

Introduction: Please be aware that we will not necessarily go through each of the sources in class. I provide them here for your edification and enjoyment.

I. Spain:

A. The Tragedy of the Spanish Expulsion:

The following account of the Spanish Expulsion was written by an anonymous Jew in Italy in April or May of 1495. (Note: During this period, there were numerous similar accounts floating around Italy. With a few exceptions, we do not know their authors).

The English translation is from Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 51.

“And in the year 5252 (1492), in the days of King Ferdinand, the Lord visited the remnant of his people a second time [the first Spanish visitation was in 1391 when mass riots resulted in mass conversions throughout Spain}, and exiled them. After the King had captured the city of Granada from the Moors, and it had surrendered to him on the 7th of January of the year just mentioned, he ordered the expulsion of all the Jews in all parts of his kingdom-in the kingdoms of Castile, Catalonia, Aragon, Galicia, Majorca, Minorca, the Basque provinces, this island of Sardinia and Sicily, and the kingdom of Valencia...

The king gave them three months’ time in which to leave...the Jews were to leave during May, June and July and be out of the country by August 1, the 8th day of Av...About their number there is no agreement, but after many inquiries, I found that the most generally accepted estimate is 50, 000 families [this would be about 250,000 persons. Other estimates run from 100,000 to 800,000.] ...[here the author cites some important rabbinic and intellectual figures who were forced into exile]. [the author cites numerous attempts made by Jewish leaders to avert or delay the expulsion, but without success]

Then they saw that there was evil determined against them by the King, and they gave up the hope of remaining. But time had become short, and they had to hasten their exodus from Spain. They sold their houses, their landed estates and their cattle for very small prices, to save themselves. The king did not allow them to carry silver and gold out of his country so that they were compelled to exchange their silver and gold for merchandise of cloths and skins and other things [ever since 1480 Jews and Gentiles were forbidden to export precious metal, the source of a nation’s wealth]. One hundred and twenty thousand of them went to Portugal...and they paid one ducat for every shoulder, and the fourth part of all the merchandise they had carried thither; and he [the King of Portugal] allowed them to stay in his country six months. This king acted much worse toward them than the king of Spain, and after the six months had elapsed he made slaves of all those that remained in this country, and

banished seven hundred children to a remote island to settle it, and all of them died. Some say that there were double as many. [King Juan of Portugal (1481-1495) did send a significant number of Jewish children to the island of St. Thomas off the coast of Africa]...

Many of the exiled Spaniards went to Mohammedan countries, to Fez, Tlemcen and the Berber provinces, under the King of Tunis [these North African lands are across the Mediterranean from Spain.] On account of their large numbers the Moors did not allow them into their cities, and many of them died in the fields from hunger, thirst, and lack of everything. The lions and bears, which are numerous in this country, killed some of them while they lay starving outside the cities...A part of those who went to Northern Africa, as they found no rest and no place that would receive them, returned to Spain, and became converts and through them the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled [Lamentations 1:13] "He has spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back."...

When the edict of expulsion became known in the other countries, vessels came from Genoa to the Spanish harbors to carry away the Jews. The crews of these vessels...robbed them and delivered some of them to the famous pirate of the time who was called the Corsair of Genoa...

Many ships with Jews, especially from Sicily went to the city of Naples on the coast. The King of this country was friendly to the Jews...and was merciful towards them...The Jews that were at Naples supplied them with food as much as they could and sent around to the other parts of Italy to collect money to sustain them...On account of their very large number, all this was not enough. Some of them died by famine, others sold their children to Christians to sustain their life. Finally, a plague broke out among them, spread to Naples, and very many of them died, so that the living wearied of burying the dead...

He who said unto His world, Enough, may He also say Enough unto our sufferings."

- B. ***Iggeret haShemad*** (Letter of Apostasy) or ***Maamar Kiddush Hashem*** (Discourse on Martyrdom) written by Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135-1204) in 1163 as a *Halkhic* and moral guide for the Jews of Spain who were facing forced conversion to Islam:

It is very important to note that these are just brief bullet extracts from one of the most critical Halakhic letters in Jewish History. The *Iggeret haShemad* was written by Maimonides in response to a North African Rabbi's stark condemnation of those Jews who had converted to Islam under duress in 1095 and 1148:

For a more in-depth analysis of this letter see Haym Soloveitchik's article

"Maimonides *Iggeret ha-Shemad*: Law and Rhetoric" in his *Collected essays volume II*

1. Individuals who convert to another religion in times of persecution did not accomplish the *mitsvah* of *kiddush ha-shem*, but nor are they blamed for *hillul ha-shem*.
2. If one is obligated to convert to another religion but the conversion implies **only a verbal compromise** (as is the case in Islam) and not acts, and it is possible to keep the Jewish precepts in secret, this is a legitimate way to confront this historical situation. And if a religious authority is asked for advice in this situation, he should counsel the conversion and not the martyrdom (since the martyrdom may likely leave children who will be forcibly converted).
3. In this situation, where one converts verbally, there is no blame placed on the person that converted to another religion, but only if he violates the Sabbath without being obligated to do so.
4. The obligation of the individual who has converted under duress is to keep the tradition and the laws as much as he can. And in the event that he violated a specific law, he should keep all the others (even if it seems to him as less important than those which he has violated)
5. Lastly, this situation is legitimate only in so far as he was unable to leave the lands of persecution. **The individual is obligated to move to another place where he will be able to fully practice Judaism at the first opportunity**, and if he decides to stay by his own choice, he is then considered to be *mehalel ha-Shem*.

II. Portugal:

A. Forced Conversion in Portugal March 19,1497. From the words of Bishop Coutinho of Seville: Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, 59.

"I saw many persons dragged by the hair to the font. Sometimes, I saw a father, his head covered in sign of grief and pain, lead his son to the font, protesting and calling God to witness that they wished to die together in the law of Moses. Yet more terrible things that were done with them did I witness, with my own eyes."

B. The Massacre of the New Christians of Lisbon, 1506. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 56-59. The following account of the massacre is taken from the Latin work of Geronymo Osorio (1506-1580), a Catholic prelate of Portugal who wrote the story of the reign of Emmauel.

“About the same time [a time of drought and plague and of high prices] there happened a great tumult at Lisbon, raised by the fury and madness of the rabble; in this almost all the Jews, who as we before observed, had been converted to Christianity, were cruelly massacred.

The affair was as follows: the greatest part of the citizens had left the town because of the plague, and many French, Belgian and German ships had arrived there at this time. On the 19th of April [Sunday afternoon about 3 o’clock] many of those who remained in the city went to St. Dominic’s church to attend divine service. On the left side of this church is Jesus Chapel, much frequented by people at their devotion. Above the altar is placed a representation of Jesus on the cross, and the hole, representing the wound in our Savior’s side, had a glass cover. When many people had fixed their eyes and attention on that wound, a lucid brightness shone from it. On this appearance many said it was a miracle and that the divinity testifies his presence by a wonderful sign.

Some one of the Jews, who not long before had taken upon him the profession of Christianity, with a loud voice denied it to be a miracle, adding that it was very unlikely that a piece of dry wood should show forth a miracle. Many indeed doubted of the truth thereof; yet considering the time, place and congregation it was highly imprudent for anyone, let alone a Jew, to endeavor to convince people of a mistake, when they were firmly persuaded the thing was true. The populace, naturally headstrong, inconsiderate, and apt to be struck with anything that appears marvelous upon hearing that a Jew derogated from the credit of the miracle, began to make an uproar. They called him a perfidious, wicked betrayer of religion and an outrageous and malicious enemy of Christ, and declared him worthy of torture and death.

Nay, their fury arose at last to such a degree, that falling on this unhappy wretch, they dragged him by his hair into the marketplace before the church, where they tore him to pieces, and making a fire, threw his body into it. [the mob was excited also because the king had that very day freed some New Christians arrested for celebrating the Passover.] All the common people flocked to this tumult, and a certain monk made a speech too well adapted to their humor at the time. In this he excited them with great vehemence to revenge the impiety of the Jew. The mob too apt of their own accord to be outrageous, by this means became the more transported with fury. Two other [Dominican] monks, at the same time holding forth a crucifix, loudly excited the people to slaughter, at every other word calling out: Heresy, heresy! Avenge the heresy, and extinguish the wicked race!

The French and German [sailors] quickly came ashore, and having joined the Portuguese, they committed great havoc. This cruel massacre was begun by five hundred, who were at last joined by several others. Transported with madness and

boiling with rage, they fell upon the wretched Jews, of whom they killed great numbers, and threw many half alive into the flames. By this time several fires were kindled near the place where the first offender had been burnt...the shrieks and outcries of the women, together with the piteous supplication of the men, might, one would think, have softened the most savage hearts into pity; but the actors in this horrid scene were so divested of humanity, that they spared neither sex nor age...so that above five hundred Jews were either killed or burnt that day.

The news of this massacre having reached the country, next day [Monday, the 20th of April] above a thousand men from the villages flocked into the city and joined the murderers, and the slaughter was renewed. The Jews, being under the greatest terror, concealed themselves in their houses; but the blood-thirsty rabble broke open the doors, rushed in upon them, and butchered men, women, and children in a most barbarous manner; they dashed the infants against the walls, and, dragging all out of doors by the feet, threw them into the fire, some quite dead, and others yet breathing life...

The third day [Tuesday, the 21st of April] those inhuman barbarians returned again to the slaughter; but they scarcely found any to murder, for most of the Jews who survived had either saved themselves by flight or lay safely concealed; yet some slaughter was committed. On these three days above two thousand of the Jewish race was murdered...

C. Excerpt from the Lament of Don Judah Abravanel (ca.1460-ca. 1535) for his son who was lost during the mass conversions under King Emanuel of Portugal. 1503.

From: *Medieval Iberia: Readings From Christian, Muslim and Jewish Sources* Edited by Olivia Remie Constable. Translated from Hebrew by Raymond P. Scheidlin

At the time the poem was written it is unclear if Don Yehuda believed his son was still alive and would receive the letter, or he was writing it *as if* his son was still alive. To the best of our knowledge father and son were never reunited, nor did his son ever return to Judaism.

[the poem begins by offering background to explain how his son came to such circumstances]

After he [King Juan of Portugal] died a foolish king arose
fanatical and hollow in the head,
who violated all the House of Jacob,
turned my noble people to his faith.
Many killed themselves, rather than
transgress the Law of G-d, our help in need
my darling boy was taken, and his good name,

the name of the rock from which I was hewn [Don Yehuda's son was named Isaac after his father the famed Don Isaac Abravanel] changed!
He's twelve years old...I haven't seen him since...

[The Poet now addresses his son directly]
You steal my very sleep with the thought of you--
Am I sleeping or awake? I cannot tell.
I cannot touch my food, for even honey
stings, and sweets taste venomous to me.
Miserably I nibble coal-burnt crusts,
moistening with tears my dried-out bread
My only drink is water mixed with tears;

But when I dream of your return, and when
I picture in my mind's eye how you look,
How good my fortune seems! The rose returns
to dress my cheek in sanguine once again.
I sleep and find sleep sweet; I wake
refreshed, delighting in your lingering image
The water that I drink is sweet, and even earth
tastes sweet when I imagine you are here...
The thought of you is joy to me and pain,
Tonic and torment are from you, balm and bane.
I have your image graven on my heart,
But also our separation in my core...

Now pay attention, son: Know that you
descend from scholars, men with minds
developed to the point of Prophecy.
Wisdom is your heritage, so do not waste
Your boyhood, precious boy.
Think of your studies as pleasure: learning Scripture,
Conning the commentators, memorizing
Mishna, reasoning out the Talmud...

Dear one, what keeps you with an unclean folk,
An apple tree alone amid the carobs,
A pure soul lost among the nations,
A rose among the desert thorns and weeds?

Set out upon the road to me, my dear.
Fly, bound like a fawn or a gazelle,
and make your way to your father's house, how sired you
(may G-d protect you, Who protected me!)
May the Lord give you smooth roads to travel...
I now commend my son to G-d, my shepherd,
and cast my burden on my Highest Father.
He will bring my dear son to my presence:
When I call my darling boy will hear.
Then I will sing a love-song to my Maker...
O may it please Him like the Temple rams;
My hymn, my words, like bulls upon His altar
And may He show me Zion in her splendor,
The royal city of my anointed king,
And over it, two luminaries, equals:
Messiah, son of David and Elijah.
May never enemy again divide her,
Or nomad pitch his tent in her again.

D. Excerpt From the Title Page of Rabbi Abraham Zacuto's *Sefer Yihusin (Book of Generations)*: Translation is my own.

[For the purpose of] Recording all the generations from the time of Moses our leader may his memory be blessed until the generation of the present author.
Also included in this work, are the words of the *Haham* the Ra'avad (Rabbi Abraham ben David III- 1110-1180) in his work *Sefer haKabbalah* [Book of Tradition] as well as most of [the work titled] *Seder Olam Zuta* (an early 9th century historical work)
He [the author] also added some of the "chronicles" of the gentile Kings...which he copied from the Greek sources and from the works of the great Josephus.
Besides for these [aforementioned materials], there are numerous other [historical] compilations from varied sources.