

The Tsedaka Family:

One of the Most Active Elements in the Samaritan Community in the 20th Century

By: Nathan Schur [Tel Aviv]

The Tsedaka family has been one of the most active elements in the Samaritan community in the 20th century. Its roots are in Nablus [while some of the other creative families hail originally from Damascus, Gaza and Saraphand near Ramleh in the mid-west of the Land of Israel]. Originally it was there part of the Tsafari family.

In earlier centuries some of the Samaritan families lived in Cairo, Saraphand, Gaza and Damascus, but during the 17th and 18th centuries all parts of the community moved to Nablus. Throughout the 19th century all Samaritans lived in Nablus. But early in the 20th century [1905] members of the Tsedaka family started to move to new abodes.

Abraham b. Marchiv Tsedaka moved to Jaffa, where he tried to open a shop for textiles. He failed twice in 1894 and in 1902, but succeeded in 1905, and lived there with his family, which grew in the end to eight children. His movement is of the greatest importance in Samaritan history. Not only was the isolation of his tribe in Nablus thus broken, but the new settlement established by him comprises now, after a century, half of his nation.

He was not the only one to feel the need to move away from Nablus. His fathers' cousin, Arieḥ [Nimr]=Yisaschar b. Shalma, moved to Tull Karim, but life for non-Muslims was not easy there. Aryeh's family lived there for nearly two generations, but did not succeed eventually to sink roots there.

The "Jaffa branch" of the family moved in 1926 to Neveh Tzedek [another suburb originally of Jaffa and eventually of Tel Aviv], where they remained till 1947, but some of its members returned to Nablus when the 1948 war loomed on the horizon. Still, 39 Samaritans stayed on the Jewish side during this fateful struggle.

Most of the members of the Tsedaka family returned after the war in August 30, 1949, to Tel Aviv and Jaffa [which was now part of Tel Aviv]. One of the sons of Abraham b. Marchiv, Yefet, initiated the Samaritan settlement in Holon and directed its development.

In the early 1950's some of the Samaritans of Nablus moved to Holon under the family reunification scheme between Israel and Jordan.

Other members of the Tsedaka family were active mainly in the cultural field, and thus, mainly Ratson b. Benyamim, who was a prolific writer. His two sons, Benyamim and

Yefet, founded in 1969 the Samaritan bi-weekly newspaper A.B.. Benyamim has also opened in 1981 the "A.B. - Institute of Samaritan Studies" at his home in Holon.

The following is a list of the main branches and members of the Tsedaka family [see life's tree].

I want to touch now quite shortly on several members of the Tsedaka family:

[1] - Yaakov b. Yishmael and his brother Shalma [1a] were textile's peddlers in the villages around Nablus [late 18th century - early 19th century].

[2] - Marchiv b. Yaacov [1823-1881]. He was merchant in Nablus in the middle of the 19th century. One of the stories told about him in the family reports his being seized by a serious malady, during which his stores increased in value. Actually he, and his brother Chovav [2a- 1826-1886] knew how to profit from fluctuations in the value of money, and became thus wealthy.

[3] - Abraham b. Marchiv [1852-1928]. In order to keep up the value of the property he had inherited from his father he decided to move away from Nablus and to settle in the prospering harbor town of Jaffa. He failed twice, but succeeded in 1905 to open a textile shop there. He prospered and raised a family of 8 children. He made new contacts with the Jewish community there and especially with Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, one of the most important leaders of the labor Movement, and later the second President of Israel. His main interest was not so much in trade as in the composition of poems [nearly a thousand, some 300 of which were included in Ratson b. Benyamim's compilations]. He translated also from

Arabic. In 1926 he returned to Nablus where he died two years later.

[4] - Arie b. Shalma [1853-1917]. He was the cousin of Marchiv. He copied many old Samaritan documents and was known for his sound knowledge of Arabic and Hebrew. He wrote down most of what is now known about the early members of the Tsedaka family.

[5] - Yefet b. Abraham [1894-1982]. The fourth son of Abraham b. Marchiv. He lived initially in Jaffa and Tel Aviv. He served as supervisor of Jewish Kosher Shechita. In 1951 he bought a vacant sand-lot in Holon and lived at first in tents he erected there the same year. Later he headed the further steps to develop there a Samaritan quarter. With the help of Ben-Zvi he got the necessary political backing and bank loans. The original tents and huts turned into a proper residential quarter, with a synagogue and a cultural center. He was so successful that Holon has grown into an alternative to Nablus itself. As initially no Cohanim moved there, Yefet served as a Chazan, Shochet, teacher and head of the community. He has generally been regarded as the most prominent Samaritan of his generation.

[6] - Ratson b. Benyamim [1922-1990]. He and his two brothers inherited the shop owned by his father and uncle Asher in Nablus. Later he moved to Holon where he opened a shop of his own. His importance lies however in the cultural field. With him starts the new period in Samaritan cultural history, in which most of the literary activity takes place in

Holon and most of the works are published. More than twenty of his books have been printed. Some are in field of liturgical poetry, one contains poems and hymns for the service of the Day of Atonement, and another is of non-religious poetry in Samaritan Hebrew and Arabic. Further he has edited various Samaritan works which otherwise might have been lost. He has aided Israeli scholars [specially Prof. Z. Ben-Hayeem] in their work on the Samaritan language, music and folklore. A detailed article has been published on him by Prof. Dov Noy [A.B. no. 503-505, 1990].

[7] - Arie b. Zakkai [1927-1994]. He spent his youth in Tull Karim, but moved later to Nablus and later on, in 1952, to Holon with his father. He wrote numerous works of poetical nature, many of which were published in A.B.

[8] - Abraham b. Nor. His wife Rachel [8a] was written secular verse, in Hebrew, and has published a volume of her work in 1977. However the links of Abraham and his family to the Samaritan creed have weakened and were in the end severed. This is a rare case among Samaritans today, but is not completely exceptional.

[9] - Yisrael b. Gamliel [1932 -]. He has worked at the Israeli Society for The Production of Coins and Medals. He has published Samaritan texts, prayer books and especially a detailed edition of Samaritan Pentateuch. For many years he is noted for his close association with Prof. Ben-Hayeem and Prof. A. Tal.

[10] - Benyamim b. Ratson [1944-] - He has studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He worked for 25 years for the Jewish Agency [till Oct. 1994]. He married Miriam Davidovici from Romania and has 4 children. He founded in 1969 the Samaritan bi-weekly A.B. – The Samaritan News which contains material in four languages. The first issue was only of 2 pages, but nowadays the issues run to 50 pages and even more. This paper has opened a venue of literary expression to many Samaritans, who otherwise would not have published anything. Mainly it serves to keep the flame of Samaritan nationhood burning, to educate the younger generation to pride on their ancient traditions, but also to serve as mirror of its current development. It is an indispensable source of information for the use of scholars and acquaints the members of the community with some of the worldwide developments of Samaritan research. Benyamim is active in Samaritan public affairs, travels much and has founded a center for Samaritan studies in his home: "A.B. -

Institute of Samaritan Studies".

[11] - Yefet b. Ratson [1946 -] - He is a senior official in the Mizrachi Bank in Tel Aviv and co-founder with his brother Benyamim, of the A.B. - newspaper and institute. While

his brother serves as editor, he handles the technical side, but writes also many articles, especially on social subjects.

[12] - Naphtali b. Tamim [1959-] and his brother [13] Doron[1965-] are authours of the religious poetry and have published prayer books.

[14] - Malka b. Tamim [1958- now Sassoni] is a teacher by profession, but better known among Samaritans as one of the directors of the Samaritan [male] basketball team.

The Tsedaka family members now some 130 members, and is the third largest of the Samaritan families. Only some 11 of its members live in Mt. Gerizim, all the others in Holon.

by Nathan Schur

A.B.'s addition:

[15] - Batia b. Yefet [1925-]- Ratson b. Benyamim's widow. The most prominent personality among the females of the community on the last two-generation. She worked as a schoolmaster in Jewish-Israeli schools for 40 years. Since her retirement she is devoting all her time to teach the Samaritan heritage to females and children of the community in Holon and Mount Gerizim. With her sister Zippora they both published a book on the Samaritan cook, traditions and customs [+Danscho Arnon].

[16] Zippora b. Yefet [1926 - now Sassoni] - Teacher in Jewish-Israeli schools for over 30 years. Since her retirement she is devoting all her time to teach the Samaritan heritage to females and children of the community in Holon and Mount Gerizim. With her sister Batia, they both published a book on the Samaritan cook, traditions and customs [+Danscho

Arnon].

[17] - Yossef b. Ovadia [1938-]. An active of the Israel's Labour Party during the years 1983-1996. Member of the municipality council in the year 1983-1988. He was assigned in 1985-1987 as one of the voices of the mayor of Holon and later, in 1992, as one of the advisers of Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhaq Rabin, then adviser of the minister of religious affairs Schimon Schitrit for the Autonomy matters till 1996.

[18] - Yefet b. Ovadia [1945-] - Has published a new edition of the Samaritan Pentateuch copied by him as well as a new edition of the 19th century's poem "Molad Moshe"[=Birth of Moses].

[19] - Yoetz b. Asher [1945 -] - The translator from Hebrew into Arabic of the whole editorial articles and reports in A.B..

A.B. addition (A.B. News Services)

