

27.9.2019

JERUSALEM

## EULOGY FOR MR. AZARIA LEVY AZIZOLLAHOFF

Exactly a week ago, we bid farewell to our beloved uncle Azaria, a special, quiet, modest and noble man; A scholar and a researcher.

Uncle Azaria was the son of Amin-Benjamin and Sarah Levy Azizollahoff, from the community of The Forced Converts /The Crypto Jews of Mashad, who left Iran in 1922 and came to Israel, then Palestine...

Uncle Azaria was born in Jerusalem on 1.4.1925, the young brother of Jacob, Ben Zion, Rahamim, Hanna, Ester, and Yocheved, God bless their memory, and the brother of Leah, may she live long and healthy life.

On the day he was born, The Hebrew University was opened in Jerusalem, on Mount Scopus, with the presence of Lord Balfour, what made the parents think to name him Balfour, but finally was named after his grandfather Azaria, father of Amin Aziz'allah.

Uncle Azaria grew up in the Azizollahoff house in the Bukharan Quarter of west Jerusalem.

In his book The Jews of Mashad, (1998,2006) Azaria wrote:

"Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, my father Amin-Benjamin tried to make a living from Carpet weaving industry. Together with a friend he bought a carpet weaving machine and started a carpet factory, but in the absence of skilled workers and markets for the carpets, he had to close the factory at an early stage. After a while he decided to move to Bombay, India, leaving Sarah and the children in Jerusalem.

At the time there were already a few Meshedi Crypto-Jews in India, involved in the pearl, gem, fur, carpet and spice trade. The Pearls came from Bahrein and Ceylon, the carpets from Afghanistan and Persia, and the furs from Turkestan,

Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was essentially the same business they had in Meshed...

Among the crypto-Jewish families, business was based on a network of sons, brothers and uncles, scattered in different towns, later countries.

One would buy merchandise and send it to the other to sell and vice versa...

So, my father Amin lived in Bombay and every 2-3 years would return to Jerusalem and stay with us a year or more. Thanks to his business in India we never knew shortage, and life in the family courtyard was pleasant as it was interesting.

In many rooms surrounding the courtyard lived numerus relatives and relatives of relatives...Many of the courtyard dwellers had diverse and useful talents. One played the violin, another sang well, and whenever there was a celebration, there was never a shortage of musicians to entertain the guests. Weddings Bar Mitzvas and other celebrations were held in the courtyard."

So, this was the atmosphere in which uncle Azaria and his brothers grew up. Together they learnt at home Jadidi, Persian in Rashi letters... then studied in Takhkemoni school and later in Alliance.

The sisters studied in Miss Landau school, later Evelina de Rothchild, in English.

In the courtyard a well was dug for fresh rain water, and the children used to pump water and drink directly from the well.

The jolly children and youngsters had great time together in the courtyard and around...

School was an experience in itself, mostly social and humoristic, but all brothers graduated Alliance school with perfect Hebrew, English, French, Persian, Arabic and Ladino.

Azaria's brothers turned to deal with commerce, like their father and uncles, but Azaria turned to another world, to the Academic

world...the world of books and researches. He studied History of the Jewish nation and French literature and dived into History.

Azaria dedicated his life to a Life Project Research about the History of his family and the Crypto Jews of Mashad...

Mashad, the extreme Moslem city in north Iran...

Mashad from which our grandparents, Amin-Benjamin and Sarah Azizollahof came to Jerusalem, under most difficult conditions, using donkeys, carriages and horses, trains and ships... via Afghanistan and India through the Red Sea and Suez Canal to Jaffa, and finally to Jerusalem...

Mashad, where our forefathers were forced to convert to Islam, in order to stay alive and led double life... Living seemingly as Moslems, but leading a full Jewish life under cover... Their Moslem neighbors called them Jadid al Islaam (the new Moslems) ...Kosher meet, synagogues, Brit Mila, Jewish weddings... They all had 2 names, a Moslem one and a Jewish one...

They even used to go on Pilgrimage-Haaj to Mecca, stopping on the way in Jerusalem, to put some money aside in order to build the 2 Meshedi synagogues, Haaji Adonia and Haaji Yekhezkel in the Bukharan Quarter of Jerusalem...

Our dear uncle Azaria dedicated his life to a vast and profound research of this fascinating chapter in the history of the Persian Jews of Mashad... He spent 6 months in London Libraries going through hundreds of Reports of British officers, consuls and Foreign Office representatives, who were stationed in Iran in general and in Meshed itself during those years.... thousands of research cards are still kept in the drawers of Azaria's desk... these were the basis of the articles and books he wrote on this unknown, at the time, chapter of our history... Azaria is considered one of the most important researches of the Crypto-Jews of Mashad.

Uncle Azaria was the first intellectual in our family, and we are all very proud of him and of the great effort he invested all his life in the research of our family and the Crypto Jews of Mashad.

10 years ago, Azaria got a reward from the Mashadi Community as a token of gratitude and appreciation to his important life project.

In 1955 Azaria married Rina Brandies from Antwerp, Belgium, the daughter of a diamond dealer family, who made Aliya to Israel, Jerusalem, and was interested in Persian arts and crafts...

She accidentally entered the antique shop of grandfather Benjamin in the center of Jerusalem, and wanted to buy a brass tray/Tass.

She didn't know how to polish it... Azaria offered his help... the rest is history... The tray is still there in their beautiful house in Jerusalem, a house which looks like a museum...

Together they lived modestly 65 years, studied and researched a lot...

He worked as a librarian in the National Library of Hebrew University in Jerusalem and she worked in Hadassah Hospital laboratories... together they travelled all around the world by themselves and in good health T.G.

In the last year, uncle Azaria started to get old... had difficulties walking, got weak and fragile...

Rina accompanied and assisted him all along with remarkable devotion! We appreciate and thank Rina from the bottom of our hearts for taking such good care of our dear brothers.

Last Thursday, Azaria was very weak... didn't drink or eat...he didn't want to go to the hospital... we arranged a hospital treatment at home... a nurse came in the evening to take care of him... Ora, his niece and Shlomit, Rina's cousin, came to help...

Friday morning, 22/9/2019, Azaria didn't wake up... He was deeply asleep... another nurse came... Zvia, his niece came in the morning...

later Yigal and me, Nava, his nephew and niece, came to be with Azaria and his wife, in his last hours...  
in the afternoon, 4.14 pm Azaria passed away, at home... in his bed...with his wife and 2 nephews around him, quietly... elegantly... peacefully...

In the last 2 years Jennis, a wonderful volunteer helped Azaria and Rina with extraordinary devotion... Thank you dear Jennis from the bottom of our heart!

In the last 6 months, Ebi, the personal assistant, who was like a son to Azaria, helped him in everything he needed daily...

Thank you dear Ebi for helping our dear uncle in his last months!  
God bless you! He loved you and appreciated your help so much, and thanked you publicly in front of us two weeks ago, saying:  
"I would like to thank publicly my dear friend Ebi, who helps me every morning in a way nobody can..."

Dear uncle Azaria, we all love you very much!  
We did everything to ease your last days and hours!

If there was anything, we did, which annoyed you, we ask for your forgiveness!  
We will always love you!!!

Dear Rina, thank you so much for taking such good care of our uncle all these years!

You inherit us today as your nephews and nieces!  
We will be with you and take care of you as much as possible with love and respect!

We wish you good health and long life.  
Lovingly  
Nava Levy Suesskind

Azaria Levy was buried in Jerusalem On 24/9/2019

May he rest in Peace....