Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto (1565-1648), rabbi of Damascus, Siria.

The family of Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, came from Portugal. The famous patriarch of the family, Rabbi Yosef Pinto, established himself in Damascus the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal, in 1497. He was a wealthy and generous philanthropist, known for his kindnesswith those in need.
The father of rabbi Yoshiahu Pinto, also named Yosef, devoted his attention to the education of his son, and did not spare efforts to get the best teachers for him, making sure that his son would finish the six tractates of the Mishna, probably by heart, before the end of his childhood.
The main teacher of rabbi Yoshiyahu was rabbi Ya'aqob Abulafia, one of the greatest luminaries of Syrian Jewry. Rabbi Abulafia was a "musmakh", one of the seven ordained rabbis of his time. This point requires some elaboration. When the Jews left Spain and established themselves again in Erets Israel, one of the leading rabbis, rabbi Ya'aqob Berab, decided to "renew" the official rabbinical ordination, which could be issued only in Erets Israel. That ordination allowed the ordained rabbi (or musmakh) to legislate, not just for his particular community, but for all Am Israel. One of the first rabbis to be ordained in Tsefat (Safed) around 1550 was rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the shulhan 'arukh. Part of what makes the shulhan 'arukh a book with authority for all Jews is the fact the Rabbi Yosef Caro was a "musmakh". Those who were ordained could ordain other Rabbis. Rabbi Ya'aqob Abulafia was the grandson of rabbi Ya'aqob Berab, and was also a musmakh. The ordination had to be given with the consent of all living ordained rabbis. Rabbi Abulafia, with the other six ordained rabbis (musmakhim), granted the ordination to rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, who became one of the last rabbis to hold this prestigious renewed semikha. In the presentation of his books, one can notice the way Rabbi Pinto is always addressed by other rabbis "HaRab haMusmakh…" .
Rabbi Pinto became the rabbi of Damascus when the famous Rabbi

Hayim Vital died in 1620.

After a few years, Rabbi Pinto decided to leave his position in Damascus and went to Erets Israel. In one of his books, kesef mezuqaq, he explains why he left to Tsefat. His son, Yosef, was a genius, a prodigious Tora scholar, and Rabbi Pinto knew that the best Rabbis in the world lived in Erets Israel. Unfortunately, after a short time his son Yosef became sick and died at the age of 24. Devastated, rabbi Yoshiyahu came back to Damascus, and to find solace and consolation for his great loss, he dedicated himself to writing and publishing books.
Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto died in Damascus in 1648. His other son, Rabbi Daniel Pinto, moved to Aram Tsoba (Aleppo) and became one of the most important rabbis of the city.

HIS BOOKS

Rabbi Pinto was a very prolific writer. The first book Rabbi Pinto wrote was **kesef nibhar**. This is the only Hebrew book ever printed in Damascus. Kesef Nibhar is divided according to the wekly sections of the Tora (perashiyot). For each section there are two or more sermons (derashot). The sermons begin with the exposition of one Midrash, one of the fields of expertise of rabbi Pinto, and includes commentaries from the Talmud, the weekly Tora section and the exposition of selected practical Jewish laws (halakhot). Rabbi Pinto quotes very often, in this and in his other books, his teacher and mentor, Rabbi Ya'aqob Abulafia.
His second book, **kesef mezuqaq**, is also organized according to the weekly sections. But in this book rabbi Pinto writes mainly about musar (morality, ethics and Jewish philosophy). For example: the reason for the existence of man in this world; the ways to increase our trust in God (bitahon); the ways to appreciate the goodness and kindness of God to His creatures; the ways in which HaShem educates and teaches us when we suffer (yisurin, nisionot); the principle of divine reward and divine punishment; etc.

He wrote also a book explaining the Hagadot and Midrashim, called **me-or 'enayim**, and a book on Mishle, the proverbs of King Solomon, **kesef tsaruf**.
Finally, he most important book he wrote is **nibhar mikesef**, a

selection of his rabbinic responsa to a variety of Halakhic questions on the four sections of the Shulhan Arukh. In the introduction one can see the Haskamot, the licenses of approval to rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, the “Rab haMusmakh”, given by the prestigious rabbis of Aleppo and Damascus of his time. Click here to download the book nibhar mikesef. This edition was published in Aram Tsoba (Aleppo) in 1869.