth and maturation.

The Torah has been likened to milk and honey – nourishing as milk and sweet as honey. Hence, in Baghdad we used to eat *Kahi* – a puff pastry of wheat, with cream and honey, date syrup, or apple jam. *Baklava*, cheese *buraq* or cheese *blinz* are also in order.

Shavuoth used to be referred to as *Id-el-Zeyagha* when people used to visit the shrines in Iraq of the Prophet Ezekiel, Joshua the High Priest, Ezra the Scribe and others.

Shavuoth customs: We stay up all night studying the Torah and reading the 613 commandments, Midrash and *Adra Rabba* (part of the *Zohar*). This is called *Hatheema*. People commemorate their departed relatives' souls by bringing, or sending, food and refreshments in their memory. It was usually a folded loaf of Iraqi bread containing *halawa* (a preparation of semolina, oil and sugar) and a note of the person's name.

Busy woman's *Kahi*: Roll ready-made puff pastry to desired thickness, sprinkle with sugar and put in oven until it rises.

*It is interesting to note here that when the Iraqi government, 70 years ago, asked what holidays should be allowed to Jewish employees, the community listed 11 days – 2 for *Rosh Hashana*, 1 for *Kippur*, 4 for *Succoth*, 4 for *Passover*. *Shavuoth* was either missed or considered unimportant – N.E.D.

It is a real pleasure reading *The Scribe*. It has surprised my wife and me by the keen perception and interpretation of the events and occurrences taking place in our Middle East. The stand of *The Scribe* seems unique and very interesting. Keep up the good work, and best wishes for its continued success.

Albertson, N.Y.

Leon Lawee

70 years ago

Gertrude Bell's letter to her father

Baghdad, Wednesday, July 20th 1921

On Monday the Jewish community gave a great reception to Faisal in the Grand Rabbi's official house*. The Garbetts and I represented the Residency and Mr. Cornwallis came with the Amir. The function took place at 7.30am in the big courtyard of the house – a square court round which the two-storied house stands. It was filled with rows of seats, with rows of notables sitting in them; the Jewish rabbis in their turbans or twisted shawls, the leading Christians, all the Arab Ministers and practically all the leading Moslems, with a sprinkling of white-robed, black-cloaked Ulama. The Court was roofed over with an awning, the gallery hung with flags and streamers of the Arab colours. The Jewish school children filled it and the women looked out from the upper windows. They put me on the right-hand of the chair prepared for Faisal – you know the absurd fuss they make about me, bless them. Faisal was clapped to the echo when we came and we all sat down to a programme of 13 speeches and songs interspersed with iced lemonade, coffee, tea and cakes and ices! It took two hours by the clock, in sweltering heat . . . The Rabbi [Hakham Moshe Shemash] is a wonderful figure, stepped straight out of a picture by Gentile Bellini. The speeches on this occasion were all set speeches . . . But yet they were interesting because one knew the tensions which underlay them, the anxiety of the Jews lest an Arab government should mean chaos, and their gradual reassurance, by reason of Faisal's obviously enlightened attitude. Presently they brought the Rolls of the Law in their gold cylinders, they were kissed by the Grand Rabbi, and then by Faisal, and they presented him with a small gold facsimile of the tables of the law and a beautifully bound Talmud. I whispered to him that I hoped he would make a speech. He said he hadn't meant to say much but he thought he must, and added "You know I don't speak like they do. I just say what is in my thoughts". Towards the end he got up and spoke really beautifully; it was straight and good and eloquent . . . He made an immense impression.

The Jews were delighted at his insistence on their being of one race with the Arabs, and all our friends . . . were equally delighted with his allusion to British support . . .

*The house of Meir Eliahou, which had been converted into a synagogue.

I was delighted to read recently one of the 1990 issues of *The Scribe* and to know of its existence and shall be more than grateful if you will put me on your mailing list.

I was born in Baghdad and graduated from the then "Royal College of Pharmacy and Chemistry" in 1948; moved to Teheran in 1951, and then to Paris in 1978 just before the Iranian revolution.

Thank you and I wish you all success in this wonderful mission you have embarked on.

Courbevoie, France

Victor Assim

Under Scud Missile Attacks

by Percy Gourgey MBE

On the day that the land war against Iraq began, 24 February, I flew to Israel as a member of a Solidarity Mission. Ben-Gurion airport, normally full of hustle and bustle, was practically deserted, except for a few officials. It reminded me of the Yom Kippur War of 1978 in which I was a war correspondent – the only difference being that at that time we landed in almost total darkness, because of the black-out.

At the airport we were issued with gas masks and instructions on their use, including the precautions – a special powder and a needle against the use of mustard gas and nerve gas. A few hours later we experienced our first attack. The wailing sound of the air-raid siren sounded through the clear night air – 3am – and the warning over the hotel tannoy system, in Hebrew and then in English, requiring us to take our gas masks and proceed to the sealing rooms (*hedarim atomim*). I awoke alarmed, with barely a minute to don a dressing gown and grab my mask and go upstairs.

The scene that confronted me was grim indeed. A number of men and women, in various kinds of attire, some wearing gas masks, others not, but all with drawn, anxious expressions, and a little child crying uncontrollably. For them it was a repeat performance of a nightmare scenario, as Israel had sustained 39 Scud attacks. Everywhere in Israel the warnings sounded, as no one was sure where the missiles would land, although the Iraqis had targeted them for special areas. All the windows in the room were completely sealed and there was a television set in the corner to instruct us on possible steps to be taken and also when the emergency would be over. I felt mixed reactions of fear and anger that Israel was dragged into this conflict because of a mad dictator's whim and a sense of frustration that she did not respond, though for the best of reasons – to keep President Bush's allied forces together.

A day later I visited Ramat Gan, just outside Tel Aviv, which received over six direct hits and where many Iraqi Jews live. The devastation has to be seen to be believed. The Deputy-Mayor told us his house was totally destroyed in what appeared to be a minor "Dante's Inferno" and, by a miracle, he and his wife escaped. Large craters were still to be seen.

Israeli restraint in the face of these unprovoked attacks was admirable and deserves far more recognition from the international community than has so far been shown both by way of political and material recompense. Full information as to the damage caused was suppressed during the war to avoid helping the Iraqi military establishment. While the Scuds fly at the rate of a mile a second, the Patriots travel at the rate of a mile and a half a second. The Scuds are launched to a height of about 200 kilometres, but a problem was that the Patriots did not intercept and destroy them high enough so that considerable damage was caused by the falling debris. Most of the 39 Scud missiles launched against Israel, at 5-minute flying time from Western Iraq, were negated, and by a miracle more loss of life and property was not caused.

The start of the land war was considered a particularly dangerous time as it was thought at the time that a desperate Saddam Hussein would resort to chemical and biological weapons, using artillery shells or planes. Doubtless he was deterred by the Americans' and Israel's possession of weapons of mass destruction.

After the cease fire the overwhelming feeling in Israel was that the Allied troops should have entered Baghdad, UN Resolutions notwithstanding, but that, in any case, Saddam Hussein and his evil Baathist regime must be removed if the "peace and security" called for in UN Resolution 678, authorising force to remove Iraq from Kuwait, are to be achieved.

Freemasonry

by Elias Dangoor

Freemasonry used to be considered, at least by outsiders, a secret society. This is not the case.

It is an open society but with its own secrets. It is founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue and based on the highest ideals of the way of life, its fairness and help to all fellow creatures.

It calls on its members "to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties by never proposing, or at all countenancing, any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society, by paying a due obedience to the laws of any state which may for a time become the place of your residence, or afford you its protection, and above all, by never losing sight of the allegiance due to the Sovereign of your native land". And "to obtain from every topic of religious and political discussion".

Also to "do justice, love mercy, practice charity, maintain harmony, and endeavour to live in unity and brotherly love". (Sounds like one of the Hebrew prophets – Ed.)

I was going to join in Iraq during the 1950s but the person who was going to introduce me decided to emigrate at that time and I missed the opportunity. And that was a blessing in disguise because when the revolution took place shortly afterwards, the government rounded up all freemasons and put them in jail!

Lodges normally meet four times a year in the evenings where the members, who are from all walks of life, enjoy the rituals which are mainly on similar lines as mentioned above, and have a good meal with lively speeches. To many members, this is all that interests them in Freemasonry. They become friends in the same way as club members.

But for those who are more ambitious and want to progress, there are other meetings where they can learn and study, also other lodges of higher degrees to join. After several years of progress, a member may be entitled to attend the Grand Lodge of England, which is a great experience by itself. There is nothing like it. It is normally attended by over one thousand members, and presided by The Duke of Kent or by his deputy, Lord Cornwallis. The latter is the grandson of Sir Kinahan Cornwallis who accompanied King Faisal on his arrival to Iraq in 1921, and was the British

Ambassador in Baghdad during Rashid Ali in the 1940s. Kings and princes were always involved in Masonry. Also great statesmen like Winston Churchill.

Almost any man (but no women) can join. All he needs to do is to ask a member for introduction. It is common to see a father and son in the same lodge and they normally stay for life. It is so pleasant to see members in their nineties who attend regularly, do good work and give lovely speeches.

There is a museum opened to the public with a guide to show the Grand Lodge when there is no meeting at Great Queen Street, WC2, which is very much worth seeing.

Scribe comment: According to *The Brotherhood* by Stephen Knight (presented to us by Dr. Davide Sala), Freemasonry is a secret society. The first three degrees are: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason. The vast majority of Freemasons (like Elias Dangoor) rise no higher than that, but are quite unaware that there are in fact 30 higher ranks, governed by a Supreme Council. Initiation to the Higher Degrees is open only to those Master Masons selected by the Supreme Council, consisting solely of members of the thirty-third degree.

The Brotherhood was de-Christianised 200 years ago and the main rituals settled around the legend of King Solomon's Temple.

The popular belief is that Freemasons in office help other Masons, but they strenuously deny that.

Thank you very much indeed for including me on the mailing list of *The Scribe*. May it prosper for many years to come under the sure guidance of its noble-hearted founder and editor. May Allah multiply your kind, as the Arabs say in gratitude.

I left Baghdad in 1954, on a scholarship awarded by the Anglo-Jewish Association (from the H.E. David bequest). I studied Philosophy at King's College (London), and have been teaching it in the Southern hemisphere – first in Auckland University (1959), then at Sydney University (1960-68), and since 1969 at Monash University. I managed to bring the rest of my family, consisting of my late mother and two sisters, to settle in Australia back in 1960. And I have an elder sister who left for Israel in the 1951 exodus, but is now settled in San Francisco.

The idea of getting Iraq to pay reparations for Jewish property confiscated under the infamous law of 1951, is as bright as it is just; the parallel which you draw with German reparations after the Second World War is unimpeachable, it seems to me. It is heartening to see that Israel is taking the initiative on behalf of its ex-Iraqi Jews; let us hope that justice will prevail.

Melbourne Edward J. Khamara

I am trying to collect stories, anecdotes, epigrams and jokes of Old Baghdad. I have collected several dozen such stories, and if any of your readers know of others, I shall acknowledge them all. I am hoping to collect them into a small book and due credit will be given to all.

Ramat Gan Dr. Maurice Saltoun

**Letter to Mr. Douglas Hurd
Foreign Secretary**

I was pleased to note your proposals for a future security structure for the Middle East and for the equitable sharing of its oil wealth. I was, however, surprised by your suggestion that only Moslems should qualify.

Jewish rights in the region are ancient and deeply rooted; the Jews who left Arab lands now number two millions. Any Middle East plan that leaves out Israel or discriminates against it is doomed to failure. Should Pakistan, but not Israel, have a say and a benefit in the Middle East? Israel is most suited to police the region.

I am afraid the Foreign Office is up to its old tricks again, trying to maintain British influence in the region by running down Jewish rights there. Even State Secretary James Baker confirmed that Israel would be part of a Middle East security structure. Trading land for peace can only make sense if the Arabs give up part of their huge land mass.

Moreover, there can be no deal for the Palestinian Arabs while there is no deal for the Kurds.

On a more constructive matter, I suggest that Great Britain and the United States (with some lesser participants) should replace OPEC by forming the Petroleum Central Selling Organisation (PECSO) to acquire the rights of marketing oil worldwide at, say, \$30 a barrel of which \$20 goes to the countries of origin and the other countries of the region, including Israel, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Turkey. The special relationship between Great Britain and America should form the basis of the new world order. Germany, Japan (and Belgium) must not continue to make hay in the Allied sun●

Naim Dangoor

Dear Mr. Dangoor,

Now that hostilities in the Gulf have been suspended, there is an urgent need to work out arrangements for ensuring long-term peace and security in the region. That is primarily a matter for the Arab governments concerned and the UK has urged them to consider what arrangements will be necessary.

The efforts to solve the Arab/Israeli problem will be crucial to the search for peace and stability in the whole region. We support the idea of an international conference at an appropriate time. In our view there are two fundamental principles: the right of all states in the region, including Israel, to live in security; and self-determination for the Palestinian people.

We support the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people to self-expression within existing international boundaries. We have regularly raised with the Iraqi authorities our concern about human rights violations, including those against the Kurds●

**Correspondence Unit
Middle East Department**

I thank you for your letter of 19 March and hasten to stress certain points which have been glossed over in your reply.

When today we speak of the Middle East problem, we don't mean Turkey or Iran, Arabia or Egypt. We mean the area covered by Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel

and Jordan. This area is known as the Fertile Crescent. So let us concentrate on that region. You, the British Foreign Office, are responsible for all the trouble in that region for the last 75 years. I say that more in sorrow than in anger. If you know it, then you know it. More the pity if you don't.

Since 1916 your policy in the Fertile Crescent has been based on the Arabs with the intention of establishing British control over the whole region. You destroyed the Ottoman Empire which was a lesser evil than what came in its place. You tried to drive the French out of Syria. You tried to frustrate the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. You organised anti-Zionist riots in Palestine and managed the Arab war against nascent Israel. You allowed the Baghdad pogrom against the Jews in June 1941 and were happy to see the mass emigration of the well-established Iraqi-Jewish community from its ancient homeland.

You echo Mr. Hurd when you state that the long-term peace and security in the region is primarily a matter for the Arab governments concerned. But as current events are showing, and was even recognised by the League of Nations, Iraq is not an Arab country. Syria/Lebanon is not an Arab country. Israel/Jordan is not an Arab country.

To the 20 million Kurds who live in an area larger than Great Britain you only offer "self expression within existing international boundaries," meaning, presumably, that they can open a cultural centre and be allowed to speak their language. But the 2 million Palestinian Arabs should, in your opinion, have self-determination presumably leading to an independent state in two areas smaller than Barnet, linked by a corridor across Israel with the expectation that one day they will over-run and destroy Israel.

In south-west Asia the Arabs are seven times the number of the Jews but they have land 140 times that of Israel. It is true that most of Arab land is desert; but so also is Israel. The Jews are engaged in rolling back the desert that the Arabs themselves created through centuries of neglect.

Jewish rights in the Fertile Crescent do not stem from UN Resolutions, the terms of the Mandate, the Balfour Declaration or even biblical promises. The region has been our habitat since time immemorial, which antedates by a thousand years the arrival of the Arabs.

After the Great War, mainly through the Lawrence factor, the Arabs were given more than they deserved or were entitled to. After the Second World War, in spite of their siding with the Nazi enemy, they ended up with 22 independent countries with more than half the world's oil reserves to boot. To hold on to their ill-gotten and undreamed-of gains, the Arabs have engaged in terrorism - terror against the Armenians and Assyrians, terror against the Kurds, terror against the Jews, terror against Iran - terror by PLO, terror by Libya.

Terrorism, intimidation, threats and hostage-taking, have been the Arabs traditional ways to conquest. Have we not lived through the Gulf crisis and seen what

Saddam did to Kuwait and how he tried to deal with the Allied countries?

Fifty years ago Rashid Ali embarked on an adventure even more fantastic than that of Saddam. Counsellled by the ex-mufti of Jerusalem, Amin Husseini, he offered Iraq to the Nazis at a time when Britain stood alone and Syria was already in Vichy hands. Had Rashid Ali succeeded, Hitler would have been able to out-flank Russia and Egypt, occupy the Persian oil fields, cut off the Allies' supply line through the Gulf and stretch a hand to Japan.

Churchill insisted that there could be no negotiations with Rashid Ali, and the battle for Iraq took place on the island of Crete where, at heavy losses, Britain managed to destroy Hitler's sole air-borne division and thus save the Levant from the German threat. Crete was given up on the same day that Britain regained control of Iraq.

Fifty years later a new Iraqi dictator was pushed to extremes by Yasser Arafat. Should the Palestinians now be rewarded for their role in the Gulf crisis and in occupied Kuwait? And should Arab regimes be rewarded on top of being saved from extinction, and Israel punished for her restraint?

Moreover, the brilliant victory of the Gulf war has been spoiled by the ignominious attitude of the Allies towards the Kurds. Where is your concern for human rights when 1.5 million Kurds are fleeing for their lives from the terror of Saddam, while you and America look on with folded arms?

We recognise your ambition in the Middle East but resent the hypocrisy in pursuing it. Come to us and we will give you a better deal!

You may ask why then we are here. We are here because the Middle East became too hot; because we like law and order; because there is an affinity between the Jews and British people - both having contributed greatly to the progress of Mankind.

In his book *A History of the Jews*, Paul Johnson writes of the Jews: To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of personal responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal, and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human kind.

The British people gave the world parliamentary democracy, justice, and a language.

There will be more peace in the Fertile Crescent if it is recognised not as an Arab region but as a region of many nationalities and creeds●

N.E.D.

Dear Mr. Dangoor,

Thank you for your letter of 2 April. Your observations on the Middle East have been noted●

Middle East Department

(It appears that the Foreign Office have nothing to say to my analysis and accusations●

N.E.D.:

The SCRIBE

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COOKERY CORNER

by Alice Shashou

Chinese Crispy Seaweed

Wash and dry 1½lbs of ^{Green}cabbage leaves or spring greens, remove and discard rough stalks and shred with a sharp knife into the thinnest possible shavings.

Dry thoroughly by spreading them out on absorbent paper.

Heat oil in a wok or deep fryer. Add the cabbage leaves and stir-fry on medium high.

When the shavings start to float to the surface, scoop them out with a slotted spoon and drain on absorbent paper to remove excess oil.

Sprinkle salt and caster sugar on top – mix gently. Serve cold. ●

Iraqi Thoumiyi

Ingredients:

2lbs lamb or beef cut into cubes
1 onion, finely chopped
1 bunch spring onions, finely chopped
1 bunch chopped fresh mint
7 cloves *fresh* garlic (less if using dry)
¾ cup lemon juice
About 5 tablespoons sugar (or to taste)
1 tablespoon oil
Salt and pepper

Method:

Salt and pepper the meat. Put in a pan with the oil, onions and garlic. Brown over medium heat and stir until browned evenly. Add enough boiling water to cook the meat. When it is nearly cooked, add the lemon juice and sugar; then the mint. Simmer until all the ingredients are cooked and the taste is sweet and sour, and a small amount of thick sauce remains. Serve hot with white rice.

A variation: Add the cloves of garlic, whole, halfway through the cooking.

This recipe can be prepared with meatballs, or with *kubbas*, as a party dish. The *kubbas* are the size of walnuts.

Method:

Fry two chopped onions and about seven fresh cloves of garlic in oil. Add tomato paste and stir. Add boiling water, salt, lemon juice and sugar. When the water boils, add the *kubbas* and the mint and simmer until they are cooked and a small amount of thick sauce remains. ●

Rice with Broadbeans – a party dish

Ingredients:

2 cups basmati rice
1½-2lbs frozen broadbeans, or 2 packets
1 bunch fresh dill, cleaned and chopped
Salt, oil and margarine

Method:

Soak the rice for 2 hours in water with a little salt. Boil a small amount of water and add the broadbeans for 1 minute. Remove the skin. Drain the rice and boil uncovered for about 8 minutes or until slightly undercooked.

Drain in a colander and rinse with water to remove excess starch and salt. Heat a little oil in a large pan. Put in a layer of rice, a layer of dill and a layer of broadbeans. Keep doing this until all ingredients are used. Add two tablespoons of water on top of the rice and scatter pieces of margarine all round the pan. Place a clean towel over the pan and cover with a tight-fitting lid. Simmer over a low heat for about 30-40 minutes. The rice at the bottom will be crisp and golden. You can put raw, sliced potatoes at the bottom of the pan before putting the rice. The potatoes will be crisp. Serve hot. This rice is delicious! ●

Meat Balls in Aubergine Sauce

Ingredients for meat balls:

2lbs minced beef or any other meat of your choice
1 onion cut very fine
1 teaspoon cumin
Salt, black pepper, flour
1 tablespoon margarine
1 tablespoon breadcrumbs
A little chopped parsley

Ingredients for the sauce:

5 aubergines
2 sliced onions
2 tablespoons tomato purée

Method:

Grill aubergines until the skin blackens and blisters. Remove the skin carefully and squeeze out the bitter taste. Mash with a fork to make a purée.

Fry the sliced onions until golden. Add the mashed aubergines and tomato purée.

Season to taste and cook for about 5-10 minutes. You have the sauce.

Now combine minced meat, seasonings, breadcrumbs and make small balls. Roll in flour and fry in oil. Cook in a little water and tomato paste for a few minutes until cooked. Mix with the sauce and simmer for 10-15 minutes. You can serve with rice. ●

Crepe Caramel

For the caramel:

½ cup sugar
3 tablespoons water

For the custard

4 eggs
1 pint milk
1 small (7oz) tin Nestlé milk
About 3 tablespoons sugar

Make the caramel:

Use a 2-pint pudding mould with a ring inside.

Combine sugar and water in the mould and boil gently over medium heat until golden brown. *Do not stir.* Rotate the mould so that the caramel covers the sides. Leave for a few minutes to set. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).

Make the custard:

Combine the ingredients in a liquidizer until well blended and pour the custard into the caramelized mould.

Place mould in a large saucepan. Pour in boiling water until it comes half way up the side of the mould.

Place the saucepan in the preheated oven for about 40 minutes or until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. Remove mould from hot water to cool completely. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or preferably overnight.

To unmould: Loosen the edges with a sharp knife. Place a large plate on top of the mould, then invert the mould and plate together. Carefully lift the mould. Caramel will run down the sides. ●

Tips

If you knock a tooth out by accident, you should put it in a cup of milk. Milk will preserve it for up to 12 hours instead of the usual 12 minutes; which gives dentists the chance to put it back and avoids the cost of a replacement tooth. It must be whole milk and you have to keep it in the fridge.

Prick an egg with a needle before boiling to stop the shell cracking when cooking.

Avoid eating between meals, especially sugary foods as they encourage tooth decay.

If you fry frozen foods, the inside or filling should be as hot as the outside, otherwise it is dangerous to eat.

Rub raw potatoes on your hands to remove stains or dirt.

It is healthier to give a baby home-cooked foods rather than jars.

To make a dish tastier, after marinating the meat or chicken, add fresh mixed herbs such as thyme or rosemary and bay leaves.

Mothers are warned that shaking talcum powder over babies at bathtime and during nappy changes can be fatal for some babies as it causes severe breathing difficulties. It is safer to sprinkle the powder on their hands before applying it to babies. ●

Letter to U.S. Ambassador in Britain

Jews from Arab lands hold the key to any successful resolution of the Palestinians' problem, which must be viewed in the context of the wider Arab-Jewish settlement of the Middle East.

Since 1948, and even before, Jews in Iraq and other "Arab" countries had to leave their ancient homelands because of discrimination and persecution. While Israel has integrated its refugees, the Arabs have deliberately kept theirs in squalor for political reasons.

The Middle East conflict is not between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs but, as is being slowly appreciated, the conflict is with the neighbouring Arab countries that relentlessly waged war on Israel, incited the Palestinians not to come to terms with the Jews, financed terrorism, and rejected all United Nations resolutions.

There can be no peace in the Middle East unless these same Arab countries are made parties to an eventual settlement, bearing their share of the refugee problem and the cost of their settlement in their own areas.

The Jews from Arab countries are the *quid pro quo* of the Palestinian Arabs – the other side of the coin. And, in any future negotiations, if Israel is going to represent the Jews from Arab lands, then the neighbouring Arab countries should also represent the Palestinians. If, however, the Palestinians are going to have a separate voice in a regional peace conference or dialogue, then Jews from Arab lands must also have a separate representation.

The solution to the Middle East problems must be global, for there can be no peace in one corner of the Middle East while Lebanon slides to a slow death; while millions of Kurds cannot attain autonomy; while non-Arab minorities in Iraq remember their massacres and their stolen lands; while the Shia majority of Iraq are oppressed; while Arabs control five million square miles of territory and non-Arabs are denied any territory; while some Arab rulers pocket most of the oil wealth and Israelis keep tightening their belts. These petrobillionaires have made of Iraq a dangerous aggressor and of Kuwait a target for aggression.

The solution must be global, for there can be no peace for the Palestinian-Arab refugees while the material and political rights of Jewish refugees from Arab lands are ignored. The Jews have an historic right to a share of the Fertile Crescent – its territory and its wealth – indeed superior to that of the Arabs. As to Resolution 242, this was firmly rejected by the Arabs who must not now be allowed to play a game of Heads, we win – Tails, you lose.

To the PLO, who say they want to establish a free, multi-racial, democratic, secular and progressive Palestine, we say we want to establish a free, multi-racial, democratic, secular and progressive Middle East. To those who say Zionism is responsible for all the trouble in Palestine, we say that Arab imperialism is responsible for all the trouble in the Middle East.

The cornerstone of any peace accord should be the transfer of some Palestinian refugees, from Judea, Samaria and Gaza, to Arab countries, especially those unwilling to live under Israeli rule.

Under pressure from President Truman, a million Jews were allowed 40 years ago to leave Arab countries and go mainly in Israel. This was to be the first leg of a reciprocal exchange of populations that would establish peace between Jews and Arabs. But only a trickle of Palestinian Arabs were allowed to replace them. The exchange of populations must now be completed.

Naim E. Dangoor

Thank you for the copies of correspondence between yourself, the Foreign Office and the United States Embassy.

Your support for Israel is unstinting and the people of Israel appreciate it very much.

Israel Embassy
London

Zvi Rav-Ner
Information Counsellor

Hanina Z. Shasha

A pen portrait of a painter

Nature has played an important role in my life.

I grew up always near water, in Baghdad facing the Tigris, in Beirut facing the Mediterranean, in Switzerland facing the Lake of Geneva, in Cairo facing the Nile. Then, when we came to New York in 1941, my father, Khedhuri Zilkha, who loved water, looked for an apartment that faced the reservoir in Central Park, with a far-away view of the Hudson and the bridges.

My boarding school in Beirut had a magnificent garden. I still remember the exotic plants and their individual perfumes.

The silver lining of my two years in Switzerland was the beautiful mountains. The school took us on numerous outings where we learned to appreciate the magnificence of nature.

I will never forget my first experience of spring in Europe after a cold and bleak winter. The hills were so inviting, with the daffodils growing . . . I took pleasure in rolling down the hills to experience real renewal of nature.

When I came back to the Middle East my parents were living in Cairo. My three years in Egypt were sheer enchantment!

In Cairo, I studied Islamic Art for two years. Gradually, my sensibilities were being directed towards art.

Thirty years ago, I heard about an unusual painting teacher – Margaret Stark. She was teaching at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She also had a few students at her studio. It was there that I began to prepare myself for the future, when my three children were grown, and I would have time for myself.

Margaret Stark had studied with Hans Hofman. I loved her method of teaching, because you had to think and weigh what colours to choose. She taught how to paint abstracts, before painting tangible subjects. She plunged me into a world I discovered and loved. Through the years I have been most fortunate to have studied with many other stimulating teachers.

I paint rather than sculpt because I have an innate sense of colour.

Painting has become my diary. It is my all-consuming passion. It is a real catharsis.

When I paint I let my intuition guide me. It is a sort of hypnosis for me.

I don't quite realise what I did until I take my painting home and look at it and re-work it in my head.

I feel immersed while I am painting. It is not an intellectual pursuit, it is most like being part of nature – positive, sincere, loving and warm.

I find great beauty in nature and often in life.

Why do I do abstract paintings sometimes?

As a young adolescent I loved geometry, which appealed to my sense of order.

I need to do both. I have been painting for more than thirty years.

I am a privileged person who sees the world in colour.

My son and his American bride, and also very close family friends, were very much impressed by your Journal *The Scribe*. They desire to receive same too.

New York Ellis N. Baruch

Hasan Al-Aswad

(A childhood memoir)

As a child and a teenager in Baghdad, I grew up in two homes, one in the Abakhana (electric utility) district during the winter months and one in Karradah (the river front) during the summer months. That was the norm in those days, for it was prior to the advent of air-conditioning. During the summer months, we the children spent our days in the Tigris river – swimming, fishing, canoeing and growing cucumbers and tomatoes in the sand bars which surfaced regularly in the stream as the water level fell with the progress of the summer. Our neighbours were mostly Moslems, including bedouins, who built mud huts anywhere there was vacant land, indeed they were squatters, and we the children made friends with them and played with them, for we were young and innocent and free of prejudices.

To accommodate my newly married sister, my father built a house back of our river front house and contiguous to it. In fact there was an entrance leading from our house to the other.

Before my sister, her young family and bachelor brothers-in-law (as was the custom) moved in, we the children used to play hide-and-seek in this empty house devoid of any furniture, curtains or any other objects.

One evening at dusk, we the children went to play this game and among us there was a black Moslem boy named Hasan. As it is called for in this game, each went to hide in a different part of the house and then returned to the "safe" starting point before the "tagger" could tag us, i.e. all except Hasan. We awaited his return to no avail. As a result, we all joined the "tagger" in the hunt for Hasan – again without finding him. This became a mystery to us; because, after all, the house was empty and how could anyone hide for so long without being found by so many of us?

One part of the house was a half basement and, while we commenced playing at dusk, it got progressively darker, particularly in this space. We would go in there looking without seeing anyone. In jest or exasperation we began calling him names and urging him to reveal himself so we could start another round of play. This appeared to work for pretty soon two rows of pearly teeth appeared in laughter. Hasan had taken off his *dishdasha* – the simple white garment Moslem boys wore – hidden it behind his back against the wall and stood there in his birthday suit! His dark skin had blended with the darkness in the corner of that sub-basement to conceal him for all that time.

Such a workable plan! ●
Scarsdale, New York Alfred A. Shasha

I have been receiving *The Scribe* for more than a year. Baghdad being my city of birth, I am, of course, very interested in what you write and compliment you on managing this magazine so artfully and intelligently.

Please let me know the subscription fee.

Zurich Abdulla K. Zilkha

The Scribe: Our journal is sent free of charge to our readers.

LETTERS

May I add a few words to your fitting obituary on Dr. Irene Sala. There are few people who have come to this country in recent years who have been taken so easily to the heart of the Jewish community as Irene Sala. She was a unique research worker in her chosen field of archaeology. She had a sharp mind and was focused in bringing the research to well-thought-out conclusions.

But it is as a friend and colleague that we will miss her most. David and Irene were a formidable couple: kindly, courteous and helpful.

We shall not forget Irene ●
London SW7 Prof. Eric Moonman
Director of The Natural History
Museum Development Trust

A Moslem friend of mine, who became a Catholic, was invited to a demonstration Passover Seder and dinner at the presbytery of her church "to experience the Jewish roots of our Christian faith and to understand the meal Jesus shared with his disciples". The Service was rendered in a way that makes it more intelligible to the participants ●

London Renée Elkabir

I find your magazine quite fascinating, since it gives Western (Ashkenazi) Jews insight into the life of Jews from one ancient community.

I went to school with at least one boy whose family suffered severely after the 1967 war - I believe his uncle was hung in Baghdad - and I have a number of friends who have Baghdadi roots. They all read your magazine.

I was trained as an Assyriologist in Jerusalem: I'm sure you know that Jewish names are found in cuneiform documents from after the Exile. Or Ran Zadok (c/o Department Assyriology, Hebrew University) has written a number of publications about this. Please also print more Judeo-Arabic. I don't often see it ●

St. Kilda, Australia Larry Stillman
Associate, History Dept,
University of Melbourne

I am one of your very satisfied readership. Both my wife and I get pleasure in your Newsletter, I when reading about times past (or even future) and my wife in respect of your recipe section, which she finds very interesting and informative as she is an Ashkenazi Jewess.

I have been saving all the issues since I began receiving the Newsletter, but unfortunately I have difficulty in placing them in a ring binder, for which I have to punch holes, as the printing is too close to the edge.

Is it possible to widen the left-hand margins on the pages? I am sure I am not the only person with this difficulty ●

London N3 E. Amron

Scribe: The best way to file *The Scribe* is not in a ring binder, but in a binder using a wire or cord to hold the individual issues. A special binder to hold 60 issues of A4 journals is available from *The Scribe* at £6.

I am writing to ask *The Scribe* to consider two proposals:

1) Reissue in one bound volume all past issues of *The Scribe* - from the very beginning. Each issue contains something unique, sometimes historical and sometimes contemporaneous about us and our life as it unfolds. I see this record as a goldmine for us and for posterity, and it is a shame to lose it.

If you agree to go along with the proposal - would you consider also indexing the volume?

The Scribe has provided a dynamic platform. It is worth making all efforts to preserve its accomplishments.

2) Create a membership list, with as much information as possible, to facilitate contacts.

The continued publication of *The Scribe* is nothing short of a miracle. You have helped create a wonderful tie among some of us who are scattered all over the globe and provided an educational medium that nourishes the magnificent heritage of our ancestry. We are deeply in debt to you ●

San Francisco Prof. Daniel Khazzoom

Scribe: Bound volumes of the first 50 issues of *The Scribe* (originals and photocopies) will be available at the end of 1991 for £25 in the UK and US\$50 overseas, postpaid, if a minimum of 20 orders are received. Write to the Publishers, enclosing remittance

An index would be attempted later and would be made available to readers, free of charge, on request ●

Thank you for publishing my letter in your May issue. I really feel I am married to an *enfant terrible*!

While in Baquba, where he was chief surgeon for the whole Liwa, my husband met General Qassem and his crowd several times at the house of a senior army doctor living there. These officers were stationed at *Jalawla*' military base where Qassem was commandant. His doctor friend exposed the entire plot (which was hatching as a plan to kill the Regent only, as early as 1957). My husband was supposed to carry the news to Ahmed Mukhtar Baban, who was Deputy PM and Minister of Defence then. However, my husband took no action, and he has regretted it ever since. We still wonder how the face of the entire Middle East would have changed.

To honour the recent victory over Saddam and as a bit of *kudos* to Schwarzkopf, he has plagiarized something:

"Gimme some B's middling (b)old,
 Gimme some F's spitting fire,
 Gimme some P's, O clouds unfold,
 Gimme more tanks most dire.

Chorus 1 (Baker et al)

We will not stop our oral froth,
 Nor let our feet sleep in our mouth,

Chorus 2 (Arms merchants, et al)

'Til we have rebuilt our AAR-se-Naals
 In Saddam's grey and sere land".

As far as the world is concerned, one can substitute Assad, Fahad, Ghaddafi, or any other petty tyrant that has the money or the oil, so shall the West insist on snatching defeat out of the very jaws of victory and impose on us to swallow our frustrations and shut up ●

Ramat Gan, Israel Patricia Ruth Saltoun

Discrimination in Israel

The problem of discrimination against Iraqi Jews in Israel had been raised in your recent issues. It is unfortunate that the problem still exists in spite of the passage of time, and in order to understand fully its roots and subsequent elimination, one must first differentiate between government discrimination on the one hand and individual and social discrimination on the other hand.

There is no doubt in the minds of most Iraqi Jews, during and after their mass emigration to Israel in the early 1950s, that the government of Israel, led by the Labour Party at that time, had badly and unfairly treated them.

The traumatic experience of being left in the Ma'abaroth, hopelessly and helplessly without money and jobs, with minimum food for survival, was almost beyond belief. It resulted in both physical and emotional diseases. As a young physician, I conducted extensive research on the prevalence of bronchial asthma, one of many psychosomatic diseases suffered by the Iraqi Jews who were free from the disease in Iraq.

The reasons behind such a harsh and cruel treatment by the authority could be any or all of the following:

1. Government officials might have thought, wrongly, that the Ashkenazi Jews had suffered more than the Oriental Jews in building the Jewish State and that their sacrifices were far greater and, therefore, became indifferent to their hardship and needs.
2. Government authority thought, also wrongly, that the Iraqi Jews were rich, sent their money out of the country and, therefore, did not need financial aid like the Jews of Eastern Europe, for example.
3. Iraqi Jews were considered inferior to and less civilised than the Ashkenazim.

Years later, when the Iraqi-Jewish people settled somehow, and started to organise themselves, they had a good look back at the recent past. In the late 1970s the votes of the Oriental Jews shifted towards the Herut Party and helped bring down the Labour Party for the first time. Through their powerful vote, Oriental Jews can eliminate all kinds of government discrimination.

Unfortunately, it is not so easy to eliminate the social discrimination that the Iraqi Jews feel, because it is connected with human nature *à priori* against certain ethnic groups, as well as culture and way of life, for example, in the way of dressing.

But the danger is that some Iraqi Jews, in their enthusiasm against discrimination, might be tempted to attribute their social or professional failure to ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, it must be emphasised that it is natural and acceptable to acquire friends with whom one has a common culture and language. The difficulty of the Polish or Romanian Jews to be acquainted with Iraqi Jews has nothing to do with ethnic discrimination. Marriages between Iraqi and European Jews, by and large, were a failure, and again for the same reason, not because of discrimination. As we say: People mix with their kind ●

Great Neck, New York Dr. Albert Khabbaza

I enclose a copy of my latest poem, "War". This poem reflects the experience of being Jewish in a Moslem Middle Eastern country at war.

This work is an entry from a book of poetry I am in the process of writing, entitled *Secrets of the Heart*. Prior to the publication of my book and in view of the current events in the Middle East, I would like *The Scribe* to consider this poem for publication ●

Flushing, N.Y. Gila Khabbaza

War

It's not so much
the war itself
nor the reasons behind it
it's the cold feeling
in my heart
as my body trembles
with the sound
of yet another bomb
it's the fear
that the gun we hold
in our hands today
could be pointing at us
tomorrow

it's long buried memories of the past
that have come back to life
that are here to haunt me once again
it's the wounded of the war
neither dead nor alive
forever wandering
forever in pain
it's the prisoners of the war
tortured to the point
where death
is the only rescue
for their burnt, whip-lashed bodies
scattered across the floors
of the dark, deserted
rat infested prisons
of the Middle East

it's the friends who get shot
in front of my eyes
as I silently kneel down beside them
in a pool of urine and blood
feeling helpless
I touch their cold lifeless bodies

it's holding back the tears
and the urge to scream hysterically
for I know that I will be the next
should I make the slightest sound

it's walking with my head down
hoping that the guards
would not recognise me
with my face covered
that my eyes will not reveal
my endangered religion

I pray that they will not want to search me
that they will not ask me to undress

I freeze with fear
as I feel the cold tip of a gun
run across my bare skin
"Where do you think you're going?"
a question often asked, seldom answered . . .

it's the desperate need in me
to escape this nightmare
of pain and misery
(No matter what the risk
I'll pay the price)

it's the memory of a little girl
I once picked up from the streets
In vain, listened for the sound
of a heart beat
but her cold white hands
told me
I was hours too late . . .

it's escaping
and having to leave behind
all that I love so much

it's constantly wondering
whether my friends and family
are dead or alive
as they put on
their gas masks
and wait
for yet
another attack . . .

it's holding you tight
as you caress my scars
wishing that time
would stand still
yet knowing
that we may only be
seconds away
from getting blown apart . . . ●

© 1991 Gila Khabbaza

Gila Khabbaza

In your issue of January 1991, Dr. Albert Khabbaza of New York calls for saving the Iraqi-Jewish language, threatened with extinction, which is really part of our heritage and is an important link among Iraqi Jews now scattered all over the world.

I think that, in addition to the measures proposed by Dr. Khabbaza, we should try to collect and preserve the proverbs (short sayings) used by Iraqi Jews in their own unique dialect. These proverbs have been accumulated over hundreds of years of Jewish life in Iraq. Some of them are based on experience and wisdom. Others express ways of thinking; still others are humorous, critical or sarcastic.

Among the proverbs I remember are:

إذا اثنين قابلت فاعلم انك معك هزبر
إذا فونك فدللك فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم

"If two people tell you your head is not on your body, shake it". This means two heads are better than one.

الما جيرا باطو عتر ما يصيح انايح
فول فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم

"He who does not carry a goat under his armpit does not cry 'Baaaa'". It means a guilty conscience gives one away.

كل قويه للزوان طايح
ولا قويه للزوان طايح

"A strong person must bend with the passage of time" i.e. people cannot rule or have their own way indefinitely; one day they will be weakened and become submissive or change their ways.

ضوا اللول صبيح فدهم
فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم

"The fire at night became ashes in the morning". This is said about a prosperous person who may have wasted his fortune and become very poor, or a good person who raised bad children.

ما كل مدعمل فدهم
فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم فدهم

"Not all that has a round shape is walnut". In other words, not all that glitters is gold.

Flushing, N.Y., Salim Khabbaza

We would be very grateful to be put on the mailing list of your wonderful journal *The Scribe*. We were both in Iraq and our children will love to learn more about the history of the Babylonian Jewry ●
California Aliza and Shaul Asher

Letter to Mr. Clemens Nathan, London

Thank you for reminding me to watch Rabbi Hugo Gryn's documentary on his early life and his home town.

It was a superb and moving production. Although not directly involved, I can never come to terms with the magnitude of the Holocaust. I can't believe that I lived through a period when 6 million Jews were massacred in cold blood with no one paying much attention. That is why I admired Rabbi Gryn for controlling his emotions while recounting his horrible experience.

Regarding Japan, the old Jewish Encyclopaedia which I consulted many years ago at Jews' College, stated under Tribes, Lost Ten: One theory identifies the Shindai or holy class of Japan as descendants of Ten

Tribes. The first known king of Japan, Osee, 730 B.C. corresponds to the last King of Israel, Hosea, who died 722 B.C. ●

Naim Dangoor

I was deeply touched to receive your extremely nice letter and the references which I have given to my son. I am so glad you saw Hugo Gryn's documentary. I can tell you a great deal about his background and about my own family's similar experiences. Fortunately we did not have to go through what he did as a child, although many of our relations did.

The feelings which you have about the Holocaust are one of the great conflicts of my life in accepting much of my faith. I am completely disturbed by this and yet I know that without faith there is no hope ●
London Clemens Nathan

Comments by N.E.D:

Newton and the Holocaust

Can the Holocaust of European Jewry have a positive value?

According to Newton's second law of motion, which is an established rule of this universe, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". The positive value of the Holocaust is in the civilising reaction it can have on the human race in general and the people of Europe in particular.

What a costly lesson? But what a savage Europe, that produced Stalin and Hitler! European civilisation is only skin-deep, and Europe is not a safe place to be in. A united Europe compounds the danger.

In their role as God's Chosen People, the Jews must either conquer to establish the kingdom of God, or suffer. We chose the latter course. Thus, while waiting for the Messiah, we continue to suffer for God the wickedness of this world. To fill the gap, Christianity and Islam, steps in the right direction, crupted by our example but in the face of our opposition. Those who say we don't want to be chosen can opt out and be relegated to oblivion, as happened to others before.

The Holocaust belongs to history; it belongs to mankind. In one sense we must look on it in that light and keep reminding the world of it as a lesson and as a warning. To drive home the lesson, we have every right to seek retribution - not so much from aging octogenarian war criminals but from neo-Nazis who are raising their ugly heads all over Europe and beyond. Because the punishment of the Holocaust did not fit the immensity of the crime, neo-Nazis have the audacity to deny it, in order to prepare the way for a repeat performance.

All those who deny the Holocaust, or say Hitler was right to kill the Jews, or incite racial hatred, should be treated as if they themselves took part in that mass genocide. The War Crimes Act is incomplete and ineffective without this provision ●

We acknowledge with thanks receipt of voluntary and generous contributions from:

- Mrs Victoria Somekh, USA
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- Mr Abdullah H. Simon, New York
- Mr M. Ephraim, Watford
- Mr Edward J. Khamara, Melbourne ●

Saddam's origins

abridged from the *Wall Street Journal*

Fragments of Saddam Hussein's troubled childhood continue to come to light.

His father died a few months before Saddam was born, scholars believe. And until the boy ran away from home at age 10, his relatives passed him back and forth and didn't let him go to school.

"His birth in 1937 wasn't a joyful occasion", writes the Iraqi president's hand-picked biographer. New evidence suggests that Saddam's mother, Subhah Talfah al Musallat, who died in 1983, didn't want him to be born and rejected him after birth.

Israel's leading academic expert on Iraq had a two-hour interview with an Iraqi emigré named Nezima. Despite the passage of more than half a century, the 73-year-old woman, who moved to Israel in 1950, told how a pregnant woman named Subhah from Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit stayed with Nezima's family in Baghdad for four nights in the spring of 1937.

She recalls the guest was so distraught from the deaths of her husband and only son that she had to be restrained from killing herself and her unborn child.

Nezima brings out a worn photograph of a boy scout troop. She points out her husband and Khair Allah Tolfah, Saddam's maternal uncle and the man who would send him to school and furnish his daughter for a wife.

Amazia Baram, the Haifa University historian and author of the new book *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Baathist Iraq*, is convinced Nezima's story is genuine.

She certainly tells an interesting story. The pregnant Subhah arrived in Baghdad in March 1937. At the time, Nezima was nursing her own first born. The date is clear in her memory, she says, because it was Purim, a Jewish holiday. Baby Saddam was born April 28.

Nezima's brother-in-law, Salim Zilka, who died several years ago, brought Subhah and her 15-year-old son to Baghdad from Tikrit, 100 miles away. The Zilkas, then one of two Jewish families in Tikrit, operated a prosperous trading company. The family founded Tikrit's first school for girls, and gained a reputation for philanthropy, even among the area's majority Sunni Muslims. Tikritis in need, Nezima says, often turned to Salim Zilka.

Subhah's son was dying of cancer. When his condition turned critical, Salim drove the boy to el-Majidia hospital in Baghdad. He left Subhah at his mother's home nearby and stayed with his in-laws.

For the next four days, Salim accompanied Subhah to the hospital, where doctors held out little hope for the son. At night, Salim came home and told Nezima about this poor, pregnant woman, who had lost her husband, was losing her lovely son, and was sinking into despair. Nezima remembers Salim and herself weeping late into the night for Subhah.

On the fourth day, the boy died and Subhah was beside herself with grief. Sobbing uncontrollably, she pulled out

clumps of hair from her head and beat her pregnant abdomen with her fists. She tried to throw herself in front of a moving car, Nezima says, but Salim restrained her.

"Salim asked Subhah why she was punishing the baby inside of her", Nezima says. "She said she didn't want him. She told Salim, 'After losing my husband and my child, what good can this baby do for me?'"

Salim drove Subhah back to Tikrit and Nezima lost touch with her after that.

One of Salim's daughters, R'ayah, said Subhah's gloom persisted long after giving birth. Residents of Tikrit were surprised, R'ayah said, when Subhah gave her baby the uncommon name of Saddam, which means a sudden shock or jolt in Arabic. Subhah rejected the child, R'ayah said, leaving him with an uncle for years.

At age 10, Saddam's biography says, he decided he wanted to go to school. But when he asked his mother and stepfather — his mother had married his father's brother in accordance with Mideast custom — to send him, he was "brusquely rejected". So he "set out, alone as always, to face his destiny", the book says.

The early difficulties Saddam Hussein faced, the official account says, "taught him certain basic virtues that were to remain with him throughout his life: patience, endurance, tenacity, grim determination...".

Mr. Baram says, "Maybe something in the difficult early period does explain why Saddam believes so deeply that what's good for himself is good for mankind" ●

I was very interested to read in your March 1991 edition that the prophet Jeremiah was lynched by a Jewish mob in Egypt. Can you tell us more of this incident and let us know your sources? ●

London

Lucien Gubbay

Scribe: After Gedaliah (the Governor of Judah appointed by the Babylonians after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.) was murdered, Jeremiah had to flee to Egypt with his followers, finding asylum there. Jeremiah's last recorded prophecy is a condemnation of Egyptian Jewry for their idol-worship. For the depth of his dispute with them read Jer. ch. 44. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should be hostile to him. Encyclopaedia Americana writes: "According to a tradition he was stoned to death in Egypt by his own countrymen." Some believe this incident happened in Aswan or in nearby Yeb (Elphantine) where there was a Jewish garrison at the time of the Persian occupation of Egypt some 40 years later ●

Forty years ago, on *Shavuoth*, I arrived with my family to Israel. Today, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of this event with a lot of relatives and friends.

I can still see in my mind the figures of the past. I remember the stories of the underground heroes who made history. The stories of many who were caught and tortured in jail. Those who took part in daring operations. Those who escaped walking thousands of miles by foot, their eyes on the Promised Land, a long arduous journey from the shadow of the gallows to the warm smiling sun of Israel ●

Ramat Gan

Esther Mercado

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