

herself that her son was finally returning to faith's bosom, and prepared for me a *Talit* bag made of velvet, made sure there was a *Siddur* (Prayer Book) and *Talit* (Prayer Shawl) inside, and saw me off saying "*Allah ma'ak*" (God be with you) through her tears. I convinced myself that I was going to the mulberry tree in the yard, but enjoyed the solos that Ninyo, the conductor, gave me. Looking back, it is quite obvious to me that in doing this I was seeking the safety of a group without Ashkenazim.

My classmates soon learned what I was doing on *Shabbat*. There was disagreement among the boys. One turned up his nose on hearing "*Synagogue*", another's eyes popped out on hearing "*Sephardi*", one mocked the prayers, and another the singing. I realized that I must choose between the two worlds, and I chose the new. On *Shabbat*, everyone goes to the beach, they said. I too began going to the beach although I did not know how to swim. My *Sabbaths* became secular beach days."

I chose the new, but not through denial of the old. Wherever I went – the youth movement, the Palmach, the Kibbutz (where I still live today) – I brought along my entire self; not merely the new Amnon, but also the Shamosh family and Aleppo; everything. Everyone knew. I spoke to my mother in Arabic in the Kibbutz dining room, while she added some Aleppo dishes to our Kibbutz menu. Not only did I not hide or deny my origins, but felt I should emphasize them, although not out of conceit. In Hebrew there is no clear differentiation between pride and conceit. Pride is something positive; conceit is one of the most negative elements, it leads to arrogance, separatism and hatred.

I am proud of my city, Aram Soba, and of the well-rooted Jewish culture which flourished there. But the separatism of the Aleppo communities around the world is foreign to me, and I am amazed at their arrogance towards anyone who is not "one of us". Today I live in Kibbutz Ma'ayan Baruch, in the Upper Galilee. Geographically I am as close to Syria as possible; spiritually, I am far from the culture, the way of life and thought and the value system which characterized Jewish society in Syria. I am still nostalgic about Aleppo, I would very much like to go back and see the town; but I do not miss the way of life there, which exists no longer. In my stories I try to show it in its true light, I do not try to revive it. May it rest in peace.

N.B. Between the time of the broadcast and the preparation of this transcript, my brother Yitzhak, and my brother Tuvia and his wife Ada, in whose home I grew up, have all passed away. May they be of blessed memory.

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