



A FAMILY IN ALEPPO

By Amnon Shamosh

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

I remember my father. My clearest memory is of him lying in bed paralyzed. The story in the family was that the paralysis began when he fled the market where he had a goldsmith's stand. Rumors were flying that the Arabs were harassing the Jews and so, fearing that something might happen to him, he quickly closed his shop and ran home; when he arrived he collapsed. I spent my childhood in the fanatical city of Aleppo, in the north of Syria. We lived in constant fear, and there were valid reasons for this fear. Father never recovered from his sickness. He passed away when I was seven. Ever since I have carried with me the image of Father confined to his bed, in pain. As for the period before this, Father in the market or sitting on the little stool in the coffee house with the narghileh, these pictures are vaguer, obscured by a sort of dreamy haze. I see his stall in the market through a dreamlike mist.

I do not remember my father's family; not even my grandfather and grandmother on his side. We lost contact with them. Since I was the youngest son in the family, and as my father died at such an early age and, perhaps, for other reasons, our relationship was much closer with my mother's large family which had also been in Aleppo for generations.

I know little more of my father's family than that they have not left the Middle East since the time of the Exile; the family wandered through Turkey, Syria and Egypt, passing through Safed, Tiberias and Jerusalem, of course. The name Shamosh is, apparently, the Arabic construct form of the Hebrew word *Shamash* (synagogue beadle). We used to say in Arabic "*shomosh-el-k'nis*" (*shamash* of the synagogue). Presumably one of my ancestors was once the synagogue *shamash*.

