Rabbi Eliyahu Hazan (1846-1908) and the Role of Secular Studies

Rabbi Eliyahu Bekhor Hazan

Rabbi Eliyahu Hazan (1846-1908) , son of Yosef Rafael Hazan, was born in Izmir, Turkey . His grandfather was Rabbi Hayim David Hazan, the author of *nedib leb* and the Chief Rabbi of Israel (Hakham Bashi and Rishon LeZion) in 1861. In 1856, when he was 10 years old and with the blessing of his parents, he was taken by his grandfather to Yerushalayim. There, he studied day and night for many years. At a very young age he was part of the Bet Din (rabbinical court) of Rabbi Abraham Ashkenazi. In 1866 his grandfather granted him his Rabbinical ordination.

In 1872 when visiting Tripoli (Libya), he was offered to serve as the Chief Rabbi of Libya, a very important and numerous Jewish community on those days.

The first task he took upon himself was to make some improvements in the area of education. In his most famous book,*ta'alumot leb* Rabbi Hazan describes the situation of the Libyan community in this area: "And I saw that the cause of their insufficient education in Tora and general studies (*derekh ereṣ*) is the lack of a proper Talmud Tora (a Jewish school), because the children attend some informal classes in the Synagogues… where there is only one teacher for 60 or 70 students at a time… and those parents who want to give a better education to their children are forced to send their children away to Europe or to the [private] Catholic schools in the area"

Despite some opposition, Rabbi Hazan founded a Jewish day school in Tripoli, in which Jewish children were given instruction in religious topics, as well as in other subjects, like mathematics and the Italian language, which was the most essential tool to guarantee that the students will have a *melakha* (profession or commerce). He also required that all school instructors would be certified teachers.

(*To be continued…*)

□□□□□□□ □□□□□□

Upon leaving Yerushalayim to establish himself in Libya he writes: *“My family and I left with a broken spirit the Holy city, the city of my ancestors’ graves… “*. In honor of Yerushalayim Rabbi Hazan wrote this beautiful poem “*ochil yom*“, where he expressed his deep longing for the Holiest city. **This piyut** is very popular among Jews from North Africa.