

English Abstracts

Halachic Rulings of the Rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir regarding Protestant Missionary Activities During the Nineteenth Century

Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky

The Halachic rulings by the rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir, beginning in the 1830's through the end of the 19th century, reflected their determined opposition to the intensive and multi-faceted evangelical activity of three Protestant missionary organizations which were active among the Jews in these cities. As a result of these missionary activities there were dozens of cases of Jews who had converted, both in Istanbul and Izmir but not in Saloniki.

In seeking the conversion of the Jews the following methods were employed. Jews were invited to visit their churches and the mission houses; the printing of Bibles and of the New Testament, translating them and other Christian writings into Ladino and distributing them among the Jews; visits to the homes and shops of Jews; and delivering sermons during the administration of medical care as well as the establishment of schools for Jewish children. The Halachic ruling which mainly viewed excommunication as an important tool against the missionary activities was intended primarily to provide the rabbis with a united front, in order to give a Halachic basis in their struggle against the missionizing.

This article deals with the rabbinic rulings which dealt with the various types of missionary activities. The varied evangelical activities, included the distribution of Bibles by the missionaries; the giving of holy books to converts and missionaries; friendly relations with the

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missionaries; sending boys and girls to Christian schools; receiving assistance from missionaries during times of need, and receiving medical assistance in missionary clinics and hospitals which it opened. It can be learned that the rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir wrote Halachic rulings which mainly opposed interactions between Jews and missionaries. And yet, one can see that among them, that there were different attitudes towards receiving or purchasing books from the missionaries.

The influence of the Early and Later Spanish Sages on Ashkenazi Rabbinic Rulings at the Onset of the Modern Era

Jay R. Berkovitz

Until the sixteenth century, the interaction between the Eastern and Western rabbis was limited due to several factors. These factors included the geographical distance between the two centers, differences in the cultural and political reality of the two groups, and the intellectual and methodological gap which evolved procedurally between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Halachic rulings.

With but a few exceptions, to begin with, it was not possible to deal with the Sephardic or Eastern material, without the use of secondary tools. In the sixteenth century an historical turning point took place: Sephardic literature rose in stature in Ashkenazi countries, above all else, due to the invention of the printing press.

Although in the commentaries of Rabbi Moshe Iserlish, known as the Rema, in the compendium of Jewish law, the "Shulchan Aruch", Sephardic tradition served only as a secondary source, in his book "Darchei Moshe" and in his responsa a more inclusive approach was created which held an important place for Sephardic traditions of the Middle Ages.

In the seventeenth century there were Ashkenazi rabbis who believed that the Sephardic tradition was meant to fulfill a decisive function in

the completion of their Halachic discussions. The commentary of the Sha"ch – Rabbi Shabtai Ben Meir HaCohen, marked a turning point in this matter.

In his commentary, an unprecedented melding of Sephardic and Ashkenazi opinions was generated, which were cited within one discourse around the "Shulchan Aruch". The continuation of this trend appears in the responsa of Rabbi Yoel Sirkis "HaBayit HaChadash", in that of Rabbi Yair Chaim Bacharach "Chavat Yair", as well as in the book "Makor Chaim".

In the wake of the Thirty Year's War and the decrees following the Chmielnicki Massacres of 1648, the question of aguna women – those "chained" by impossible marriages, was raised as a central topic. Many of the Ashkenazi rabbis, for example Rabbi Menachem Mendel Krochmal in his Tzemach Tzedek responsa, and Rabbi Gershon Ashkenazi in his Avodat HaGershoni responsa, would find support in the Eastern rabbinic rulings.

By basing themselves on the modus operandi within the rulings of the Eastern rabbis, there was an increasing tendency to permit agunot to remarry in the aftermath of those turbulent times. This increased the spread of new cultural and Halachic encounters between Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions.

Notice of Passing Notification Letters: "Ta'aziya", According to the Tradition of Northern Yemenite Jewry

Aharon Gaimani

In Yemenite communities there were those who would announce the death of an important person by sending a letter of condolence, called a Ta'aziya, to all the acquaintances of the deceased in towns near and far. To the nearer towns the notification letter would arrive during the shiva- the period of the seven days of mourning, and to the further towns, after that period.

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This article will focus on the "letters of passing" of Northern Yemenite Jews, since in that area there was a more widespread custom to send them. The letters were sent by messengers from the community of the deceased, to communities listed in the letters, where relatives and acquaintances lived.

This article will discuss ten of these "letters of passing" from the twentieth century, accompanied by a discussion regarding the structure of the letters and their content, while also detailing their wording and language. Eight of the letters describe the passing of men, and two of the passing of women, this is probably due to their special status.

The writers of the letters used various stylistic methods to enhance the feelings of sadness. After accepting the justness of the Divine decree which was accompanied by verses from Scripture, the letter continued with words of lamentation regarding the deceased as well as describing his virtues. It went on to list the names of the communities and the recipients to whom the letter was sent. This was followed by the name of the deceased's community accompanied by listing the names of the senders, meaning the community and the family which was sending the letter, who were the relatives and friends of the deceased. The letter continued with a prayer and possibly a request in the merit of the deceased. It closed with verses of consolation, and then listed the date of passing. The letter was read in each of the communities which were listed within, and afterwards it was transferred to the next community on the list.

The letters also enlighten us regarding the specific protocol which the Jews of Northern Yemen had developed for themselves in the religious-communal area. Through these aforementioned letters we are given a glimpse into the community and history of northern Yemenite Jewry, and to the names of rabbis and important public figures, whose names were hitherto erased from the pages of history.

The Elements of Public Sephardic Discourse

Shmuel Trigano

This article deals with presenting the attitude of certain leadership elements in the State of Israel towards Edot Hamizrach – Jews from Arabic speaking countries, as a distinct group and as having a common origin and mentality.

The attitude is expressed as a clear "distinction" between Edot Hamizrach and the rest of the groups within Israeli society.

The article lists three types of attitudes, i.e. divisions within society, in which each type expresses a characterization through which it ascribes to Edot Hamizrach a unique definition of mentality, thereby separating them from the other population groups.

This article asserts that these "divisions" are based on untruths, short sightedness, and a need to define "mentality" for dishonorable purposes. While on the other hand, there is a driving imperative to delve deeper into Jewish history in order to refute those "divisions".

The Institution of the Eastern Charedi T'shuva Movement and the Renewal of the Local Sephardic Rabbinate

Nissim Leon

This article demonstrates one of the effects of the Eastern Charedi "T'shuva" – repentance, movement on the very foundation of religious life of Eastern (Sephardic) Jews in Israel – the authority of the local rabbis.

At the center of this issue is the contribution of the T'shuva movement which was established by Eastern-Charedi rabbis for the purpose of implementing the renewal of the local Sephardic rabbinate. The Eastern

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Charedi T'shuva movement also was and is a source of local religious initiatives, which grows alongside preachers and local Halachic guides. It also contributes to various innovative and creative rabbinic projects and undertakings in the image of the traditional Sephardic rabbinate, and wish to invest it with authority as well as envelop its community with charedi trappings.

It desires to shift from a rabbinate whose power and authority rests on a formal position which is recognized by the governmental authorities, to a rabbinate which is becoming increasingly intermeshed, whose source of authority is drawn from voluntary local enterprises. These ventures adhere to the religious message of a return to their own roots and traditions. It uses charedi tools and ethos to bring about this calling, and to spread it about as an all-Israeli idea.

A description such as this can be used by us as a source from a different perspective when viewing the Eastern-Charedi T'shuva movement in Israel. The shift is from an ethnic movement which appears to be dealing with religious missionizing, to a religious movement which strives towards ethnic renewal, in which one of its expressions is the change through which it brought some backbone to the local Sephardic rabbinate.

Rabbis in Georgia, Uzbekistan and Dagastan during the Soviet Period

Rina Lapidus

This article deals with the activities of the two main republics in the Eastern Soviet Union: Georgia and Uzbekistan. Jews have lived in Georgia from the fifteenth century until this very day. The lives of the Jews in Georgia- mainly in the cities of Tbilisi and Kutaisi were wretched. There were no Jewish institutions, there was no organized Jewish community, and the rabbi had to fill all communal roles.

The most prominent figure of Georgian Jewry was Rabbi Avraham HaLevi Khvoles (1854 or 1857–1931), a native of Latvia who studied in Slobodka under Rabbi Yitzchak Elhanan Spector of Kovno (1817–1896). Rabbi Khvoles founded a yeshiva, contributed to the spread of Jewish studies, Zionism, and the Hebrew language in Georgia.

Another rabbi who contributed greatly to Georgian Jewry was Rabbi David Ben Menachem Baazov (1883–1947). Rabbi Baazov trained generations of students which then spread Judaism and Zionism; chief among them were Nathan Eliashvili, the three Dvarshvili brothers—Moshe, Gavriel and Yaakov, Aharon Kricheli, Eliyahu Papisnadov, Chaim Mordechai Perlov, Yaakov Abramowitz Chovalshvili, Mordechai Shmelshvili, Yitzchak Michalshvili, Shalom Penikshvili, and David Pichhadze.

The Jews who lived in Uzbekistan were mainly concentrated in three cities: Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent. For the most part, in Uzbekistan, there were no ordained rabbis but only laymen who were called "Talmud Chochum", who would organize the prayer services. The most worthy member of the community was chosen to fulfill this role.

Although the lives of the Jews were difficult, they were quite far from the eyes of the strict Soviet authorities on Moscow; this is what enabled the Jews to keep, if only an iota of Judaism. In Uzbekistan we know the names of religious leaders who contributed to the maintenance of Judaism: David Simantov Boisuni, Tzion Ben Menachem Sopichaiev, Nissim Ben Shimon Oviadov, Zion ben Yonai Avzebekiev, Avner Ben Zvulun Leviev, Mashiach Ben Yitzchak Borochof, and Yaakov Ben Avraham Borochof.

The antisemitism which was dictated by the Kremlin would leave its heavy footprint both in Georgia and Uzbekistan. The "Jewish Doctor" affair in the early 1950's, left its mark on Eastern Soviet Union Jewry, as well as in the European areas of the country. The Jews suffered from a myriad of expressions of antisemitism; from terminations of employment to murder. The Jews of Georgia and Uzbekistan were

among the first to immigrate to Israel at the beginning of the seventies of the twentieth century.

Rabbi Shaul Even Danan – His Leadership and Ruling-Making Ability In Enacting Rabbinic Bylaws: The Solution towards the Problems of Modernity in Morocco

Moshe Ammar

This article describes the situation of Jews in Morocco and their status as a result of the inroads made by French culture which began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the spreading of French patronage over Morocco from 1912 through 1956. During this time the Jews of Morocco were exposed to Western culture and the younger generation was swept up by it and moved away from their traditional Jewish lifestyles. This phenomenon raised in its wake several problems specifically in the issue of matrimonial law for which a satisfying solution could not be found within the framework of local tradition and existing Halacha.

Furthermore, Morocco is a large country, the distances from region to region are great and travel between them was rare. Over the course of many generations each of those regions developed its own traditions and Halachic rulings. The French authorities developed the country both economically and through improved transportation. It laid down a railway, and paved roads all throughout Morocco which made emigration from area to area much easier. When Jews from different areas began to interact, differences in Halachic rulings became very prominent, and the need arose to unify into only one Torah and one Tradition.

In order to solve the two main problems which were mentioned, there was a need for a person who could deliver spiritual guidance with leadership and rulemaking capabilities. That person was Rabbi Saul Even Danan, the Chief Rabbi of Morocco and the President of the

Supreme Bet Din for Appeals from 1948 through 1967. The rabbi initiated the establishment of "The Rabbinical Council" which was comprised of the presidents of local Battei Din (pl. rabbinic courts) and select rabbinic judges. The council's decisions were accepted and enforced as "takanot" – as rabbinic bylaws which were accepted by all the Battei Din in Morocco.

The "Rabbinical Council" came together for a total of six sessions, during which dozens of topics were discussed. At these meetings many takanot were enacted and novel Halachic rulings were passed. The aforementioned served both for the unification of rabbinic rulings and traditions, such as rulings regarding the kashrut of meat and the Halachot of inheritance, as well as the solution to problems in the rules of matrimony, those problems which modernity had "placed at the doors" of the Bet Din. For the success of the deliberations and the fruits they bore, one must give due honor to Rabbi Danan's capable rulings and wise leadership, as well as the respect he bestowed upon his rabbinic colleagues and for the feelings of camaraderie he gave them.

"Such Judgments – They Know Not"?

Rendering Decisions Based on Gentile Law and Business Practices: The Stance of Halachic Decisors in the Ottoman Empire From the 16th Through the 19th Centuries

Ron S. Kleinman

This article will deal with the stance of the Halachic decisors in the Ottoman Empire from the 16th through the 19th centuries regarding the question of whether it is permissible to render decisions regarding monies by using existing Gentile customs and laws. Most rabbinic authorities of that period, whose decisions are included in this study, were of the affirmative opinion of indeed using those existing laws, by citing the Jewish dictum "That the law of the resident country is law" – and therefore must be obeyed. They reasoned that even if the source is

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a Gentile one, the parties will abide by that custom, despite there not being a Jewish tradition, not knowing what their own tradition is, or even by one that is contrary to Jewish Halachah.

Many of those rabbis relied on the ruling of Rabbi Avraham Ben David of Posquieres, known as the Raavad, and on the responsa of Rabbi Shlomo Ben Avraham ibn Aderet, known as the Rashba.

Opposing them, was the 16th century Rabbi Chaim Shabtai, known as the Maharchash who ruled against this practice, by basing himself on the responsa of the Rashba himself (Shu"t HaRashba 6, 254), in which the Rashba strongly condemned anyone ruling according to Gentile law regarding the laws of inheritance- either due to custom or by citing the Jewish dictum "That the law of the resident country is law". The Rashba ruled that way since it mimics the ways of the Gentiles and because it abandons Torah law. At the start of the 19th century, Rabbi Eliezer De Toledo also ruled that way by basing himself on that same ruling.

Other contemporary sages which were included in this study did not cite the aforementioned Rashba responsa, as opposed to several Ashkenazi sages who did rule that way based on it.

Rabbi Rephael Yosef Chazan, who lived in Izmir, Turkey in the 18th century, instituted the ruling that Gentile customs have no validity, even if the Jews do follow that particular practice. His grandson, Rabbi Chaim Palagi, also rules that way. Neither supplied reasoning for their unique ruling, nor did they deal with the basic principle of whether it is proper to even rule on issues based on Gentile customs.

This study deals with customs of the Gentiles primarily in the areas of commerce and inheritance. Only a few of these sources mentioned Gentile courts and of customs which arose from Gentile jurisprudence. The positions that the rabbis of the Ottoman Empire held regarding these matters requires further investigation.

Rabbi Moshe Binyamin: One of the First Kabbalists in Baghdad

Shaul Regev

Very few manuscripts authored by our Babylonian sages from the 17th through the beginning of the 19th century are in our hands today. This is due to the elements of nature, wars, and occupations which all contributed to the loss of the originals. It is also possible that there are few extant copies since perhaps those Babylonian sages did in fact not write much.

We find a similar situation in the Great Yeshiva of Mosul, headed by the sages of the Barazani family who also did not leave us many manuscripts, either because they did not write much or if they did, those manuscripts were lost to us over time.

Rabbi Moshe Binyamin was one of the renowned Kabbalists who lived in Baghdad at the close of the 17th century through the middle of the 18th century. Much of his background is shrouded in uncertainty. We have very little information about him from external sources, with the majority of it coming from his own preface to his books.

Three of his Kabbalistic books survived, the first being, "Tfila L'Moshe" – "A Prayer to Moses", which contains his interpretation of ten chapters from the "Book of Psalms" which are included in our prayers commencing from chapter 90, "A Prayer to Moses". This book continues with his elucidation on "The Prayer of Hannah", "The Prayer of Hezekiah", "The Prayer of Jonah", and other texts of a similar nature. The second book, "Sha'arei Yerushalayim" – "The Gates of Jerusalem", contains his commentary on the chapters of comfort and condolence found in the "Book of Isaiah". In his third book, "Ma'asei Rav" – "The Deeds of Rav" he elucidates on the deeds of Rabba Bar Bar Chana, as found in the Talmudic tractate of "Bava Batra". In all of his writings, his commentaries are a blend of literal interpretation, homiletic exegesis, and Kabbalistic meanings.

In his generation we do find other sages, such as Rabbi Ezra The Babylonian, who also wrote about Kabbalah albeit not at the level of

Rabbi Moshe Binyamin. In the generation following him, we find the writings of other Kabbalists such as Rabbi Sasson Shenduch. These early writers were but a prelude to the deluge of Kabbalistic writing in the 19th century which had tremendous influence on Babylonian Jewry at the time.

HaRav Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook and his Attitude
Regarding the Sephardi Sages During His Stay in Jaffa
5674–5664 (1914–1904)

Ben Zion Rosenfeld

This study offers an innovative, complex and rich with information approach in researching the unique topic of the life of HaRav Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, regarding his attitude towards the rabbis from the East, the Sephardi rabbis, who were in Jaffa during his tenure as chief rabbi of the city from 1904 through 1914.

As a central city of the Yeshuv, as the Jewish settlements of then Palestine- Eretz Yisrael was called, there were large communities of Jews from the East, which had their own spiritual leadership. Rabbi Kook, “the new Oleh” was also their official rabbinical leader, and during that period he formulated his attitude towards their communities and their rabbinic leaders.

There were a number of important Eastern rabbis in the city, some which were as of yet unknown, but whose status was central to the community. This article discusses their various connections with HaRav Kook, mainly in their collaborative and intensive public activities together.

A large portion of this study deals with the more prominent Eastern sages in Jaffa at the time, Rabbi Ahrvatz and Rabbi Uziel.

Finally, this article offers additional aspects which point to the connections between HaRav Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook and the Eastern rabbis, such as in his responsa in Halachah, his personal

connections with those sages from outside of Jaffa, in Eretz Yisrael and abroad, as well as his extensive knowledge of Eastern rabbinical literature of the recent past generations.

The Historic Connection between the Rabbinic Leaders of Algeria and Eretz Yisrael in the Era of Change (1830–1962)

Yossef Charvit

The rabbinic sages of Eretz Yisrael provided a unique contribution and had a profound influence on the rabbinic leaders of Algeria. This assisted them in stabilizing and maintaining their positions during the 19th and 20th centuries. This contribution and influence came in the form of the introduction of the Hebrew press in Algeria. During this period of transition, the press served as a bridge between the Algerian sages and the manifestations of modernity.

Under the guidance of those sages this press navigated the complexities of Halachah during those turbulent times. It served as a source of their authority and support in their controversial religious decision-making processes, as well as assisting them in quelling localized squabbles. The press laid down an ideological foundation for the philosophy underlying religious Zionism across its entire spectrum. It took a position against all forms of assimilation, becoming a stabilizing factor in communities which were undergoing unrest and discontent.

In the period following 1841, when Jewish religious judicial autonomy was taken away, and its religious authority was no longer supported by the central government, the sages of Eretz Yisrael filled the void and became the font of wisdom, guidance, and inspiration.

The Algerian sages found an alternative source of religious authority in their Eretz Yisrael counterparts. This period of historic cooperation between the sages of Algeria and those of Eretz Yisrael represented their finest hour during these turbulent and ever-changing times.