

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

1. Who was the first scholar of note that came from Baghdad?
2. When did the Arab government in Baghdad withdraw their support of the Resh Galusa?
3. How was the Resh Galusa, Rav Ukba, removed from office?
4. What was the profession of Natira and his sons?
5. Who were Rav Saadyah Gaon's principle supporters?

This and much more will be addressed in the eighth lecture of this series: "Baghdad".

To derive maximum benefit from this lecture, keep these questions in mind as you listen to the tape and read through the outline. Go back to these questions once again at the end of the lecture and see how well you answer them.

PLEASE NOTE: This outline and source book was designed as a powerful tool to help you appreciate and understand the basis of Jewish History. Although the lectures can be listened to without the use of the outline, we advise you to read the outline to enhance your comprehension. Use it as well as a handy reference guide and for quick review.

THE EPIC OF THE ETERNAL PEOPLE
Presented by Rabbi Shmuel Irons

Series V Lecture #8

BAGHDAD

I. Baghdad: The City of Old

A.

רב יהודה חלש ואתפח, על לגביה רב חנא בגדתאה ורבנן. ברכות נד:

Rav Yehudah was ill and recovered. R. Hanna of Baghdad and other rabbis went to visit him. **Berachos 54b**

בגדתאה - שם עירו בגדד, היא עיר החשובה שבבבל משחרבה בבל. רש"י ברכות נד:

Bagdatha: The name of his city was Baghdad. It is the most prestigious city in Babylon after the destruction of Babylon. **Rashi Berachos 54b**

B. After the battle by Buweib which was conducted in the month of Ramadan, less than two months after the battle of the bridge, Muthana decided not to give any respite to the Persian army which was situated on the other side of the Euphrates between Madain and Diardiaria by the Sib river which flows between them. He boldly decided to push his army all the way to **Baghdad**, which was less than a day's distance from Madain (Ctesiphon). There in **Baghdad** was a great fair which attracted merchants and wealthy [buyers]. He suddenly came upon the city with his cavalry. The city was full of the shrieking and cries of the masses of the merchants and men of great wealth as they looted the city. It was then that the Persians awoke from their slumber and saw that they would no longer be able to rely on the government of women and so they removed Boron from the throne and crowned Yezdegerd (in the year 634) as king. **Weill, Geschichte der Chalifen**

C.

ובתריה מלך מר רב נטרונאי כהנא בן מר רב אמונה ומן בגדד הוה ומן תותירא ברא. אגרת רב שרירא גאון 103

After him [in the year 748] ruled Mar Rav Natronai Kahana b. Mar Rav Emunah. He was from **Baghdad**, from the outer bridge. **The Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon p. 103**

D.

ובתריהן גאונים מפומבדיתא מר רב ישעיה הלוי בר מר רב אבא ומן כלואדי הוה מתא דמקרבא לבגדד ומלך בשנת ק"ז. אגרת רב שרירא גאון 109

After them (in the year 796) the following were the Gaonim of Pumbedeisa: Mar Rav Yeshaiya HaLevi b. Mar Rav Aba. He was from **Kalwadi***, a town in the close vicinity of **Baghdad**. **The Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon p. 109**

*Kalwadi is situated on the eastern side of the river Tigris, and became later a suburb of Baghdad.

II. Baghdad and the Resh Galusa

A.

וקם בתריה מר רב אברהם בר מר שרירא בשנת קכ"ז (שנת ד"א תקע"ה ליצירה) מלך תרתי סרי שני והוה מר רב יוסף בר מר רב חייא א"ב. ובפלוגתא דדניאל ודוד בן יהודה נשיאים אקרי מר רב יוסף בגאונות. ולבסוף נתפייסו עם מר רב אברהם ואמרו דתרויהו מר יוסף ומר אברהם מקרו גאונים. . . . וזמנא חדא (בערך שנת ד"א תק"פ) אתו לבגדד ואתרמו דהוו ביה כנישתא דברנא שלא בכלא רבתי. אגרת רב שרירא גאון 111

In the year 815 Mar Rav Avraham bar Mar Sherira became Gaon [of Pumbedeisa]. His reign lasted twelve years and Mar Rav Yosef b. Mar Rav Chiyah was the Av Bais Din. During the struggle between Daniel and David ben Yehudah, Reshei Galusa, Mar Rav Yosef was called upon to become Gaon. They finally made peace with Mar Rav Avraham and they decided that both Mar Rav Avraham and Mar Rav Yosef should be given the title Gaon. It happened that R. Avraham b. Rav Sherira and R. Yosef b. Mar Rav Chiyah (app. in the year 820) went to Baghdad in the synagogue of Barna Shalah at the Great Conclave. . . . **The Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon p. 111**

B.

ובאמצע ימי ישמעלים בימי דוד בן יהודה הנשיא אשתפלו מן שולטנותא דמלכא ולא אזלו רשוואתא דפומבדיתא בתריהון אלא כד ניחה להו לנשיאים למהוי להו רגלא בפומבדיתא אזלין להתם וקבעו להו. והשתא לא אשתיייר מכלהון דבי נשיאה אלא חד יניק. אגרת דרב שרירא גאון 91-93

In the midst of the reign of the Arabs in the time of David ben Yehuda (circa 825) the Nasei, the Resh Galusa, fell from power and no longer had the backing of the government. [From that time on] the Roshei Yeshiva of Pumbedeisa would no longer go there. Rather, when the Resh Galusa would want to have the assemblage in Pumbedeisa he would go there [to Pumbedeisa] and have it set there. At this time there is no one left of the house of the Nasi except for one child. **The Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon pp. 91-93**

C. In the days of David ben Yehudah, the Exilarch, the members of this family were removed from the service of the King; afterwards they tried to join the learned men and the Yeshivos, but were not received until they had accepted the conditions of the Yeshiva which supported them. These conditions were confirmed in the handwriting of every succeeding Exilarch. Such documents are still preserved in our archives. **Letter from Rav Shmuel b. Ali, Rosh Yeshiva of Baghdad, in the year 1170**

D.

וכשיוצא ריש גלותא כל העם יוצאין לפניו ולאחריו ואומרין לפניו דברי שירות ותשבחות עד שמגיע לביתו . . . וכל התלמידים שהולכין עמו ומלוין אותו עד ביתו אינו מניח אחד מהם שיצא מביתו עד ז' ימים ומאותו עת ואילך אין יוצא מפתח ביתו והעם מתקבצין ומתפללין עמו תמיד בחול בשבת ויו"ט ואם רוצה לצאת ולעשות צרכיו רוכב במרכבת המשנה במרכבת שרי המלך בבגדים נאים והולכין אחריו עד ט"ו אנשים ועבדו רץ אחריו וכשעובר על אחד מישראל רצים אליו ומחזקין בידיו ומסבירין פניו וכן עושה כל אחד מישראל שיעבור עליו עד שיתקבצו עליו כמו נ' או ס' עד המקום שהוא בא שם, וכשהוא חוזר אל ביתו עושין לו כזה המנהג ולעולם אינו יוצא עד שהולכין אחריו כל סיעתו ודומה בהליכתו כאחד משרי המלך. וכשהוא רוצה ליכנס לפני המלך לבקש ממנו דבר או לראות פניו מבקש משרי המלך הנכנסים אליו תמיד לדבר אל המלך שיתן לו רשות ליכנס אליו ונותן לו רשות על השוערים להכניסו וכשנכנס רצין לפניו כל עבדי המלך והוא הכין בחיקו זהובים וזוזים שיתן לאותם עבדים הרצים לפניו עד שלא יכנס והוא מכניס לחיקו ונותן לכל א"ו מה שיומן לו הקב"ה והם מכבדין אותו ואוחזין בידו עד שהוא בא ועומד לפני המלך ומשתחוה לו והוא רומז עליו שהיה עומד על רגלו אחת וסומכה בשניה עד שרומז המלך לא' מעבדיו עליו ולקחו בידו ומושיב אותו במקום שרמז המלך שיושיבנו בו. ואח"כ מדבר עם המלך והמלך שואל אותו על שלומיו ועל דבריו ועל מה נכנס אליו והוא מבקש רשות ממנו שידבר בפניו והוא מרשה אותו ואז מתחיל בהלולים וברכות המוכנים לו מקודם לכן ומסדר לפניו [כ]מנהג אבותיו ואבות אבותיו ומפייסו בדברים ערבים עד שעושה בקשתו ונותן לו שאלתו וכותב לו כל חפצו שיבקש ממנו ויוצא משם ונפטר בשמחה ובשלום. קונטרס נתן הבבלי המובא בסוף ס' היוחסין

When the Resh Galusa leaves [the Great Synagogue after his inaugural ceremony] all of the people present [surround him and] go in front and back of him and say before him words of song and praise until he reaches his home. . . and all of the disciples of the Yeshivos (Sura and Pumbedeisa) that went with him and accompanied him to his home are required by edict of the Resh Galusa to remain with him for seven days. From that time on, he does not leave his home. [However,] the people always gather and pray together with him, in the weekdays, on Shabbos and Yom Tov. If he feels it necessary to go out [to a specific destination], he rides in a chariot on a pair of that of the ministers of the King, wearing distinguished clothing. Up to fifteen people walk behind him together with his personal slave. And when he passes by a Jew [on his way] they run toward him and take hold of him and honor him [by making him part of the entourage] and so do they do to every Jew they pass by until he reaches his destination with an entourage made up of some fifty or sixty people. And when he returns home, the same procedure is followed. He never leaves without his entourage. His trips are like that of a minister of the King.

When he would want to have an audience with the king for the purpose of making some specific request or [simply] to pay him a visit, he would go and ask one of the king's ministers who had constant access to the king to ask the king to grant him an audience. The king would then grant him an audience and inform the guards of the palace to allow him in. When the Resh Galusa would enter the palace, the king's servants would invariably run out to greet him and he would then disburse (bribe them with) gold and silver coins from a purse he had prepared for them in his bosom. The amount of money he disbursed on this occasion [varied and] was in accordance with the blessings that the

Holy One, blessed be He, had bestowed upon him. They (the servants) in turn honored him and took him by the hand and escorted him to the king. He would then prostrate himself before the king and the king would hint to him to stand on one foot while being supported with the other. [This he would do] until the king would hint to one of his servants to take him by the hand and seat him in the place that he had designated for him. Afterwards, he would begin to speak to the king. The king would inquire about his welfare and his affairs and the purpose of his visit. The Resh Galusa would then ask permission from the king to speak in his presence. After he granted him permission, he would then begin to heap upon him the praises and bestow the blessings that he had prepared before hand. He would follow the protocol that had been followed by his forebears and would set him at ease with sweet and pleasant words until [finally] the king granted him his request and had it written up [in an official document]. He would then take leave of the king with joy and peace [of mind]. **The Account of Nasan HaBavli**

E.

ופעם בנו של דוד בן זכאי יצא למדינת פרס שהוא מרשות אביו ולא כבדוהו ולא נשאו לו פנים ושלח והודיע לאביו ואביו הוציא עליהם פתיחות וחרמות והודיע למשנה והמשנה הודיע למלך וכתב המלך אל מלך פרס לסמוך ידו ולעזור עליהם וכששמע מלך פרס והגיע כתב מלך בבל לידו שלח ידו בהם ונטל מהן ממון הרבה מפיוס (מפרס) שהוא רשות אביו ומכל פרוורהא וחזר לבבל ולא היה אחד מר"י מי שיערער עליו בדבר זה. סיפור נתן הבבלי

Once, the son of David ben Zakai went out to the district of Persia, which is part of the domain of his father, and he wasn't honored by them. He sent and informed his father and his father sends writs of excommunication. He [also] informed the vizier who informed the king. The king sent to the king (governor) of Persia to give aid and support in his efforts against them. **When the king of Persia heard about this and when the king of Bavel's letter reached him, he punished them.** He (the son) received much money from Persia, for this is part of the domain of his father, and from the surrounding areas. Afterwards he returned to Bavel. None of the Roshei Yeshivos objected to how the incident was handled. **The Account of Rav Nasan HaBavli**

III. The Gaonim of Baghdad

A.

ובתריה בשנת ר"א (ד"א תרמ"ט) מלך מר רב האי בר מר דוד [כפומבדיתא] שבע שנין ומחצה. אגרת רב שרירא גאון 114

שהיה דיין בבגדד שנים רבות קודם לגאונותו . . . והוא תחלת מי ששכן מן הגאונים בבגדד. שערי שמחה ח"א צד ס"ג-ס"ד

After him, in the year 889, Rav Hai bar Mar David reigned in Pumbedeisa for seven and a half years. **The Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon p. 114**

He was a judge in Baghdad for many years prior to his reign as Gaon . . . He was the first of the Gaonim to live in Baghdad. **Shaarei Simcha Volume I pp. 63-64**

B. All these things were in vogue in the time of our predecessors when they lived in Neharde'a, Sura, and Pumbedeisa, but now that we have fixed our abode in the big city of Baghdad, the custom has changed. **Responsa from the Cairo Geniza, Geonica**

IV. Natira and the Jewish Aristocracy of Baghdad

A.

אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: אומה זו כגפן נמשלה, זמורות שבה - אלו בעלי בתים, אשכולות שבה - אלו תלמידי חכמים, עלין שבה - אלו עמי הארץ, קנוקנות שבה - אלו ריקנים שבישראל והיינו דשלחו מתם: ליבעי רחמים איתכליא על עליא, דאילמלא עליא לא מתקיימן איתכליא. חולין צב.

R. Shimon b. Lakish said: This people [Israel] is like unto a vine: **its branches are the aristocracy**, its clusters the scholars, its leaves the common people, its twigs those in Israel that are void of learning. This is what was meant when word was sent from there [Palestine]. 'Let the clusters pray for the leaves, for were it not for the leaves, the clusters could not exist'. **Chullin 92a**

B.

ענין גלות עוקבא שהוא מזרע דוד שבא לאפריקי ונהג שררה בכבל שנים רבות והיה ר"י בימיו רב כהן צדק . . . נפלה קטטה ביניהם על רשות כרסאן מפני שבראשונה היו נוטלין רשות כרסאן לפומבדיתא וכל הנאה שתבוא ממנה לפומבדיתא תגיע ובקש רב עוקבא להשיב הנאתה אליו ומנעה רב כהן צדק והיו לו עוזרים יוסף בן פנחס וחתנו נטירא עם קצת פנות הדור עד שהוציא עוקבא מבבל וגלה למקום הנקרא קרמיסין דרך ה' ימים במזרח בבל. ובעת ההיא עמרם בן שלמה [ששנא] ר"י סורא. וישב עוקבא בקרמיסין עד שיצא מלך בבל לטייל בקרמיסין מפני שיש בה מים גנות פרדסים וכל כרכום שבבל ממנה הוא בה. וחויץ ממנה כמו חצי מיל מקום הנקרא שפראן ויש בו בנין יפה וכשיבא המלך לשם בו היה מטייל והיה בו בית א' גבוה שיעור ב' קומות והיו בו ב' צורות אחד של מלך וא' של פלגשו ובתחתיתו דמות סוס חלול ויצאו מים מן ההר ויכנסו בו ויצאו מפיו. והיה המלך בכל יום ויום יוצא לאותו מקום לטייל והיה עוקבא מכוון אותה שעה ועמד לפניו ומברך אותו בדברים ערבים ובשירים נאים וכך היה עושה לו בכל יום ויום עד מלאת לו שנה. וסופר המלך כותב לו שיריו ודבריו בכל יום ויום וראה שמה שאמר היום אינו אומר למחר פעם אחרת וכן עשה כל השנה מראשה ועד סופה. לאחר מלאת השנה הגיד הסופר למלך שלא היה עוקבא שונה הדבר מראש השנה עד סופה ובקש ממנו המלך שיתן סימן לדבריו כי לא האמין בדבר הביא פנקסו ושירי עוקבא כתובים בו ואין דבר שנוי ומשולש וצוה המלך שיכנס עוקבא לפניו. כשכנס א"ל המלך שאל מה אתן לך ושאל ממנו השבתו על כנו וכתב לו המלך מכתב כשאלתו, וכיון ששב היה קשה הדבר על נטירא ועל יוסף בן פנחס והנלוים עמהם והיו מדברים עליו אל המלך עד שצוה המלך שיצא והגלה אותו פעם שנית. וכתבו עליו מעם הארץ שלא יכנס בכל מלכות בבל לעולם ואם יכנס יחרם כל רכושו. ספור רב נתן הבבלי

The following is an account of the exile of Ukba, a descendant of the house of David, who finally came to Africa: He had reigned [in the capacity of Resh Galusa] in Bavel (Baghdad) for many years. The Rosh Yeshiva in his days was Rav Kohen Tzedek . . . An argument developed between the Rosh Yeshiva of Pumbedeisa and the Resh Galusa regarding the district of Khurasan (Eastern Iran or Afghanistan). Originally the district of Khurasan belonged to Pumbedeisa and they were its beneficiaries. Rav Ukba desired that the benefits be restored to him. Rav Kohen Tzedek prevented him. He (R. Kohen Tzedek) had support from **Yosef ben Pinchas and his son-in-law Natira together with some of the aristocracy of the generation** . They [finally] removed Ukba from Bavel (Baghdad) and he was exiled to a place called Karmisin (app. in the year 858), a five day easterly journey from Bavel (Baghdad). At that time Amram ben Shlomo (Sheshna) was the Rosh Yeshiva of Sura.

Ukba stayed in Karmisin until finally the following occurred: The king of Bavel would go to Karmisin [for a vacation and] go out for a stroll. This was due to [its flowing] water, [its luxurious] gardens, and orchards. It was the source of all of the saffron of Bavel. Besides that, a half a mile outside of Karmisin was a place called Shafran which had an exquisite building. When the king would go there he would stroll [about the building]. In it there was a room that was twelve feet high that had two sculptures: One of the king and the other of his concubine. Underneath them was a hollowed out horse. Water from the mountain would flow through the horse and come out its mouth. The king would [inevitably] take a stroll in that particular place every day. Ukba made it his business to be there at the time of his stroll. He would then stand before him and bless him with pleasant words and beautiful songs. This he did every day for a whole year. The king's scribe kept a daily record and wrote down all of his songs and words. He was [amazed] to see that the Resh Galusa had composed a different presentation for every single day of that year. After the entire year had gone by, the king's scribe informed him of this and the scribe proved it to the incredulous king by showing him the records of each and every presentation. The king then commanded Ukba to appear before him. When he entered, he asked Ukba: What can I give to you [as a reward]? He replied that he wanted his former position restored. The king granted him his request and wrote him an official confirmation. **Natira, Yosef ben Pinchas and his group** found it very difficult to tolerate the restoration of Ukba to his former position. They prevailed upon the king to exile him once more. [In addition] they had the populace write a writ of excommunication forbidding him to reenter Bavel. **The Account of Nasan HaBavli**

C. "By the payment of *jizya*, the Jews became *dhimmi*, protected subjects; were the tax to be abolished, Jewish blood would be shed freely." **Natira's** appeal to Caliph al-Mu'tadid (892-902) to continue the Jewish poll tax that he was about to abolish.
Cairo Geniza

D.
וכן כל חפץ ושאלה אשר יהיה לכם מצד המלכות הגד תגידוהו לפנינו, כי אז נצוה את בעלי בתים חשובים אשר בבגדאד. . . בני מ"ר נטירא ובני מר אהרן [ב"ר עמרם] . . . ואז ישיבו לכם מאת המלך כאשר יספיק ד' מעוזנו בידם. אגרת לקהלת מצרים מאת רב סעדיה גאון

Whenever you have transactions with the government I beg of you to let us know about them, so that we may command [the help] of the prominent members of the community in Baghdad . . . namely the sons of **R. Natira** and the sons of R. Aaron [b. R. Amram] . . . then the government will grant your request according to G-d's help. **A letter to the community of Egypt written by Rav Saadyah Gaon**

E.

ולא היו ימים מועטים עד שנפלה מחלוקת בין ר"ג ובין רב סעדיה ונחלקה מלכות בבל לשנים וכל עשירי בבל ותלמידי הישיבות וחשובי המקום היו עם ר"ס לעזור אותו בכח ממונם והסברת פנים אצל המלך ושריו ויועציו. והיה בכבל אדם חשוב כלף בן שראגדו עוזר לר"ג והיה בעל ממון ונתן ממונו ס' אלף זוז . . . ולא היה יכול מפני שהיו עם ר"ס בני נטירא וכל עשירי בבל . . . ונתקבצו כלם על כשד בן אהרן חותן כלב בן שראגדו . . . והלך וקבץ כל גדולי הדור לביתו והיה עמהם הר"ג ודבר אליו בפניהם מה המעשה הזה שעשית . . . וכשנשלם דבר זה ביניהם שמח כשד על הדבר שנשלמו על ידו. ספור רב נתן הבבלי

In a short period [after the appointment of Rav Saadyah to the position of Gaon of Sura] a quarrel broke out between the Resh Galusa, David ben Zakai, and Rav Saadyah. The kingdom of Bavel was split in two. All of the aristocrats of Bavel (Baghdad) together with disciples of the Yeshiva as well as the prominent citizens were with Rav Saadyah. They gave him monetary help and used their influence with the king, his ministers and advisors. There was a prestigious person in Baghdad, however, by the name of Caliph ben Sarajdo, who supported the Resh Galusa. He was [also] a man of wealth and he gave a sum of 60,000 zuz [in his support of the Resh Galusa against Rav Saadyah]. He was unable, though, [to unseat Rav Saadyah] due to the fact that **Natira** and the aristocrats of Baghdad were on the side of Rav Saadyah. . . . [After Rav Saadyah was finally unseated and the quarrel took on epic proportions] all of the populace gathered about **Kshad ben Aaron**, the father-in-law of Caliph ben Sarajdo. . . . He went and gathered together all of the prominent members of the generation to his home including the Resh Galusa and told them: could you allow such a thing to occur! . . . When they finally settled amongst themselves, **Kshad** was happy that he had been responsible for making peace. **The Account of Nasan HaBavli**

F. **Do you want to avoid my inflicting penalties on you that may affect you and your heirs for ever?** I shall refrain from it on consideration of a matter that will cause you no damage whatever. At the beginning of each month I need an amount of 30,000 dinars, which must be paid within the first six days to the infantry troops. However, I am usually not in possession of such a sum, either on the first or on the second day of the month. I want you, therefore, to advance on the first of each month a loan of 150,000 dirhams, an amount that you, as you know, will get back in the course of the month from the Ahwaz revenue. For the administration of the Ahwaz revenue belongs to you, and these moneys (from Ahwaz) are a permanent advance of money to you, to which I am going to add (as security) the amount of 20,000 dinars that are payable every month by Hamid bin Abbas. This will be the compensation for the first installment, and I shall be relieved of a heavy burden. **A letter from the Vizier Ali bin Isa (early tenth century) to the Jewish banker Yosef ben Pinchas**

TIMELINE**DATE****EVENT**

622	Mohammed and His Followers Flee to Medina (Hegira)
632	Mohammed is Succeeded by Abu Bakr
634	Abu Bakr is Succeeded by Umar
644	Umar is Succeeded by Uthman
656	Uthman is Succeeded by Ali, Mohammed's Son-in-law
661	Ali is Assassinated - Rift Among Moslems Regarding Succession
661	Muawiya I Comes to Power to Found the Dynasty of Ummayyads - Shiites Refuse to Accept Him or His Successors
750	Ummayyad Dynasty Supplanted by Abbasids
762	Caliph al Mansur Begins construction of Baghdad
766	Baghdad Becomes the New Capital of Islamic Empire
825	Resh Galusa is Removed from his Official Position
928	Rav Saadyah Gaon of Sura
942	The Death of Rav Saadyah Gaon