

RATSON B. BENYAMIM TSEDAKA - 90 YEARS TO HIS BIRTHDAY

By Benyamim Tsedaka, 2012

A salute to the memory of our father Ratson b. Benyamim Tsedaka Hatsafari in the Anniversary of 90 years to his birthday and to the youth generation till 30 years old that never met him.

On the Tomb of Ratson were engraved some of his many titles, that represent his activity in the short 67 years of his life: Writer and poet, best reader of the Law and best worshiper, best singer and correct reader of the Torah.

He was born in Nablus, Samaria in 22.2.22, (22 of February 1922). When he was 6 years old he completed the first reading of the entire Torah and at 8 he sang the first poem before the worshipers in the old Samaritan synagogue in old Nablus. At 10 he sang the great poem of the night of the Day of Atonement and hearted the encouraging complements of his excited listeners. He was raised by his uncle Asher b. Shelach Tsedaka Hatsafari and the full pride of his father Benyamim. He was attracted to the poetry and learned all of its secrets to the highest level. Since in the 1930's till the middle of the 1940's was darkness all over the synagogue hall in Shabbaths and Festivals mornings every worshiper learned the poems and the prayer by heart. Ratson was promptly prominent in this regard with his superb photographic memory. He learned by heart the Torah books of Genesis and Exodus that read in the night of the Day of Atonement to the level that he read them completely by heart from the start to end and back. At the end of the 1940's the Samaritans to enlighten the synagogue hall from evening to evening and the worshipers stopped to read it by heart but straight from the book.

When his father troubled with an eyes illness and stopped to work, Ratson was forced to leave his high school study in Nablus and helped the family in their shop of materials in Nablus market. At the start of the 1940's he became closer to the first daughter of the head of the community in Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, Batia daughter of Yefet b. Abraham Tsedaka Hatsafari that was almost 4 years younger than him. They both fell in love with each other and got married in 1943. Batia moved from Tel Aviv to Nablus to her father in law and his son, her husband house. There they gave birth to their only two children Benyamim and Yefet.

All of Batia family continued to leave in Tel Aviv. After the establishment of the State of Israel she convinced her husband to move back to Tel Aviv with their children, and this is what they really done in 1951 in the frameworks of the agreement of family unification between Israel and Jordan. Batia has completed her study in the teachers seminar and became an excellent teacher in Israel. At the same year, 1951, all the family moved to live in tents and wooden houses on a sandy area that her father Yefet bought in Holon till 1955 when they all moved again to the constant living center - The Samaritan Neighborhood in the south of Holon. Ratson worked hard in many different physical jobs till he started to work in a shop for camping equipment. There he became an expert in tailoring and in trade. At the start of the 1970's he bought the shop from its owner and developed it to be much a bigger business of Camping tools, bags, sea and picnic tents. Also, Batia succeeded in her work as a teacher and became successful principal in schools in the Dan District.

During all these years, Ratson improved his knowledge of all aspects of the Samaritan tradition and together with his wife, the couple developed a home for wise men and scholars from the country and abroad that showed interest in Samaritan Studies. The greatest scholar of Samaritan Studies of our generations was Prof. Zeev Ben-Hayeem. Called Ratson: My teacher and mentor, because he found him the first informant of the highest level for the Israelite-Samaritan tradition in reading the Torah, in the poetry and hymns. Prof. Dov Noy and Dr. Yom Tov Levinski found him as a the best source of the knowledge of the Samaritan Folklore and listed from his mouth hundreds of folk stories. Prof. Noy described him as the reviver of the new renaissance in the Samaritan culture. Prof. Ben-Hayeem described Ratson as the "sea of knowledge and traditions of the Samaritan Community".

His meetings with scholars and very learned persons from outside the Samaritan Community have led Ratson to deepen his knowledge in all aspects of the Samaritan literature. Already in his youth he copied several time the five books of Moses', the hymns books, the books of Halacha and homiletic of the Samaritans. His competent control in Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic made his study much easier.

Ratson became a close friends to other Samaritan wise men in Holon such as Abraham b. Marchiv Hamarchivi and Yisrael b. Gamliel Tsedaka Hatsafari. They started to print their manuscripts they had copied from the Torah and books of prayers in many copies for the use of the Samaritans. With his cousin Abraham b. Nor Tsedaka they both published the first comparative edition of the Jewish and Samaritan versions of the Torah in 1962-1965. Ratson was the first to publish a three languages Torah that he edited,

copied and was also the first to publish a punctuated Torah to make the reading of the Torah much easier, all with his beautiful script in Ancient Hebrew and Arabic.

In the year 1956, the first Samaritan book of prayers of the six Shabbats of the Counting of the Omer was published by Ratson and his friends mentioned above. After the second book published two years later - Prayers of the Seventh Month and the Ten Days of Forgiveness - the group was divided and every one of them started to publish books separately. Ratson never despaired and continued to publish most of the Samaritan prayer books by his editing and beautiful script. Then he started to publish other books of the Samaritan literature, books of happy occasions praises, books of pleas to the Almighty, hundreds of poems that he had collected from private Samaritan libraries. He copied and published in Aramaic and Arabic translation the great composition of Tibat Maeqeh by Marqeh the greatest Samaritan sage of the 4Th century. With Prof. Noy, he published in 1965 in modern Hebrew 12 folk stories by the University of Haifa Press.

His expertise in Samaritan Poetry, Ratson expressed by recording 400 hours of all Samaritan melodies of music in week days, Shabbats, Festivals, and days of happiness and mourning. All the recordings were collected by the National Library in Jerusalem and they are an authentic source to every scholar and Samaritan to trust on in learning and singing of the Samaritan Poetry.

Ratson continued to be a human magnet to every Samaritan that wanted to learn the secrets of the hymns and the Samaritan culture. After 1967, he tightened his contacts with the priests of the community and the sages in the Nablus Samaritan community and introduced them to the scholars. One of the most important contributions Ratson made was collecting compositions of Samaritan poets from public and private collections in old manuscripts, recopying it and editing in collections of poems in his book "ElTasabich" [praises] and his other book "Tachnunev Israel" [Pleas of Israel]. Both books are a testimony of eternalizing hymns of Samaritan poets, that without Ratson initiative nobody would have been open to know about their greatness. In reviving these poems he concentrated in three Samaritan poets of the 19Th-20Th centuries: Phinhas b. Issac the Priest' Abraham b. Marchiv Tsedaka Hatsafari and Ab-Sikkuwva b. Saed Hadinfi. Ratson collected many poems of other neglected poets and also copied and edited like 1000 poems composed by Abraham b. Marchiv Hatsafari and added a translation in Arabic in separate column.

Of course Ratson himself was a great poet and composed like 800 poems, from them he incorporated tens of his poems in the books of prayers and other books he copied and published. His books of prayers are the first source to all copyists in our time. In case of differences between their text and the text of Ratson's books, a priority must be given to Ratson's books.

The last years of his life, when he suffered a heart disease and no doubt let to know that he is very ill, Ratson dedicated to renew all sets of books of prayers of the year and recopied them by adding lost authentic traditions in the titles and between the parts of each prayer. He added also hundreds of new poems he composed and poems he collected from ancient manuscripts in Europe and the USA. He added also lots of information in the margins of many of his new sets of books that otherwise it was forgotten from the hearts of the Samaritans.

Till 1967, Ratson served also as the cantor of the Holon synagogue and showed his great knowledge in this regard too, but stopped to serve in this position when the first priests came to Holon after 1967. He also composed many hymns for happy occasions and attracted the members of the community with personal lines to each of them. Ratson had the extra ordinary talent to tell the same story hundreds of times and in each time the story heard like it was told the first time.

May the Almighty give mercy to his soul and dwell her in his paradise when time is right. Ratson died on Shabbath. January 20, 1990.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005

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