

The traditions about the lost tribes in Afghanistan

By

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The oral and written traditions about the history of the Afghan people, who call themselves '*Banei Israel*', are a combination of legend and reality. According to them, they were exiled by Bokhtu-n-Nazar (Nebuchadnezzar). They reach Mesopotamia and from there they penetrate into Persia and then into the Ghor region in western Afghanistan. Around the thirteenth century (Mongol's conquest) they move towards the southeast and reach the area of the Suleiman Mountains near the Khyber Pass, which connected Afghanistan with India (today on the border of Pakistan). According to the same tradition, their ancient ancestor is Kish. His son King Saul, known as 'Malik Tavalot' (a king of his rank and above), had two sons - Barakhia and Jeremiah. Their verifications were from the tribe of Levi. Barchia had a son named Assaf and Jeremiah had a son Afgana, after whom the Afghan people were named. When they arrived in their new country they became known as mercenaries for any price. Their courage and toughness were for nothing at all times.

A. The lost tribes in the sources of Israel - legend and reality

The term 'the lost tribes' or in English is a nickname for the tribes of Israel that separated from Judah in 930 BC and were exiled by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria in 720 BC. Since their discovery, nothing has been known about them and they have become an unfailing source for legends, ethnological and theological debates and nowadays for sensational television and radio programs.

B. The traditions of the Afghan people regarding their origin

The traditions among the Afghan people are the strongest and most documented. In early history books of the Afghan people, such as '*Makhsan-i Afghani*' from the 16th century and in all subsequent historical chronicles, there is a direct reference of the Afghan people to the people of Israel. The grandfather of the Afghan Shah Amanullah authored the book '*Afghan Chronicles*', a comprehensive historical book on the history of the Afghan people, in which he explicitly states that the Afghans are of Israeli origin.

The concentration of evidence revealed the following similarity between them and Jewish customs:

1. The Pathan constitution and its resemblance to the biblical constitution, a soul for a soul, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
2. They grow beard wigs.
3. They circumcise their children on the eighth day.
4. Their clothing resembles *a tallit* and a garment with four wings - the Afghans carry on their shoulders a *Joy Namoz* - a place of prayer - a cloth 3-4 meters long is intended to cover the head and shoulders and during prayer it is spread on the ground. The cover is also used as a shroud.
5. Purification customs after menstruation. Prohibition of contact during shaking and immersion after menstruation.
6. when a person dies childless his brother carries his wife.
7. Honoring a father - reaches the level of worship.
8. Forbidden foods - do not eat pork, horse or camel meat and do not mix meat with milk, because the soul that eats it will die that year.
9. Saturday is the day of rest.
10. The lighting of candles on Shabbat evening by the old women of the tribe who have reached the age of menopause.
11. Blood is smeared on the lintel and the two mezuzahs during an epidemic.

12. There are Hebrew names among them that are not common among Muslims, such as Israel, Shmuel, Akiba.

13. Some of their settlements bear the names of settlements in the Land of Israel.

"The tribes of Afghanistan, among whom the Jews of Afghanistan have lived for many generations, are Muslim tribes who preserved and still preserve the wonderful tradition of their origin from the ten tribes. This tradition, which circulates among the people of the Afghan tribes, is ancient and has a historical basis, which was supported by several researchers and tourists, Jews and non-Jews. Jews, who visited those places, and also those who were engaged in researching this country and its population, according to literary sources only. This information is found in ancient Afghan chronicles and is also repeated by new Afghan writers. Things were published on this matter in books and encyclopedias, in European languages and in Hebrew... however A thing has happened in our time: the State of Israel was established and the time has come for the immigration of the Afghan Jews. Their coming to us gave us an opportunity to collect testimony from living witnesses, eyewitnesses who spent many years among these tribes and knew their traditions and customs closely. who heard in their ears."

Rabbi A. Avichail, who is the head of the 'Amishav' association, which was established in 1975, brought things into Messianic faith. In his book 'The Lost tribes in the Land of Assyria, the Israeli Origin of the Pashtun Tribes' and later in his book 'The Lost and Rejected Tribes of Israel', he provides evidence according to which the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan, whose ancient name they are called 'Bani Yisrael' live in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. They number about 20 million. Rabbi Avichail tries to prove the connections of the Pashtun to the lost tribes of Israel.

The Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan live a tribal life near the border of Pakistan, formerly India. They are sturdy tribes of brave warriors, tall and their faces are bright compared to the other peoples in the region, their noses are elongated,

some of them have blue eyes and red hair. It is difficult to distinguish them from the Afghan Jews

d. Evidence from the royal palace of the Afghan Shah

The British who ruled the area called the Pathans 'Jews'. A British military doctor named Bellew, who served as a physician and spy in the palaces of the kings of Afghanistan in the ancient capital Kandahar, writes in his memoirs from 1857 that he discovered seven historical books written in the years 1783-1605 in Persian and which explained the origin of the Pashto tribes who call themselves Banei Israel. The tribes claim their descent from king Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. The Afghan tradition speaks of the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Musa, accompanied by the tabernacle called 'Tabut-i-Sakina' - the Ark of the Shekhinah. When Saul was made king he was defined as a king of his rank and above. He had two sons Jeremiah and Afganah, whose descendants were from the tribe of Levi. Bellew, who was not a lover of Israel, points out that it is a wonder in his eyes that a noble people like the Afghan people do not choose the ancient Romans or Greeks as their forefathers but instead chooses the people who killed God [Jesus]. To teach you, that the historical truth cannot be ignored. He says that thousands of Jews were exiled by order of Bukhto-Nasser-Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Kohistan-i-Ghor in western Afghanistan. They served as a mercenary army for anyone interested. As soon as they had a place, they move to the interior of the country. Until the coming of Muhammad, they were adjacent to five Torah Pentacles. The elders of the tribe came to Baghdad and converted to Islam and attracted all the Pathans to Islam. Their Hebrew names were converted to Muslim names.

The Afghans count from the first Adam to Abraham our father 63 generations. From Abraham our father to King Saul 45 generations. From King Saul to Qais who accepted Islam 37 generations.

Bellew adds and points out: the physiognomic structure of the Afghans is very similar to that of the Jews. They marry within the tribal framework. They excel

in impatience, lack of self-restraint, unstable moods, diligence and a great love of freedom. They are loyal to the tribal constitution and they excel as hard-working people.

Their tribal constitution - Puchtonwali - reminiscent of the biblical constitution - is the basis of tribal life and customs. He mentions the Passover sacrifice ceremony, the sending of the scapegoat to the wilderness in the days of plague. In days of plague they put sacrificial blood on the doorstep of the house. The meat of the sacrifice was given to the priests of the tribe. In cases of adultery, the adulterer is stoned outside the camp. Estates are not transferred from tribe to tribe. The distribution of the estates is determined by lot. Another custom is the custom of the pilgrimage to the temples located on the top of the mountains.

Photographic evidence

A team of Canadian television made a program about the lost tribes in Afghanistan. The staff interviewed me in June 1997 about these traditions. They said that during their visit among the Pashtu tribes in Pakistan and Afghanistan, they found a great similarity between the Pathans and the Jews. According to one of the staff members, if you put a Pathani in the clothes of a *Hasid* (an ultra-Orthodox Jew), you will find no difference between him and a *Hasid* from Eastern Europe. The members of the royal dynasty that was deposed in the early 1970s by the Soviet Union, attribute themselves to the 'Banei Israel'. The beginning of the dynasty in 1747.

Meetings with Pashtuns

In 1995 I met an Afghani Pathani in the city of Tashkent in Uzbekistan. He confirmed to me the traditions of the Afghan people regarding his Israeli origin, but he did not find any mental or national connection between his tribes and the Jewish people today and the State of Israel

Interview with Fathani Othman Abd al-Rahim Khan

Othman was born in the USA. At the time of the interview in my home in Jerusalem (July 13, 1997) he was 21 years old, studied archeology of the biblical period at Harvard University and arrived in Israel as part of an expedition for archaeological excavations in Ashkelon. Othman specializes in the history and life of Afghanistan and Kashmir. His father, born in Kabul, Afghanistan, a doctor by profession. He left Afghanistan during the war (1972-1973) and immigrated to the USA. His mother was born in Kashmir. Both the father and the mother live the Afghan historical tradition that they passed on to their son, according to which they are descendants of the ten tribes that were exiled by Nebuchadnezzar in the eighth century BC and rolled into the region.

Othman has already visited Afghanistan several times and plowed through its length and breadth while growing a beard and wearing traditional Afghan clothing. His relatives accompanied him on his tours.

The suffix Khan in his family name shows that he belongs to the Pathan tribes and perhaps also to the royal house.

According to him, Zahir Shah (1915-2007), the exiled Afghan king, lived in Milan in Italy in wealth. Othman met with Zahir Shah's son in Afghanistan, an educated man with a doctorate who shows no interest in returning to the throne but is active in the field. Anti-monarchical elements have no interest in eliminating the king, who at the time of the interview was in his eighties. In contrast, the Taliban maintained contact with the Shah. His son is active in the field.

I told Othman that the Afghans collaborated with the Nazis in World War II.

According to him the king was weak and the one who actually led the country was Prime Minister Hashim Khan, who had a Nazi orientation.

He saw inscriptions in the Kabul museum from the ancient Jewish cemetery in Jam. He mentions the address with the reference *Shaliyakh* ('messenger').

According to him, there are many scores of settlements in Afghanistan and Kashmir that are also mentioned in the Bible. The names Kabul, Kashmir, Hazor near Kabul. Many places have meaning only in Hebrew. He found words and inscriptions in Hebrew. According to him, he has photographs of Hebrew documents bearing the names Assaf, Barchia , Israel, Benjamin. In the sources of Islam there is no mention of Lamech, Noah's father, but there is a place that mentions the name of Noah's father - Matar Lam - the grave of Noah's father, Lamech. The direction of the grave is towards Jerusalem. According to him, the residents of Kashmir do not use the name Kashmir given to the region by the British but with the ancient name of *Kasher* and not Kashmir as the British gave it. According to him, these Pashtun tribes came from Herat, Kandahar, Khosat, Lagman, Kabul, these came from the tribes of Israel. There is a region called Pashtunistan.

A tradition among the Kashmiris, who have a common border with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan for their origin from the ten tribes. There is a lot of literature written by foreigners. They call themselves Banei of Israel'. Names such as Beit Pe'or, Pisga, heshbon, Mount Nebo were found.

Historians state that the Kashmiris are descended from the Israelites. Many of their customs are the same as those of the Pashto tribes and marriages between Pashto men and Kashmiri women are known. There are tribes that live in isolation. The Jaji and Shimanoid tribes live in the Khyber Pass

He collected Shinwari and Afridi customs. According to him, today it is dangerous to go to the control areas of the Afridi tribes (sub-tribes): Yusef Zai, Yitzhak Zai, Elias Khil, Suleiman Khil. Some people are called Kais-Kish as a first name. After their conversion to Islam they had to change their Hebrew names. Very little is known about it. The Yusuf Zai tribe came from the Kabul area and the Hazara live near the Pakistani border. Othman talked to hundreds of Pathans and they all agree that they originate from the people of Israel, but most of them are against the State of Israel. In Othman's opinion, there is a blood relationship between the Jews and the Pashtuns. He is willing

to do a genetic test and compare his blood with mine to find similarities in ancestry. [The aforementioned test was not carried out].

According to him, the tribal constitution states - if you have a territory and you have a guest you cannot harm him even if he is your enemy. If he asks to stay with you, you must accept him as a welcome guest, however, when the guest leaves the tribe's territory, they may kill him.

In 1978 there were still Jews in the city of Herat. In 1995, Othman found a Jew named Bezalel in Kabul. He has a beautiful daughter in Kabul who married a Muslim and so he stays there. There are no active synagogues left. In the central market in Kabul he saw an ancient carpet with Hebrew inscriptions embroidered on it. According to Othman, within ten years all traditions will disappear from the world and there will be no one who knows the history of the Afghan people. The Mujahideen know nothing of their past. The culture is disappearing, the music is disappearing, the famous Afghan carpets have no one to continue and weave them. Kashmir is also a victim of the struggle between India and Pakistan.

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I asked: "Othman, you must have heard about the Hebrew discoveries that were made in the Ghor area, a province on the Rhod River that draws its waters between Herat and Kabul. The first place of residence of the tribes of the 'Children of Israel.' "If we discovered in 1957 an ancient Jewish cemetery with 88 Hebrew tombstones from the years 1249-1012, which the local residents called the 'green magic tombstones'. Is there a chance that more evidence will be discovered in the future?"

and he replied: "I know the area in question. In my estimation, archaeological excavations will be conducted at this site in the future, which will also reveal findings that prove one.



Tombstone of Elisha ben Moshe Yosef (Firuz-ku 1190);

Tombstone of the Minister Moshe ben Ephraim Bezael (Kandahar 1320)



Important evidence of Jewish life on the Silk Roads in the Middle Ages was recently found in a cave in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan, about 230 km west of Kabul, not far from the two largest Buddha statues in the world, which were destroyed by the Taliban for being 'un-Islamic'. There to this day are several hundreds of pages written in Hebrew, Persian, Persian-Jewish, Arabic and Arabic-Jewish. They include letters, legal documents, merchant registers, Hebrew poetry, biblical commentaries, prayer passages and also unknown passages from Rabbi Saadia Gaon's polemic against the Hivi el-Balkhi, the biblical critic.