



# Chida

People of the Book  
Boca Raton Synagogue  
Rabbi Efrem Goldberg



# Lineage

- ♦ Had an illustrious lineage including his great-grandfather, R' Avraham Azoulay, great scholar and author of numerous sefarim including Chesed L'Avraham, Ma'aseh Chosheiv and more.
- ♦ His father R. Yitzchak Zerachia Azoulay was a great sage of Yerushalayim and is quoted by the Chida on numerous occasions.
- ♦ In 1724 (5484), Yosef Azoulay was born in Yerushalayim.
- ♦ He was born in his mother's seventh month of pregnancy and was so frail was thought to be a stillborn.
- ♦ As a child he was called "bechor" because he was the eldest child.



# Childhood

- ♦ He was named for after his maternal grandfather, R' Yosef Bialer. Later Chaim and Dovid were added and he became – חיים יוסף דוד אזולאי or חיד"א.
- ♦ At 7 years old, he was described by his father (letter of approbation to Sha'ar Yosef)  
“recognized his Creator and was dwelling in the tents of Torah.”
- ♦ In 1732 when he was 8 years old, a plague struck Yerushalayim and his mother passed away. Her greatest desire was for him to study Torah and so he enrolled in Yeshivat Bet Yaakov Pereira.



# Prodigy

- ♦ At the age of 12, the Chida wrote a commentary on the medieval Sefer Ha'agur.
- ♦ In 1770, years later, he would say about that first writing:  
“I have read it and they are invalid – the word of youth. This, and all that is written in these notebooks, should be forgotten and not repeated.”
- ♦ At the age of 16, the Chida wrote a small booklet called He'elem Davar, the Hidden Thing. In it, he notes 150 examples of authors who asked questions based on missing or inaccurate information such as confusing two Tanaim of same name.
- ♦ At the age of 20, the Chida wrote his first full length sefer, a commentary on Meseches Horiyos called Sha'ar Yosef. It was published with 27 endorsements from rabbis in Yerushalayim, Chevron, Livorno and Amsterdam.



# Orator

- ♦ In addition to tremendous writing talents, he was a great orator.
- ♦ By the age of his bar mitzvah, he had already delivered 7 public sermons.



# Teachers

- ♦ Ohr Ha'Chaim – R' Chaim Ibn Atar
  - ♦ Born 1696 in Morocco.
  - ♦ In 1739 left to set up a yeshiva in Yerushalayim. Stopped in Italy to raise funds.
  - ♦ Yeshiva was established in Acco in 1741 and then moved to Yerushalayim in the summer of 1742.
  - ♦ The Chida was 18 at the time and left his yeshiva to join the Ohr Ha'Chaim's yeshiva, Knesset Yisrael.
  - ♦ The Ohr Ha'Chaim passed away suddenly on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz 1743. Nevertheless, the Chida was deeply influenced by him.



# Chida on Ohr Ha'Chaim

“As a young man, I had the privilege of being in his exalted yeshiva, and my eyes saw the greatness of his Torah uprooting the highest mountains, and his sanctity was extraordinary... The Rabbi’s heart was filled with the Talmud and he was like an overflowing fountain. His wisdom is recognized from his books; however, that is but one tenth of his true wisdom, his depth of heat and the extraordinary sharpness of his mind”



# Other teachers

- ♦ R' Yonah Navon – became head of Yeshivat Knesset Yisrael. He was the Chida's primary teacher.
- ♦ R' Eliezer Nahum – Sephardic Chief Rabbi
- ♦ R' Yisrael Meir Mizrahi
- ♦ R' Shalom Mizrahi Sharabi (Rashash)



# Kabbalah

- ♦ The Chida frequented Yeshivat Bet El, a yeshiva in Yerushalayim devoted to kabbalah.
- ♦ The Chida was 13 years old when it was founded in 1737 and he joined at a young age.
- ♦ He struggled to pick up Kabbalah as quickly as he grasped the revealed Torah. Nevertheless, he was tenacious to acquire it.
- ♦ Despite his young age, he participated in the Ahavat Shalom Society, which accepted upon themselves standards of piety.



# Shaliach

- ♦ Historically, when Jewish communities in Israel were struggling financially, a Shaliach was sent to both raise funds and serve as a liaison between the Jews of Israel and the Diaspora.
- ♦ The Shaliach had to be capable not only of raising money, but a scholar and inspiring figure, a charismatic leader and teacher.
- ♦ The Shaliach often kept up to one third of what he raised.
- ♦ He usually travelled alone, but sometimes took one companion.



# Shaliach

- ♦ In 1753, the Jewish community of Chevron was in dire financial straits. They desperately needed a Shaliach to work on their behalf.
- ♦ They looked to the 29 year old scholar from Yerushalayim, R' Chaim Yosef Dovid Azoulay. He accepted and set out on a journey to Europe that would last for 5 years.
- ♦ He expended great efforts bringing honor and glory to the Land of Israel and its population.



# Shaliach

- ♦ The Chida felt it was an obligation of Diaspora Jews to support the Jews living in Israel.
- ♦ In his Pnei Dovid (p. 98) he wrote:

“Praised are the people of Israel that when a shaliach comes to them from Eretz Yisrael, they honor him and show him kindness... and because Jews of the Diaspora are the reason for the very existence of a settlement, they merit to be part of the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel... All these words are true to one whose eyes are not bleary, as opposed to those people who look for pretexts to bring down the shaliach of Eretz Yisrael, and thus to destroy the inhabitants of Israel who are known as ‘straight’ for their study and mitzvot go straight up to heaven.”
- ♦ The Chida restored honor to the position of Shaliach.



# Shaliach

- ♦ Whenever he traveled, the Chida brought a large number of garments to ensure a proper and dignified appearance at all times. He mentions many times in his journal that he went to great lengths to ensure a respectable, dignified appearance such as wearing a special turban.
- ♦ When he arrived in a city, people ran to see him. He had a saintly appearance and demeanor and a charismatic personality.
- ♦ In addition to his native Arabic, he understood Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and little English.
- ♦ He carried letters from the city he was representing and collected more letters of approbation along the way. For example, in 1754, when he arrived in Lemberg, he had over 300 letters and certificates in Hebrew, Spanish and Italian.
- ♦ In his diary from his travels, he writes about a search he was subjected to at the border of Frankfurt am Main and that his pockets were stuffed with passports of several different nationalities to ensure smooth border crossing.



# Fundraiser

- ♦ He was an incredibly successful fundraiser.
- ♦ He rode a lavish carriage at great expense that he purchased in Mantova, Italy in 1776.
- ♦ Besides collecting money, he developed relationships and connections with prominent figures in the communities he visited.
- ♦ He attributed his success to Hashem, not himself:

“May His glorious Name be blessed, Who has given me intellect to interact with them with diplomacy and manners...and I know about myself that I hardly know how to conduct an insignificant conversation, but all of my words seemed like pearls to them, appropriate in intellect and talent.” (Ma’agal Tov, p. 36)



# Fundraiser

- ♦ He didn't receive a commission, but a flat fee instead.
- ♦ When he returned home from shelichut, he would send a printed card to all those who helped him during his trip.



# Manuscripts

- ♦ On his travels he would examine manuscripts

“...a full Talmud with very old writing, written on parchment, with the entire Talmud in one binding, the size of the Mishneh Torah with the Kesef Mishneh, Venice edition. There is an inscription that says that it was copied in Paris for a relative of our teacher Shimshon of Sens (one of the Tosafists) in 5103... I read through four or five pages of Masechet Horayot, and I found very many textual variants. I would have loved to have had the pleasure of looking through this Talmud, but the man ordered his butler to hurry my departure and did not allow me the time I needed.”



# Pnei Yehoshua

- ♦ On a visit to Frankfurt, the Chida learned of the consequences of the raging conflict between R' Yaakov Emden and R' Yonasan Eibshitz.
- ♦ R' Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, the Pnei Yehoshua, sided with R' Emden in his accusation against R' Eibshitz and was forced to move from Frankfurt to Worms.
- ♦ The Chida went to Worms to meet the Pnei Yehoshua, whom he described as having an appearance, “like that of an angel of God.”
- ♦ They spent a shabbos together and developed a close relationship.



# Shelichut

- ♦ The Chida traveled to Amsterdam, England, France and many other places.
- ♦ During his stay in London, The Chida toured the famous Tower of London. In his memoirs, he describes fascination over the magnificent treasure he saw.
- ♦ In France, he visited the French Academy of Sciences where he visited the library.



# Shelichut

- ♦ When the Chida returned to Yerushalayim, he rejoined the Yeshiva and sat on the rabbinical court of his teacher, R' Yonah Navon.
- ♦ In 1760, the Chida was offered the position of Chacham of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam but wanting to staying in Yerushalayim, refused.



# Egypt

- ♦ The Chida was sent on a mission to Turkey and on the way back stopped in Egypt. The conditions in Israel were difficult and many had moved to Cairo
- ♦ Two months after his arrival in Egypt, the Chida was offered the position of rabbi of Cairo. He accepted and delivered his inaugural sermon on Shabbat Teshuvah 1764.
- ♦ He served as the head of the Rabbinical Court in Egypt as well.
- ♦ Shortly after his arrival in Egypt, his daughter Klara took seriously ill. In 1765, he learned that his father died, and his daughter died later the same year.
- ♦ In 1769, five years after arriving in Egypt, the Chida and his family left Cairo. He decided to go live in Chevron, arriving there on 24 Sivan.
- ♦ In the next three years while living in Chevron, he made great progress in his writing including a significant portion of the Birkei Yosef. He also taught in the yeshiva in Chevron.



# Passing of His Wife

- ♦ In 1772, the Chida was asked to go on Shelichut again for the people of Chevron.
- ♦ While in Tunis, on 22 Adar, the Chida received a package of letters from Livorno. In one of the letters he read that his wife, Rachel, had passed away. He wrote that upon reading the letter, “the world went dark for me.”
- ♦ In order to avoid the Tunisian Jews’ insistence that he marry one of their own, the Chida mourned privately.
- ♦ After Sukkos 1773, the Chida intended on leaving, but the Tunisian Jews insisted he stay and even involved the Sultan. He stayed another 6 months and finally left on 24 Nissan, 1774. The townspeople accompanied him with live music, and was escorted by fifteen men on horseback.



# Children

They had raised 5 children, two sons and three daughters.

- ♦ Raphael Yeshayah, born in Yerushalayim 1743.
- ♦ Avraham, born in Yerushalayim 1753 before the Chida left for his first shelichut.
- ♦ Sarah, married a wealthy man in Livorno.
- ♦ Klara, passed away in Egypt in 1765
- ♦ Simchah, born in Egypt.



# Second Marriage

- ♦ On 7 Chesvan 1779, at the age of 55, the Chida married his second wife, a woman from Pisa, Italy named Rachel Levi.
- ♦ He chose to remain in Livorno Italy with his new wife to focus on his own studies and writing.
- ♦ Additionally, the Chida engaged in meditation and mystical studies and practices. He founded a society in Livorno called Hadashim Labekarim to study intensely and recite prayers the Chida himself composed.
- ♦ He was offered the position of rabbi of Livorno twice and refused.



# Legendary Tzaddik

- ♦ There are countless stories of miracles performed by the Chida that emerged from almost every community he ever visited.
- ♦ When ever asked about these miracles, he would answer, “the salvation was not in my merit, but in the merit of my fathers.”



# Passing

- ♦ It is unclear why the Chida never returned to Eretz Yisroel despite writing of a longing to go back.
- ♦ On 26 Kislev 1803, the Chida's second wife passed away. Afterwards, his health began to deteriorate.
- ♦ On Friday night of Shabbos Zachor, 1806, the Chida passed away at 83 years old. In his belt they found a will he had prepared in his final days asking, "Each day, ten people should come to the study hall and study eighteen chapters of Mishna."
- ♦ He was eulogized throughout Israel, Turkey, North Africa, Germany and Poland.



# Scholarship

- ♦ “From Yosef to Yosef, there arose no one like Yosef,” comparing R’ Chaim Yosef Dovid to R’ Yosef Caro. (Minhage Ha’Chida)
- ♦ “We always follow in his footsteps.” (Kaf Ha’Chaim 15:31)
- ♦ Rav Akiva Eiger and the Mishna Berura regularly quote the Chida’s works, Birke Yosef and Machazik Beracha.



# Writing Style



- ♦ The Chida had a highly developed sense of language.
- ♦ He emphasized brevity.
- ♦ Follows Sephardic style of halacha of avoiding pilpul and innovation and building on those that preceeded him.
- ♦ Travel journals display a sense of humor.
- ♦ Mussar was a fixture in his learning schedule and wrote several works of mussar.
- ♦ He wrote two important works of Jewish bibliography and historiography. Shem Hagedolim 1774 is the first scientific foundation for Jewish bibliography and his travel journal Ma'agal Tov 1834.







# Scholarship

- ♦ Chida published 3 volumes of responsa.
- ♦ He composed tefillos.
- ♦ He wrote several works of derashos.
- ♦ He wrote a book called Petach Enayim on the aggadic portions of Talmud.
- ♦ He wrote a book on the Rambam's mishneh Torah.
- ♦ He wrote numerous commentaries on the Pesach Hagadah.



# Shabtai Zvi



- ♦ The Chida strongly opposed the false movement of Shabtai Zvi, but he was careful not to reject or deride great Torah scholars.
- ♦ He continued to study and quote even those who had followed Shabtai Zvi.





# Chassidism

- ♦ He lives during the birth of Chassidism, though it didn't spread to Sefardic lands.
- ♦ He mentions Chassidim and its leading figures in several places in his writings.
- ♦ Chassidic sources suggest that the Chida was influenced by Chassidism and regretted not meeting Chassidic masters.
- ♦ R' Elimelech of Lizhensky said the Chida was sent from heaven to neutralize the destructive forces of the Enlightenment.



# Reburial

- ♦ The Chida was originally buried in the Jewish cemetery in Livorno Italy.
- ♦ In 1956, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chida's death, the Sefardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, R' Yitzchak Nissim launched an initiative to bring the Chida's remains to Yerushalayim.
- ♦ It took connections with numerous dignitaries worldwide, both political and religious to accomplish the task.





# Reburial

- ♦ On Sunday, 20 Iyar, the coffin was removed from the Livorno cemetery and sent to Rome. It remained at the Sephardic Synagogue there until the morning. It was then brought to Israel where it was greeted by a large delegation at the airport.
- ♦ Tens of thousands accompanied the Chida from Yeshurun Synagogue to Har Ha'Menuchos.

