

Matsliach Matsil

Rabbi and Mohel

1877-1962

Matsliach Yitzchak Matsil was born in 1877. The oldest of seven children [4 girls and 3 boys] and the first male, he was called Bechor. His parents died when he was very young and, as the oldest in the family, it became his responsibility to raise his siblings. He married off his three single sisters and sent his two brothers [Harry and Morris] to the United States. He would wait until the passing of the father of



his wife [Amelia Levy] to make his own immigration, WWI further postponing his plans. It would not be until 1919 that Bechoraki would come to the USA. He already had five children [Isaac, Renee, Matty, Jeanette and Manny and five more would be born to him in the USA [Morris, Julie, Selma, Sol and Israel, who would die in infancy].

In the early part of the 20th century, Ioannina found itself in need of a rabbi and the community sent Bechoraki to Salonika to study for the rabbinate. He would also be certified to become the shoet and the mohel. He circumcised close to 600 male infants, both in Ioannina before he left, and in the United States, after he arrived, meticulously listing their names in a prayer book. Included among the circumcisions were five of his six sons and nine of his grandsons. Most were performed with no charge, especially those performed during the depression when money was so scarce.



Rabbi Matsil with his family

Initially, on his arrival in New York, in 1919, he went to work with his younger brothers at the bathrobe factory they had established [Matsil Brothers] at 628 Broadway. Even though he had helped finance this venture, his role in the firm would be short-lived. The younger brothers thought that Bechoraki's ways were too European.

Bechoraki Matsil was active in Kehila Kedosha Janina until the family moved to Brooklyn [first Williamsburg and then Bensonhurst] and then

served as the rabbi of the first Mapleton Synagogue on 66th Street [also called Kehila Kedosha Janina of Mapleton], a small Greek congregation housed on top of a large Ashkenazi synagogue, until his passing in 1962 at the age of 85.

His youngest son, Sol, has carried on the traditions, serving on the Board of Kehila Kedosha Janina and as past presidents of the Brotherhood of Janina and the Pashas.

We are indebted to Sol Matsil, the youngest son of Bechoraki, for providing us with the list of circumcisions, the inspiration for this exhibit.

We are grateful to Morris Matsil for providing us with Rabbi Matsil's Sefer Ha Sharashim which will shortly be an important part of an upcoming exhibit on Yanniote Siddurim. His daughters {Selma and Jean} provided us with the quills Rabbi Matsil used to inscribe the names of the circumcised boys. Sol Matsil provided us with Rabbi Matsil's prayer book, family photo and shofar.

We are exceedingly grateful to the children [Leon and Emmeline] and widow [Esther] of Manny Matsil of Blessed Memory for providing us with Rabbi Matsil's circumcision utensils.

We wish to thank the members of the Matsil family for their support in enabling us to tell this important story and to Marty Matsil for the suggestion that the story should become part of our website.

Rabbi Matsil would inscribe the names of all the boys he circumcised, using a personal prayer book to record the names, first on blank pages at the beginning of the book and, then, after those pages were filled, on blank pages at the end. In total, over 600 names of Yanniote males would be inscribed, from 1910-1919 in Ioannina, and the remainder in the USA after he arrived. He would record the hour, the day, the father's name and that of the child. When he circumcised one of his own sons or grandsons, he would add something special. Below is a translation of Rabbi Matsil's circumcision of his youngest son, Sol.

The year 1929

At 2:00 AM on the third day from Shabbat [Tuesday] the second day of Adar Rishon, G-d granted me a male child and he was circumcised by my hand on the ninth day of that month. And his name in Israel was called Shelomo [Solomon]. As he was worthy of the circumcision, so shall he enter to Torah, to marriage, to mitzvot and to good deeds.

Amen Ken Yehiratson