Rabbi Raphael Meldola (Livorno 1754- London 1828)

Raphael Meldola (1754-1828), was the son of Moses Hezekiah Meldola (1725-1791), professor of Oriental languages in Paris. Raphael was born in Leghorn (Livorno), Italy in 1754. He received a thorough university training, both in theological and in secular branches, and displayed such remarkable talents that when only fifteen years old he was permitted to take his seat in the rabbinical college and received his rabbinical ordination from the famous Chida (Rabbi Chayim Yosef David Azulai, z"l).

In 1804 he was appointed as Chakham of the Sephardi community in London. Rabbi Meldola possessed of a remarkably virile mind, he was a dominant factor in the British Jewry of his generation. His scholarship attracted around him a circle in which were many of the most distinguished men of his day, including Benjamin Disraeli (first Jewish-born British Primer Minister) and Isaac Disraeli and it is noteworthy that he opposed the policy which produced the famous rupture between the later and the *mahamad* (the lay leaders of the Spanish and Portuguese community in London). He maintained a literary correspondence with many of the most prominent Christian clergymen and scholars of his time; and his acquaintance with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Canon ofWindsor led to his being received by King George III. He wrote the book Chuppat Chatanim (1797), on the laws of marital life. He also published sermons and memorial poems. His book Derekh Emunah (The Way of Faith) appeared with his English translation after his death. His son David Meldola (1797-1853), succeeded him as presiding rabbi though not as Chakham of the Sephardi community in London.

In the following Rabbinical Responsa, rabbi Meldola criticizes all those who are not careful to read the Tora or the Tefila, without knowing and without applying the laws of Hebrew grammar (diqduq). In the Hebrew section of the Responsa, he also criticizes those who pretend that correct Hebrew reading pertain to the area of Minhagim, and therefore, don't see the

correct reading of the Tora as absolutely mandatory. It is a worth reading text for all those interested in Hebrew grammar and its application in Jewish Liturgy.

“it is incontrovertible evident that the Torah or Divine Law, which is read in every Synagogue in the world throughout tho year, as also our Forms of Prayers which we address to God must be read correctly and distinctly according to the principles of Grammar, vowel points, &c, as the Prophet Nehemiah expresses, chap. viii., v. 8,” So they read in the book in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.” Agreeably to the greatest Authorities, both, ancient; and modern,’as Talmud, Maimonides, Shulchanaruhk, or the Code of our holy Laws, &c. and ‘which has been strictly observed by all our fathers from the lime of our great Lawgiver to the present day….”