

CHAPTER I

It was a crisp early morning in Kisley 1496 (5256). Though technically early winter, that mattered little to the southern sun, which was rapidly expanding the sky with red-orange light. In the streets of Lisbon, Portugal, shops and stalls were opening up one by one, as if the owners themselves were yawning awake with the dawn.

The pedestrians were interlaced with Jews in *tallaisim*, prayer shawls, hurrying on their way to the synagogue. At the entrance, a crowd of men had gathered to read a notice that had just been posted on the doors.

PROCLAMATION

His Majesty King Emanuel hereby decrees that by November of the following year no person of the Jewish faith is to remain in Portugal. This law applies to any Jew, be he of local or foreign birth. Those wishing to remain may do so only on condition that they accept the true faith.

The decree was signed by the monarch, prime minister, and bishop of Portugal.

The Jews, numb with shock and bewilderment, began to mumble among themselves. The proclamation, though harsh, had been no surprise; it had, in fact, been a topic of worried debate ever since 1492, when the largest group of Jews had been brutally thrust from neighboring Spain. There had been talk that the Portuguese king, longing for a treaty with his powerful neighbor, had desired the hand of the Spanish princess in marriage. Such an alliance would be advantageous to both countries, which now controlled much of the New World. However,

The Story of Yosef Caro

Author of the Shulchan Aruch





high position. But they chose the true faith of their forefathers in the poverty of an unknown land over an empty faith with empty trappings of power in the land whence they came.

The Caro family left Spain — Ephraim, his brother Yitzchak, and their families. They booked passage on a frigate which, like many, fell prey to the numerous pirate ships that cruised the Atlantic and Mediterranean waters. They were fortunate to leave the ship in one piece; often the helpless refugees were robbed and sold into slavery, or left for dead.

The Caros managed to arrive in Portugal, where they joined the growing community of ex-patriot Spaniards and quickly reestablished themselves. Along with the new arrivals were Jews who had left Spain long ago for Portugal; these Jews greeted their brethren with open arms.

The memories, however, were slow to fade, and the fear remained that the Inquisition would some day spread its tentacles westward. Now the fear had been confirmed.

"Eleven months is not much time," a butcher commented sourly.

"It's certainly better than the last time," a friend retorted. "Why, I left Spain with only the clothes on my back."

"And now where shall we go?" a wine dealer lamented. "The ports of Europe are closed. We are forsaken."

"Let us hide," said a printer. "We can disguise our identities and continue our religious practices in secret."

"Like a Marrano?" the butcher thundered. "You choose to be a coward, rather than maintain the faith of our forefathers? Surely you will not forget that *Kiddush Hashem* is our noble duty."

Ephraim Caro remained by the door wordlessly, listening to the

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain would only agree to such a marriage on the condition that Portugal become rid of her Jews.

Many of the Jews standing around at the synagogue door that day bitterly recalled their native land, where four years ago they had left possessions behind, with great fear and little notice, and headed to an unknown destiny. They cynically took note of the words "the true faith," knowing quite well that the church was, as usual, behind all this, and knowing what lay in store for those who refused to convert. Jews who did not escape were tortured mercilessly and dispatched in an *auto-da-fe* — burning at the stake. The rest either fled or went into hiding.

On this dismal day it was a refugee from Spain to whom the others turned. A tall, slender man walked regally up the steps to the entrance, a little boy at his side, as the others respectfully parted way. He bent forward and read the harsh decree; the others watched, awaiting his reaction.

Returning to his erect posture, the man twisted his face in disgust and shook his head. "It has finally happened," he said. He sighed, and made a futile attempt at humor. "Well, at least our monarch was kind enough to give us notice."

This man, Ephraim Caro, was descended from a family of advisers to King Ferdinand. Wealthy and influential, the Caros had been offered the chance to convert and retain their

mournful discussion. Behind him stood his son Yosef. The boy had been four at the time of the Spanish expulsion, and vaguely remembered the anxious whispers, the hasty packing of bags, the sad departure from their lovely estate in Toledo, the rocky voyage on the unseaworthy vessel.

Now, at eight, he was a serious and precocious lad who had grown attached to his new home and had made new friends, many of them Spanish-born like himself. In Lisbon young Yosef acquired a teacher, Rabbi Yaakov Beirav, who gave the boy his initial Torah knowledge. The boy quickly displayed an active intellect, cultivated by many hours of study and memorization. He especially loved studying with his uncle Yitzchak, a

great *rav* in the community. In addition, the boy admired his father who, true to his aristocratic lineage, was an active leader in community affairs. This was not the first time Ephraim Caro had been sought for advice.

Now the boy watched, and waited for his father to speak. The latter, holding his *tallis* close to him, turned in the direction of the town square. He frowned. In the distance, a friar was conversing with a shopowner.

At last he turned his head back to the crowd of Jews. Raising his hands, Reb Ephraim said, "Gentlemen, it is getting late. I'm afraid that unless we begin soon the time for morning prayer will pass."

The men turned and stared.

"But my lord, what shall we do

about the decree?" a man asked.

"There is nothing we can do now but include in our prayers an appeal for Divine succor."

Some of the men turned away cynically.

Gently, Ephraim Caro continued. "Gentlemen, fear not. I beg you, do not worry or despair."

"But Reb Ephraim, our *lives*," wailed one. "Ours and our children's."

"G-d will save us," Reb Ephraim replied. "He has not forsaken us. So many times our enemies have tried to destroy us — to bend us to their ways. We can never be swayed. Or destroyed. In time we will find an answer. In the end, the Jews will triumph."

(To be continued)

The Jews of Portugal

Little is known of the early history of the Jews in Portugal, but they probably settled in parts of that country during the early years of Muslim rule.

When Portugal emerged as a distinct nation under Affonso I (1139-85), a number of wholly Jewish districts existed, but the total Jewish population remained small. Under Affonso III (1245-79), the reconquest of Portuguese lands by the Christians from the Muslims was completed.

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During the 13th century, the Jews acquired a lot of economic and political influence as tax collectors, court doctors, craftsmen, and astrologers.

astrologers. They also served as intermediaries between Christians and Muslims. Diniz (1249-1325), the beloved king of medieval Portugal, made the chief rabbi, Don Judah, the administrator of his treasury. Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), the greatest figure in the expeditions that expanded Portuguese trade to Africa and Asia, summoned the cartographer Abraham Cresques from Majorca. A generation later, three of the earliest Portuguese printers were Jews. The first 11 books to be printed in Portugal were in Hebrew.

Portuguese Jewry was spared the

1391 massacres that brought death to tens of thousands of Spanish Jews and left behind thousands who accepted baptism in order to escape death.

There were many in the general populace who were stirred to envy and religious hate by the importance of the Portuguese Jewish community. In 1449, this hostility caused a riot, in which many homes were destroyed and a number of Jews killed. But afterward, the community lived in peace until the end of the century.

In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the territories under the Spanish crowns of Castille and Aragon. Understandably, the largest single body of Jews who chose to go into exile rather than convert sought refuge in nearby Portugal, where there was already an active Jewish community and where both the general and Jewish culture were very similar to their own. Estimates of the number of Spanish Jews who fled to Portugal vary widely — from 60,000 to 150,000.

But no warm welcome awaited them. Thirty of the richest families were permitted to settle in Oporto; so were 600 other families, who were able to pay a tax of 100 crusados each. A number of craftsmen skilled in making armaments were likewise granted the right to remain indefinitely on the payment of a poll tax of four crusados. The bulk of the emigrants, under a poll tax of eight crusados, received permission from King John (1481-95) to remain for eight months in order to prepare for departure to another country.

Shipping was provided very slowly. Those who came aboard were treated brutally, being disembarked, regardless of their wishes, at the nearest point on the African coast. Thousands who remained after the



expiration of the eight months were declared to have forfeited their liberty, and were sold as slaves.

John's successor, Emanuel the Fortunate (1495-1521), was favorably inclined toward the Jews. Recognizing that those Jews who had not left in

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time were guiltless, he restored their liberty. However, public policy made him change his mind. He was eager to marry the Infanta Isabella, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella; such a marriage offered every prospect that their children would one day rule over the entire Iberian peninsula. The Spanish sovereigns, however, consented to the marriage only on condition that all professing Jews, Spanish or Portuguese, would be expelled — a condition to which Emanuel yielded.

On November 30, 1496, the marriage treaty was signed. On December 4, Emanuel ordered that by November of the following year no Jew was to remain in Portugal. Soon he began to regret the prospect of losing so many wealthy and industrious citizens. However, he

could not permit them to remain as Torah-faithful Jews.

On March 19, 1497, all young Jews up to the age of 25 were seized and forced to become baptized. Some parents killed themselves; others, unwilling to separate from their children, joined them in baptism.

November was approaching. Emanuel ordered the Jews to assemble at Lisbon and to embark from that port. The twenty thousand Jews who gathered were herded together and detained until the time for departure had expired. The entire Jewish population was then forcibly baptized, and declared equal citizens of the realm. A handful managed to escape, among them the king's astronomer, Abraham Zacuto, whose astronomical tables were used by Christopher Columbus.

Emanuel realized that under such a conversion these people could not be reasonably expected to abandon their ancestral faith and become true Christians. Emanuel promised the Conversos, as they were called, a twenty-year immunity from scrutiny of their personal lives. In 1512, he extended the period for a further twenty years.

There were New Christians even before the forced conversions of 1497. One, Fernando de Noronha, served as commander of the second Portuguese expedition to Brazil, in 1501-1502, and in July 1502 contracted with the king for the exploitation of the new colony.

In 1506, a number of New Christians were caught celebrating the Passover together in Lisbon. They were arrested, but released after only two days' imprisonment. Twelve days later, a Converso who scoffed at a miracle reported to have taken place in the Church of Santo Domingo was dragged out of the church and

butchered. A terrible massacre began, and more than two thousand Jews were killed. The king punished the perpetrators severely. The town was heavily fined and some fifty culprits were executed.

After the riot, Emanuel realized that assimilation would take much longer than he had anticipated. If the Conversos were to fully contribute their entrepreneurial skills and experience, which the Portuguese economy badly needed, a more conciliatory policy toward them was necessary.

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Accordingly, he decreed in 1507 that Conversos who wished to emigrate should be allowed to do so, and to take their possessions with them. Conversos who wished to leave the country temporarily could do so as well. They were also permitted to trade on land and sea, sell property, and freely export money or merchandise, so long as it went to Christian countries in Portuguese ships. Many Conversos seized the opportunity given them and left Portugal. The majority, however, lulled into a false sense of security, remained. In the course of the years, the continuing exodus of skilled and wealthy Conversos caused Emanuel to reconsider: shortly before his death in 1521 he clamped down on the general permission and limited departures to those specifically authorized.

In 1531, the Inquisition was introduced in Portugal. In response to appeals by the New Christians, it was suspended by the Pope until 1536, and only over forty years later did it attain the power it had in Spain. From the introduction of the Inquisition, however, Conversos began to flee Portugal, particularly during the reign of Sebastian (1557-1578), who granted them free departure upon payment of 250,000 ducats.

The stream of escaping Conversos continued until the end of the Inquisitional era. Although gradually stripped of much of its power, the Inquisition was not abolished until 1832. The last *auto-da-fe* — burning at the stake — took place in 1791. Therefore, as late as the eighteenth century, Conversos were fleeing Portugal to the countries of the West. Among a group of Jewish immigrants who in 1733 sailed to colonial Georgia was Dr. Samuel Ribeiro Nunez. A former court physician in Lisbon who had suffered at the hands of the Inquisition, he smuggled himself out of the Portuguese capital on an English brigantine, in the middle of a dinner which he had given to allay suspicion.

Aaron Lopez, a Portuguese Converso by birth who arrived in Newport in 1752, sent a ship to Lisbon in the 1750's to rescue his Converso brother and family. They became professing Jews when they reached America. As late as 1795, many members of the long-established Spanish and Portuguese congregation in London, in their Aliens' Certificate, gave flight from the Inquisition as the reason for their coming to England.

Interestingly, while Conversos were still fleeing Portugal, some professing Jews were laying the foundation of Jewish resettlement in that country. Around 1800, a number of Jews, mainly from Gibraltar, settled in

Lisbon. Complete equality was achieved only with the establishment of the republic in 1910.

As the nineteenth century advanced, less and less was heard of Converso survival in Portugal. As the twentieth century approached, it was generally assumed that the Conversos had died out. Then, in 1917, a Polish-Jewish mining engineer, Samuel Schwartz, discovered a community of Conversos in a remote northern region of Portugal. They recognized themselves as Jews, were called Jews by their neighbors, married among themselves, and harbored memories of Jewish observances.

While Schwartz was publishing his discovery, stirring a degree of consciousness among remaining Conversos in Portugal, Captain Arturo Carlos de Barros Basto, a descendant such a family, openly espoused Judaism. Going across to Tangiers, he formally entered the Jewish fold, married a woman belonging to a prominent Jewish family of the Lisbon community, and set up a Jewish household.

Barros Basto was one of the heroes of the 1910 revolutionary movement, which ended in the proclamation of the Portuguese republic. During World War I, he served with great distinction with the British Expeditionary Force in France. Already before that war he had begun to attend services in the Lisbon synagogue and to study Hebrew. His efforts to revitalize the spiritual life of the Portuguese Jews attracted the interest of world Jewry. With the generous financial support of Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris and, later on, the generosity of the Kadoorie family of Shanghai, a handsome new synagogue was built on the outskirts of Oporto.

However, Barros Basto's movement to bring the surviving Conversos back to the Jewish fold, met with very little success. The Catholic church was hostile to his efforts, which it probably

Jews, were admitted as immigrants. Later in the war, Portugal agreed to grant entry visas as part of various rescue operations. During this period, Portugal saved all of its Jewish citizens



viewed as Jewish missionizing among Christians, even though these "Christians" were Jews. Responding to church pressure, the government announced that employment opportunities for those who entered the Jewish fold would be limited. Besides church and government opposition, there were many Conversos who, having straddled two faiths for many generations, preferred their own way of life. Yet though their number was small, there were Conversos in Portugal who, nearly five hundred years after Kings John and Emanuel, amazingly retained enough of their former Jewishness to find their way back to the Jewish community.

During the Holocaust period, Portugal's policies toward Jewish refugees were highly praiseworthy. After the fall of France, thousands of refugees, a large proportion of them

as well as Jews in occupied countries, to whom it granted consular protection. Portugal joined other neutral countries in saving Hungarian Jews by granting them protection. Throughout the war, Lisbon served as a base for the operations of Jewish organizations in and beyond the Iberian Peninsula.

Few of the thousands of Jewish refugees who passed through Portugal in the Holocaust years remained in the country. In 1945, the Jewish community numbered about 1,000, but its size has steadily shrunk since. In 1971, the number of Jews had declined to some 650, and at the present time the Jewish population is only 300. This figure does not include Conversos, whose number cannot be estimated. Those Conversos who have reentered the community are counted as Jews.

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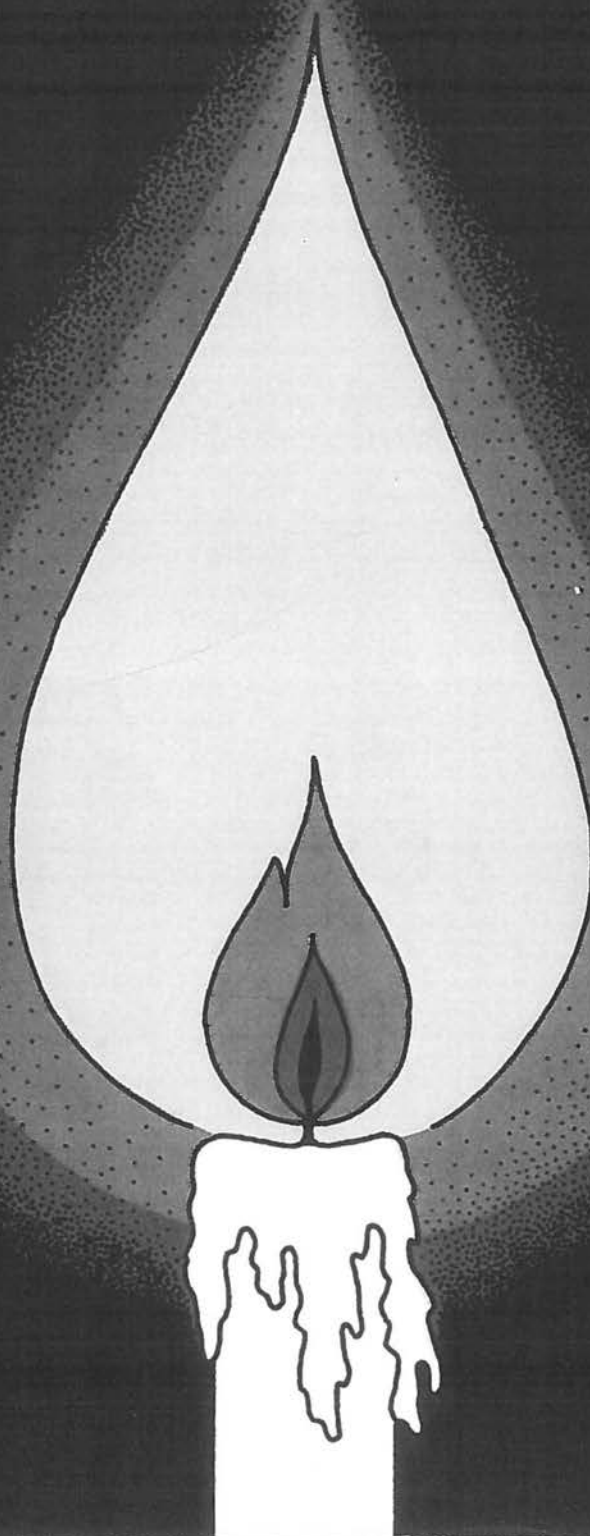
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A little light
dispels darkness

TO OUR READERS

We at **The Jewish Reader** have been quite gratified by the reaction to our first issue. It was our feeling that the Jewish public has been looking for quality reading material which reflects our values, and we think our magazine is helping fill the void that has existed.

The focus of the second issue is Chanukah. The miracles of Chanukah — the defeat of the Syrian-Greeks and the Temple menorah which stayed lit for eight days — symbolize the superiority of the Torah outlook. For over 2,000 years, Chanukah has represented the victory of Torah-true Judaism over other philosophies of life. It is for this reason that Chanukah is primarily a spiritual holiday, not a material one as is Purim.

"Torah Highlights" delves into the connection between Chanukah and the sale of Yosef by his brothers. "Jewish Faith and Chanukah" discusses the importance of the holiday as a reflection of absolute Jewish faith.

Other features include a look at our use of the secular calendar, the continuation of "Across the Atlantic" — a tale about Jews in colonial America — and "He Won't Miss Me," which analyzes two attitudes toward **gemilus chasadim**, acts of kindness. There is also a biography of Rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the **Shulchan Aruch**.

We wish you a Happy Chanukah, and look forward to your comments about this issue.

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The Jewish Reader

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