

# PREFACE

As dictated by Sephardic tradition, I carry my paternal grandfather's name: H elal Farhi. He passed away well before I was born, but I grew to know him through the various stages of my life.

As a child, I played with his medical bag and microscope. I knew that he was born in Damascus in 1868 into a family that was famous for their services to the Ottoman Sultans for over a century. An illustrious relative of his was Haim "El Muallem" Farhi who, from 1789 to 1819, was the Financial Vizier and de facto ruler of the medieval city of Akka and its province. In 1799, Haim refused to surrender to Napoleon's armies and was successful in defending Akka until Napoleon's retreat two months later. But the Farhi family also counted many rabbis, literary critics, men of science and diplomats, all of whom had played important roles in the life of the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire.

My grandfather first attended a local yeshiva where he studied Hebrew, the Torah and the Talmud. He went on to finish his education in non-sectarian schools where he mastered Arabic, Turkish, French, English and Italian. At the age of 18, and for the three following years, he was appointed General Secretary of the Ottoman Administration of Vilayet de Rachia el Wadi in today's Syria. At 21, he began Medical School at the American University in Beirut. My father explained to me how my grandfather's eventual move to Egypt was forced and brought upon by health reasons: as he pursued four years of supplementary studies in London, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. It was suggested to him to spend some time at a spa resort in H elouan, on the outskirts of Cairo where the dry weather of the Egyptian desert would be more beneficial than any European sanitarium. After his convalescence, he met Esther Setton whom he married and together they selected Cairo, Egypt, as their city and country of choice. They had two sons: Azar (my father) and Jacques and four daughters: Ren ee, Lily, In es and Fortun ee.

I was told many stories about his dedication as a general practitioner to generations of families. He would be called at all hours of the day and night and take his horse drawn carriage, a rare and elegant way of transportation at the time, to make his house calls. His compassion and concern for needy patients lead him to place the necessary money to purchase prescriptions under their pillows. In one case, after making a house call to a destitute family and seeing that they were sleeping on the floor, he bought them a mattress.

Crowds of people were common in front of his house as he treated impoverished people free of charge.

At an early age I leafed through the Encyclopedia Judaica to look up my grandfather's name for my own enjoyment or to impress a friend. It is with the same feverish anticipation that I would find his name time after time, admire his picture, and read with unflagging pride how much Dr. Hillel Farhi had contributed to the Jewish knowledge and literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I knew that after a whole day devoted to taking care of sick patients, he would spend his evenings deepening his knowledge of languages and philosophy, studying the Bible commentaries, translating the poems of Omar Khayyam and writing articles to be published in Egyptian newspapers (notably El Chams). These articles were multi-purposed. Some aimed to familiarize the non-Jewish community with the Jewish religion, while others were directed towards the Jewish youth to deepen their understanding of their ancestors' rituals and ethics. In 1935, he was one of the founders of "La Société de la Jeunesse Juive Egyptienne," the Jewish Youth Association in Cairo, and "La Société d'Etudes Historique Juive d'Egypte", the Jewish Historical Studies Association of Egypt to which he devoted the majority of his time.

By far the masterpieces of Dr. Farhi's literary work, which he bestowed on us, are without a doubt his translations from Hebrew to Arabic of the prayers following the Egyptian and Sephardic rites. Motivated by his compassion and sense of responsibility toward his fellow man, he undertook the great task of translating the daily prayers and those of the High Holidays. His style is pure and denotes his deep knowledge of both languages as well as the history of Jewish prayers. My grandfather carefully wrote the poems in verse, gave them a historical context, and added commentaries and references to the Bible. He pointed out the difference between the Sephardic and Ashkenazy rituals, and briefly alluded to the Karaite and Rabbanic rituals. Furthermore, he added all the dates and references of other German, French, English and Italian translations.

When I became a young adult, my father entrusted me with a blue velvet box. Inside were medals that my grandfather wore proudly at the end of his career. After 27 years of faithful service as Chief Doctor to the Egyptian Rail System, King Fouad 1<sup>st</sup> awarded him the Nichan El Khamsa medals and an official Royal certificate that I proudly keep. I also have a mantle clock that was awarded to him in August 1915 by the British Red Cross for his services rendered during World War I.

My grandfather was not only a man of science with a great heart, but also a poet and an artist who sketched with a keen eye all those who filled his life. He also conceived and compiled innumerable games, quizzes and puzzles which challenge us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century no less than they did in his time. His profound knowledge of languages formed the foundation from which he constructed an Arabic/English/Hebrew tri-lingual dictionary. Unfortunately, it remains unpublished despite my father's efforts. Among the invaluable keepsakes that I have from my grandfather is his draft of the Farhi family genealogy. This has inspired in me a passion for the history of the Farhi family and its achievements over the centuries. Each time I make a new entry or add a new family to the Farhi tree I am filled with affection for the man who propelled me into it. Today, the Farhi web site, "Les Fleurs de l'Orient" ([www.farhi.org](http://www.farhi.org)) extends not just to Dr. Hillel's personal documents but to a history of the Farhi who lived in the South of France in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as well.

I have always carried the deep conviction that I ought to safeguard the legacy of this wonderful man. The reprinting of the Siddur has been on my mind for many years, and I was encouraged to accomplish this by the numerous requests I received to obtain a copy. Many of these requests came from people who had owned one at one time and who used it in their daily prayers, but who had left their copy behind after their exodus from Egypt in the 1950's. Since the original galleys were lost, typesetting the Siddur for printing in Arabic and Hebrew would have been an enormous task. However, with the digital revolution, publishing a new edition became quite feasible. At the suggestion of Joseph Mosseri, a collector of Hebraic documents in Brooklyn, New York, I decided to reprint the first edition of the numerous editions that were made. We selected one of the two copies of the 1917 edition which my family had possessed. We had it unbound and bound back to its original condition after scanning and digitally cleaning all the pages. We were thus able to recreate the Siddur that is presented here. Mr. Joseph Mosseri was kind enough to write the introduction to this "recreated" Siddur and it follows this Preface. An obituary published in 1940 by Abraham Elmaleh, in its original French version, which serves as a complete biography of Dr. Hillel Farhi, is included at the end of this Siddur.

I would like to thank the many people who encouraged and helped me in this endeavor. My gratitude goes to Rabbi Mordehai Abergel of Magen Aboth in Singapore who supplied me with the Hebrew and Arabic fonts, Gilles and Lina Sion and Andrew Strum for their valuable advice. My sincere thanks to Bertho Farhi who personally knew Dr. Hillel and told me many stories evidencing the kind of doctor he was, and to my cousin, Lucien Gubbay, whose

conversations supplemented some fond memories and who gave me a copy of his portrait. I am also grateful to Joseph Mosseri for his introduction of Dr. Hillel Farhi's liturgy which follows this Preface and Mrs. Ang Soo Buay of Superskills Graphics for her continuous faith in the project and for her assistance through the pre-publishing process. To my son, Philippe, who helped me with the graphics, thank you. To my brother, Albert, and to my sister, Liliane, I am appreciative for your enthusiasm and encouragement. I am also grateful to my sister, Sarine, my brother-in-law, Maurice de Picciotto, my nephew, Jeffrey de Picciotto, my daughter, Sabrina, and my old friend Peter Thall for their editing skills. To Albert Hayoun, Ephraim Mozes and Gisèle Toueg, I am thankful for their suggestions and corrections. To my mother, Antoinette, I am profoundly indebted as this project would not have been possible without her locating a copy of the 1917 Siddur. And last, but not least, to my wife, Jeannine, for her graceful patience and understanding, I love you.

It is my great honor to present to you Dr. Hillel Farhi's Siddur.

### **Hélal Farhi**

Grandson of the late Dr. Hillel Farhi

*18<sup>th</sup> February 2003*

*Taipei, Taiwan*

### **Preface Update for Version 4**

The first Siddur published by Dr. Hillel Farhi was a 1913 edition in Hebrew only. After the success of the third edition of the 1917 Siddur, we continued to receive requests for reprints. We decided to add an English translation of Dr. Hillel Farhi's (Arabic) Introduction to the Prayers to this new edition. The translation was made in 2004 by Halfon N. Hamaoui (z'l), a family friend, and edited posthumously in 2010. We also added an 1940 obituary poem by Mourad Farag, a close friend of Hillel, and a Table of Contents with references to the 2003 (Arabic) chapters and pages numbers.

We would like to thank the late Dr. David Marzouk (z'l) and Lucien Gubbay for their contributions, revisions and editing of the English document written by Halfon Hamaoui' (pages 24 to 33), as well as to Jacques Farhi for his continued help and support, and to my daughter, Sabrina Farhi for the graphics and assistance with the layouts.

### **Hélal Farhi**

*18<sup>th</sup> February 2015*

*Boca Raton, Florida*