

Yigdal for the 2nd night of Passover in commemoration of the rebuilding of the great synagogue following the storm which struck Gibraltar in 1766

This is the story of a song from Gibraltar which was composed to sing only on the 2nd night of Passover. I don't think anyone remembers that song except our family, thanks to my dad.

A great storm struck Gibraltar on 30st January 1766, destroying much of the city and the great synagogue Sha'ar HaShamayim which was incredibly rebuilt the same year. This is a note that my father wrote on July 3rd, 1995, about this terrible event. The music file is in attachment.

Gibraltar and the Cyclone

By James Levy (my father)

"I was reading the newspaper "The Suburban" of 22 June 1995 when on page 26 I fell suddenly upon an article by Elizabeth Shields on Gibraltar. The article gave a very detailed account of the population and Jewish life in Gibraltar. Suddenly I read: Synagogue "Sha'ar Hashamayim" rebuilt in 1766 after a huge rainstorm. This information was familiar to me.

This revived my memories, and I would say made me remember the rest of the story. In fact, my family lived in Gibraltar from my dear father (Z-L) back to my great-grandparents. This goes back to the 1730s or 1740s and maybe even further ... So, they lived in Gibraltar when the famous "cyclone" happened. We do not know what it was exactly; a hurricane, tornado, tidal wave etc. After days of anxiety, the unleashed elements calmed down, the Merciful God (Bendito Dios!) has kept (most) people from evil, safe and sound!

All that I am writing, Papa had told me briefly, as we walked toward the synagogue on the second night of Passover...

He said to me: "You know, James, tonight is a big holiday, at the prayer of Yigdal*, you will hear a song you do not know, this music is to be sung only for Yigdal of the second night of Pesach to remember and thank God (Baruch Hashem) for the miracle which happened to our grandparents in this terrible storm. I never forgot his words.

The Yigdal begins, I marveled at first; a sweet song, musical, harmonious, joyful, rising to the sky. The synagogue is celebrating, everyone is singing, I see joy and happiness on their faces and in that second night of Pesach, I felt so happy to be with my dear Papa.

Note: The Shabbat corresponding to this event is called Gibraltar "Shabbat Hasdé" (if I remember correctly). In my book published "Shira Vesimha" you will find the singing of "Yigdal for the second night of Pesach" on page 9 of the directory.

James Levy

*Yigdal: Hymn sung at the end of the ceremonial observance.

We thank Him for his goodness and mercy, exalt and glorify Him for his glory and magnificence!

The Keys of the City: Sam Benady's writing blog

THE STORM OF 1766

The violent storms which batter Gibraltar from time to time remind us of the damage which Gibraltar can suffer during bad weather.

We are used to storms causing damage and occasionally death in the sea around Gibraltar, or even on the foreshore, but when we read that the synagogue was destroyed by the storm of 1766, we might ask ourselves how a building in the centre of town could suffer in this way. We must remember that in 1766 the town did not extend much farther up the Rock than Engineer's Lane, so that when the storm broke on 30st January 1766, the waters poured down from the Upper Rock, no doubt carrying rocks down as well, they were not diverted into drains or halted by buildings higher up but crashed directly on to the unprotected wall of the synagogue, bringing the building down.

A total of 60 persons died as a result of the storm and Major General Irwin, the Lieutenant Governor, wrote to London: "...since the misfortune at Lisbon, so dreadful an accident hath not happened to any town." ...

George Foxwell, a soldier on the Rock at the time, wrote in his autobiography *A Sinner Saved*: "The Jews' synagogue was demolished, and some Jews who were in it were buried in the rubble." Describing the aftermath of the storm, he says,

All hands were set to work, Turks [he probably meant Moors], Jews, and Gentiles, to clear the streets, repair the works, and create such temporary defenses as the nature of the place would admit of; but, notwithstanding the lower class of inhabitants as well as the troops were constantly employed, it was some months before the streets were cleared, and the damages repaired.

Extract from: <https://keysofcity.blogspot.com/2020/11/the-storm-of-1766.html?view=flipcard>