However, the conflicting interests of his financial and political careers led to his downfall, caused by the collapse of Menem's economic policy and the political and economic crises that ensued. Beraja was held responsible for the losses of the Banco Mayo, which had bitter consequences for the Jewish community. Beraja was placed in preventive custody in December 2003 and at the beginning of 2005 was still awaiting trial. He accused the president of the Argentinean Central Bank during the crash of Banco Mayo – Pedro Pou – of discrimination and antisemitism.

Beraja served in several international Jewish organizations and was the vice president of the World Jewish Congress and the president of the Latin American Jewish Congress and the Fedración Sefaradí Latinoamericana (FESELA). He promoted the creation of important new projects, like the Universidad Hebrea Bar Ilan and a Jewish video-cable station (ALEPH), which did not last. He was the recipient of the Jerusalem Award for Jewish Education in the Diaspora from the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

[Efraim Zaidoff (2nd ed.)]

BERAKHAH, ISAAC (d. 1772), rabbi and preacher in the Aleppo community. The support and encouragement of Elijah Silbirah enabled Berakhah to pursue his studies until he became a noted scholar. His *Berakh Yiẓḥak* (Venice, 1763), a book of homiletics, contains several sermons for each weekly Reading of the Law; they deal mostly with halakhic problems. He often mentions Maimonides' *Yad ha-Ḥazakah*, Samuel Eliezer *Edels, the *tosafot*, and the responsa of *Isaac b. Sheshet. In addition to halakhic problems, he deals with such questions as the *kavvanah* and joy with which one should perform the *mitzvot*. Some of Berakhah's responsa were published in S.R. Laniado's *Beit Dino shel Shelomo* (Constantinople, 1775). Abraham Antibi, one of his many pupils, eulogized him at his death. Berakhah's sons Ḥayyim and Elijah were also rabbis in Aleppo.

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BERAKHOT (Heb. בְּרָכוֹת: "Benedictions, Blessings"), first tractate of the Mishnah, Tosefta, Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. On its placement at the head of the order *Zera'im*, which deals with agricultural laws, see **Zera'im*.

The tractate deals with aspects of the daily liturgy (as distinct from the prayers of holy days, ritual readings of scripture, etc.). In keeping with the general objectives of the Mishnah, it is concerned primarily with the laws governing formal prayers and blessings, and deals only rarely or peripherally with the content, theology, or rationales for these prayers. These latter dimensions are discussed more extensively in the Tosefta, Talmuds, and cognate passages in midrashic works. Although the Talmud was able to identify some biblical foundation for the liturgical topics dealt with in the tractate, the Mishnah organizes the material according to a topical sequence, with only occasional allusions to scriptural sources. Study of other literature from the Second Commonwealth, especially the liturgical texts from Qumran, allows us to better understand the place of rabbinic prayer in the broader evolution of Jewish worship of the time.

Mishnah *Berakhot* focuses primarily on three liturgical categories: (1) the *Shema*; (2) the *Tefillah*; (3) miscellaneous blessings to be recited on specified occasions, especially on the enjoyment of food and other physical pleasures. A "blessing" is a formal liturgical unit that is usually recognizable by its opening "Blessed are you, Lord our God [Sovereign of the Universe] …."

Shema

Early rabbinic and apparently pre-rabbinic tradition interpreted the command (Deut. 6:6, 8) "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart … when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" and the similar expressions in Deuteronomy 11:18–19 as explicit directives to recite the passages in which those expressions occur (Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–21) daily in the evening and morning. This obligation was understood to be the fulfillment either of a separate precept, of the broader requirement to study Torah, or as a declaration of one's acceptance of the "yoke of the kingship of Heaven" in declaring "the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4) and the "yoke of commandments" in Deuteronomy 11:1, as understood by Rabbi *Joshua ben Korḥa (Ber. 2:2). A third section was added to the *Shema*, at least in its morning recitation: Numbers 15:37–41, dealing with the commandment of ritual fringes. The Mishnah (1:5) sees this as fulfillment of the obligation to mention the Egyptian Exodus daily, though this seems doubtful. In both its morning and evening versions, the *Shema* is embedded in a framework of blessings that relate to the natural transition of the times of day, the divine love for Israel that was expressed in the giving of the Torah (of which the *Shema* is a part), and hopes for redemption.

The first three chapters of the Mishnah deal with the regulations for reciting the *Shema*. Topics include: the designated times when it may be recited, the appropriate physical postures, the accompanying blessings, laws about interruptions and irregularities in the recitation (e.g., if it was inaudible or in the incorrect sequence), and instances when a person is exempted from the obligation.

Tefillah

Mishnah chapters 4–5 deal with the *tefillah*, the central rabbinic prayer whose standard version consists of 18 blessings and was to be recited in the evening, morning, and afternoon. The structure and text of the prayer are presupposed, but not set out, in the Mishnah. Although the sages linked the institution of prayer at fixed times to the practices of the biblical patriarchs and the schedule of daily sacrificial offerings, the content and set times of the mandatory *tefillah* are considered

to be of rabbinic origin, albeit influenced heavily by biblical themes. Topics dealt with by the Mishnah include the designated times for the three services, occasions when the full 18 blessings or an abbreviated versions should be recited, occasions when one may forgo the normal physical requirements of standing facing towards the Jerusalem Temple, aggadah-like traditions about the preference for spontaneity and a reverent state of mind, and some prayer customs that are forbidden, evidently because of heterodox associations.

Blessings

Chapters 6 through 9 of the Mishnah are devoted to the blessings that accompany specified occasions. The Tosefta (4:1) supplies theological and scriptural rationales for this practice: "A person should not taste anything before reciting a blessing, as it says [Ps. 24:1] 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.' One who enjoys the benefits of this world without a blessing has committed a trespass," etc. The *halakhah* in the Mishnah requires that the precisely appropriate blessing be recited for each occasion. Accordingly, different blessings are designated for fruits of the earth, fruits of trees, bread, other baked goods, wine, "the seven species" of Deuteronomy 8:8; and guidelines are provided for choosing the correct blessings when there are numerous foodstuffs.

Chapter 7 discusses the procedures for the concluding blessing after a formal meal or banquet, especially the "invitation to bless" (*zimmun*).

Chapter 8 consists of a list of disputes between the Houses of Shammai and Hillel related to blessings recited at meals. Some of these disputes, or the reasons underlying the respective positions, remain obscure, and several were transmitted in differing versions in *baraita*s in the Tosefta and Talmuds.

Chapter 9 contains a miscellaneous collection of blessings for various occasions, including places of religious significance, wonders of nature, life-milestones, and deliverance from danger.

The Mishnah contains traditions covering the full range of the tannaitic generations, including material dating from the Second Temple era (e.g., 1:1 cites the evening purification practices of the priests as a reliable sign of the advent of nightfall).

Both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds contain full tractates for *Berakhot*. The Babylonian is the longest in the Talmud (by word count), owing to its extensive collection of aggadic material, much of it appearing as loosely connected digressions. Although some of these passages offer valuable insights into the rabbis' attitudes towards prayer (often defined as a plea for divine mercy), the material covers a vast assortment of themes, including biblical expositions, hagiographical narratives, dream interpretation, and a great deal of folklore.

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[Eliezer L. Segel (2nd ed.)]

BERBERS, indigenous North African tribes who originally spoke dialects of the Berber language. Medieval Arab writers ascribed the ancestry of the Berbers to *Goliath the Philistine and maintained their Canaanite origin. The Phoenician colonization of Africa, the long Carthaginian domination, and the survival of Punic, a language closely related to Hebrew, supported these legends which spread among the Berbers themselves. Similar tales are found in the writings of Greek and Latin authors and in the Talmud which spread the legend that the Canaanites immigrated of their own free will to North Africa. It is said that the survivors of the Jewish revolt in *Cyrenaica (115–116 C.E.) found refuge among the Berbers of Western *Libya. Scholars have frequently claimed that the Jews' desire to proselytize found a favorable atmosphere among the Berbers from the first to the seventh centuries. African Christianity, whose early converts were Jews, clashed with Jewish proselytism. Archaeological discoveries, epigraphs, and writings of the Christian scholars Tertullian and St. Augustine, indignant at the growing Berber conversions to Judaism, attest to these facts. The persecutions by the Byzantines forced Jews to settle among the Berbers in the mountain and desert regions. Ibn Khaldun confirmed the existence of a large number of proselyte Berbers at the time of the Arab conquest of Africa. The Islamization of these countries, however, did not abolish all previous beliefs. Christianity was abandoned rapidly; Judaism continued to exist and – from Tripolitania to *Morocco – modern ethnographers and anthropologists encountered small groups whom they called "Jewish Berbers." These isolated groups of Jews lived in the high mountains of North Africa until the last few decades. Some scholars designated them as the descendants of Berber proselytes. In most cases they eventually intermingled with the rest of the population. However, the survival of such groups to the present is now doubted.

It is difficult to evaluate Jewish life in Berber society because Berbers did not have a written history. Berber history was completely oral. Thus, information on Jewish life comes from travelers who visited the Atlas Mountains, from a few written sources, and from interviews with people who lived in these areas. Two main sources are *Higgid Mordechai*, written by *Mordechai Hacohen*, a Jewish scholar from Tripoli who wrote about the Jews in Jabel Nafusa, south of Tripoli, and a statistical study carried out between 1961 and 1964 by the Mossad, the Israeli secret service, during the "Yachin Operation," in which the Mossad organized the *aliyah* of the Jews in the area.

Jews coexisted within Berber society. They had complete autonomy, communal organizations, and the possibility of practicing their religion. Jews were mainly occupied in trade