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JULY 20-JULY 27

around the world

Israel's currency, the shekel, is now legal tender

The shekel can now be used in trading overseas, with banks throughout the world converting shekels to other currencies, according to Israel's business daily *Globes*. Israeli companies also will be able to make payments in shekels to overseas customers.

The change comes after Israel received recognition from CLS Bank International, the international currency clearing system. Mexico's peso also was recognized. Official membership in CLS recognizes the shekel as one of the strongest currencies in the world, according to *Globes*.

from Israel

A winner of Israel's version of "American Idol" represented the country at the Eurovision song contest.

Boaz Maouda, 20, passed a qualifying round for Eurovision 2008 with the song "The Fire in Your Eyes." He advanced to represent Israel at the final in Belgrade and came in 9th with 124 points.

Maouda, who goes by the professional name Boaz, won the televised vote-off singing contest "A Star is Born" last year, dazzling spectators with a counter-tenor voice



trained in the Yemeni synagogues of his upbringing.

in Europe

Europe gets own main synagogue without a single stone being lifted.

The Brussels main synagogue, La Regence, was rededicated as the Great Synagogue of Europe in a traditional ceremony led by Brussels Chief Rabbi Albert Guigui in early June. Hosting the event was the Conference of European Rabbis, which represents Orthodox rabbis in more than 40 countries. Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, and Sir Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth of United Kingdom, addressed guests from the international rabbinic community, the Brussels diplomatic corps and the local community.



joke of the week

Two men went bear hunting. While one stayed in the cabin, the other went out looking for a bear. He soon found a huge bear, shot at it but only wounded it. The enraged bear charged toward him, he dropped his rifle and started running for the cabin as fast as he could.

He ran pretty fast but the bear was just a little faster and gained on him with every step. Just as he reached the open cabin door, he tripped and fell flat. Too close behind to stop, the bear tripped over him and went rolling into the cabin. The man jumped up, closed the cabin door and yelled to his friend inside, "You skin this one while I go and get another!"



famous rabbis

Rabbi Azariah Figo (1579-1647)

In the introduction to R. Azariah's classic halachic work *Giddulei Trumah* he bemoans the fact that in his early youth he had been excessively preoccupied with alien studies.

However, he had learned to concentrate on what was the primary field of study-Talmud. R. Azariah was born in Venice not long after the burning of the Talmud in Italy in 1553, when the state of Italian Jewish religious life and scholarship was at a decidedly low level.

It is a testament to R. Azariah's passionate devotion to his studies that though he frequently lacked the necessary texts to pursue his studies he nevertheless composed a work which became an immediate favorite.

Most of the *Giddulei Trumah* was written while he served as Rabbi in Pisa as a young man. During this period he wrote a number of questions to the great scholar R. Yissachar Ber Eilenburg, who included them in his *B'eir Sheva*.

In 1627 he returned to Venice to become a Rabbi and preacher.

His sermons were exceptional for their exquisite form as well as for their relevance to contemporary defects and problems. R. Azariah wrote them down in a rich, moving style but died before they were published. Seventy-six sermons (*derashot*) in all, mainly devoted to the different seasons and holidays, they were published the year after his death. In the forty eighth sermon he sees three causes for the ills that beset the Jewish people of his day: the contention and strife between one Jew and another: the failure to sense and recognize that they were in *galut* and the self-indulgence and pursuit of material pleasure; the shameless immodesty. The volume was called *Bina L'Ittim* and has had fifty editions.

Several years ago Rabbi Binyamin Efrati published *Ittim*, a 161 page volume presenting the essence of the ideas contained in the *Bina L'Ittim*.

R. Azariah also wrote a volume of *responsa*, which remains unpublished. www.ou.org

Trivia Time

In honor of Israel's 60th birthday this year we bring you the following trivia quiz. Good luck!

1. What is Israel's *Internet country code*?
2. How many seats are there in the Israeli Knesset?
3. Who appoints the Justices of the Israeli Supreme Court?
4. How many nature reserves are there in Israel (within 10)?
5. How long (+/- 10%) is Israel?
6. How long is the term of the President of Israel?
7. How long (+/- 10%) is the coastline of Israel?

1. .il
2. 120
3. The President of Israel
4. 150
5. 290 miles (470 kilometers)
6. 5 years
7. 170 miles (273 kilometers)

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