

# **Samaritan Political Identity - Part I**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for an M.A. in Middle Eastern History by  
**Stephen Kaufman**

Tel Aviv University 1998

Advisor: **Dr. Meir Litvak** Click on footnote numbers to go to references.

---

---

## **Contents**

### **PART I**

1. [Introduction - Placing the Samaritans in Context](#)
2. [The 1841 Crisis](#)
3. [The Samaritans on the eve of World War I](#)
4. [The Samaritans under British Mandate](#)
5. [The Divided Community](#)
6. [Effects of the Division](#)
7. [United Post-War Development](#)
8. [The Samaritans and the Intifada](#)

### **PART II**

1. [General reasons behind Samaritan Political Mobilization](#)
2. [Leadership in the Community](#)
3. ["A. B. - The Samaritan News"](#)
4. [The Law of Return Controversy and Samaritan-Orthodox Jewish relations](#)
5. [Relations with Hamas](#)
6. [The Current Political and Social Climate](#)
7. [Reaction to the Peace Process & Oslo](#)
8. [Independent Diplomatic Activity](#)
9. [Development of the Samaritan Platform](#)
10. [New Political Reality on Mt. Gerizim](#)
11. [Representation in the PNC - the Second Expression of Samaritan Ethnopolitics](#)
12. [Conclusion](#)

## [Appendix](#)

### [Acknowledgements](#)

---

---

## **Part I**

### **Introduction - Placing the Samaritans in Context**

In the maelstrom of political conflict over the area known as Palestine or Eretz Israel, national, ethnic and religious identities separate the opposing forces and allow the participants and observers alike to view the crisis as one of any combination of those three fault lines: Zionism as opposed to Palestinian nationalism, Jews against Arabs, Judaism against Islam, or even more broadly as a clash between eastern and western culture. As an intensive and all-pervasive struggle, local minority groups such as the Druze and Circassians, whose objective identification with either side can be tenuous depending upon how the conflict is defined, are nevertheless incorporated fully into the struggle.

The six hundred member Samaritan community, evenly divided between Israeli and Palestinian populated areas, has until very recently resisted playing a political role in the conflict. They continue to refrain from any sort of official partisanship towards either side, and have even come to view themselves as a "bridge to peace" on account of their good relations with both. Yet their independent identity and neutrality on political matters, coupled with their longstanding performance as loyal citizens of the ruling regimes (in this study, specifically the Ottoman Empire, British Mandate, Jordan, Israel, and most recently the Palestinian Authority), lead to thought-provoking questions as to the nature of their real identity and sense of patriotism. In other words, how do the Samaritans see themselves in the complex struggle between Israelis and Palestinians?

The Samaritans were an isolated and persecuted minority until this century, numbering as few as 146 members in 1918. Their continued scarcity has caused them to be overlooked by most historians, journalists and political analysts who deal with the region. For Christians, the term "Samaritan" brings to mind the story of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament, which has led to its now widespread meaning as any person who helps others in distress. In many books and articles, they are depicted as a sect of Judaism, famous for their yearly Passover sacrifice on Mount Gerizim which

enough to endow them with their own religious, cultural and ethnic identity separate from that of Jews. Indeed, they meet all six of the criteria necessary for them to be labeled an "ethnic community" as defined by Anthony D. Smith in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986).<sup>1</sup>

Samaritans possess a collective name, referring to themselves as the Shamerim(?????) meaning the "keepers" or "observers" of the truth. The related Hebrew term Shomronim (?????) is more territorial in nature, meaning "Samaritans" or the inhabitants of Samaria.<sup>2</sup> They have a common myth of descent from Israelite tribes who settled in what became the Northern Kingdom of Israel, in particular the tribes of Joseph through his son Menashe, and Ephraim.<sup>3</sup> Samaritan priests trace their lineage from the tribe of Levi. Samaritans have their own shared history going back to the Exodus (like the Jews), but also including their own sages such as Baba Rabbah, and events particular to them alone - for example their revolts against the Byzantine Empire. There is a distinctive shared culture which is based solely upon Israelite religious practices: the celebration of Passover and other holidays mentioned in the Pentateuch, observance of the Sabbath, and strict adherence to the laws of purity and impurity. It is these rituals, or at least the style of their observance, that mark the cultural difference between Samaritans and their neighbors. The religious obligations have been such an integral part of Samaritan identity, that the failure to observe them signifies the termination of membership in the community.<sup>4</sup> Thus, as opposed to Judaism, there is no such person as a secular (or non-practicing) Samaritan. Because of this, it is impossible to minimize the centrality of the Samaritan religion when describing their culture. Samaritans are similarly distinct from their neighbors through their use of a Hebrew dialect and alphabet more ancient than that used by Jews. Most Jewish scribes adopted the square Assyrian script during the Second Temple period while the Samaritans continued to develop the older Israelite script.<sup>5</sup> However, Samaritan reverence for Mount Gerizim is the most compelling difference between their faith and that of others, including Judaism. Despite the presence of a Muslim tomb and the remains of a Christian church on the summit (as well as other archaeological ruins), only Samaritans hold this mountain as a place sacred to their faith, while rejecting Jerusalem's claim to holiness. On more mundane matters, such as food, popular music and non-religious dress, the Samaritans tend to resemble their Arab or Jewish neighbors (depending upon whether they live near Nablus or Holon), but this is a trait exhibited by many other Middle Eastern minorities (for example, the Armenians), and has more to do with acculturation than assimilation. Samaritans have an association with a specific territory, the land of Israel. Though their presence is now confined to the areas of Nablus and Holon, earlier Samaritan settlement was much more widespread throughout Palestine and the Levant region, including communities in present-day Egypt and Syria. The boundaries of what can be considered the historic

around 722 B.C.E. Lastly, there has existed a Samaritan sense of solidarity which continues to be strongly manifested in this century despite their territorial division into the communities of Nablus and Holon, accompanied by their language difference into Arabic and modern Hebrew respectively. It is this final component, the Samaritan sense of solidarity, which this work explores more than the other five. Most of the research gathered for this thesis was done in order to answer the question: Does a Samaritan consider himself or herself as an Israeli or a Palestinian? - given the fact that all six hundred members reside in the vicinity of either Holon in Israel, or Nablus, which is governed by the Palestinian Authority. If patriotic identities have, in fact, been established, what were their causes and effects? To answer these questions, it is necessary to trace the modern history of the Samaritans from the late Ottoman period to the present, and analyze how the vast changes in the region during that time have transformed Samaritan people into the reality existent today. This thesis is purposefully ignoring the incidents of the preceding three thousand or so years, despite their fascinating and meaningful character, in order to devote specific attention to the late modern period just prior to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I until today. This work is heavily indebted to Professor Nathan Schur's History of the Samaritans, which presents a thorough account of the Samaritan experience from their beginnings until very recently. Schur's book is recommended for those interested in the time periods not covered by this thesis, even though this work does not support Schur's classification of the Samaritans as a nation but instead sees them as an ethnic community.

Notwithstanding the claim of the Samaritans as a nation, even the depiction of a Samaritan ethnic identity can be complicated by the fact that the Samaritans themselves generally refer to their people in such general terms as a "community," "Middle Eastern group," or even a "tribe." Their stated identity as "Israelites" implies that they are of the same people as the Jews, but since the term "Jew" referred to the tribe of Judah or the geographic region of Judea before the Second Temple period (with the spiritual focus on Jerusalem rather than Mount Gerizim), the Samaritans will naturally dispute any effort to label their people as Jews or a sect of Judaism. Thus, the establishment of the State of Israel by the Jewish people (who comprise the second half of the Israelites), while welcome to many of the Samaritans, has not led to the complete assimilation or fusing of the two peoples, but merely an acceptable coexistence and occasional intermarriage between the two.

The real answer to the question of Samaritan identity in the latter 20th century lies not in their personal political orientation or stated patriotism, but rather in their ethnic identity, as described by the six components mentioned earlier. This sentiment allows a Hebrew speaking Samaritan from Holon and an Arabic speaking Samaritan from

"Palestinian." By no means is this a unique phenomenon in Middle Eastern ethnic groups, since the Druze of the Levant, however loyal to their respective states (Lebanon, Israel, Syria and Jordan), feel a durable bond towards each other - to the point that their sense of patriotism faces a severe crisis when their state acts against their people.<sup>6</sup> This sense of community is described by Professor Gabriel Ben-Dor as "primordialism," and is based upon what he calls the "assumed givens" that make up the group's identity. These "givens" stem not only from a shared kinship, but also from social criteria such as a member's birth into and natal identification with his/her particular community, a special religious tradition, a separate language, and similar social practices. He writes, "These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves."<sup>7</sup> This is exemplified by the fact that the drop-out rate of the Samaritan community in the past sixty years has been less than two percent,<sup>8</sup> despite their modernization and extensive social and economic contact with secular Israeli and Palestinian culture. Here, the concept of primordial attachment has especially shown its durability in the identity of the Samaritans. In analyzing the question of Samaritan identity, this work is calling attention to the fact that the modern era has brought about a revitalization of the Samaritan people. The twentieth century is marked by the establishment of political administrations and states that have, for the most part, taken measures designed to preserve the Samaritan people. The Samaritans for their part have been able to reverse their population decline, reassert their distinct identity, and even mobilize politically in the face of an uncertain future. This is a tremendous achievement for a group whose extinction, until recently, was imminently anticipated by its outside observers. Here, the analogy between the Samaritans and the Druze becomes strained, for the Samaritans have not enjoyed the population size, political clout and military capabilities of the modern Druze, especially those in Lebanon, for over 1000 years. However, though they still lack these vital components for survival, the contemporary period is so fortuitous that one Samaritan declared, "... from the time of Yehoshua Ben Nun 2,600 years ago, the situation of the Samaritans is not as good as this day."<sup>9</sup>

### **A Note on the Sources**

Before venturing into the main text of this work, a general overview of the sources and the methods of research used should be mentioned. The Samaritans have interested Western scholars for many years, principally on account of their religious beliefs and practices. While inquiries into the Samaritan religion have yielded fascinating clues and insights into the other major monotheistic religions and sects, the topic of the modern Samaritan historical experience has remained relatively untouched. Travel narratives have shed some light upon how the community fared during the 19th and

conflict has been published in the English language. To compensate for this, some translation from Hebrew and Arabic sources has been done. There is also a great reliance upon the media, especially articles printed in the Samaritan biweekly A. B. - the Samaritan News and annual A. B. - Echoes, which not only express Samaritan viewpoints but also reprint pieces by outsiders which relate to the community. The other main source of information came from personal interviews and field observations. The author was fortunate to have enjoyed the friendly hospitality and cooperation of the Samaritan community in this project. During the week of the Passover celebration he was made welcome on Mount Gerizim, and enjoyed the many acquaintances made while gathering the research.

---

---

### **The 1841 Crisis**

It is difficult to set a date to begin this account of the modern Samaritans. Rather than starting from a point which is generally acknowledged by scholars as the beginning of the 'modern Middle East' (such as the Ottoman conquests of 1516-17 or Napoleon's invasion of Egypt), it is more proper to start from an incident that has a special meaning to the Samaritans themselves. This event, from the mid-19th century, has a unique significance to the contemporary period because it outlines not only the troubled past relations between the Samaritans and the residents of Nablus, but it also marks a turning point in the relationship between Samaritans and Jews following centuries, if not thousands of years, of mutual antipathy.

The incident in question occurred during the social unrest that swept the entire region of Palestine following the expulsion of Muhammad 'Ali's forces from Syria into Egypt, and the beginning of Ottoman attempts to implement their Tanzimat reforms. In 1841, the 'ulama of Nablus (which resented the benefits that the Samaritans had acquired under Egyptian rule) began a campaign to forcibly convert or exterminate the Samaritan people on the pretense that they were not Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book), but pagans. As the city enthusiastically rallied behind the 'ulama, the few remaining Samaritans faced the almost certain extinction of their people. In order to refute the charge of paganism, they appealed for help from the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem (who was a recognized Jewish representative). Jacob esh-Shelaby, a prominent Samaritan living at the time, wrote that the Rabbi, "... immediately gave them a written declaration certifying 'That the Samaritan people is a branch of the Children of Israel, who acknowledge the truth of the Torah.'"<sup>10</sup> The Chief Rabbi's statement proved useful, not only in refuting the charges of the 'ulama, but also as a security document to be used if similar developments occurred again. The declaration (along with a substantial

expressed by some Samaritans today, that their well-being under Palestinian rule might be threatened - especially given the rise of radical Islamic groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At the same time, it also symbolized the coming improvement in Jewish-Samaritan relations which occurred as a result of the Zionist movement.

---

## **The Samaritans on the eve of World War I**

Centuries of persecution, disease and warfare had managed to reduce the once formidable Samaritan population to less than 200 souls, isolated in their Nablus city quarter by the end of the nineteenth century. They had numbered as many as 1,200,000 during the Byzantine era, with communities in various parts of Palestine, southern Syria and northern Egypt.<sup>11</sup> The ensuing 1,400 years witnessed a rapid decline in numbers and the extinction of Samaritan habitation in all places except for Nablus. The late 19th century remnant were employed as shopkeepers, clerks and tailors,<sup>12</sup> but the economic situation for most was so poor that they copied, and occasionally sold their own original religious manuscripts to tourists and scholars. Nathan Schur quoted Benyamim Tsedaka, co-editor of *A. B. - The Samaritan News*, as saying that these books "... were sold for pennies, as it were, and the profit, in many cases, saved the Samaritans from starvation."<sup>13</sup> Foreign travelers to Nablus wrote extensively about the impoverished conditions of the Samaritans, their small numbers, and their inbreeding. Some predicted with certainty that the Samaritans would die out within a short period. For example, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* noted in 1905 that, "The venerable but unhappy remnant seems wholly occupied with the material problems of a struggle for existence, which can hardly be continued."<sup>14</sup> The Samaritans were not given Ottoman recognition as an ethno-confessional subgroup (*millet*) until very late in the 19th century, and the status of their *millet*, like other small religious communities under the jurisdiction of Istanbul, was significantly less than the three traditional *millets* (the Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews). But they were nevertheless listed in their own category in the 1906-1907 Ottoman census.<sup>15</sup> The political situation of the Samaritans under the last Ottoman governors of Nablus was not much improved since the episode of 1841. It can be argued that the Samaritans, despite their proximity to Mount Gerizim and their settlement in the city from time immemorial, were unlucky to have lived in Nablus, given its turbulent history. As James Montgomery noted in 1907, "No town in Palestine has so bad a reputation for the ill-disposition and violence of its citizens ... The town and the district have been notorious for the lawlessness which the inhabitants have shown toward the Ottoman rule."<sup>16</sup> Though bad feelings persisted between the Samaritans and their Arab neighbors, there were no more attempts to massacre them or force their conversion to Islam since the 1841 crisis.

Ottoman period. The first was the relocation of a Samaritan family to Jaffa. Abraham ben Marhiv Tsedaka permanently left the Samaritan quarter of Nablus for Jaffa in 1905, after two previous attempts, in search of better economic opportunities. Ignoring the criticisms of his peers at home, he succeeded in setting up a tailoring shop in the Arab market. His movement marked the end of the century-old Samaritan isolation in Nablus, and his success there encouraged others to follow. Tsedaka's movement actually began the existence of what is now the Samaritan community in Holon, which comprises one half of the community. The impact of this entrepreneur, as the founder and leader of the Jaffa Samaritans, was so immense that an article in the Samaritan biweekly, A. B. - the Samaritan News, described him as "the most prominent Samaritan figure of this century."<sup>17</sup> Abraham Tsedaka's choice of Jaffa in particular was fortuitous, since it brought the Samaritans into contact with the momentous events taking place there as a result of the beginning of the Zionist immigration into Palestine. As Professor Schur noted, "The first Samaritans to settle there entered thus at the ground floor, as it were, of a new development, which was to bring about a complete change in the history of the country."<sup>18</sup> Contact between the Jewish settlers and the Samaritans therefore began at this early stage of the process which eventually established the State of Israel. The relationships that developed between the Samaritans and the Zionist movement signified the second important change in modern Samaritan history. The early Zionist settlers, on account of their secular ideology, were free of the ancient polemic that had characterized Jewish-Samaritan relations in the past. The traditional Jewish attitude was based upon II Kings 17, which described the Samaritans as the descendants of the Assyrian-imported "Cuthim," who were converted to a religion similar to Judaism in order to rid their land of a plague of lions. The new immigrants instead looked upon the Samaritans as close relatives who had somehow managed to survive in Palestine during the two thousand year Diaspora of the Jews. This attitude has continued to be manifested by the present-day Israeli government, which has issued identity cards to the Samaritan citizens of Israel that read "Samaritan Jews," or even simply "Jews."<sup>19</sup> (This is despite the aforementioned fact that while the Samaritans refer to themselves as "Israelites," they eschew any reference to themselves as "Jews," since they note the different historical meanings of the two words.) However, it has been supposed by outsiders and by Samaritans alike that the remnant of the Samaritans in the Holy Land can be seen as an example of what Jews and Judaism would have been today had they never gone into exile. An interesting personal anecdote to illustrate this point was my attendance at a Sabbath service on Mount Gerizim with a Canadian-born Jewish photographer, who remarked to me his sensation that he was seeing his religion as his ancestors in Palestine would have practiced it more than two thousand years before. It is possible that this feeling was also shared by the new immigrants at the turn of the century.



Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi (1884-1963), who would become an influential Israeli Knesset member, and later the second president of the new state. As a new immigrant to Jaffa, the twenty-three year old Ben-Zvi met Abraham Tsedaka while on a quest to find someone to teach him Arabic. Although it was the first occasion that he had met a Samaritan, the future president had already developed an interest in the community, perhaps stemming from his lifelong fascination with oriental Jewish sects. Though perhaps more aware of Samaritan history than his fellow Zionist immigrants, Ben-Zvi's personal reflections shed light upon the curiosity that other settlers similarly felt towards them. In his *Travels* (1960) Ben-Zvi wrote: From early childhood I felt captivated by the story of this strange tribe, settled between the twin mountains of Shechem, and its grand history during the millennia. How great was the strength of this small and poor tribe, which stood up to the whole world, and none of the waves of foreign rulers could uproot it and make it unfaithful to its religion!<sup>20</sup>

The close relationship that developed between Ben-Zvi and the Samaritans as a result of his friendship with the Tsedaka family translated into future benefits for the small community as Ben-Zvi's career developed. Because of his efforts, a school was established in Nablus for the Samaritans with Jewish aid and his influential contacts eventually brought about a steady supply of financial aid to the Nablus community from the "Joint" (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) after Israel's establishment.<sup>21</sup>

Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi was also instrumental in encouraging the Samaritans to intermarry with the Jewish immigrants. This greatly contributed to their numerical recovery in the 20th century (to such an extent that some have referred to it as a "baby boom"). In terms of biology and genetics, the influx of new blood can be viewed as greatly beneficial to a people described by Tel Aviv University geneticist Batsheva Bonne-Tamir as, "the most inbred population in existence."<sup>22</sup> The traditional imbalance of men and women had encouraged at least two marriages between Samaritan men and women from the small Jewish community of Nablus, as documented by newspaper reports from 1886 and 1896.<sup>23</sup> However, this practice did not become officially sanctioned by the Samaritan leadership and the High Priest until Ben-Zvi convinced the elders of its necessity in the early 20th century. Because of the fact that the Samaritan faith is inherited through one's father (unlike Judaism), it was possible to overcome the two thousand year old tradition of shunning intermarriage, provided that the Jewish women converted to Samaritanism. Since that time, particularly in Holon, Jewish-Samaritan couples have been seen with greater frequency. However, despite its contribution to the recent surge in numbers, there now exists a danger of future assimilation based upon the divergent traditions of inheritance. As former Holon community secretary Baruch Marhiv noted in 1991. "Jewish law says that the mother's children are Jewish. so if

to classify the practice as a positive development. As a summary to the above sections, it is worth reiterating that these two developments that affected the Samaritans during the twilight of Ottoman rule, the establishment of a community in Jaffa and the start of the Zionist immigration, were immeasurably important factors that directly shaped their ensuing development. There is much that can be explained about the Samaritans today that have their origins in this period - for example the political and cultural division of the community between Israeli Samaritans and those in Nablus, and its newfound prosperity since Israel's establishment. Paramount in importance is the personality of Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, whose acquaintance was made at this time. His interest in helping the Samaritans led to their receipt of economic and social aid, and as will be discussed later, their political incorporation into the State of Israel. Ben-Zvi's encouragement of Samaritan-Jewish intermarriage has led to his credit by some Samaritans as the man who saved them from extinction.<sup>25</sup> The importance of Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi is best summarized by one Holon resident, who said, "We didn't love Ben-Zvi because of the economic or political or social aid he gave us. What we owe him is the will of the Samaritans to survive."<sup>26</sup>

---

### **The Samaritans Under British Mandate**

The positive developments mentioned of the late Ottoman period did not bear fruit until a new power came to dominate Palestine. The 1918 British occupation and subsequent mandatory rule began a process of recovery that saw the Nablus Samaritans grow from 146 people, their lowest number to date, to 250 in the period of thirty years.<sup>27</sup> Added to this rapid growth were another 58 people living outside of the mother community (now beyond Jaffa to places such as Tulkarem, Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan and Haifa). Thus, in this short time, their population more than doubled.<sup>28</sup> The lower mortality rate experienced during this time was a direct result of the British administration, which ruled them more benevolently than the Ottoman governors. This was a fact confirmed in 1944 by the High Priest in an interview with traveler Leslie Farmer.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the developments that occurred in, or had their roots during this period have already been mentioned, such as the establishment of a school in Nablus for Samaritan youth by the Jewish Agency and the post-war commencement of aid from the "Joint," both of which were projects initiated by Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi. The school was later forced to close during the 1936-39 disturbances and following the 1948 war that established the State of Israel. However, the "Joint," in coordination with the Red Cross, was able to assist the Nablus community after 1949. The rise in population of Samaritans

which all but destroyed the old Samaritan quarter. It is interesting that an observer described the connections between Nablus and its new offspring communities as "not very close,"<sup>30</sup> despite the fact that enforced separation between them would not occur until after the 1948 War. The annual Passover celebration marked the main period of interaction, which was ironic since the holiday would become the only such occasion in the first nineteen years following Israel's establishment.

It was clear that major changes were about to occur in Mandatory Palestine. As the prospect of a Jewish state in at least part of the region loomed larger during this period, Samaritan attitudes towards the future were somewhat mixed between encouragement at their recognition of the improved Jewish attitude towards them, and their reluctance to accept future Jewish hegemony over territory that they viewed as rightfully Samaritan (owing to their belief that they were the descendants of the northern tribes of Israel). Following the publication of the Peel Commission report to divide Palestine between the Jews, Arabs and British, former British policeman Douglas Duff recorded a conversation between the Samaritan Deputy High Priest and a scribe, which illustrated this theological dilemma. In it, the priest foretold the imminent coming of the Taheb (the prophet who would arrive at the End of Days) on account of the allotment of land outside of Judea to the Jews. 'Then, Eminence, I take it that you are an enemy of this Jewish State' asked the scribe. 'No, I am no enemy of the Jews having their own Kingdom once again. I am angry that they should be installed on land that is Israel's, that has never been theirs' replied the Deputy.<sup>31</sup>

The scribe continued to question his superior, to which the priest finally begged to be allowed to answer with his own opinion as a man, and not as a religious leader. In his personal response, the Deputy High Priest diplomatically voiced his support of the Jewish position, disbelieving speculation that they would agree to such a partition as outlined in the Peel report.

'I doubt whether this scheme will be very acceptable to the Zionist Jews.

Why should it? They are being asked to give up the very substantial things which they have won during the past few years, and to exchange them for the very shadow of a state.'<sup>32</sup>

Thus, based upon this conversation, it would appear that the Samaritan attitude towards the forthcoming Jewish State was one of cautious encouragement. Theological arguments aside, the friendly contacts established with the Zionist settlers and the assistance given to them by the Jewish Agency were gestures significant enough to convince the ordinary Samaritan that his future well-being would be guaranteed under Jewish rule.

Unfortunately, Samaritan relations with the Arab residents of Nablus continued to be characterized by the mistrust carried over from the Ottoman period and reinforced by the perception among many Arabs that the Samaritans were Jews.<sup>33</sup> The animosity translated into a feeling of contempt by some Samaritans towards the nationalist aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs. The viewpoint of the same Deputy High Priest was that there was no such group as "the Arabs," but that the term merely signified the political dreams of Palestinian Muslims, who had no real leadership and no critical concern as to who would eventually rule the country.<sup>34</sup> The sense of contempt at that time was echoed by a statement from H.V. Morton who wrote his feeling that the Samaritans, "... consider the Arabs who have been there since 638 AD as interlopers!"<sup>35</sup> Yet, fear of the Arab majority in Nablus prevented most of the Samaritans themselves from saying such things, if indeed they felt them. From the sources consulted, including Professor Schur's book, there is no evidence of any real Samaritan political activity for themselves or in support of others during the British Mandate period. Given their continued vulnerability due to poverty and small population size, this is not an unreasonable conclusion. However, one Samaritan from Holon mentioned in conversation the participation of Samaritans in the 1936-39 riots. Though this has not yet been verified by independent sources, one can speculate that such action could have been similar to the participation of the Nablus Samaritans in the Intifada, which will be described in a later chapter.

---

## **The Divided Community**

Through circumstances beyond their control, the Samaritans found themselves splintered by an unfriendly border for the next nineteen years after Israel's establishment. Thus began a period of separate development and separate histories. The impact of division left a profound impression upon the community as a whole. It is little wonder that, for a people so few as the Samaritans, enforced separation called their very existence into question. Though the relations between the Nablus community and its offsprings during the British Mandate were described as distant in the previous section, the imposition of this separation by the 1949 cease-fire line, an action over which the Samaritans had no power to resist, brought about an enhanced meaning to the annual Passover celebration and contributed to the realization (if it had been previously lacking) that the two communities needed each other. This period can be described as the time of "acculturation" for those left inside the Israeli border with Israeli/Western society, and their full inclusion in the new state brought them economic and political benefits. Whereas for the Nablus community, despite its good relations with the Hashemite monarchy, these years marked a time of continued stagnation in these two spheres.

In the first few years after the 1948 War, the authorities of Transjordan refused to allow the Samaritans from Israel to cross the border to visit their peers in Nablus. Finally, after the matter was raised repeatedly to the mixed armistice commission by Israeli MK Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, Amman decided in 1951 to permit an annual pilgrimage during the Passover week, starting from the Mandelbaum Gate crossing in Jerusalem. The Samaritan Passover, already their most important (and famous) celebration, thus took on an even greater significance during this period. Professor Schur writes:

... these visits were the central yearly event in the lives of both communities. The Samaritan preoccupation with the continued existence of their sect and its growth found there full expression in a furious round of matchmaking between members of both communities, Courtships, betrothals and marriages were all compressed into the short days of reunion. The grown-ups would use these hours so as to update their relatives and friends on family gossip, young men would compare jobs and incomes, young women - dresses, and children would play together and exchange Israeli stamps against those of the Arab countries.<sup>36</sup>

Following the war, the Family Reunification Act allowed these mixed couples to live together in either Transjordan or Israel. Because of the more favorable economic and political situation in the latter, almost all chose to live in the Jewish State. The Samaritan inclusion in the Israeli Law of Return (which will be discussed below), likewise facilitated the permanent movement of Nablus Samaritans across the border. Apart from the rushed activity of Passover week, the two communities, devoid of telecommunication or postal contact, maintained an indirect connection through the "Good Wishes" programs broadcast by the radio services of Israel and Transjordan, which kept them informed of each others' births, marriages and deaths.<sup>37</sup> These programs, in effect, played the important role of unifying the community during their long periods of physical separation. As will be discussed in the second half of this work, however brief these programs were, they played the role of a community newspaper during the years of division.

The year 1951 saw the beginning of a special Samaritan quarter in Holon. The leader of the Israeli community, Yefet ben Abraham Tsedaka, purchased a vacant sand lot southeast of Tel Aviv and lived with his immediate family in tents that were set up there. Within four years, he was able to achieve his goal of establishing a special Samaritan neighborhood (now named 'Neveh Markeh'), which replaced the scattered settlements in Israel with one location of concentration, allowing the Samaritans in the country to function and develop as a community. With the help of Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, Tsedaka received assistance from the Israeli government to build seven white duplexes. and later (1963) to erect the first Samaritan synagogue in Israel.<sup>38</sup>

Minister Moshe Sharett declared that the Samaritans "... are like the Jews who come from Arab countries." The subsequent law that emerged in 1951 indeed gave the Samaritans coming from Nablus the same legal immigration privileges as Oriental Jews.<sup>39</sup> But, even more significantly, it eased their integration into Israeli society since they were recognized not only by the government, but also by their fellow citizens, as having the judicial distinction of being Jews. This equal status under the law was the justification for Ben-Zvi's claim in his book *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (1957) that:

Samaritans in Israel share to the full all the rights enjoyed by Israeli citizens, and the government provides allocations from public funds to meet their social and cultural requirements.<sup>40</sup> Yet, the status of the Samaritans was often challenged by the religious Jewish factions, even in recent times when the Ministry of the Interior under Aryeh Deri attempted to revoke the Samaritan inclusion in the Law of Return in 1994. (This will be discussed in greater detail in the second half of this work.) In 1955, for example, there was an argument over the Tel Aviv burial society's refusal to inter Samaritans in Jewish cemeteries. This prompted Ben-Zvi to declare that the Samaritans viewed themselves as, "... complete Israelis, not only in citizenship but in their spiritual relationship to the rest of Israel ... I think it is a sin to tell them to look for a burial place alongside Christians."<sup>41</sup> In the end, the Samaritans were given their own plot in the Qiryat Shaul cemetery. The Holon community was allowed an autonomy over their religious matters, even when Samaritan-Jewish marriages occurred, which marked the only legal difference between them and their Jewish neighbors. The Law of Return had the effect of opening the historically isolated Samaritan community up to the larger society around them. The daily interaction with their Jewish neighbors socially, at school and in the workplace, enabled the Holon community to change from being a completely oriental people, as they gradually adopted certain aspects of European culture practiced by their Israeli neighbors.<sup>42</sup> A little more than a decade after the Samaritan inclusion in the Law of Return, Israel Tsedaka noted:

Reality shows us an interesting phenomenon. The more our young are educated and the more their intelligence level rises - as far as daily life is concerned, they are like their non-Samaritan neighbors in every respect. One cannot distinguish between them and other youth, not in their appearance (clothes) nor in their mode of life ... The children go to public schools and their privileges and duties are the same as for anyone else. The younger generation participates in parties and dances just as any other citizen ... One can say that externally the members of the community became assimilated with the surroundings, but this is not true with respect to their internal life. This they preserve and observe strictly. Small breaches that occur are always explained in terms of temporal needs only ..."<sup>43</sup>

For the first time in their collective historical memory, they were living in a state that gave them equal rights and responsibilities with the majority - a fact so momentous that Holon resident Israel Tsedaka made the statement (quoted in the introduction) claiming that the Samaritan situation today is the best since the time of Joshua (c. 1200 B.C.E.).<sup>44</sup> It is therefore not surprising that strong feelings of Israeli patriotism developed among the Samaritans of Holon. In Nablus, however, the good fortune of the Samaritans in Israel was echoed on a vastly smaller scale, due to continued economic under-development and troubled relations with their Palestinian neighbors. The improvement that did occur can be credited to their good relations with the Hashemite monarchy. From the time of King Abdullah, it appears that the royal family desired to help the Samaritans, though it did not always have the funds to do so.<sup>45</sup> This would appear to be surprising, since, unlike the Israelis, the Hashemites felt no sense of kinship towards the Samaritans, nor was there an advocate in Amman to argue the Samaritans' cause such as MK Ben-Zvi. Nevertheless, certain policies of the Jordanian government were designed to help the Samaritans - but the rationale behind them remains debated even within the community. The most important and far reaching benefit to the Samaritan community under Jordanian rule was the acquisition of land on Mount Gerizim. At the beginning of King Hussein's reign, the Samaritan holy sites located on the summit were under the ownership of Arab residents of Nablus, who required the Samaritans to pay a tax upon every pilgrimage occasion. This information reached Amman, and the young King Hussein summoned the landlords to his palace. A student from Holon recounted, "After a very short dialogue, the owners agreed to sell him their lands." The King transferred the land over to Samaritan ownership, where it still remains a communal Samaritan property.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the continued food and economic aid from the "Joint" via the Red Cross was allowed to proceed to Nablus unhindered, though Amman was well aware of the real source of the generosity, across its western border. In individual Samaritan writings, there are other accounts of Hashemite benevolence. It worthwhile to note that, despite its appearance as a propaganda statement, a 1966 Samaritan publication (in English, and therefore presumably meant for tourists) declared:

Without any discrimination, they are equal to any Jordanian citizen in all rights and duties of labor, education, and law. The contribution to that is the righteous and just policy of His Majesty King Hussein ... His Majesty, may he live long, seizes every opportunity to be familiar with the occurring situation and safety of this sect within all his capacities.<sup>47</sup>

Whether or not this statement reflects heartfelt Samaritan sentiments, the contrast between the Hashemite actions on their behalf and the centuries of Ottoman negligence is noteworthy. The warm relations with the palace were no doubt interrelated with the



Nablus was a center of pro-Nasserist sentiment and the Jordanian Legion was often sent to quell disturbances there. The Samaritans, protected by the police, were resented for their pro-Hashemite orientation and were popularly regarded as Jews.<sup>48</sup> In this case, the maxim, 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend,' may help to explain Samaritan relations with the monarchy - though their small numbers and poor economic situation hardly made them a valuable ally. Since any Samaritan advancement needed to come at the expense of those who held the popular and economic power in Nablus (Palestinian Arabs), a certain amount of cynicism can be applied when recounting Hashemite actions. On one occasion Amman showed its willingness to intervene in a Samaritan-Nablus dispute. In 1966, after an argument between the Samaritan High Priest and the Nablus post office manager, the High Priest was arrested by the municipality. Upon King Hussein's learning of the incident, the Samaritan leader was ordered released, cleared of charges, and the manager was forced to apologize to him.<sup>49</sup> Yet, despite the loyalty that the Nablus Samaritans felt towards their king, they were, for the most part, unable to develop a Jordanian political identity similar to the Israeli attachment of the Holon residents during this period. This can be attributed to their continued alienation from the Nablus residents, which did not subside until after the Israeli occupation of the city in 1967. It was difficult to feel a shared patriotism with their neighbors, who themselves did not accept Jordanian rule, in the midst of the bad feeling between them at that time. The shallow feeling of a Jordanian identity for the residents of the West Bank during the years of Hashemite rule certainly extended to Samaritans. When Jordanian authority was removed in all but name following the 1967 War, it is fair to say that their political allegiance became "open," even though they managed to renew their independent contacts with Amman ten years later.

There are dissenting voices among both parts of the Samaritan community as to King Hussein's real intentions towards the community. The fact that the annual Passover observance attracted scores of curious foreigners founded accusations that the Jordanians merely viewed them as an asset worth preserving as a valuable tourist attraction - an allegation similarly made against the Palestinian Authority and the Arab residents of Nablus today. One Samaritan charged that there was also a propaganda value to ensuring the existence of the Samaritans, saying "King Hussein did not protect us because he was in love with the Samaritans, but because he could point to us and say, 'Look, we have religious freedom in Jordan.'"<sup>47</sup> This has also been said of Yasser Arafat in the present times. But it is impossible to objectively prove or disprove either of these charges against King Hussein, and of course, time will be the ultimate judge of PNA (Palestinian National Authority) President Arafat. The economic woes of the Nablus Samaritans continued, despite the assistance from the "Joint." Most worked as tailors, teachers or tourist guides, with the exception of one resourceful priest who made a living reading palms (including those of high officials and members of the



and not the rule. A Samaritan writer in 1965 spoke of the slow growth of the community from the end of World War I on account of the shortage of young women, but added:

Most of the women in Jordan grow old before they marry, for the men are poor and cannot afford marriage, a house, etc. This situation was due to the fact that the tribe was unsuitably educated in Jordan, and therefore could not receive well-paid jobs.<sup>51</sup>

The writer remarked that the situation was improving under King Hussein, along with the financial help from the "Joint" and some European countries. But the dire economic condition of the community prompted a plea from a Samaritan pamphlet, Brief Theoretical Points of View about the Samaritan Sect of Nablus (c. 1960), to "all people of the world who appreciate benevolence, good-doing, and protection of noble ideals." The last chapter, entitled "The Call," was written in English and no doubt meant for their foreign visitors. It warned:

Oh Wise men of the world. This our sect is about to become extinct, because it has no source of living whatsoever, no possibilities for gain or employment, no material sources to give education for its young men, who have a start in secondary schooling.<sup>52</sup>

It went on to list four reasons for the current plight of the community, namely: lack of sufficient financial support; bad health due to poor diet, clothing and medicine; a poor state of mind due to their continued hopelessness; and the fact that no marriages were possible due to the lack of necessary prerequisites (food and lodging).<sup>53</sup> "The Call" ended its plea by saying: The Council of the three Tribes of Israel (The Samaritans) humbly beg all good-doers to offer any help for them, and they are prepared to accept any charity whatever small it might be, so that they might supply members of the Samaritan Sect, who are mostly women and children, with their living necessities. God alone knows our grievance and intentions, and will reward you for your good-doing.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of this document goes beyond its portrayal of the economic conditions of the Nablus Samaritans. It was a direct and independent effort to secure assistance from outside peoples and nations, bypassing the Jordanian government. This fact is highly important to this work, since "The Call" can be viewed as a precursor to the recent "Document of Seven Principles," (1995) which is a similarly independent action, bypassing both the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in order to gain outside support for Samaritan needs, in the latter case, political.

Near the end of the nineteen year division, one of the worst nightmares imaginable to the Samaritan people took place. when the Jordanian authorities prevented Samaritans

were often subjected to long and humiliating interrogations. They were then escorted by bus to Nablus under a heavy military guard. The Palestinian population of Nablus resented the arrival of these "Israelis," and so the confinement of the Samaritans to their campsite on Mount Gerizim most likely served the dual purpose of the Jordanians to minimize disturbances in the city and to prevent espionage by the citizens of its enemy.<sup>55</sup> In 1966, citing the fact that some of the Holon Samaritans served in the Israeli army, the Jordanians detained a group of young men and refused them entry. Israel Tsedaka emotionally recounted:

... we came to the Mandelbaum Gate to come to here [Mt. Gerizim] and the Jordanian army took twenty young people as our people sat on two or three big buses. And I remember that my wife and my children were on the bus. I was not allowed, and my little child - his name is Yigal and was two or three year old - he watched me from the bus but I couldn't go. I can't forget this. He watched and asked, 'Why can't my daddy come with us?'<sup>56</sup>

Holon resident Rami Sassoni was another Samaritan denied permission to celebrate the Passover. In an article to A. B. - The Samaritan News in 1970, he wrote: Worst of all was the actual hour of sacrifice, far away on Mt. Gerizim.

Horribly helpless, I broke into tears at times. For a moment, it seemed to me as if the smell of the sacrifice had reached my nostrils, despite the vast distance separating us. Words cannot portray the innermost feelings of my heart.<sup>57</sup>

The next year, 1967, saw at least half of the community excluded. Since participation in the Passover was a mandatory requirement for each Samaritan and the holiday marked the only occasion of interaction between the two communities, the exclusion was a very real threat to the existence of the Samaritan people as a whole. It is therefore not surprising that, in the aftermath of the Israeli occupation of Nablus, the June 13, 1967 edition of the Jerusalem Post quoted the Samaritan High Priest as saying, "... just as the Lord had sent Moses to deliver his people from Egypt, he sent Moshe Dayan to save his people again."<sup>58</sup>

---

## Effects of the Division

The period of division was very important in reinforcing the Samaritan identity. Despite the full integration of the Holon branch into Israeli society, with its political implications, the enforced separation caused a deep longing for contact with the

event for both was the Passover celebration which temporarily reunited them. The religious celebration had therefore taken on an even deeper communal significance during the division. A dichotomy of loyalty appeared for the first time between the Samaritans and the polities that ruled them. The establishment of the Israeli and Jordanian states marked the first time that the Samaritans were separated by a political boundary, and thus the first time that their existence and interaction as a single community was subject to events that did not directly concern them. Even the Israeli Samaritans, who were and still are devoted citizens to their state, discovered the vulnerability of their Samaritan identity in the larger field of Middle Eastern politics. When the division was ended by the 1967 War, the memory of their helpless situation during this period remained in the consciousness of the entire people, spurring later efforts to prevent or preclude a repetition of these circumstances.

The separation produced major cultural differences between the two which can still be clearly seen today. The fact that the Holon Samaritans adopted many aspects of Israeli culture, including the use of modern Hebrew has already been mentioned. In doing so, they have departed from the manners of the Nablus community, which continues to exhibit a distinctly Arab character in food, dress, and language. For both, these are the natural results of acculturation with the surrounding population. The Holon residents were encouraged to join secular Israeli society, and thus were able to integrate very quickly. The Nablus community, though continually isolated, had already adopted corresponding Arab cultural traits over time (like Armenians and Oriental Jews). The effect of the division was not to make them "more Arab" in culture, but to remain just as they were. The new language difference was (and is) exhibited by such important discrepancies as given names. For example, a family from Holon could name their child 'Yosef', while their counterparts in Nablus would name theirs 'Yousuf.' Also, the Samaritan representative to the Palestinian Authority is addressed in Holon as the Priest 'Shalom,' while he is known in Nablus as the Priest 'Saloum.'

Given the new cultural diversity, is it now possible to speak of the Samaritans as one ethnicity? According to community members from both Holon and Nablus, the answer is yes. Once again, it is the all-encompassing role of the Samaritan religion that makes the two more alike to each other than to their immediate neighbors. Even some of the cultural differences, which were immediately recognizable in 1967, have been counteracted by the Samaritans themselves. Many are now bilingual in Hebrew and Arabic, and all learn ancient Hebrew and its script for religious purposes. A recent article on the internet observed that, ... members living in either community can slip, chameleon-like, from Hebrew to Arabic, depending on who is in the room. Most even have two full names, one for each language.<sup>59</sup>

Cultural differences between the two are thus perceived only as "cosmetic," because the Samaritans continue to see themselves as one people - the six criteria of the Samaritans as an ethnic community that were mentioned in the introduction were essentially not erased. As one eighteen year old Holon resident described to the author:

I have a lot of [Samaritan] friends in Nablus. They especially hear Arab music. I especially hear Western. Both of us are Samaritans. On the religious side we have a lot in common. When they go to school, I feel like I go to school. When they have an Arab friend, I feel like I have an Arab friend.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, the visible effects of the nineteen year separation did not outweigh the sense of community. The Samaritans took advantage of the end of the division to reincorporate and recombine the two halves, forging new links in an effort to demonstrate their unity both to themselves and to outsiders. This process still continues, and it is not unreasonable to predict that continued unrestricted access between the two communities will eventually minimize some of the effects of the 1949-1967 division.

Nineteen years is a very short time as far as Samaritans are concerned, since they have thousands of years of recorded history. Yet, for such a short period, it would seem surprising that such important cultural differences developed between the Holon and Nablus communities - so important that even after thirty years of free access between them, it is still easy for an observer to independently identify where an individual Samaritan resides. Despite the fact that the Arabic language is no longer the natal tongue of half of the community, and despite the fact that the youth of Holon prefer the music of "Metallica" to singer Amr Diab, the Samaritans claim to be one people, and this work supports their claim. They are culturally united by their religion and the manner in which they practice it. They are linguistically united by their sacred texts written in ancient Hebrew, and also through the efforts of individuals on both sides to acquire a knowledge of the other's colloquial language. In effect, the Samaritans are slowly becoming a "trilingual" community, with ancient Hebrew as the principal common denominator between the two halves. With regards to language, it is impossible to completely eradicate the differences so long as both halves remain where they are, and need to function within their surrounding communities (for example, to be employed). Therefore, if the Samaritans desire to minimize the outward effects of their division, the trend towards a trilingual community appears to be the most practical solution, and can be seen as an adaptation to the political circumstances rather than an independent innovation. What cannot be overlooked is the psychological impact of the division on both sides, which has ultimately resulted in the current Samaritan political mobilization. This aspect will be explored in the second half of this

advance the wellbeing of the community as a whole. However, the emphasis will be on the ways in which the Nablus community was able to develop with the assistance of the Israeli government (under pressure from the Holon branch), while establishing ties with their Palestinian neighbors at the same time.

---

### **United Post-War Development**

The 1967 (or Six Day) War which brought the West Bank under Israeli military control was the catalyst for positive changes for the Samaritan community, especially those in Nablus. The difficulties of the previous period left a fervent desire among both to be brought under one polity. Indeed, as was just mentioned, many Samaritans saw this as a necessity if their existence was to be maintained. An interesting personal account of the Israeli entrance into Nablus is left by Pnina Tsedaka, the one Holon Samaritan who had moved to Nablus before 1967. Her words demonstrated the confused situation during the war, when all of the Samaritans saw the conflict as the means by which they would be reunited, combined with the fear that the current status might not change.

Suddenly they [Kol Israel] started broadcasting about a cease-fire, and the Jews hadn't come to Nablus! What a nightmare. All of the Samaritans in Nablus wanted the Jews to come over. London was broadcasting at 10 pm that there was a cease-fire between Israel and Jordan ... I took my son with me to the bed and started to cry. Suddenly my husband came to me and said 'Pnina, get up get up. There is a special thing I want you to see.' He and I ran to the window and I saw Nablus fully enlightened. It was 11 PM. Projectors were lighting the city. That was the IDF. I could feel my muscles shrinking that night, I just couldn't move. But I could believe what had happened. In the morning I woke up and I waited to see the soldiers in the streets. I didn't see anybody. Suddenly up on the mountain I saw an Israeli jeep and on it was an Israeli flag. You know what that meant for me? - That was the messiah! I got such an ecstasy. I just ran on the roof of our neighborhood, and I waved with my hand to every Israeli passing by. That was redemption.<sup>61</sup>

When news of the conquest reached Holon, the Samaritans there immediately arranged permits to travel to Mount Gerizim in order to celebrate the Pentecost with their newly accessible brethren. It was, as A. B. - The Samaritan News described, the warmest reunion on record.<sup>62</sup>

Overnight the political status of the Nablus Samaritans, as with the other West Bank residents. changed to that of Jordanian citizens under Israeli military administration.

represent their wishes to the administration, the Nablus Samaritans canceled their aid from the "Joint" in anticipation of direct assistance from Israel. This was slow in coming, until finally in February 1968, a Samaritan complaint was heard. When Defense Minister Dayan met with students from the Hebrew University, he encountered Benyamim Tsedaka from Holon (who was to play one of the leading roles in the political and cultural Samaritan coming-of-age as the co-founder of A. B. - The Samaritan News in 1969). Tsedaka asked three questions which were later broadcast on Israeli radio: a) Is the status of the Samaritans, as the only Israelis in the territories, enough to give them special rights? b) Why wasn't any step taken to change the situation which they had under the regime of the Jordanian kingdom, steps which the military government is supposed to do in Nablus? And, c) the Samaritan community in Nablus needs to be refreshed spiritually, culturally, and economically. Tell me sir, which order are you planning to give in these aspects?<sup>63</sup> These questions prompted Dayan to immediate action. A committee was formed through the Ministry of Religion which made recommendations for assistance and raised the funds to carry them out. Over the next few years, the military administration had managed to begin paying the salaries of the High Priest, cantors and religious teachers; found jobs for younger members of the Nablus community; placed fences and guards around the Samaritan holy sites; and established a special Hebrew language school for them which further increased their job opportunities.<sup>64</sup> It was not long before the Nablus Samaritans saw the vast improvement of their economic situation as a result of Moshe Dayan and the Ministry of Religion's initiatives.

A further effort by the military administration led to the eventual establishment of a Samaritan neighborhood on Mount Gerizim, close to their holy sites. With loans from the Ministry of Defense, a few houses were built soon after the 1967 War and were joined by new structures at a growing rate up until the present time. This action benefited the Holon community as well, since the government-funded houses replaced the tents they had used during the Passover holiday, and there was enough land for the Israeli Samaritans to build their own residences in the future. The impetus for a new neighborhood came from the fact that the Samaritan quarter in Nablus had become filled to capacity, and there was no possibility to expand it since their Palestinian neighbors would not sell their properties to them. Around the year 1982, writer Dan Ross paid a visit to the old quarter:

Nablus' Samaritans all live in one small, badly overcrowded neighborhood, built around their synagogue. Their rambling, Arab-style houses are divided into apartments, each shared by an entire family - from grandparents to grandchildren. Three generations may share a bedroom; young couples live with the husband's parents after they are married. Each apartment has a guest room, which goes empty even when the family bedroom is so crowded that the oldest sons have to sleep in the hallway.<sup>65</sup>

The new dwelling area, named Qiryat Luza, became the means of alleviating the overcrowded conditions. It is today the year-round home for some Nablus Samaritans, and the summer home for others. More significantly, it is the one location where all six hundred of the Samaritans dwell together during their religious holidays.

However, the Israeli-assisted project was bound to arouse the anger of the Palestinian residents of Nablus. In the period in which Jewish settlements began to dominate the hilltops around the West Bank, Qiryat Luza was seen as no different from any other Israeli-assisted settlement, whether the inhabitants were Jews or Samaritans. When some young Samaritan couples attempted to move to the new neighborhood in 1974, the municipality of Nablus promptly shut off the water and electricity supply. Also, a bomb was placed under the car of the High Priest, which failed to detonate.<sup>66</sup> There does not appear to be any official reaction by either the PLO or the Jordanian government to these actions against the community. The first PLO statement of support for the Samaritans did not occur until the period of the Intifada, after four Samaritan homes were burned by activists. But Ma'ariv journalist Shefi Gabay noted some of the opinions of the Arab residents of Nablus towards the Samaritans in 1975. According to then Nablus mayor Haj M'azuz al-Masri, their resentment was partly based upon their view that, "... the Samaritans treated the Israelis as if Nablus would be Israeli forever. Our young people didn't like this community between the young Samaritans in Nablus and the Israelis."<sup>67</sup> However, the mayor went on to suggest that the Palestinian anger over the development at Qiryat Luza occurred simply because of the failure of the Samaritans to consult with the Nablus municipality about the project. Tempers on both sides cooled, with the young people on both sides being restrained by their parents. al-Masri stated:

Lately the Samaritans went back to consult the municipality for every problem which disturbed them, and that changed the relationship for the better between them ... For the first time after a long time the municipality started to help the Samaritans financially to solve their problems in a regular way ... <sup>68</sup> It was no doubt surprising to the Samaritans that the mayor also spoke of good past relations between them and the Nablus residents. Despite this, there was indeed a warming of contacts at this time, signifying the apparent demise of ancient quarrels in the face of a new political situation for both as a result of their coming under Israeli rule. This may be a result of a gradual change of perception among Palestinians towards the Samaritans. Hitherto regarded as "Jews," and thus identified with Israel, the Samaritans could now be differentiated from the real Israelis, with whom the Palestinians were in direct contact after 1967. There was also a clear contrast between the Arabic speaking Samaritans who worked and lived in Nablus, and the Jewish settlers who isolated themselves within their neighborhoods. These comparisons probably contributed to the growing



Indeed, the post 1967 era was a period in which the Nablus Samaritans found themselves in a unique position as mediators between the Palestinian residents of the city and the Israeli authorities. The small community began to enjoy a high regard among the Arab residents because of their willingness to intervene with the military government on their behalf, and very cooperative relations with the Israelis who viewed them much in the same manner as the Israeli Samaritans. Ephrat Tsedaka wrote:

People in Nablus admitted that although the Samaritans had an "open door" to the administrator's office, they were not collaborators. In order to improve the relationship between the Samaritans and the Arabs in the city, the Samaritans tried to solve a lot of problems that the Arabs in Nablus had with the administration. This help that the Samaritans gave had never been free, and they provided a type of service for which the Arabs paid by giving money or gifts. The Israeli administrator knew about that, and he gave the matters which were under Samaritan mediators a high priority. When the mediator was a Samaritan, it was easy for the person who had a problem to get it solved because the administrator knew that he was a friend of the Samaritan community.<sup>69</sup>

It is in this capacity as mediators that the Samaritans gained their reputation for neutrality. The Nablus community, walking a fine line between their rulers and their neighbors, refrained from any sort of political activity as a matter of strict policy. This is significant, because the Israeli control of Nablus would have ensured them a certain measure of security if they had decided to overtly support the occupation, but would have dire consequences for them in the future if the Israelis withdrew. Following a pro-Palestinian policy would have compromised their assistance from the Israeli government and alienated many of their brethren from Holon. While overlooked at this time by the PLO, neutrality gave the Samaritans of Nablus a new importance and visibility within the city. By mediating between the Palestinians and Israeli authorities, the Nablus Samaritans forged very important contacts with the Palestinians, which had been sorely lacking in the past. In this way, the community began to end its social isolation from the city around them. Integration naturally produced greater business relations, friendships, and a gradual diminishment of the fear that had for so long characterized Samaritan attitudes towards their Palestinian neighbors. In 1978, Nablus mayor Bassam al-Shaq'ah felt able to describe Samaritan-Arab relations "... in two words - respect and love." The mayor, like his predecessor, may have greatly exaggerated the "good" past relations, but for the first time, his words reflected a public acknowledgement that they belonged to the city as co-citizens. The Samaritans are naturally an integral part of the residents of Nablus, and they are residents like all the other residents in town. For me personally. I have a lot of friends among the



has been a continuous situation between the past, present, and in the future.<sup>70</sup>

Bassam al-Shaq'ah's successor, Zafir al-Masri even pledged to the Samaritans the city's cooperation on utilities to their new neighborhood in an A. B. - The Samaritan News interview shortly before his assassination in 1986.<sup>71</sup> It would therefore appear that in the space of one decade, Samaritan-Palestinian relations had taken a complete turn for the better. Taking the example of Qiryat Luza, early Palestinian opposition to the new neighborhood had given way to municipal cooperation.

The Samaritans' own reaction to improved Palestinian relations with the Nablus community was naturally one of relief. An interesting article in A. B. - The Samaritan News, published just two months before the start of the Intifada, mentioned the contacts that the Nablus Samaritans had established with the leading Arab families there, and alluded to the mediation role that the community was playing. The whole relationship between the local Arabic population and

Samaritans is dictated by their bearing in mind the fact that their ancestors were here even before Muhammad. It is natural that a community acting as a people, created tight relationships with the local population and with the most respected families. The excellent economic situation of the Samaritan community is today the result of the combination of its good relations with the Israeli authorities and with the heads of the Arabic population in Nablus, without attributing any political significance. In this respect, the Samaritans in Nablus prefer to be in smooth relations with all of the political entities in the region, and not to take sides ... The careful policy of the Samaritans in Nablus indicated a change in the way they are regarded by the Arabic population.<sup>72</sup>

Partly as a result of the trust given to them by the Israelis, and partly because of their Hebrew language abilities (as a result of the ulpan mentioned earlier, as well as the increased contact with the Holon branch), many Samaritans were given jobs in the Israeli Civil Administration. In fact, about seventy percent of Samaritan adults found jobs there,<sup>73</sup> and some were even involved in the economic decision-making of Nablus. Others found positions in the new Nablus branch of Bank Leumi. In all, it was a very advantageous situation, both economically and politically, since these jobs brought about a higher standing of living and were the most significant contribution to the development of ties with both sides. It was during this period that the concept of "Samaritan neutrality" reached acknowledgement not only among the community itself, but also among Israelis and Palestinians. But this neutrality was to be put to the most severe test following the outbreak of the Intifada.

---

## **The Samaritans and the Intifada**

The Intifada took the Samaritan community in Nablus by surprise, and they soon found themselves in the middle of the conflict. The location of the Samaritan quarter between the two focal points of unrest, An-Najah University and the Muslim cemetery, made it inevitable that their daily lives would be affected. The fact that the Israeli Ministry of Defense had ordered the soldiers not to harm the Samaritans in any way, could have given the Nablus community the opportunity to avoid the curfews, road blocks, and most of the street fighting. However, their new relationship with the Palestinian residents, as well as their desire to demonstrate that they were not collaborators with the Israeli occupation, led the Nablus Samaritans to pursue a policy of what they saw as the strictest neutrality. What that translated into during the "Days of Rage" was that they would avoid any special privileges given to them by the Israelis by not acknowledging the fact that they were Samaritans. Often this meant that they were compelled to participate in demonstrations and even clashes against the Israeli soldiers with their fellow Nablus residents, and donate money to the "Intifada Fund"<sup>74</sup> to assist the families of the dead, wounded, imprisoned and unemployed.

The Israeli soldiers, ignorant of the fact that they were occasionally confronting Samaritans along with the other Nablus residents, naturally treated them the same as the rest, exposing them to the same dangers of live ammunition, plastic bullets, and tear gas. Likewise, the Samaritans chose to share the same inconveniences as the Palestinians at army checkpoints, as an article from the New York City Tribune (1989) explained:

At Israeli army roadblocks, Samaritans waited patiently in line, although they knew that mere identification would have allowed them to jump to the front. After hours, Samaritans working at the Israeli Civil Administration would meet with Nablus residents seeking help.<sup>75</sup>

The Samaritans also subjected themselves to the curfews, even to the point of combining two Sabbath prayer services into one if the streets were closed on Saturdays. Once again, mere identification of themselves to the Israeli army as Samaritans would have eliminated the need to do so, but the price of this was to be seen by their neighbors as enjoying special privileges, leading to suspicion of them as collaborators.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, these efforts to demonstrate that they were not collaborators were not always acknowledged by some of the more radical Palestinian factions. In a few circumstances, Samaritan workers at the Civil Administration were beaten. and on one occasion a Samaritan boy was kidnapped. beaten. and later

Samaritans will be discussed in the second half of this work, but during the Intifada period, immediate concern developed after Hamas activists burned a Samaritan store that sold liquor. Following this action, a meeting was held between the two sides and the matter was settled for the time being. The production and sale of alcohol (such as arak), a traditional practice by Samaritans and other non-Muslim minorities, was certain to be challenged by Islamic activists owing to the fact that Muslims were among the consumers. But, the negative actions taken against them by some Palestinians, in spite of their demonstrated solidarity, led one exasperated Samaritan to complain to the New York City Tribune, "When the Turks were here, we were called the Turks. When the British were here, we were called the British. Now with the Israelis, we are seen as Israelis."<sup>78</sup> The most important result of the Intifada, from the Samaritan point of view, was their decision to move semi-permanently to the Qiryat Luza neighborhood near the summit of Mount Gerizim. This began in 1989, after one of the Nablus community suffered a tragedy as a result of the violence. In January of that year, a Samaritan woman working at the Nablus Bank Leumi suffered severe burns all over her body after a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the bank building. It took several expensive plastic surgery operations to repair the damage to her face, and her veiled appearance aroused the constant suspicion of the Israeli soldiers. When the Nablus community moved up to the mountain in February of that year to prepare for the annual Passover observance, many had no desire to return to their homes and face the continued violence and curfews. A Samaritan debate ensued, as the Jewish Echo reported:

A minority of the community argues that Mt. Gerizim, with its religious significance, should be developed as a permanent dwelling place. By leaving strife-torn Nablus, the Samaritans would ensure their well-being and that of their children, the group says. But a majority of the Nablus residents feel that their future lies in the city where they earn their livelihood. A permanent move to Mt. Gerizim, this group adds, would only cause their neighbors to criticize them for running away.<sup>79</sup>

In the end, it was the minority that won out, as most eventually came to realize that it was impossible to enjoy life with any semblance of normality in the heart of the Intifada. As Benyamim Tsedaka explained to the Washington Post in 1991, "There, on top of the mountain, is liberty. No Arabs, no soldiers, no rocks, no curfews."<sup>80</sup> The Nablus Samaritans thus began a practice that continues today of dividing their lives between their jobs in the city, and the quiet of their Mt. Gerizim homes. Some, who managed to install heating in mountain residences to make the harsh winter more bearable, began to rent their city homes to the Arab residents. It was, as they admitted to some Palestinians critical of the relocation, an escape. But as they were now caught between so many factions fighting for the control of Nablus, their situation was

Civil Administration. In the autumn of 1989, many Samaritans and Palestinians were still working in the administration, to the ire of the demonstrators. The call by the Intifada's Unified Command for a mass resignation caused most of the Palestinians to leave, but brought about a certain dilemma for the Samaritans, who still wished to pursue as neutral a course as possible. Some Samaritans did quit and they began work as merchants,<sup>81</sup> but others feared that such action would cause them to be seen by the Israelis as collaborators for the Palestinian side. Added to this was the fact that while the newly unemployed Palestinians would receive aid from the "Intifada Fund," the Samaritans knew that they would not. Thus four Samaritan Civil Administration employees refused to leave their jobs, and as a result, their homes in Nablus were set on fire by demonstrators.<sup>82</sup> The Civil Administration immediately compensated for the damage, but help soon arrived from another source - PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. In a radio message broadcast from Baghdad, Arafat strongly condemned the arson attacks against the Samaritans and pledged to match the Israeli compensation.<sup>83</sup> The fact that the PLO leader himself had come to their assistance brought about a sense of encouragement among the Samaritans. They were the only native group involved in the Intifada that could claim good relations with both the PLO and the Israeli government.

The Samaritan experience during the Intifada led to a certain amount of anxiety among the Nablus community. Their neutral conduct had paid off in that they had avoided making enemies during a tumultuous period. But the violence that they were exposed to had led to the decision for many to move out of the city in which they had made their livelihood for centuries. Despite being generally well regarded, they were still vulnerable. The success of the Intifada in reinvigorating Palestinian nationalist aspirations meant that the political future of Nablus was even more unpredictable. A Nablus Samaritan admitted to the New York City Tribune that, "In the past, the lack of a political resolution didn't concern us. We were just a minority. Now, it bothers us."<sup>84</sup> Their minority status did not isolate them from the conflict, but made them powerless to defend their community on their own, and unable to influence any future arrangement in order to ameliorate their situation. Samaritans from Holon had likewise felt the effects of the Intifada when visiting their brethren and holy sites on Mount Gerizim. While other Israelis refrained from entering the occupied territories out of fear, the Israeli Samaritans continued their visits despite the danger of being identified as Jews. For both, the absence of stability was a dangerous situation in itself, but Israeli and Palestinian questions over the future status of Nablus and Mount Gerizim, which had direct importance to the survival of the Samaritan community as a whole, continued to ignore their needs. It appeared that politics, a field that the Samaritans had managed to elude for so long, had now grown to such an importance in their daily lives that it could be ignored no longer.

---

## Citations - Part I

1. Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 22-31
2. Benyamim Tsedaka, "Samaritans" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 14 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), 728
3. "The Good Samaritans, A Living People" (Holon: A. B. - Institute of Samaritan Studies, 1993), 5
4. ?????? .??.? "?????????????????" ,????????? 5???? ,(1996) 659?662????? (?????)??????????
5. Nathan Schur, *History of the Samaritans*, 2nd revised and enlarged edition (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 1992), 73
6. An example to illustrate this point would be the reaction of Israel's Druze community when faced with the 1983 conflict between the Lebanese Druze and the Israeli-backed Phalange militia. Their outpouring of anger and consternation was demonstrated in protests, petitions, army desertions, and even defections of Druze soldiers and officers who chose to fight alongside their Lebanese brethren.
7. Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State" in *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East*, eds. Milton Esman & Itamar Rabinovich (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 72
8. "Trying not to get crushed between the Political Millstones," A. B. - *The Samaritan News* (Holon), #651 (January 1996), 47
9. Israel Tsedaka, personal interview, 4/23/97
10. Jacob esh-Shelaby, "Personal Narrative" in *Notices of the Modern Samaritans*, by E.T. Rodgers (London: Sampson Low and Son 1855), 30
11. 64??? "?????????????????" ,????
12. Schur, *History*, 166
13. *ibid*, 187
14. Dan Ross, *Acts of Faith* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1982), 106
15. Kemal Karpat, "The Ottoman Ethnic and Confessional Legacy in the Middle East" in *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East*, eds. Milton Esman & Itamar Rabinovich (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 47
16. James Montgomery, *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect* cited in Dan Ross, *Acts of Faith*, 100

#621-2 (October 1994), 81

18. Schur, History, 196

19. Haim Shapiro, "Samaritans: 'We call ourselves Israel,'" in The Jerusalem Post c. 1993, reprinted in A. B. Echoes - 1993 (Holon 1994), 37

20. Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, Travels, cited in Nathan Schur, History of the Samaritans, 195

21. Tsedaka, "Samaritans," 736

22. Batsheva Bonne, A Genetic View of the Samaritan Isolate - dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Boston University Graduate School (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms 1965), 185

23. Schur, History, 193

24. George Alexander, "Relative Strangers," in The Jerusalem Report, January 24, 1991, reprinted in A. B. Echoes - 1991, (Holon 1992), 9

25. Ross, Acts of Faith, 108

26. *ibid*, 108-109

27. Schur, History, 199

28. Nathan Schur, "The Modern Period (from 1516 A.D.)" in The Samaritans, ed. Alan Crown (Tubingen: Mohr Publishing 1989), 126

29. Leslie Farmer, We Saw the Holy City, cited in Schur, History of the Samaritans, 209

30. Schur, History, 205

31. Douglas Duff, Palestine Picture, cited in Schur, History of the Samaritans, 207

32. *ibid*, 208

33. Schur, History, 209

34. Duff in N. Schur, History, 208

35. H.V. Morton, In the Steps of the Master, cited in Schur, Hist. of the Samaritans, 208 36. Schur, History, 212

37. *ibid*, 212

38. "Hundredth Anniversary of Leader Yefet Tsedaka's Birth" A. B. - The Samaritan News (Holon), #621-2 (October 1994), pp. 79
39. Ross, Acts of Faith, 118
40. Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi, The Exiled and the Redeemed, translated from Hebrew by I.A. Abbady (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America 1957), 109
41. Ross, Acts of Faith, 118
42. Schur, History, 211
43. Bonne, Genetic View, 27
44. Israel Tsedaka, personal interview, 23/4/97
45. 67??? ",????????????????" ,???
46. ibid, 67
47. Hasanein Kahen, Samaritan History, Identity, Religion and Subdivisions, Literature and Social Status (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press 1966), 29
48. 69??? ",????????????????" ,???
49. Ross, Acts of Faith, 109
50. 6899??? ",????????????????" ,???
51. Jacob Ben-Ezzi Cohen, The Samaritans: their History - Customs - Religion (Nablus 1965), 4-5
52. Atef Nagi & Yusuf Abu el-Hasan, Brief Theoretical Points of View about the Samaritan Sect of Nablus (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Printing Press c. 1960), 20-21
53. ibid, 21-22
54. ibid, 23-24
55. Schur, History, 212; see also "The Samaritan Survival: To Whom it may Concern," (Holon: A. B. - Institute of Samaritan Studies 1995), 4
56. Israel Tsedaka, personal interview, 23/4/97
57. Rami Sassoni, "Before the Time of Delivery" (1970), reprinted in A. B. - The Samaritan News (Holon), #608-611 (April 1994), 151

58. Ross, Acts of Faith, 112
59. "Last of the Samaritans, on a Secret Hunt," Email report sent 11/19/97 by Arabia.On.Line
60. Osher Sassoni, personal interview, 20/4/97
61. 70771??? ",????????????????" ,???
62. Schur in A. Crown, The Samaritans, 130
63. 72??? ",????????????????" ,???
64. ibid, 72
65. Ross, Acts of Faith, 109-110
66. ibid, 110
67. 74??? ",????????????????" ,???
68. ibid, 74
69. ibid, 75-76
70. ibid, 75
71. ibid, 75
72. Benyamim Tsedaka, "The Great Arab Families of Nablus," in A. B. - The Samaritan News (Holon), #443-444 (September 1987), 55-56
73. Steve Rodan, "Tiny Samaritan Community moves away from Arab Neighbors" in The New York City Tribune, 9/27/89, reprinted in A. B. - Echoes 1989 (Holon 1990), pp. 40
74. 76??? ",????????????????" ,???
75. Rodan, "Tiny Samaritan Community ...," in A. B. - Echoes 1989, 40
76. 76??? ",????????????????" ,???
77. ibid, 76
78. Rodan, "Tiny Samaritan Community ...," in A. B. - Echoes 1989, 41



**80** Jeffrey Goldberg, "Samaritans Cling Fast to Mountaintop," in The Washington Post, 12/14/91, reprinted in A. B. Echoes 1991 (Holon 1992), 61

**81.** Schur, History, 220

**82.** 77?78??? ",?????????????" ,???

**83.** Joel Greenburg & Michal Sela, "Arafat: End killing of 'collaborators'," in The Jerusalem Post, 10/18/89, reprinted in A. B. Echoes 1989 (Holon 1990), 42

**84.** Rodan, "Tiny Samaritan Community ...." in A. B. - Echoes 1989, 40

---

---