

The Hebrew language among the Jews of Afghanistan

(18th-19th centuries)

"Jerusalem is the Synagogue of the world"
(Mullah Yosef Melamed Garji)

The tiny communities in Central Asia in general and the Iranian space in particular were almost like a sealed book. We knew little about the connection of the Afghan Jews to the Hebrew language in recent generations. Did they write and read Hebrew and create in the Hebrew language alongside Aramaic and Judeo-Persian? Did the Jews of the area communicate in the Hebrew language inside and outside the community? Did they correspond with Jewish institutions in Israel and abroad in Hebrew? Did they receive textbooks and teachers from the Land of Israel? Did they have libraries that included holy books, *Piyut* (holy poetry), *belles lettres* and books of thought in the Hebrew language? Did they write their works in the field of commentary and thought in the Hebrew language? Importantly of all – did only the rabbis know the Hebrew language for generations, biblical and post-biblical texts, medieval Hebrew and contemporary Hebrew – or was Hebrew the property of all Afghan Jews? Was there a gap between men and women? Later we will try to examine some of these issues.

1. Mullah Siman-Tov Melamed - Hebrew Author

At the beginning of the 18th century, we find evidence of the knowledge of the Hebrew language and its use in the work of Rabbi Siman-Tov Melamed, a Persian-Afghan thinker and poet, the author of the book '*Hayat al-Rukh*' (Spirit of Life), '*Azharot*' (various holy hymns), '*Tafsir le-Pirkei Avot*' (Ethics of the Fathers). He combined Hebrew and Judeo-Persian songs in his works. Melamed, also known by his literary nickname Tovia, was born in the first half of the 18th century in the city of Yazd in Iran. He moved, probably in his youth, to Herat in Afghanistan, where he served as a rabbi and *Dayan* (a judge under Jewish law). Here he composed his

philosophical treatise '*Hayat al-Rukh*' (completed before 1778) which was published in Jerusalem in 1898 by the brothers Israel, Nathaniel and Benyamin (Gol) Shaulof.



Image 1: Cover of the book '*Hayat al-Rukh*' by Mullah Melamed (18th century), published in Jerusalem 1898



Image 2: Judeo-Persian and Hebrew Piyut (holy poem) in *Hayat al-Rukh*

Mullah Siman-Tov was born in the middle of the 18th century in the city of Yazd in central Persia and probably moved to the city of Herat in Afghanistan in his youth. Over the years, he became a teacher, spiritual teacher and *Dayan* (a religious judge) in the city of Herat, where he wrote his book '*Hayat al-Rukh*'. Near the year 1793 he moved to the city of Mashhad in Persia and became the spiritual leader. Mullah Siman-Tov died in Mashhad in the first quarter of the 19th century.

When we examining his works, we can find an extensive knowledge in the Bible and Talmud, in moral literature and in matters of *Halacha* (Jewish Law) and *Midrashim* (interpretation of the Bible). He also had a basic education in general philosophy and Jewish thought. He wrote mainly in Judeo-Persian, but sometimes also in Hebrew and Aramaic. '*Hayat al-Rukh*', his most important and main work, includes nearly 180

poems in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian, is a collection of morals spiced with some philosophical explanations about the 13 principles of the Maimonides' faith¹.

1. A lineage of spreading the Hebrew language

The Jews of Afghanistan, from the 19th century to the last generations, we cannot be described the Jewish life in Herat without Garji² family, which grew a glorious lineage of educators and Torah greats who spoke Hebrew and all their books were written in Hebrew.

The surname Garji indicates the family's origin from Georgia. It seems that the family was exiled in 1610 (along with Jews, Sunni Kurds and Christian Armenians) to Qazvin, Gilan and other places in Persia. These minorities were transferred from the southern shore of the Caspian Sea to Mashhad by Nadir Shah in 1746. They brought with them the Giliki dialect that was prevalent in their age and surroundings.

A year after the pogrom and forcing the Jews to convert to Islam in Mashhad (1839), the Garji family managed to escape from the Shia Mashhad with about 1,500 other martyrs and reach to the Sunni Herat where they returned to open Judaism. Soon they established spiritual leaders who served in the sanctuary in Afghanistan. These rabbis also served for the Bukharian communities in several Central Asian cities. First in Afghanistan and after they immigrated to the Land of Israel, they continued to serve as rabbis, educators, *Dayanim* (Judges under Jewish Law), preachers, biblical commentators and Sage literature, and writers of chronicles, who recorded in real time the events of the time and especially the events of the Afghani Jews.

¹ Netzer, Siman-Tov Melamed.

² The name Garji - probably indicates the origin of the family. Those who came from Georgia to the Mediterranean basin are called Gurji - Jews, Christians and Sunni Kurds were transferred by the Persians from the Caucasus to Gilan near the Caspian Sea in Iran. In 1746, Nadir Shah moved them from the Qazvin area in northern Persia to the holy city of Mashhad in order to create a counterweight to the Shiites and neutralize their power in Mashhad. After the Shiite rape of the Jews of Mashhad, about 1,500 Jews, including members of the Garji family, managed to escape and reach Herat and lead the community. The dialect according to the Garji family was the Giliki dialect, which was prevalent in Gilan and Golpaigan on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Yehoshua-Raz: Behind the Silk Curtain, p. 132.

The education of the rabbis of the Garji dynasty was quite different from the education of the other members of the community. They expanded their Torah education with the help of the rich library that was in the rabbi's house, booksellers imported books from Jerusalem and European countries, where Hebrew printing existed. The books were in Hebrew. Deep study in these books qualified them to be spiritual leaders of the community.

The members of the Garji dynasty served in all the key positions in the Jewish concentration in Herat: spiritual leadership of the Afghan Jews, who observed the tip of the behavior of the individual and the public, management of the traditional Jewish education system and Vakil-Kalontar (The head of the community and its representative before the Muslim authorities). They served also as cantors, performs circumcision and/or slaughters according to Jewish law (ritual).

Local Rabbis who lived in other settlements and trading cities in northern Afghanistan did not compete with the Garji family.

They were community rabbis in the old style, who accompanied their communities from birth to the grave, took part in days of joy and separated in days of sorrow. Three generations of rabbis from the Garji family immigrated to Jerusalem and teach Torah for about 80 years, in the Hebrew language, in the *Talmud Torah Bnei Zion* youth yeshiva in the Bukharian neighborhood in Jerusalem: Mullah Mattatya, Mullah Yosef his son and Mullah Binyamin his grandson. We find faithful testimony about the Garji family in Mullah Yosef Garji's book '*Edut bi-Yehosef*':

ורוב משפחתנו מלמדי תינוקות. מר זקננו החסיד מולא אברהם היה"ג
גומר תהלים בכל אשמורת הלילה [במשהד] ומר זקני מולא מרדכי בנו
ועטרת ראשי מור אבי מולא מתתיה גרג'י זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה. אלו
כולם היו מלמדים, ואני הדל, עפר תחת רגלי המלמדים, זה חמש
עשרה שנים מלמד תינוקות פה בתוכי ירושלים."

"And most of our family are teachers of infants. Our grandfather's father, the Hasidic Mullah Avraham, used to sing psalms throughout the night [in Mashhad], and my grandfather Mullah Mordekhai, his son, and the crown of my head, my father, Mullah Mattatya Garji, a righteous and holy

male, blessedly. All of these were teachers, and I am poor, dust under feet of those who teach, I have been teaching infants here in the middle of Jerusalem for fifteen years." ³

Table 1: Five generations of rabbis and Hebrew educators

Name	Generation	Location	Activity
Mullah Abraham Lived and taught) (in the 19 th century	1 th	,Mashhad Herat (since (1840	A founder and teacher in Herat's <i>Midrash</i> Famous for singing psalms throughout the night
Mullah Mordechai Lived and taught in) (the 19 th century	2 th	Mashhad, Herat (since (1840	Taught sacred studies in Herat's <i>Midrash</i>
Mullah Mattatya (1854-1917)	3 th	Herat, Afghanistan Jerusalem	Chief Rabbi and A teacher of sacred in Herat's <i>Midrash</i> Wrote holy books and chronicle
Mullah Yehezkel (1875-1953)	4 th	Herat, Afghanistan	Rabbi, teacher of sacred .studies Wrote holy book
Mullah Yosef Melamed (1869-1936)	4 th	Herat, Afghanistan, Marv, Turkmenistan Jerusalem	Rabbi, teacher of sacred .studies Wrote holy book
Mullah Asher (1882-1961)	4 th	Herat, Afghanistan Jerusalem	Chief Rabbi and .a teacher of sacred studies
Mullah Shmuel (cousin of Mullah (Mattatya	4 th	Herat, Afghanistan, Marv, Turkemanistan	Rabbi. Wrote holy book. Bookseller of Hebrew books

³ Garji-Edut bi-Yehosef. In the author's introduction. No page number.

No birth and death) (dates			
Mullah Binyamin Son of Mullah) (Yosef (1902-1974)	5 th	Jerusalem	Rabbi, teacher of sacred .studies

1.1.Mullah Abraham Garji (The 19th century)

Lived and taught in the 19th century in Mashhad. In 1840 he escaped from Mashhad to Herat. A founder and teacher in Herat's *Midrash*

2.1 Mullah Mordechai Garji (The 19th century)

Son of Mullah Abraham Garji. He Lived and taught in the 19th century. In 1840 he escaped from Mashhad to Herat. Taught sacred studies in Herat's *Midrash*. From a pamphlet published in the memory of Aghajan Reuven Cohen, who was a *Vakil* (the representative of the Jews before the Afghan authorities in Herat), we can learn about the educational framework that was used in the 19th century. This framework was brought with them by Mashhad martyrs who returned to their Judaism in Herat, .Afghanistan

Aghajan Reuven Cohen studied in the Beit midrash of Mullah Mordechai Garji who was a rabbi in Herat. The studies took place in the hall in the courtyard of the Garji Synagogue. He was admitted to 'Mullah' at the age of three and at the age of five he already knew how to read the Torah.

3.1. Mullah Mattatya Garji (1845-1917)

Son of Mullah Mordechai Garji. He was born in Herat in.

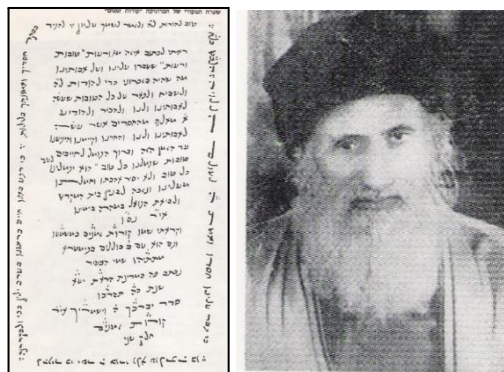


Image 3: Original cover of the chronicle 'Korot Zemanim' (chronicle) by Mullah Mattatya Garji (1857)

In 1857, a year before Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was born (who was awarded the title of 'Revitalizing the Hebrew Language'), Mullah Mattatya Garji describes in Hebrew in his chronicle '*Korot Zemanim*' the deportation of members of his congregation to a camp near Mashhad:⁴

נגזר מאת המלך, מלכו של עולם, ונתן בלב המלך [הפרסי] לגזור עלינו גלות להסיענו ממדינה זו [העיר הראת] ולהגלותנו למשהד. וביום ט"ו בשבט שנת תרי"ז [9 בפברואר 1857] התנפלו עלינו נוגשים, מכת הרג ואבדן לאמור: 'צאו מבתיכם כי כן נגזר מאת המלך'. והוציאו את הכול – אנשים ונשים וטף – ממקומם, ולא נשאו פנים לא לזקן ולא לנער. ואין חומל ואין מרחם. ותיהום העיר מזעקת עניים ויתומים. ולא הספיקו הגולים לקבוצ ממונם ולהכין צידה ובמשך ג' ימים הוציאו את כולנו חוץ לעיר למקום הנקרא מוסל. ויום י"ט לשבט [13 בפברואר 1857], הסיעו אותנו משם וקרוב לשלושים יום היינו בדרך וסביבנו גייסות גויים וגם משמים היה שלג וברד וקור וכמה נפשות גָּעוּ בדרך מרוב הקרירות ומחוסר לחם וכמה צרות אשר לא יסופר. חודש אדר, קרוב לפורים [מארס 1857] הגענו למדינת משהד ולא הניחו לנו להיכנס לעיר, אלא הכניסונו לגדרות בהמות, למבצר אחד הנקרא באב קודראת, מקום צר ובית כלא, והיינו לחרפה ולביזיון. וכמה בני אדם המירו את דתם מרוב הצרות. ובעוונותינו נתקיים בנו 'מחוץ תשכל חרב ומחדרים אימה' [דברים לב כה], כי הנוגשים כל היום מכים ורודים מכת אכזרי על העונש שהטילו עלינו ועל אי תשלום דמי שכירות הגמלים, שהביאונו מהראת, והגמלים היו רכוש המלך. ורוב הרוכבים [הגולים] היו עניים ואומללים והטילו השכירות על שאר העם [האמידים]. ומצד אחר היה בר מינן חולי ומגיפה ומתו כמה וכמה נפשות ועוד צרות אשר תקצר היריעה מהכיל... היינו שם במשך שתי שנים, ובסוף שתי שנים נתכפרו עוונותינו ותעל שוועתנו אל ה' ונתן בלב המלך לתת לנו רשות שנחזור למקומנו [לעיר הראת]. ובחודש כסלו שנת התרי"ט [דצמבר 1858] נסענו ממהד וביום שני בשבת,

⁴Mullah Mattatya Garji was the Rabbi of the congregation, educator, preacher, chronicler and commentator. He was born: Herat, Shabbat 26 in Kislev 5605 (November 7, 1844). Died: Jerusalem, Thursday, the 14th of Kislev 5678 (November 29, 1917). Garji-Korot Zemanim, pp. 144-143. Yehoshua-Raz-me-Nidhei Israel, p. 159. In 1856, Nasr ad-Din Shah, King of Persia, conquered Herat in Afghanistan and he came to terms with the martyrs who fled Mashhad and returned to their Judaism in the Sunni Herat. They deported the 'traitors' to a concentration camp near the city of Mashhad. See: Yehoshua-Raz-me-Nidhei Israel, pp. 11-110.

י"ג לטבת [תרי"ט – 20 בינואר 1859] נכנסנו להראת איש למקומו,
 "וברוך מרחם על הבריות"

"It was decreed by the king, the king of the world, and it was given in the heart of the [Persian] king to decree to drive us from this country [the city of Herat] and to exile us to Mashhad. On the 15th of *Shevat* 5617-ז'תרי"ט [February 9, 1857] we were attacked by taskmaster, a plague of killing and destruction as said: 'come out of your homes, for so it was decreed by the king' and they took everything: men and women and children out of their places and did not show respect to either the old man or the youth. There was no mercy. The noise of the city was crying out for the poor and the orphans and the exiles did not have time to gather their wealth and prepare a side. During three days they took all of us out of the city to a place called Mussallah⁵.



Ruins of The Musallah Complex (15th-century), Herat, Afghanistan

On the 19th of *Shevat* 5617-ז'תרי"ט [February 13, 1857], they drove us from there and for nearly thirty days we were on the road and we were surrounded by Muslim troops and also from the sky there was snow and hail and cold and several souls died

⁵ The Musallah Complex is a former Islamic religious complex located in Herat, Afghanistan, containing examples of Timurid architecture. Much of the 15th-century complex is in ruins today. Construction on the complex began in 1417 under Queen Gawharshad, the wife of Timurid ruler Shah Rukh, and ended in the late 1400s. The complex was destroyed in the Anglo-Afghanistan war in 1885 and due to earthquakes in the area. The *Encyclopedia of Islam*. New Edition. Brill, Leiden, volume 14, p. 658.

on the way from the coldness and lack of bread and several troubles that did not will be told.

In the month of Adar, close to Purim, Adar 5617 ה'תר"ז [March 1857] we arrived near the city of Mashhad and they did not let us enter the city and put us in cattle fences, in one fortress called Bab-Kudrat, a narrow place and a prison, and we were disgraced and contempt. Some people converted their religion [to Muslim] because of the troubles. In our iniquities, we will live in 'The sword without, and terror within' [Deuteronomy 32, 25], because those who approach all day beat us with a cruel blow for the punishment they imposed on us and for not paying the rent for the camels, which brought us from Herat, and the camels were the property of the king. Most of the riders [the expatriates] were poor and miserable and imposed the rent on the rest of the people [the wealthy]. On the other hand, there was a bar of sickness and pestilence, and many souls died, and other troubles that the canvas will be shorter than the description.

We were there for two years, and at the end of two years our sins were atoned for and our prayers went up to God, and it was in the king's heart to give us permission to return to our place [to the city of Herat]⁶. In the Kislev 5619 - ה'תר"ט – December 1858 we traveled from Mashhad and on Monday, 13th Tevet 5619 - ה'תר"ט – January 20, 1859 we entered Herat everyone to his place. Blessed be God who has mercy on people".⁷

⁶ Following British involvement and the threat of an invasion to Bushehr, the Persians retreated from Herat and the deportees got permission to return to the city of Herat. It seems that 300-400 of the deportees died of cold, appalling sanitary conditions and diseases, see: Yehoshua-Raz-me-Nidkhhei Israel, pages 157-160; Levy-*Girush Herat*, pp. 85-89; Ben-Zvi-Nidkhhei Yisrael p. 131-134.

⁷ Garji-Korot Zemanim.

The episodes from public and private life were written in Hebrew at real time in the chronicle '*Korot Zemanim*' in Hebrew-Oriental letters. The Hebrew is rich and studded with pearls of language and fragments of verses from the Bible and Sages sources. He explains the reason for writing the chronicle: 'so that it will not be forgotten by our descendants'.

In 1895 and 1898, Mullah Mattatya went on pilgrimage [زیارت *Ziarat*] in the Land of Israel] and he wrote his travel notes in Hebrew. Here is an example from his travel diary that brings his impressions of the Land of Israel in the 19th century. In the eve of the first of month Tammuz 11.6.1896) 5656 – (תרנ"ו he describes fear of an epidemic on the ship:

ובימים אלו היה חולי באלכסנדריה של מצרים וסביבותיו ולכן כל ספינה הבאה מאותם המקומות [שבהם היה החולי] אינם מניחים אותם לבא וחוששים שמא יתפשט החולי בר מיין גם במדינות אחרות ולכן מנהגם להוציא כל אנשי הספינה ממקומה אל מקום אחד ביבשה עם ממונם וכל אשר להם ומעמידים אותם בשמש ותחת האור כדי שיסור רוח החולי מהם. יש ספינות שמעכבים אותם ה' ימים ויש ו' ימים ויש ט"ו ימים כפי כובד החולי כן גוזרים רבוי הימים ולזה קוראים קראנטינא ולסיבה זו אותם ספינות שלא הלכו במקום החולי שכר הספינה כפלים, לפי שלא יש לו קראנטינא. ואנחנו בחרנו בספינה הזאת ביוקר בלא קראנטינא ויום ד' בשבת ערב ראש חודש תמוז תרנ"ו (10.6.1896) באה הספינה לכפר א' [אחד] הנקרא שאקיץ והיא רחוקה מאיזמיר כמו ⁸... ו' שעות

ובתחילת ליל ד' בשבת [רביעי], ז' לחודש ניסן [התרס"ח – 8 באפריל 1908] נסעה הספינה [מביירות] וביום ה' בבוקר היגיע(ה) הספינה ליפו ונכנסנו ליפו בשמחה ואחר ד' שעות ישבנו למסילת הברזל [=רכבת] ולעת ערב באנו לרחובות [הבוכרים] גבול ירושלים תוב"ב [תיבנה ותיכון במהרה בימינו] ועגלה [=רכבת] זו דהיינו מסילת הברזל כולנו ישראלים אנשים [=גברים], נשים וטף בשירה ובזמרה ובהגיענו לרחובות [הבוכרים] יצאו ובאו לקראתנו כמה אנשים [=גברים], נשים וטף מיושבי ירושלים תוב"ב וישבנו בעגלה פאיתון [דיליז'נס] ובאנו בביתם של האחים מ' ישראל גול.

⁸ Garji-Mass'ot, p. 275.

"In those days there was a disease in Alexandria, Egypt and its surroundings, therefore every ship that comes from those places [where the disease was] they do not allow them to come and fear that the disease will spread to other countries as well and therefore it is their custom to remove all the ship's people from their place to one place on land with their money and everything they have and put them in the sun and under the light so that the spirit of the sick will be removed from them.

There are ships that delay them for 5 days, and there are 6 days, and there are 15 days, according to the severity of the patient, so many days are decreed, and this is called quarantine, and for this reason those ships that did not go to the place of the sick, the ship's fare is doubled, according to the fact that it does not have a quarantine. We chose this ship at a high price without Quarantine and on Wednesday, 29 Sivan -5,656- תרנ"ו (10.6.1896)), the ship came to a village called Shakitz and it is about six hours away from Izmir.

At the eve of Wednesday, 7 Nisan5668 - תרס"ח - April 8, 1908⁹ the ship left [Beirut] and on Thursday morning the ship arrived in Jaffa port and we entered Jaffa happily and after 4 hours we set on the railroad [=train] and in the evening [we arrived at the train station in Jerusalem] תובב"א [will be built and prepared soon in our days] and this wagon [=train], i.e. the railroad. From there we took in the evening and this wagon [=train], i.e. the railroad. We sat in a *Faytun* [Diligence] wagon and we came to the house of the brothers M. Israel Gol at the *Rehovot ha-Bukhrim* a quarter near the border of Jerusalem תובב"א [will be built and prepared soon in our days] ".¹⁰

⁹ It is probably the second journey of Mullah Mattatya to the Land of Israel.

¹⁰ Garji-Mass'ot, p. 275.

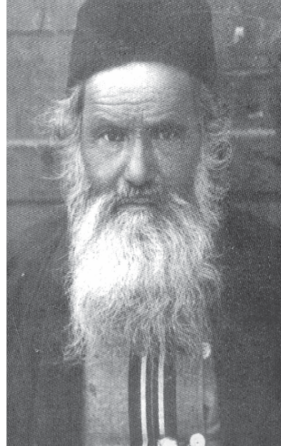


Image 4: Mullah Israel Gol-Shauloff (Herat 1859 – Jerusalem 1929). Publisher, leader and builder of Jerusalem

Mullah Mattatya Garji wrote in Hebrew and printed his book at Raphael Haim Ha-Cohen's printing press in Jerusalem his book '*Ong le-Shabbat*' in its three parts: in the first he compiled 'nice requirements and precious and nice hints' about the Torah, the *Haftarot*¹¹ and five scrolls. The book is built chapter by chapter according to the order of the Sabbaths of the year. In his second book 'The Psalms of David' he brought sermons to the book of Psalms, which the members of his congregation knew by heart. The third book is called 'The Book of the Temple' in which he brought flavors and hints and requirements about the Talmud. He ends his book by describing the praise of studying Kabbalah (Jewish Mysticism of the holy *Haari*)¹²



Image 5: Title page of Mullah Mattatya Garji book '*Oneg le-Shabat*'

¹¹ A chapter from the Prophets read in synagogue after the portion from the Pentateuch.

¹² *Haari* – title of Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (1534-1572).

The target population of his books were the men of the community who mastered the Hebrew language. His small community numbered about 4,000 people, including women and children. The traveler Ephraim Neumark writes about the personality of Mullah Mattatya:

מורה ושוחט שמה [הראת] ה' מולא מתתיהו. גם הוא לא יהנה מקופת הקהל
 כי ישא ויתן מעט להחיות נפשות ביתו [מכר תבלינים בחלק משעות היום]
 "ונכבד האיש הזה בעיני כל אחיו, ובשם "חסיד" יכנוהו".

'A teacher and a slaughter [according to the Jewish law] whose name is [in Herat] Mullah Mattatya. He also will not benefit from the public purse because he will carry and give a little to revive the souls of his household [he sold spices during some hours of the day] and this man will be honored in the eyes of all his brothers, and they will call him by the name "Hasid" (Pious)¹³.

1. The next generations of Hebrew authors

The sons of Mullah Mattatya Garji: Mullah Yehezkel and Mullah Yosef Melamed and his cousin Mullah Shmuel ben Shlomo Garji published books of sermons and commentaries in Hebrew. His son Mullah Asher, who served for 40 years in the sanctuary, did not publish any book.

4.1. Mullah Yosef Melamed Garji (1869-1936)

Mullah Yosef Melamed son of Mullah Mattatya was in the beginning a successful merchant. On his way to Land of Israel he came to Marv in Turkmenistan where he responded to the community's request for breadwinners and for seven years served as rabbi and spiritual leader, ritual slaughterer and circumciser. Rabbis who came there from the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, among them Rabbi Eliyahu Moshe Panigel (1850-1919), later *Ha-Rishon Lezion* [the chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire

¹³ Neimark, *massa'*, p. 78

and Land of Israel] and Rabbi Nachman Batito (1845-1915), later *Hakham Bashi* and *Ha-Rishon Lezion* (a chief Rabbi). They demanded from the audience Torah words in Hebrew and Mullah Yosef Garji translated simultaneously from Hebrew into Judeo-Persian. After immigrating to the Land of Israel, Mullah Yosef, following in his father's footsteps, served for 25 years as a teacher and educator in the Hebrew language in the *Talmud Torah 'Bnei Zion'* in the Bukharian neighborhood in Jerusalem.¹⁴

In his commentary on the book of Psalms '*Edut bi-Yehosef*'¹⁵, written in Hebrew, Mullah Yosef Melamed Garji also brings many autobiographical elements and anecdotes from the community's history. For examples: in the interpretation, for 'Thy servants take her stones and the dust therefore' (Psalms 102, 14) he talks about the custom among Afghani Jews to place a bag of dust from the Mount of Olives in the grave under the heads of the deceased. In his commentary to 'O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble'. (Psalms 79, 1) he recounts the bloody events in Hebron in 1929.

In the second edition of his book, he mentions the events of 1936 in Jaffa. He outlines an ideological subtext for the 'love for Zion' that expressed the aspirations of the Afghan Jews. He contrasts the virtues of the Land of Israel with the disadvantages of Afghanistan. In the chapter 87 of the Psalms, he presents 15 virtues unique to the Land of Israel, based on religious-mystical motives that place Jerusalem as the spiritual center of Judaism. He harshly criticizes those of his townspeople who are eager for money and whose hearts are not devoted to the Land of Israel. His approach is not idealistic because the settlement in the Land of Israel involves suffering and even has an advantage for a year that does not go down rains because people walk at this time crying and this is because the soul is softened and their ears are tuned to the times of redemption.

¹⁴ See: R. Binyamin Garji's introduction to his father's book '*Edut bi-Yehosef*', second edition 1972. In his introduction, he talks about his father Mullah Yosef who had a rich style and knowledge of the Hebrew language.

¹⁵ According to Psalms 81, 5: 'This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony...'

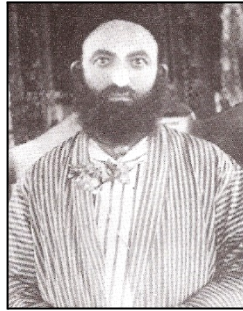


Image 6: Mullah Yosef Melamed Garji (Herat 1869-Jerusalem 1936)



Image 7: A commentary to Psalms. '*Edut bi-Yehosef*' by Mullah Yosef Melamed Garji (Jerusalem 1926)

4.2. Mullah Shmuel Garji

Mullah Shmuel is the cousin of Mullah Mattatya. In the introduction to his book *Minhat Shmuel* (Samuel's gift), Published in 1902, Mullah Shmuel writes:

מקטנותי הייתי משתוקק ומתאוה לטייל בגנות ופרדסים, פרד"ס התורה. וכל ימי שגיתי באהבתם לשמוע חידושים ולקנות ספרי הדרושים באשר ייטב בעיני. ובראותי כי איננו באפשרות לקנות ספרים אין קץ, כאשר ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים וכסף אין לי שיענה את... הכל. אמרתי עם לבי מי יתן והייתי ממוכרי ספרים

"From my childhood, I longed and longed to travel in gardens and orchards, the *Pardes*¹⁶ of the Torah. All my days I erred in their love to hear innovations and buy my necessary books as I saw fit. Seeing that it is impossible to buy endless books, when the land is long and wide than the sea and I have not money to realize this desire. I said in my heart: 'I wish I was a bookseller'." His dream came true in the city of Marv in Turkmenistan, where he served as a slaughterer and a teacher for small children. To earn a living, he sold books that he imported from Jerusalem and from Jewish communities in Europe¹⁷.

4.3. Mullah Yehezkel Garji (1875-1953)

Mullah Yehezkel, son of Mullah Mattatiya Garji, was born in Herat on 6th Shvat 5635 (12.1.1875). He received his rabbinic education at his father's house and immigrated to the Land of Israel around 1914. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, he published the book '*Hanukat Zion*' ('Zion's Chanukah'). Because *Zion* and *Yehezkel* (in Hebrew) are in numerology - 156. Mullah Mattatya was involved in the preparation of the book. The book included Jewish Law, ethics and liturgical poetry. The uniqueness of the book in the supplement to the chronicles *Korot Zemanim* of his father and in it the story of killing of thirteen Jews in the city of Maimana (18 Adar 5636/ 14.3.1876). Mullah Yehezkel died in Jerusalem on 3 Shvat 5713/ 19.1.1953.

4.4. Mullah Asher Garji (1882-1961)

Mullah Asher, son of Mullah Mattatiya Garji, born in Herat on 22.1.1882. He made a pilgrimage to the Land of Israel in the company of his father and helped him publish the 'Azharot' of Rabbi Siman-Tov Melamed. In the age of Seventeen he married a wife. After his father immigrated to the Land of Israel, he was appointed at the age of

¹⁶ **Pardes** (פרד"ס) is a Kabbalistic theory of Biblical exegesis. The term, sometimes also rendered **PaRDeS**, is an acronym formed from the initials of the following four approaches: *Peshat* (פְּשָׁט) – "surface" ("straight") or the literal (direct) meaning. *Remez* (רִמְזָה) – "hints" or the deep (allegoric: hidden or symbolic) meaning beyond just the literal sense. *Derash* (דְּרָשׁ) – from Hebrew *darash*: "inquire" ("seek") – the comparative (midrashic) meaning, as given through similar occurrences. *Sod* (סוּד) – "secret" ("mystery") or the esoteric/mystical meaning.

¹⁷ Garji-*Minhat Shmuel*.

26 as the head and the rabbi of the community and held this position for 40 years until his immigration to Israel. Like his ancestors before him, he served as a teacher and educator and spiritual leader, ritual slaughterer, circumciser and a cantor. His rulings in the law of appointees were accepted without appeal. Mullah Asher even composed a poem dedicated to David Ben-Gurion. He died in Jerusalem on 10.9.1961.

5.1. Mullah Binyamin Garji

Mullah Binyamin Garji, son of Mullah Yosef, was born in Herat and immigrated to Israel at the age of 11. Fifty years he taught at the *Talmud Torah Bnei Zion*, where his father and grandfather taught. Mullah Binyamin aside from being a gifted educator, he also served as the rabbi of the Jews of Afghanistan, Mashhad and Bukhara and accompanied their families through the life cycle from birth to death. Mullah Binyamin was a man of kindness, a Torah preacher, a teacher and educator and a captivating sermon.



Image 8: Mullah Binyamin Garji (Herat 1900 - Jerusalem 22.9.1974)

3. The curriculum in a 'midrash'¹⁸ in Afghanistan

The pupils in the '*midrash*' in Afghanistan came to train the pupils to learn the holy language in preparation for observing Jewish *mitzvot* (commands) and worship. The goal was praying in the *Siddur* (praying book) and *Mahzor* (cycle book for holidays),

¹⁸ The *Midrash* or *Mullahi* is a religious Jewish school, headed by a mullah and by young teachers – *Khalifeh*.

reading the Pentateuch with its meanings and interpretations, memorizing the Book of Psalms every day and studying the Jewish laws. The teaching was trilingual: Hebrew, Judeo-Persian (Dari) and Aramaic.

Zeev Gol quotes from the book published in memory of Agjan Reuven Cohen:

In one large hall in the courtyard of the Garji Synagogue, groups of children of different ages studied at the same time. The children sat on rugs or mats. Despite the intense cold the hall was not heated.

When child reached the age of three, he was brought to the *Beit Midrash*. To calm the child, sweets were distributed to the pupils in the group. As a virtue for success, the Mullah wrote on a hard-boiled egg verses from the Bible related to learning. The boy ate the egg and expected to succeed in his studies.

After the morning prayer and after the breakfast which included a slice of bread and a cup of tea, classes began. At 12 noon, the municipal cannon shot was fired, heralding lunchtime and the residents and pupils went out for lunch. When the shadow moved to a certain line, classes resumed until four o'clock. The pupils went to pray in synagogue the evening prayers and then they went home.

At the end of each stage of the studies, the parents brought a gift to the teacher and sweets to the children of the group.

After the great immigration of the community to Israel, few remained in the community. The teachers were Binyamin Gul and Simcha Garji. The teaching method remains as before. In the absence of many, the parents allowed themselves to bring Muslim teachers to teach the children the languages of the state.

Teacher Aghajan Batzal was one of the teachers. He taught in the forenoon and in the afternoon worked for his living in a trading house.

The last Jews remained in Herat until the Russian invasion in 1979. Some immigrated to Israel and some moved to Kabul.

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Avraham Kohen, *Kuntres Zikhron 'Olam* (Memorial Pamphlet) to the Memory of Aghajan Reuven Kohen, Jerusalem 1934.

Zeev Gul, *the Herat community in Afghanistan (1839-1976)* thesis. Efal 1984. 90 pages.

Most of the pupils studied until the age of 13. Afterwards they were sent to work in the trading cities as merchant apprentices – *Shagard* (شاطر). Outstanding pupils of wealthy parents continued to study until they reached their peak at the age of eighteen and by then they serve as ritual slaughterer, circumciser and cantors in the trading cities where merchants from the community operated. Chief rabbinate in the main city Herat was, as mentioned, a privilege mainly of the Garji family.

3.1. Languages spoken by Afghan Jews

In addition to Hebrew and Aramaic, two dialects of the Judeo-Persian language prevailed in the community: (1) '*Herati*' or '*Yazdi*' (a dialect of Judeo-Persian), in which the ancient population in Herat spoke; (2) *Gilaki* (was used by Mashhadis who returned to their Judaism in Herat). In addition, was a 'merchant language' - a secret language in which merchants combined Jewish Hebrew and Persian so that the non-Jew would not understand: such as '*Kosher kardan*' (to prepare kosher food), '*Barakha kardan* (to bless)' and '*Va-yivrah kon*' (runaway. The situation is dangerous).¹⁹

3.2. The classroom

About two hundred pupils of different ages studied in one hall in groups of ten. There was a big commotion in the hall. Hebrew, called the 'holy language', came to serve the Jewish worship. The child trained to pray. A 3–4-year-old boy learned to read from the '*Khalifeh*', a junior teacher who was subordinate to the mullah, who repeated and memorized the letters of the alphabet for a year with monotonous playing. The next stage was learning the score ('sign') and then came the stage of

¹⁹ A 'merchant language' - The 'non-Torah' language (*Zebune-Lotrayi* - Hebrew words with a Persian suffix). Yehoshua-Raz-Behind the Silk Curtain, p. 61; Kurt: Dialects.

combining the dotted letter. Every day in the afternoon, the Mullah checked the level of progress of the pupils. Two years later the child was able to read without understanding the meaning of the word. The Mullah moved from group to group and assigned one of the pupils to read aloud a passage in Hebrew and translate it into Judeo-Persian. The pupils went back and memorized the passage until they knew it by heart. The graduates delved into '*Ein Yaakov*' by Rabbi Yaakov Habib and his son Rabbi Levy ben Yaakov Habib²⁰. Advanced pupils were required to read a Hebrew text and simultaneously translate it into Judeo-Persian. The trend was rote memorization. The pupils knew by heart the Book of Psalms as well as passages from the *Zohar* (The book of *Kabbala*). A boy who read the prayers well for their pleasures he was entitled to learn to write and copy in the Judeo-Oriental script (similar to *Rashi's* script). He also learned to write eloquent letters in Judeo-Persian.

At a higher level, they learned the Onkelos (Aramaic) translation as part of the 'two readings and one translation' that they read before the weekly Portion from the Pentateuch. A gifted child studied commentary of *Rashi* and Mishnah. When Pesach (Passover) approached, they studied the Song of Songs; before *Shavuot* (Pentecost), the Book of Ruth; before Sukkot (Tabernacles), the Book of Ecclesiastes; and before Purim, the Book of Esther.

4. Attempts to reform Jewish Education

4.1. The '*Midrash*' of Mullah Yehoshua 'Amram



²⁰ A collection and interpretation of most of the legends found in the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. Compiled by Rabbi Ya'akov ben Habib, who managed to write only two parts of the book, Seder Zera'im and Seder Mo'ed, and died in the middle of his work. The book completed by his son, Rabbi Levy ben Habib. The book first published in Thessaloniki in 1516.

Image 9: Mullah Yehoshua 'Amram. Herat 1896 – Jerusalem 1980.

In the late 20s of the last century, an advanced *Midrash* was opened in Herat, which tried to break the Garji family's monopoly in Herat. It was the '*midrash*' of Mullah Yehoshua 'Amram, where the pupils studied in addition to sacred studies in Hebrew language, they also learned arithmetic²¹ and painting²² as well as holy songs under the guidance of the blind Mullah Yosef Bakhchi who accompanied himself with an Indian harmonium (like an accordion)²³. The opening of the new *Midrash* caused conflicts in the community.



²¹ Accounting knowledge is essential for a community whose main livelihood is trading.

²² Mullah 'Amram drew and illustrated the content of the lesson, for example, when they studied the treatise '*Zera'im*' he drew an oat with wheat grains on it and the students recognized the plant in the drawing: Gandam - חיטה (wheat). Yehoshua-Raz: me-Nidkhei Israel, p. 437.

²³ Bakhchi's songs are preserved in the Israeli Institute of Religious Music. He instilled the poetic tradition in the members of the congregation and their children. See: Yehoshua: A Father's will, p. 96.

Image 10: Mullah Yosef Bakhchi sings Holy songs and accompanied himself with an Indian harmonium



Image 11: Herat: The *Midrash* of Mullah Yehoshua 'Amram (seated on the right).
Standing on the left side: The Khalifeh (junior teachers)

In 1927 and 1936, the Afghani authorities tried to transfer Jewish children to Muslim state schools. There was great opposition for fear of assimilation and the recruitment of the Jews into the Afghan army. A handful of Jews sent their children to state educational institutions and provoked outrage due to the damage to Jewish solidarity. The community accompanied its opposition by activating Jewish institutions in the world that succeeded in canceling the evil of the decree. With the rise of Amman Allah Khan [1892-1960] to power and the cooperation with the regime in the Soviet Union, a handful of young Jews went to the Soviet Union and studied there at a university for foreigners and workers that mainly trained agents. Alliance Israélite Universelle also tried to establish an advanced educational school for the Jews of Afghanistan. The opposition was by the Jews and the Afghan government as well. They who saw this plane as western intrusion.²⁴

4.2. Naftali Abrahamoff - Hebrew teacher two years in Afghanistan

²⁴ Yehoshua-Raz, *me-Nidhei Israel*, pp. 437-439.

In the late 20th, as part of the reform led by King Aman Allah Khan following Ata Turk, the teacher Naftali Abrahamoff, a member of the community who graduated from the David Yelin Seminary in Jerusalem, arrived in Afghanistan, who taught Modern Hebrew to the children of the community in Herat in the years 1928-1930.



Image 12: Naftali Abrahamoff teacher from Eretz Israel (1905-1968)

Abrahamoff left behind a diary, which he published in the newspaper '*Ha-Yarden*' until the censorship of the British Mandate authorities stopped the publication of the diary.

Abrahamoff aroused the anger of the rabbis of the community who saw the young man with his bare head and clean-shaven beard as someone who harms their livelihood and accused him of exposing the youth to a bad culture, desecrating the Sabbath and harming traditional education patterns. The community were divided into two camps: One side - the 'conservatives' who continued to send their children to the old 'midrash' and the other side - the 'progressives' who sent their children to the new school²⁵.

He succeeded in translating for them the heavenly 'Jerusalem' [the name of the Land of Israel in the mouth of the Afghan Jews], to which they prayed and longed, into a pioneering Land of Israel that builds wasteland and awaits the Jews who will come to

²⁵ Naftali Abrahamoff, the teacher from Eretz Yisrael, told in his diary about a seventeen-year-old orphan boy who could not read in Pentateuch and the mullah used his services as a servant. The pupils nicknamed him 'Rosh 'Arel' (Blocked head). Abrahamoff took this orphan into his care. Soon the boy learned to read on the Pentateuch and the Prophets and on the Sabbath before his father's memorial day, successfully he read the *Torah* and the *Haftarah*.

its gates and build it. The pupils learned core subjects from him along with Modern Hebrew, Zionism and the songs of the Land of Israel. His influence on the pupils was enormous and they remembered him kindly even years later. The results of his work and his influence are also evident in the letters that the members of the community sent to the Israeli government and Jewish agency begging them to bring them to Israel. Abrahamoff describes in his diary his first meeting with the community:

הרבנית שתחיייה חשבתני לאיזה גוי טרדן והסבירה לי: 'חג היום. הרב' נמצא בבית הכנסת ואי אפשר לראותו'. בקושי עלה בידי להסביר לה שיהודי אני ובאתי לבלות את החג בסביבתם. משתפסה הרבנית את העניין, הוליכוני מיד בשמחה רבה לבית-הכנסת. אחר התפילה הארוכה הלכתי עם הרב לביתו, בסוכה גדולה ויפה מקושטת בשטיחים ותמונות מארץ הקודש. הסיבנו על הארץ ורק פתחנו בקידוש והנה (ת)מלאה הסוכה אנשים שבאו לבקר את הרב ביום החג. מטלטולי הנסיעה הממושכת [35 ימים] נחלשתי ביותר. הרגשתי עצמי עיף וחולה, וההמון הגדול והמשונה שנתקבל פתאום בבית הרב והקיפני בשאלות מרובות הנשאלות כולן בבת אחת יגעני עד מות. שמחתי איפוא לקבל את הצעתו של ראש העדה 'כלאנתר', והלכתי אתו לביתו המרווח והטוב²⁶

"The rabbi's wife thought me I was some an annoying non-Jew and she explained to me: 'Today is the holiday. The rabbi is in the synagogue and it is impossible to see him.' After a long prayer I went with the rabbi to his house, in a large and beautiful sukkah decorated with carpets and pictures from the Holy Land. As is the local custom, we sat on the carpets we had just opened with Kiddush (blessing of wine) and here the sukkah was full of people who had come to visit the rabbi on the day of the holiday. From the shaking of the long journey [35 days] I became extremely weak. I felt myself exhausted and sick, and the large and strange crowd that would suddenly be received in the rabbi's house and the audience asked me endless questions all at once would annoy me to death. I was therefore happy to accept the offer of the kalantar (کلاتر - head of the community), and I went with him to his spacious and good home." Abrahamoff pledged to serve in Afghanistan for five years, but in the revolution of 1930 against Shah Aman

²⁶ Yehosha-Raz, behind the silk curtain, pp. 242-243.

Allah Khan, he took his own life across the Iranian border with a bullet lodged in his back.

4.3. Failed attempts to reform Jewish education

Attempts to reform education were short-lived or failed, because each reform aroused the rabbis' fear of foreign influences and worry of the rabbis' loss of control and damage to their sources of livelihood.

In the 70's years of the last century and until the Soviet occupation (December 27, 1979) the Jewish children in Kabul attended a non-Jewish state school, where studies were conducted in French. Out of 2,400 pupils there were only 8 Jewish children. The graduates could be admitted to any French university. In 1927, the Afghan authorities tried to impose state education on the Jews. On that day, the pupils of the *midrash* were released from their studies, the women demonstrated wearing black clothes and a rope around their necks. The community held a public fast that day to convey the evil of the decree. Parents of three pupils who tried to enroll their children in state education led to hand-wringing over the damage to Jewish solidarity. A repeated attempt to accept the Jewish children in state institutions, which would have resulted in religious conversions and recruitment into the Afghan army, was in 1946 and the Afghan Jews mobilized against this decree. The influence of European Jews on the eve of the establishment of the state, there were approximately 4,000 Jews in Afghanistan and more than a thousand members of the community lived in the Land of Israel.

4.4. Girls' education

The proportion of males in the community who could not read and write was zero, not so among the Jewish women who are exempt from prayers and most of the duties of religious worship. It was the reason why they did not make any effort to teach them to read and write Hebrew. The Jews of Afghanistan adopted the Talmudic rule: 'Whoever teaches his daughter *Torah*, it is as if she taught insipid' (Babylonian Talmud, *Sota*, p. 1 of the Mishnah). An educational

institution for girls did not exist and only a few fathers taught their daughters to read and write. Daughter educated by the grandmother and mother to fulfill her duty as a Jewish woman and mother. They taught her marriage laws, purity laws and kosher laws along with managing a household. Upon receiving her first period, she was married. From the moment she was under the control of her mother-in-law and her husband the woman hardly left the door of her house because "All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace" (Psalms 45, 14). From the survey of the UNESCO we learned that the situation of Jewish girls was the same as the situation of girls in Muslim society. The father of the family contributed to the education of the girls when he read at the Shabbat table in *Shahin Tora*²⁷ in Judeo-Persian.



Image 13: *Shahin Tora* by Maulana Shahin Shirazi. Printed in Jerusalem 1902

4.5. Junior teachers (*Khalifeh*)

There were a few *Khalifeh* who brought their little daughters with them to the *midrash* at the age of 3-11. In the moment the girls got period they were not brought them to the *midrash*.

About four years after the great immigration of 1950, only about 200 Jews were remained in the community in Herat. The *Midrash*, which until the mass

²⁷ Maulana Shahin Shirazi, born in the 14th century. He considered the greatest poet of Persian Jews. Judeo-Persian - a Jewish dialect of Persian written in Hebrew Oriental letters. Shahin composed a number of long poems dealing with the stories of the Bible and connecting the stories of the *Torah* and *Midrash* with motifs from the Persian legendary tradition.

immigration was intended for boys only, was also opened for the study of girls. Zilpa Cohen and her sister Dina, whose father was impressed by the status of women in Russia, sent them to *Midrash*, under the direction of Khalifeh Binyamin Gol, who had no pedagogical training. Dozens of pupils from age of three to age of thirteen studied in the 'Mullah Asher' synagogue hall. About 40 girls sat there separately from the boys. Zilpa Cohen was 7 years old. They first learned the letters of the alphabet. After that, the scoring of the letters, and later they learned words and their scoring and learned simultaneous translation from Hebrew to Dari Judeo-Persian. Each pupil had a close mentor from among the older pupils. The pupils learned from books sent by the Jewish Agency: 'First Class' and 'Second Class'. They came to Israel with good basic Hebrew, which includes the ability to score Hebrew at a high level. Due to their good knowledge of Hebrew, they got good jobs and continued their studies at the university. It is important to note that women who did not receive an orderly education in Afghanistan, their daughters and granddaughters integrated into the education system in Israel and achieved academic achievements, including a third degree, senior officers in the IDF (Colonel), medicine Doctors, lecturers, advocates and more.

5. The Jerusalem publishers Gol-Shaulof

Among the first settlers from the Afghan Jews in Jerusalem were the brothers Israel, Netanel and Binyamin Gol, who were born in the city of Herat. They not only founded the Bukharian Giv'at Shaul and new settlers who came from Bukhara, Mashhad and Afghanistan, they vigorously engaged in the publishing of books in Judeo-Persian. They published first manuscripts that came from countries where Judeo-Persian speakers live. Then initiated a translation from Hebrew into Judeo-Persian of sermons and stories with a religious background. The translator was Mullah Shimon Hakham²⁸.

²⁸ Yehoshua-Raz, *me-Nidhei Israel*, pp. 440-443.



Images 14 and 15: Left: The author Avraham Mapu (1808-1867). Right: The translator Shimon Hakham (1843-1910); Center: The title page of the Judeo-Persian translation of 'love of Zion' (1908)

The publisher Yedidia ben Yosef Harati asked Mullah Shimon Hakham to translate into Judeo-Persian the 'Love of Zion' by Avraham Mapu. The book's imaginative descriptions of the Biblical period inspired the readers to immigrate to the Holy Land. Bukhara Jews gave their children names: Amnon and Tamar after the heroes of the novel 'Love of Zion'. The translator added to the book his own chapters of poetry that are not in the Hebrew original. The book was very successful among the Judeo-Persian speaking communities and had the status of a saint book like Song of Songs. The translator wrote in the concluding words in Hebrew:

מי שקרא את ספר הסיפור הזה פעם אחת, ודאי לא יריח את ריחו; מי שיקראהו פעמיים אך מקצת מריחו יריח; כל מי שיקראהו שלוש פעמים, הוא יבינו אל נכון ויחדור לעומק כל דיבוריו; אולם מי שקרא את 'הספר מאה פעמים', עד שהוא זוכר את דבריו בעל פה, יקראהו מאה פעמים ואחת

'Whoever reads this book of stories once will certainly not smell its fragrance; whoever reads it twice will smell a little of it; whoever reads it three times will understand the truth and will penetrate to the depth of all its words; but whoever has read the book a hundred times, until he remembers his words by heart, he will read it a hundred and one times'.²⁹

²⁹Mullah Shimon Hakham (Bukhara 1843 - Jerusalem 1910), son of Rabbi Eliyahu of Baghdad and great-grandson of Rabbi Yosef Maman (Tetouan, Morocco 1752-Bukhara 1822). Poet and biblical commentator and translator from Hebrew to Judeo-Persian in the Tajik dialect. Among his 32 books is a translation of half of the book of Isaiah, line of the books Sermon and Wisdom and the translation of Avraham Mapu's novel 'Love of Zion'. He was one of the leaders of the Bukhari community in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century and the

6. Letters

The knowledge of the Modern Hebrew language of the Afghan Jews finds expression in the letters they run to Israel and ask the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government to speed up their immigration to Israel. The epistles not only describe the state of the community at that time, but also correctly express the knowledge of the Hebrew language of the writers of the epistles. This is Modern Hebrew, which was influenced by the teacher Naftali Abrahamoff and reading Modern Hebrew material:

לכבוד הממשלה הרוממה והנישאה ממשלת ישראל ירום הודה
בשמחה רבה אנו שולחים למרומי ציון את ברכתנו המקורית והלבבית.
אנו מודיעים להוד כבודכם את צערנו הרב ואת שפל מצבנו הנורא. נטלו
מאתנו כל מיני עבודה וכולנו נשארנו בלי עבודה ובלי פרנסה וכל דלתי
המסחר נעולות לפנינו וכל שערי הארץ סגורות לפנינו. נגרע חלקנו גם
מבהמה מרוב צער הגלות. אין ליהודי בארץ זו כל חלק ונחלה אפילו
במשרדים או קואופרטיבים וגם אין במדינה בתי חרושת שנוכל לעבוד
בהם. בכל מקום שאנו פונים עין המלכות. וגם עם הארץ הזו מביטים
עלינו לרעה. ואם תתמהו שבמאה ה-20, אחרי מלחמת העולם השנייה
נשארה מדינה אנטישמית ופאשיסטית כזו בעולם. התמיהה אינה כל כך
גדולה, מאחר שידוע להוד כבודכם שבעולם הדמוקרטי והמוסרי
והתרבותי של יבשת אירופה קרה ליהודי גרמניה ואוסטריה וכו', שואה
גדולה של הרג שישה מיליונים מאחינו שנהרגו בידי הטמאים הנאצים,
שעד עתה לא נרפאו ממכתם. אנו בגלות ישמעאל, עם פרא ובלי
תרבות, על אחת כמה וכמה שכולנו בסכנה גדולה, סכנת נפשות, מעת
אשר דרך כוכב מיעקב, מיום שקמה הממשלה הראשונה לעם ישראל,
נהיתה שנאתם אלינו כפל כפליים.

ועתה, נא ונא ובבקשה מכבודכם לקדם את פני השואה הבאה עלינו.
תעזרו לנו בהקדם האפשרי כל עוד נשמה באפיו. מטרתנו ומגמתנו
במכתבים אלו לעלות ארצה, כי להטה בקרבנו אהבה בלי מיצרים לארץ

beginning of the 20th century and one of the founders of the Bukhari neighborhood in Jerusalem.

ישראל וגעגועינו אליה תוקפים אותנו בלי הפוגה וכל מעינינו מכוונים כלפי הארץ וכל עורקינו ומיתרי לבבנו מלאים כמהון ועריגה לארץ ישראל וממשלת ישראל.

על החתום: מאת קהל קדוש עדת יהודי אפגניסטן בעיר הראת
"ובחתימת 70 רבני וראשי העדה באפגניסטן"

Honor of the uplifted government –

The Israeli government admitted. Greetings!

With great pleasure we send to the heights of Zion our original and heartfelt blessing. We inform your majesty of our great sorrow and the lowness of our terrible situation. They took all kinds of work from us and we are unemployed and without a livelihood. All the gates of commerce were closed to us and all gates of the land are closed before us. Our situation is worse than the fate of an animal in grief of exile. Jews in this country do not have any share or ownership even in offices or cooperatives and there are no factories in the country where we can work.

Everywhere we turn the eyes of the kingdom follow us, as well the [Muslim] residents stare at us with hatred. If you wonder that in the 20th century after World War II, such an anti-Semitic and fascist country remained in the world, the astonishment is not so great, since it is known to your Honor that in the democratic, moral and cultural world of the European continent, a great holocaust happened to the Jews of Germany and Austria, etc. killing six million of our brothers who were killed by the impure Nazis, from whose scourge we have not yet been healed.

We are in the exile of Ishmael, a wild and uncivilized people, and we are all in great danger, in danger of souls, from the time that 'shall step forth a star out of Jacob' ³⁰(Deuteronomy, 24, 17), from the day the first

³⁰ Since the State of Israel was established (1948).

government was established for the people of Israel, their hatred for us became twofold.

Now, please and please, Your Honor, to advance the face of the coming holocaust upon us. Help us as soon as possible as long as we live. The purpose of our appeal and our tendency in these letters is to immigrate to Israel, because there is a burning love among us for the Land of Israel and our longing for it attacks us without respite and all our eyes are directed towards the land of Israel and all our arteries and the strings of our hearts are full of longing for the Land of Israel and the government of Israel.

On the undersigned: by the holy congregation of the Afghan Jewish community in the city of Herat and signed by 70 rabbis and heads of the community in Afghanistan."

7. Poetry as an expression of longing for Zion

In the absence of Hebrew printing in Afghanistan, a tradition of copying was developed. From the moment the Jewish boy learned to write, his masters trained him in cryptic writing and the tradition of copying Hebrew poems, one from the Bible and one from translation. Their love for Hebrew holy songs, who all love Zion and longing for Zion, began in the midrash, where they learned the craft of calligraphic copying in a personal notebook, known as دستک - '*Dastak*' (a 'handiwork') - an illustrated notebook into which the students copied holy songs, chapters of ancestors, the Ibn Gavirol's '*Azharot*' ('Warnings'), sermons, tales and poems related to Zion. The *dastak* passed from father to son. Thus, he knew and even knew by heart Hebrew poems that emphasized their connection to Zion, which they sang in the *midrash*, the synagogue, at public and family events and at home. Apart from the Hebrew holy songs, Persian-Jewish translations were also added, some of which were translated from Hebrew in a free translation.

During the week of the canopy, the groom was accompanied by ساقدوش - *Sakdush* (groomsmen) who sang songs of Zion in honor of the bride and groom and in honor of

the crowd from the *Dastak*. The favorite poem of all is 'El Ram Hasin Yah', a powerful acrostic that is often sung to this day:

אל רם חסין יה, שוכן עליה, מהרה גואל לעם שבטי יה
אל נשא ורם, גלה קץ נעלם, לבני אברהם, עם בחר לו יה
שוכן בשחק מהם אל תרחק, לזרע יצחק הוצא לרונה
לעיר תפארתה, מבין עדה, לבני יעקב שלח אליה
מקדש הדומה, ישיר בו עמה, בשירת משה, נביא בחיר יה
הרם עם אביו, ובנה אפריון, לגזע אהרן, יקריבו ליה
חזק ואסף לבית יוסף, ירבו ויפרו כגפן פוריה
אמץ בן דוד, וישפט תמיד, כל צר תשמיד, גרש מעיר יה

In the poem 'El Ram Hasin Yah', a prayer in Hebrew for the end of the exile, to gather all the people of Israel from the Diaspora and bring them to the Land of Israel, for the coming of the Messiah, for the building of the temple and for the renewal of the sacrifices. The children of Israel will greatly multiply and destroy or remove every enemy from the city of God.

Apart from the songs were in Hebrew or translations from Hebrew to Judeo-Persian were also brought, some of them in free translation. The audience knew by heart Hebrew poems were sung in the *Midrash*. Some songs were composed by the members of the community and accompanied by musicians, most of whom were Muslims.

Summary

The above examples show that the Hebrew language accompanied the Jews in Afghanistan almost all areas of life. Works were written in Hebrew in various areas. Hebrew was the connecting thread between the diaspora and the homeland of the Jewish people and the language of communication among Jewish communities in the diaspora.

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³¹Chapters of Abrahamoff's diary were published in *Ha-Yarden*, issues: 234 (14.2.35); 236 (17.2.35); 238 (19.2.35); 240 (21.2.35), 244 (26.2.35); 247 (1.3.35); 255 (11.3.35); 259 (15.3.35); 284 (15.4.35). Special thanks to his daughter Liora who also made available to me the manuscript that Abrahamoff intended to publish as a book but the British mandatory censorship prevented him from doing so.

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