



כולל רבנים  
רבינו צבי אשכנזי

An Initiative of Amsterdam Community Kollel

## THIS WEEK IN JEWISH HISTORY

### 30 Tishrei

- Israeli forces trap the Egyptian Third Army on the eastern side of the Suez during the Yom Kippur War, 1973.

### 1 Cheshvan

- The Eighth Crusade ended, 1270.
- Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid arrived in Jerusalem, 1700. He died 3 days later.

### 2 Cheshvan

- Pogrom in Odessa took 300 Jewish lives, 1905.
- Mir Yeshiva was forced to close its doors after 124 years, 1939. Today, B"H, it is alive and well in Jerusalem.
- Nazis executed 10,000 Vilna Jews, 1941.

### 3 Cheshvan

- Last of 16,000 Jews of England expelled by King Edward I left, 1290.

### 4 Cheshvan

- Torquemada was appointed Inquisitor-General of Spain, 1483.

### 5 Cheshvan

- Jews of Landau, Germany, ordered to wear yellow badge, 1468.
- Yahrzeit of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer, 1874.

### 6 Cheshvan

- King of Sicily forbids decorating the outside of Shuls, 1366.
- Rambam reached Jerusalem, 1165. He and his family celebrated the date as a private holiday.

## WEATHERING THE STORM

RABBI MEIR KATZ



When Hashem instructed Noach to build the *Teivah*, He commanded him to cover it both inside and outside with tar. Why was this double protection necessary?

The *Teivah* was more than a vessel to survive the *Mabul*; it was a lesson for every generation. Just as Noach needed a safe haven from the raging storm outside, we too must create homes that protect our families from the storms of the outside world. We must be careful about which influences we allow to enter our homes, ensuring that the values and messages of the outside world do not undermine the kedushah we strive to build.

But the *Teivah* teaches us something deeper: it is not enough to protect our homes from the outside; we must actively protect what happens within them. Today, this means looking not only at what enters through our front doors, but also at what enters through our devices. A home may appear sheltered from the outside world, yet its screens can bring that very world directly into our living rooms and into the hearts and minds of our children. True protection requires boundaries both outside and inside.

This idea of protection, both from without and from within, is also reflected in the mitzvah of sukkah. We leave the security of our permanent homes and enter a temporary dwelling, placing ourselves beneath the protective shade of Hashem. Yet the sukkah also reminds us that our protection must be infused with holiness from within.

Remarkably, the word sukkah has the numerical value of 91, corresponding to the combined values of two Divine Names: *Adonai*, which equals 65, and the *Shem Havayah*, which equals 26. These two Names can represent the meeting of Hashem's presence in our physical world and His transcendent holiness.

# HISTORIC VISIT TO THE KEVER OF THE CHACHAM TZVI

More than 300 years after the Chacham Tzvi left Amsterdam under painful circumstances following a communal dispute, a special request for *mechilah* was made at his final resting place in Lviv, Ukraine.

Rabbi Moishy Bald, an avreich of the kollel, spent the Yamim Noraim in Lviv, assisting his father, who serves as the rabbi of the local community. During his stay, at the behest of the kollel and the Amsterdam rabbinate, Rabbi Bald organised a minyan to request mechilah on behalf of Amsterdam's rabbanim and Jewish community. Whilst the cemetery was destroyed by the Nazis during World War II and a market was later built over it by the Soviets, a memorial made up of *matzeivas* from the cemetery stands over the site of the *chelkas harabbanim*.

The initiative followed a visit to Amsterdam last summer by the Mevakshei Emunah Rebbe, organised by Rabbi David Szejnhauer. During the visit, the idea was raised of seeking forgiveness from the Chacham Tzvi for the distress caused to him during his tenure as Rav of Amsterdam and the circumstances surrounding his departure.

Rav Wolf, Rav and Av Beis Din of Amsterdam, composed a special text of *mechilah*, which was recited by Rabbi Bald.

The occasion was particularly meaningful for the Kollel that carries the Chacham Tzvi's name, and the gathering concluded with heartfelt tefillos that the Chacham Tzvi should be a *meilitz yosher* for Amsterdam's Jewish community.



# AMSTERDAM ASKS FORGIVENESS: THE CHACHAM TZVI AFFAIR

RABBI YISROEL MEIR INGLIS



*“Rabbeinu Chacham Tzvi, forgive us,*

*Forgive the Amsterdam community,*

*Forgive the Amsterdam Rabbinate.”*

This heartfelt plea for forgiveness was recited shortly after Yom Kippur this year in Lviv, Ukraine, at the final resting place of Rav Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi, known as Chacham Tzvi, who served as Rav of Amsterdam’s Ashkenazi community from 1710 to 1714. But what happened in Amsterdam more than three hundred years ago that prompted this journey to Chacham Tzvi’s kever? How did a celebrated rabbinic appointment descend into years of bitter dispute? What caused the relationship between Chacham Tzvi and Amsterdam’s communal leadership to deteriorate so badly? And how did that conflict end with Chacham Tzvi leaving Amsterdam, only for the city to seek his forgiveness more than three centuries later?

## A celebrated appointment

Amsterdam in 1710 was fast becoming one of the leading centres of Ashkenazi Jewish life in Western Europe. What had begun as a small Ashkenazi presence earlier in the seventeenth century had grown rapidly, swelled by refugees from Eastern Europe fleeing the Chmielnicki massacres. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, it had developed into an affluent and prestigious community of considerable size and stature. The kehilla wanted a rav of corresponding distinction, a scholar who would match the community’s growing reputation.

Their choice fell upon Rav Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1658 in Moravia, and having previously served as Rav in Sarajevo and Altona, he had acquired a formidable reputation as a talmid chacham and posek.

When Amsterdam approached him in 1710, the appointment seemed an ideal match between an ambitious community and one of the most distinguished rabbanim of his generation. The first signs of strain, however, appeared almost immediately.



CHACHAM TZVI, RAV OF AMSTERDAM,  
1710 TO 1714.

## A question of tenure

The first dispute concerned something seemingly straightforward: how long was Chacham Tzvi's appointment to last? When Chacham Tzvi arrived in Amsterdam, a disagreement quickly emerged over the length of his term. The *parnasim* favoured a three-year contract, in keeping with the common practice of the period, while Chacham Tzvi sought a longer term of six years. He had prepared his own version of the contract with a stated duration of six years, but the *parnasim* held firm and the final agreement retained the three-year term. At the very end of the contract, however, appeared the words: 'May he lead us unto eternity; in his light may we walk forever.' Those seemingly flowery words of blessing would later prove far more consequential than they first appeared.<sup>2</sup>

## Tensions beneath the surface

With the question of his contract seemingly settled, Chacham Tzvi set about his new role with energy. He established a *kloyz*, a forerunner of the modern kollel, which provided a framework for supporting Torah learning.<sup>3</sup> He also raised the standard of *kasbrus* by arranging access to kosher milk, and used his position to raise funds for impoverished Jews in Eretz Yisrael. In 1712, he also published in Amsterdam his celebrated *Shu"t Chacham Tzvi*, a collection of responsa that would go on to spread his reputation throughout the rabbinic world and would remain an important halachic work for generations.

Yet alongside these accomplishments, tensions began to surface almost from the moment he arrived. His son, Rav Yaakov Emden, records that upon his arrival the community arranged a banquet in honour of his appointment. Chacham Tzvi, however, insisted on examining the *shochet* before partaking in the meal. After testing him, Chacham Tzvi declared that the *shochet* was no longer capable of properly examining the *shechita* knife for imperfections and ordered his dismissal from his post. From that point onwards, the former *shochet* and his circle became bitter opponents of Chacham Tzvi.<sup>4</sup>

The episode was an early indication of the kind of Rav Amsterdam had appointed. Chacham Tzvi was uncompromising when he believed halacha was at stake, even in the face of strong opposition or at the risk of offending the communal leaders who had appointed him. That temperament would soon come increasingly to the fore.

Chacham Tzvi had walked into a kehillah already deeply divided. One of the sharpest disputes centred on rival chazzanim. The dispute had split the community into opposing camps, and only months before Chacham Tzvi's arrival the hostility had spilled over into violence. On Shabbos Shuva 1709, a public dispute in the shul had turned physical and was followed by communal measures imposing fines on those involved. Even before Chacham Tzvi's arrival in Amsterdam, one faction was eager to win him over, offering him an exorbitant bribe of twenty thousand gold pieces. Chacham Tzvi refused, saying he could not pass judgement before hearing the viewpoint of both sides. Once in Amsterdam, he ultimately sided with the opposing camp, thereby earning the enmity of powerful figures who would remain among his most determined opponents.

The hostility became intensely personal. Rav Yaakov Emden relates that one of the leading figures in the opposing faction went so far as to give his dog the name “Chacham Tzvi”.<sup>5</sup>

### The contract dispute erupts

It was against this increasingly bitter backdrop that the seemingly settled question of Chacham Tzvi’s contract resurfaced. In April 1712, the *parnasim* demanded that Chacham Tzvi produce his copy of the contract. His salary was already in arrears,<sup>6</sup> and they promised to pay what he was owed only after he handed over the document.

After initially refusing to comply, Chacham Tzvi eventually handed it over on 25 May. The following day the *parnasim* decided that his contract would not be renewed upon its expiration in March 1713.

In response to the attempted dismissal, Chacham Tzvi’s supporters filed a petition with the Amsterdam magistrates. They accused the *parnasim* of neglecting to enforce communal *takkanos*, as well as undermining the rabbi by allowing a visiting rabbi to deliver a *drasha* contrary to communal regulations and allowing the sale of meat, wine and cheese without the required rabbinic certification. These complaints were a preface to their main grievance, namely what they regarded as the arbitrary dismissal of Chacham Tzvi.

Meanwhile, the *parnasim* attempted to bolster their position by encouraging members of the community to file formal complaints against Chacham Tzvi. Amongst other grievances, the complainants alleged that Chacham Tzvi had charged excessive fees for officiating at weddings and performing other rabbinic roles. He was also the subject of wider criticism that he was overly concerned with matters of *kavod*, honour. The *parnasim* also compiled a lengthy written defence of their decision to dismiss Chacham Tzvi, alleging that he had failed to fulfil his obligations as Rav. They claimed he did not deliver *drashos* frequently enough and that the private weekday *minyan* held in his home, although expressly permitted by the communal *takkanos*, competed with the main communal service. To demonstrate that their position enjoyed broader support, they collected the signatures of eighty prominent members of the community.

The dispute now moved beyond the confines of the Ashkenazi kehilla. Rather than decide the matter themselves, the Amsterdam magistrates referred the competing claims to the leaders of Amsterdam’s separate Portuguese Jewish community, the *ma’amad*, whose opinion carried considerable weight with the city authorities.

At the heart of the dispute lay the ambiguity that had been present from the beginning. The *parnasim* maintained that the contract was explicit: a three-year term. Chacham Tzvi’s supporters, however, pointed to the wording at the end of the contract: ‘May he lead us unto eternity; in his light may we walk forever.’ This phrase, they maintained, was evidence that the appointment had been intended to be permanent.<sup>7</sup>

In September 1712, the Portuguese *ma'amad* delivered its decision. It found that the Ashkenazi *parnasim* had breached the communal regulations and could see “no sufficient reason” for dismissing Chacham Tzvi. Their recommendation was passed to the Amsterdam magistrates, and Chacham Tzvi remained in office.<sup>8</sup>

For now, Chacham Tzvi had won. His position had survived, and the attempt to remove him had failed. But little had actually been resolved. The *parnasim* remained convinced that ultimate authority over communal affairs lay with them, while Chacham Tzvi showed no inclination to compromise what he regarded as the authority and independence of the rabbinate. Within a year, a far more explosive controversy would bring those competing visions into direct collision.

### **The shadow of Shabbetai Tzvi**

Nearly half a century earlier, the Jewish world had been shaken by the extraordinary rise of a false messiah. Shabbetai Tzvi had proclaimed himself Mashiach and had attracted followers across Europe and the Ottoman Empire before stunning the Jewish world in 1666 by converting to Islam. For most of his followers, the apostasy brought the movement to an abrupt end. Others, however, refused to give up their belief. Many of these followers, known as Sabbateans, remained outwardly observant Jews, whilst secretly holding the heretical belief that Shabbetai Tzvi was the messiah. They developed a complex theology which was often covertly circulated in disguised Kabbalistic form, making Sabbatean beliefs difficult to identify and root out.

Chacham Tzvi had encountered Sabbateanism repeatedly during his life and had developed a reputation as one of its fiercest opponents.<sup>9</sup> It was therefore hardly surprising that when a wandering Kabbalist arrived in Amsterdam in the summer of 1713, he immediately recognised the potential danger.

### **A dangerous visitor**

The man at the centre of the coming storm was Nechemiah Chiya Hayyun, a wandering Kabbalist whose teachings and writings had already aroused fierce debate across Europe. By the time he arrived in Amsterdam in the summer of 1713, he had left a trail of controversy behind him. Hayyun had travelled from community to community, publishing his writings and seeking rabbinic *haskamos* for them. Wherever he went, reactions were sharply divided. Some rabbanim detected unmistakable traces of Sabbateanism in his writings and regarded him as a dangerous heretic. Others received him favourably and even granted *haskamos* to his works. He therefore reached Amsterdam carrying an unusual combination of credentials and controversy: his writings had been endorsed by respected rabbanim, yet contained ideas that his opponents believed concealed heretical Sabbatean theology.

Almost immediately after Hayyun's arrival in Amsterdam, warnings about his suspected Sabbatean beliefs reached the Portuguese *ma'amad*. Rav Moshe Chagiz, a travelling rabbi and determined opponent of Sabbateanism who was then living in Amsterdam, raised the alarm.

The *ma'amad*, after consulting Chacham Tzvi, initially took the allegations seriously, restricting Hayyun's movements until his writings could be investigated. A special *beis din*, headed by the Portuguese Chacham, Shlomo Ayllon, who had himself been suspected of Sabbatean sympathies,<sup>10</sup> was appointed to examine his books.

Chacham Tzvi was able to examine Hayyun's writings and quickly became convinced that his suspicions were justified.<sup>11</sup> Rather than wait for the conclusion of the Portuguese investigation, he publicly denounced Hayyun and his writings as heretical.<sup>12</sup> It was at this point that the dispute began to change character. The question had become larger than whether Hayyun was a Sabbatean. It was now becoming a struggle over who had the authority to decide.

The *ma'amad* was furious that Chacham Tzvi had publicly condemned Hayyun before its own *beis din* had completed its investigation. It responded by ordering, under threat of *cherem*, that all writings against Hayyun be handed over and that no one discuss the matter until a final decision had been reached. The dispute rapidly spread into the wider community. Rav Moshe Chagiz described being harassed in the streets and even receiving death threats from Chacham Ayllon's supporters.

After several weeks of deliberation, the Portuguese *beis din* delivered its decision. It cleared Hayyun of the charges against him, declaring that it had found nothing objectionable in his writings. Far from ending the controversy, the ruling only deepened it.

At this stage, Chacham Tzvi turned outwards. He wrote to leading rabbanim across Europe, circulated denunciations of Hayyun and appealed for support. His efforts soon began to bear fruit. Rabbanim in other cities condemned Hayyun, and some of the *haskamos* that had lent his books their appearance of respectability were withdrawn or even alleged to have been forged.

The result was a striking divide. In Amsterdam, the Portuguese leadership had cleared Hayyun and defended the authority of its own *beis din*. Beyond Amsterdam, however, Chacham Tzvi was increasingly successful in persuading prominent rabbanim that Hayyun was a dangerous heretic whose writings risked reigniting the Sabbatean controversies of the previous century. The dispute had now become a struggle over whose judgement on Hayyun would carry authority in the wider Jewish world.

## No way back

By November 1713, the confrontation had reached a breaking point. The Portuguese *ma'amad* sent Chacham Tzvi a formal demand: he was to withdraw his ban against Hayyun within three days, publicly retract his accusations and instruct any rabbanim abroad whom he had enlisted in the campaign to do the same.<sup>13</sup> Chacham Tzvi refused. He maintained that the Portuguese leadership had itself originally sought his opinion and that matters of heresy were serious enough to require rabbinic intervention, regardless of questions of communal jurisdiction. He was prepared to submit the dispute to impartial arbitration, but not under the threat of *cherem*.

The *ma'amad* responded by forbidding its members from assisting or dealing with Chacham Tzvi or Rav Moshe Chagiz. When this failed to produce the desired result, a formal *cherem* against both men was announced. The pressure soon extended beyond the Jewish community itself. Using their influence with the city authorities, Chacham Tzvi's opponents succeeded in having him placed under house arrest.

At the same time, Chacham Tzvi's opponents in the Ashkenazi community seized the opportunity to revive the old dispute over his contract. Outside scholars were asked to interpret the document, and this time some concluded that its three-year term was decisive and that the words "May he lead us unto eternity" were no more than a poetic flourish. Although the Amsterdam authorities did not immediately reverse their earlier support for Chacham Tzvi, he now found himself under pressure from both sides of the city's Jewish community.

By the end of 1713, Chacham Tzvi found himself squeezed from every side. The Portuguese *ma'amad* had placed him under *cherem*, forbidding its members from speaking to or associating with him; his old opponents within the Ashkenazi community had revived the dispute over his contract; his salary remained in arrears; and, through the intervention of the civic authorities, he had even been placed under house arrest. With his position in Amsterdam effectively untenable, he petitioned the magistrates for the salary still owed to him and for the expenses of his departure.<sup>14</sup> He sent his wife and children ahead to Emden, and on 3 January 1714 left Amsterdam by boat for Rotterdam, from where he continued to London.<sup>15</sup>

Less than four years after Chacham Tzvi arrived as one of Europe's most celebrated rabbanim, his Amsterdam rabbinate was over.

## Amsterdam remembers

After a period in London, Chacham Tzvi travelled through Germany and Poland and eventually became Rav of Lemberg, modern-day Lviv, where he died in 1718. More than three centuries later, representatives of the Amsterdam community stood at his grave in Lviv. The words composed for the occasion were careful not to reopen the old quarrel: "We do not come today to judge the people of those generations, nor can we know all that was in their hearts or all the circumstances of their time."<sup>16</sup>

Chacham Tzvi never returned to Amsterdam. Yet more than three centuries later, Amsterdam came to him.



MATZEIVA OF CHACHAM TZVI IN LVIV

<sup>1</sup> Chacham Tzvi was elected on 7 January 1710 by a substantial majority: 100 of the 151 votes cast went to him, with the remainder divided among three other candidates. His candidacy had also been strongly endorsed by the leaders of Amsterdam's Portuguese community, whose approval the Ashkenazi leadership frequently sought. See Judith Bleich, *Hakam Zebi as Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazic Kehillah of Amsterdam (1710–1714)*, pp. 50–51; Yosie Levine, *Hakham Tzevi Ashkenazi and the Battlegrounds of the Early Modern Rabbinate*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Much of what is known about the contract's drafting comes from the 1712 testimony of communal scribe Pinchas Jacobs, given after the dispute over Chacham Tzvi's tenure had erupted. Jacobs said the *parnasim* had instructed him to prepare a three-year contract, while Chacham Tzvi produced a six-year version. He claimed that, after a sharp dispute, a 7 was added to שש, "six", making ששז, "three", and that Chacham Tzvi insisted on adding the words "May he lead us unto eternity; in his light may we walk forever", even threatening the scribe with a ban. See Bleich, pp. 68–70; *Shu"t Chacham Tzvi*, vol. ii, no. 252.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Chacham Tzvi's *kloyz*, see "The Chacham Tzvi and a Precursor to the Modern Kollel," *Mesilah*, Vol. II, Issue 15, *Mishpotim* 5786 (Feb. 2026), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Rav Yaakov Emden records the story in *Megillas Sefer*, but the communal records do not fully match his chronology: they show that a new *shochet* had already been appointed shortly before Chacham Tzvi's arrival and was dismissed only days later. See *Megillas Sefer*, p. 26; Bleich, pp. 73–74.

<sup>5</sup> See *Megillas Sefer*, pp. 29–30; Bleich, pp. 70–73.

<sup>6</sup> Chacham Tzvi's salary was unusually high: 600 Reichsthaler, approximately 2,500 guilders annually, plus a residence. His predecessor had received 400 Reichsthaler, while even the Chachamim of Amsterdam's wealthier Portuguese community received no more than about 1,200 guilders a year. The expense placed real strain on an Ashkenazi community with only around 800 contributing members. See Bleich, pp. 51–52, 92–93.

<sup>7</sup> The Chasam Sofer later explained that a rabbi's fixed-term contract was intended for the rabbi's benefit: when the term expired, he could leave, but the community could not thereby dismiss him. See *Shu"t Chasam Sofer*, O.C. 205–206.

<sup>8</sup> See Bleich, pp. 102–103.

<sup>9</sup> His opposition long predated Hayyun. A legend preserved in Adrianople even claimed that when Shabbetai Tzvi demonstrated his supposed messianic powers by flying through the air, Chacham Tzvi duplicated the feat to show that it was no miracle. Whatever the story's historical value, it reflects his early reputation as a determined opponent of Sabbateanism. See Bleich, pp. 21–22; Jacob J. Schacter, "Motivations for Radical Anti-Sabbatianism: The Case of Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi," pp. 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> Ayllon's past was highly controversial. It was likely that he had, at one stage, belonged to the Dönme, the Sabbatean sect whose members outwardly converted to Islam while retaining Sabbatean beliefs. Rav Moshe Chagiz further accused him of having married a woman who had separated from her husband without receiving a Jewish divorce, and Ayllon appears to have remained married to her into his early Amsterdam years. Rav Yaakov Emden nevertheless relates that in 1718 Ayllon apologised to Chacham Tzvi and was forgiven. See Matt Goldish, "Hakham Solomon Ayllon: Amsterdam's Sabbatean Rabbi, 1700–1728," pp. 172–73, 179.

<sup>11</sup> Chacham Tzvi and Rav Moshe Chagiz initially struggled even to obtain a copy of Hayyun's book, eventually purchasing one at what Carlebach calls an "outrageously inflated price" so they could examine it closely. See Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> For decades after Shabbetai Tzvi's apostasy, many rabbanim had favoured silence, fearing that public controversy would only give Sabbateanism greater attention and legitimacy. The Hayyun affair marked a major break with that approach. Even Rav Moshe Chagiz initially urged Chacham Tzvi to wait for the *beis din*'s decision, fearing that his haste would "engulf the community in tumult"; he later concluded that the longstanding policy of concealment had itself allowed Sabbateanism to spread. See Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, pp. 76–80, 85–86.

<sup>13</sup> The *ma'amad* explicitly framed the dispute as one of jurisdiction: Hayyun, it argued, was not a member of Chacham Tzvi's Ashkenazi community, and he had therefore exceeded his authority by banning him and continuing the campaign after the Portuguese *beis din* had ruled. See Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, pp. 108–09.

<sup>14</sup> On 1 February 1714, shortly after Chacham Tzvi's departure, the Amsterdam burgomasters awarded him 767½ guilders in salary arrears and a further 200 guilders for rent. The *parnasim* counterclaimed, and the surviving records do not make clear how the dispute was ultimately settled. See Bleich, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Rav Yaakov Emden later wrote that his father chose to leave rather than pursue the dispute through the civic courts, lest "the Divine Name be defamed among the gentiles." See *Megillas Sefer*, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> The opening and closing quotations are from the text of the request for *mechilah* written by Rav Eliezer Wolf, Av Beis Din of Amsterdam, and recited at Chacham Tzvi's kever in Lviv on behalf of the Amsterdam community, 12 Tishrei 5787 (23 September 2026).