

# Are the Pathans Jewish?

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From Mr Yisrael Mishal, who lived in Afulah and was formerly President of the Afghanistan Jewish community, I often heard unusually fascinating quotations and stories uttered repeatedly and Mr Mishal gave live examples of his meetings with Pathans who dwell on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Who are the Pathans? They are also called Afghans or Pishtus after their language. They identify themselves with their former name 'sons of Israel', even though nowadays they live as Muslims. In Afghanistan they are said to number six to seven million, and in Pakistan seven to eight million. Two million of them live as beduins. Outwardly, the Pathans are similar to the Jews.

From their ancient customs, one can point to a connection between the Pathans and the Jewish people. They make up about half of the population of Afghanistan, in the region called Pushtunistan, on the eastern border of Afghanistan. Over ninety per cent of the inhabitants are Sunni Muslims. Later modernisation has penetrated into this State, and even less in the hilly areas near the border. In these places, the Pathans continue to live in the tribal framework as their fathers and forefathers did. The legal system operates according to the Pashtunwali," the Pashtun Laws, parts of which are similar to the laws of the Torah.

The Pathans are known for their physical strength. They are tall, light-coloured and handsome, good soldiers and for the

most part bear arms from a young age. They are diligent and intelligent, faithful to an exemplary degree and are known in the world as outstanding hosts.

### **What is the Ethnic Origin of the Panthim?**

The Panthim are not similar in their outward appearance or in their character to any of the ethnic groups which populate this environment: the Indian group-Iranians, Mongolians, Turks or Persians. Most of the researchers are of the opinion that the origin of the Pathans is indeed Israeli. The aliyah to Israel of Afghanistan Jews and the volume of evidence heard from them on this subject about the customs of the Pathans corroborate this idea.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL**

There is interesting evidence about the preservation among the tribes of family trees on their origin, and on their relationship to the fathers of the Israeli people. These family trees are well preserved. Some of them are penned in golden lettering on deerskin. The names of the tribes speak for themselves: the tribe of Harabni (in the Afghan tongue) is the tribe of Reuben, the shinwari is Shimeon, the Levani - Levi, Daftani - Naftali, Jaji - Gad, Ashuri - Asher, Yusuf Su, sons of Josef, Afridi - Ephraim, and so on.

The former monarchy in Afghanistan has a widely-spread tradition according to which their origin was from the tribe of Benjamin and the family of King Saul. According to this tradition, Saul had a son called Jeremia and he in turn had a son called Afghana. Jeremia died at about the same time as Saul and the son Afghana was raised by King David and remained in the royal palace during the reign of Solomon too. About 400 years later, in the days of Nebuchadnezer, the Afghana family fled to the Gur region (Jat in our times). This is in central Afghanistan and here the family settled down and traded with the people of the area. In the year 622, with the appearance of Islam, Muhammed sent Khaled ibn Waleed to the 'sons of Ishrail' to spread the word of Islam among the Afghanistan tribes. He succeeded in his mission, returned to Muhammed with seven representatives of the residents of

Afghanistan and with 76 supporters. The leader of these people was 'Kish' (the name of the father of Solomon). According to the tradition, the emissaries succeeded in their assignment and Muhammed praised them for this.

## **THE PLACE OF THE ASSYRIAN EXILE**

According to the Bible (the second Book of Kings, Chronicles 1 and 2), the ten tribes were exiled to Halah and Havor and the river Gozan and to the cities of Maday. According to the tradition of the Jews of Afghanistan, the river gozan is 'rod jichan' (river in Persian is rod), one of the tributaries of the Emo-daria, which descends in the vicinity of the town of Maimane. The city of Havor is, they say, peh-Shauor (Pash-Havor') which means 'Over Havor' in Afghanistan, and today serves as the centre of the Pathans on the Pakistan that the whole area populated the ancient Assyrian Exile. There are researchers who claim that all the Jews living in southern U.S.S.R. along the Emor-daria' are the descendants of the ten tribes - the Bucharins, Georgians, etc. As we know, a group of "B'nei Yisrael' some of whom settled in Israel, is also found in India and Afghanistan. The existence of the Pathan tribes is therefore in the heart of the area in which the ten tribes are found.

## **THE SIMILARITY OF THE PATHANS TO THE JEWS**

The British, who ruled Afghanistan for a long time, found it difficult to distinguish between the Pathans and the Jews, and called the Pathans 'Juz' - Jews. The Jews, too found it hard to distinguish between themselves and the Pathans when the latter are not wearing traditional dress. Afghanistan has about 21 peoples and languages and only the Pathans, apart from the Jews, look clearly Semitic; their countenance is lighter than that of other peoples and their nose is long. Some of them also have blue eyes. Since most of them grow beards and sidelocks like Jews, this also adds difficulty to an attempt to distinguish between them and the Jews.

## **JEWISH CUSTOMS**

Even though the Pathans accepted Islam voluntarily and forcibly, they maintain Jewish customs preserved from the recesses of their past. The book contains considerable evidence taken from Jews of Afghanistan who lived in the neighbourhoods of the Pathans and had contact with them. The evidence doesn't relate to all the Pathans or to all the tribes and places. However, it does prove the existence of Jewish customs among the Pathans. The research on this subject still requires completion, both quantitative and qualitative. Let us note the customs in headline form only: sidelock, circumcision within eight days, a Talith (prayer shawl) and four fringes (Tsitsit), a Jewish wedding (Hupah and ring), women's customs (immersion in a river or spring), levirate marriage (Yibum), honouring the father, forbidden foods (horse and camel food), refraining from cooking meat and milk, a tradition of clean and unclean poultry, the Shabbat (preparation of 12 Hallah loaves, refraining from work), lighting a candle in honour of the Shabbat, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) prayer (some of them pray turned in the direction of Jerusalem), blood on the threshold and on the two Mezzuzot (in times of plague or trouble), a scapegoat, curing the ill with the help of the Book of Psalms (placing the Book under the patient's head), a Hebrew amulet (Kamia), Hebrew names (also. for neighbourhoods and villages), Holy Books (they especially honour 'the Law of Sharif' which is the Law of Moses), and rising when the name of Moshe is mentioned.

As for the Pathan law, they have laws similar to the Jewish law. The Magen David symbol is found in almost every Pathan house on an island in the Pehshaur district. The rich make it of expensive metals, the poor from simple wood. The Magen David can be seen on the towers of schools and on tools and ornaments.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND OTHER EVIDENCE**

Apart from synagogues, Sifrei Torah, Hebrew placenames and tribal family trees, there also exists evidence on important archeological finds: near the town of Herat in Tchcharan, old graves were found on which the writing was in Persian and in the Hebrew language. The graves date from the 11th to the 13th centuries. In an opposite fashion, so it seems, there are a

number of inscriptions engraved on rocks in ancient Hebrew script near the town of Netchaset.

In the 'Dar el amman' museum in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, there is a black stone found in Kandahar, on which is written in Hebrew.

It would be appropriate to end this article with one of the pieces of evidence. Mr Chiya Zorov of Tel Aviv notes: When the Bolsheviks rose to power in Russia, they divided the large area of the southern part of central Russia into smaller districts such as Tanjekistan, Turkemanistan, Kazchastan, etc. In Tanjekistan, which is in northern Afghanistan, there was a village by the name of Dushme. When Stalin gained power, he called the village in his name, Stalinabad. It started to develop and grow and many Jews then began to stream into Tangekistan. They found that the Tanyakis light candles on Friday evening. When the Jews went to visit them, they revealed that they eat a dish made of meat stuffed with rice called Pacha, which is characteristic of the Bucharian Jews and is eaten on Friday night. When they asked them what it was, the Tajiks replied that this is an ancient traditional food of theirs and its name is Pacha. They also said that they have a tradition that they were once Jews.

Rabbi Saadia Gaon discussed at length with the Hacham Hivay Habalchi and in the opinion of the speaker, in that period (10th century) the Jews were inclined to assimilate into Islam and it was about this that they were arguing.

The scholar Ibn Sina, born in Buchara, also lived at the time. The teacher Tajiki said that he, too, belongs to the Jews who were forced to convert, assimilated into Islam and are called Tchale. As recounted, the meaning of his name is Even Sina - son of sinal (and up to this day in many languages, and also in Hebrew, the words are similarly pronounced - Sinai, Sin Sina) and perhaps this is why he called himself Ben Sinai, in other words, son of the Torah which came forth from Sinai.

The Maharaja of Mardan was a scholar who completed his studies at the University of London and would often visit the converts of Mishhad who lived in Pehshaurf. He also visited a Jew called Carmeli, who told Mr Hiya Zorov that the Maharaja always said the day would come when they would learn to

distinguish the origins of all people and then they would know that all the peoples in the vicinity of Afghanistan were once Jews. The Maharaja published a book in English and wrote of this in the introduction to the book. But the book was lost. There was a time when the author Hiya Zorov, with late President Ben-Tsvi, who considered it of great importance, tried to find the book, but in vain.

Some of the Bucharian Jews have a tradition that they are among the people of the First Temple possibly from the Ten Tribes, but he doesn't know about this and afterwards they were joined by Jews from the Second Temple Exile.

Translated from Hebrew by Issachar Katzir, from "Lost Tribes from Assyria" by A Avihail and A Brin, 1978

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