

**In Search of Memory:
Towards An Understanding of the *Baladhur*
By Rabbi Eliezer Brodt**

In a recent post at *the Seforim blog*, while reviewing R. Ovadiah Yosef's recent work, *Chazon Ovadia*, I wrote as follows:

"R' Ovadiah Yosef is world famous for his unbelievable memory, resulting in a tremendous bekius. I once joked that he must have had someone develop a computer program and attach it to his brain to help him retain so much information and recall it at all times."

To this, one anonymous commenter wrote as follows:

"Actually, there is a (unconfirmed) shmu'a that R. Ovadya partook of the Jewish mythological memory-booster known as Balzar. It is mentioned in different sources as being very dangerous, but granted one survives, it leaves the one who ingested it with a superlative memory. (The *Sefer Hakanah* refers to this when it says: "*chazor chazor, v'al titz'tarech l'balzar*"). The Chida is said to have accidentally ingested it as a child, and fortunately came away with only a few paralyzed fingers -- and a great memory. I recently heard a "ma'aseh nora" regarding someone who recently attempted to track this (grass?) down and how min hashamayim he was stopped. Very scary."

I would like to thank this anonymous commentator for giving me a great excuse to discuss this interesting topic of *baladhur*, the topic of the post below, which will elaborate on the anonymous above. I would like to explain some possibilities of what this *baladhur* is, whether or not it's dangerous to use, and list various gedolim who have actually used it. I will be tracing this through early Jewish and Arabic works – some rather rare and unknown – and I will, as well, provide the background to the authors of those works.

Memory Improvement and *Chazal*:

Methods for improving memory has been around for a considerable amount of time. *Chazal* were very concerned with memory, as originally *Torah Shel Ba'al Peh* was not allowed to be written. Thus, to ensure correct transmittal, a good memory was essential. Further, (and perhaps based in part on the above concern,) the *Mishna* in *Avos* (3:9) states if one forgets his learning, this "sin" is punishable by death. Indeed, throughout *Chazal* we find many different techniques to help one remember. For instance, the use of *Asmachtos*, according to some rishonim, is to aid memory. The use of *simanim* such as the one which appears in the *Haggadah* from R. Yehuda of *Detsach-Adash-Beachav* are also for purposes of memory. Many of these *simanim* are the subject of a recent sefer printed from manuscript of the Aderet called *Miglat Samanim*. [Additionally, there is an entire work devoted to explicating the *simanim*, *Simanim HaShalem*.] Aside from memory tools, we find many things one should refrain from eating or doing because it will cause one to forget. It is also commonplace, to find many different *segulos* (as opposed to *ashmachtos* and the like which have a rational connection to memory) to improve one's memory. R. Yehudah Aryeh (Leon) Modena devoted an entire sefer to this topic, called *Lev HaAreyeh*. Recently, R. Chaim Kanievsky has also written a complete work on this topic. Even more recently, R. Lerner has devoted a part of his now bestseller (currently over ten printings) *Shmirat Haguf VeHanefesh* to this topic. This year R. Avraham Zion printed a very comprehensive work on the topic, *Zekher Oseh*, some 562 pages gathered from many sources (pgs. 323-324 helped me a bit in my preparation of this post).

Returning to the memory segulah, some mention ingesting *baladhur* as one such *segulah*. *Baladhur* became so popular that it even became used in a *pisgam* used to remind one to review ones learning.

Early Usage of *baladhur*:

The use of *baladhur* has early roots. R. Emmanuel Loew in his *Die Flora Der Juden* (Vol 2 pg 203) cites a source that attributes this discovery of Baladhur to Shlomo Hamelech. *The Zohar Chadash* relates a story where *baladhur* was eaten to help them understand Torah; referred to as balad on pg. 8b Margolis edition.

Professor Gerrit Bos has written a very comprehensive article tracing this *baladhur*, regarding how early one can find that it was used at all and in particular to improve ones memory[3]. Bos provides examples showing how Galen was aware of the *baladhur*, but the earliest specific reference to it can be found in the writings of Alexander of Tralles (mid-sixth century), with subsequent references found amongst the Arabic physicians Ibn Masawayh (d. 857), Sabur ibn Sahl (d. 869) and ibn Yahya al-Razi (d. 932).

Ibn al-Jazzar, a famous Arab physician (d. 980) and medical author, wrote a treatise entitled *Risala Fi Al Nisyan Wa Ilajih*. This work is on “Forgetfulness and its Treatments.” In 1995 Gerrit Bos printed a critical edition of this Arabic text and all the subsequent Hebrew translations of this work, with an excellent introduction and commentary. The title of this new volume is “Ibn Al-Jazzar on Forgetfulness and Its Treatment.” (This work had been translated into Hebrew many times.) Ibn al-Jazzar writes about *baladhur* several times – how to use it exactly to help ones memory (pg. 50, 52, 69-70). For more on this work see [here](#).

We now turn to the Jewish sources advocating for the use of *baladhur* for improved memory. They include: R. Moshe Narboni,[4] R. Meir Aldabi (grandson of the Rosh), R. Yehudah Aryeh (Leon) Modena, R. Hayyim Vital and R. David de Silva (son of the *Prei Chadash*). R. Hayyim Vital, besides for providing a recipe for *baladhur*[5], writes that there were people who used to give it to their sons every day for *petihat lev*. [6]

What is *baladhur*?

Chulsis:

Now that we have seen that there is a history to *baladhur* (and later on we will discuss specific examples of *baladhur* use), we must now turn to the question of what exactly *baladhur* is. Meir Benayahu cites “old people in Jerusalem” that *baladhur* is תיחלה (*chulsis*). *Chulsis* appears frequently throughout *Chazal* including in the *Mishna*, *Tosefta*, *Talmud Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*. Many of these places are quoted by R. Moshe Perlman (*Midrash Ha'Refuah*, 1:80). [9] In *Masekhet Shabbat*, *chulsis* (140a) appears in a discussion about the permissibility of soaking it in water as a medical cure. The *Yerushalmi* (Shabbat 20:3) brings from Shmuel that *chulsis* is a healthy food.

The *gemara* in *Chulin* (58b) discusses whether swallowing *chulsis* renders a bird a *treifah*. Shmuel says it does, as it punctures the bird’s throat. But, the *Talmud* concludes that it depends whether it is the branch of the *chulsis* or it was swallowed in its liquid form. Additionally, the *Yerushalmi* in *Shabbat* records that R. Yehudah says that if someone eats *chulsis* on an empty stomach, he will start to burn up and his skin will start peeling. Rav Avuhah says he actually ate *chulsis* and luckily he was standing in water when he did so as the water cooled him down. From these sources it appears that *chulsis* is something very sharp physically, as it could harm the throat of a bird, and it also has a sharp effect on the body, i.e. raising one’s temperature.

The Rambam (*hilkhot de'ot* 4:8) writes that in the rainy season, one should eat a little bit of *chulsis*. The *Avodat Hamelech* in his comments on this Rambam references the two statements above discussing the effects of *chulsis* on body temperature. He most likely means to explain that the Rambam's source to eat *chulsis* is based on the *gemara* in *Shabbat* that says it's healthy, however his source to eat only eat a little bit is based on the *gemara* in *Chulin* that shows that eating a lot is dangerous.

R. Tanchum Yerushalmi writes that *chulsis* was a plant whose seeds are eaten for medical purposes (*Ha'madreich Ha'maspek*, pg. 151). Meiri writes that *chulsis* was used for heart problems, and R. Ovadiah Bartenurah writes that *chulsis* is something hot eaten by people in cold places (probably based on the above Rambam). [See also *Arukh Hashalem*, 3:421.]

Rashi in *Shabbat* (140a), *Avodah Zarah* (35b) and *Chulin* (58b) translates *chulsis* as א"רזל. *Lazei Rashi* does not know what this word means in old French (#1251), but א"רזל sounds like it's our *baladhur*. The Rosh states explicitly that *chulsis* is in fact *baladhur* and there is nothing as sharp as *baladhur* (*Avodah Zarah*, 3:166). The *Beit David* accepts that this is the correct definition of *chulsis* (*Yoreh Deah*, #36). *Rabbeinu Yerucham* writes that the *chulsis* is the *baladhur* and although eating it does not pose a problem for *hilkhot tereifah*, it is prohibited for another reason - *sakanat nefashot* (*Sefer Ha'dom Netiv* 15:5, pg. 121b). We see from the above sources that the definition of the "old people" quoted by Meir Benayahu has some support.

The *Shulhan Arukh* writes that if a bird eats something that punctures its intestines, for example, a branch of *chulsis*, the bird is rendered a *treifah* (*Yoreh Deah* 51:4). The *Prei Chadash*, after quoting the *Rabbeinu Yerucham*, says that it can't be that *baladhur* is deadly, as we know that people eat this *baladhur* and it helps the memory. According to the *Prei Chadash*, the method of eating *baladhur* was actually by means of a bird (I assume he means they ate birds that were feed the *baladhur*). He writes that although the *gemara* in *Chulin* says that it can dangerously raise one's temperature, this was only when it was eaten on an empty stomach, as it states explicitly. The *Tevos Shor* disagrees with this and he says there is a printing mistake in the *Rabbenu Yerucham*. He meant to say that *chulsis* is, in fact, *assur* because it renders the bird a *treifah*. When he says it is dangerous, he is actually referring to a something else mentioned there, unrelated to *chulsis*. The *Shulhan Gavoah* writes that the *chulsis* is *baladhur* and he heard that *baladhur* is extremely sharp and dangerous to eat, but nonetheless improves ones memory. The *Shulhan Gavoah* brings that in his country, Salonkia (Thessaloniki), there was a great *talmid hakham* who was famous for his memory and he later found out that they said this memory was a result of his eating the *baladhur*. The *Shulhan Gavoah* writes he is not sure exactly what the connection is between *baladhur* and a bird, but it seems that they would feed a bird this *baladhur* before *shehitah* and than one eats this bird.

Chulsis, thus baladhur, is Coffee:

The *Kanfei Yonah* cites the work *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* who says the *chulsis* is coffee! The *Kanfei Yonah* writes that although we know that coffee is not so sharp, being that the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* was a big *hakham* in his time, especially in medicine, we therefore must follow his opinion. Additionally, according to the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*, *baladhur* is coffee. The *Darkei Teshuvah* cites the *Maaseh Tuviah* that *chulsis* is the actual coffee bean, but not in its more common ground state. The *Malbim* in his *Alim Le'treifah* (Rambam, *hilkhot de'ot*, #21) writes that it's very hard to accept that *chulsis* is coffee, as *chulsis* is supposed to be extremely sharp and we know that coffee is not. (However, this truly really depends on the specific type

of coffee, as there are both sharper and milder strains.) Furthermore, the *Malbim* notes that today people drink coffee on empty stomachs and nothing happens, whereas the *gemara* said that your skin starts peeling and one's temperature rises. Therefore, he concludes it is an error to link coffee with *chulsis*.

The *Segulat Yisrael* dismisses the Malbim's question from the *gemara* in *Chulin* that the statement that *chulsis* will cause one's skin to peel and raise one's temperature is only when *chulsis* is eaten alone – that is, without water. But as coffee is typically mixed together with water, that is the reason we don't see this effect on people who drink coffee even on an empty stomach. Thus, the *Segulat Yisrael* concludes that coffee does help the memory a bit (pg. 33). This is then quoted in *Shmirat Haguf VeHanefesh* (2:794) to prove that coffee helps one's memory. The *Da'at Torah* writes that he experimented with coffee and never found it to be so sharp as to qualify for what the *gemara* is referring to so it can not be that it is *chulsis*[10].

Interestingly enough today medical studies show that coffee does help the memory (see [here](#)) although some of the sources seem to say it only helps women who drink coffee (see [here](#)). It is worth pointing out that that in the popular and excellent historical fiction work by David Liss, *The Coffee Trader*, one of the main characters, a woman, eats coffee and it has a profound effect on her.

It is clear that R. David de Silva did not think that *baladhur* is coffee as he has a special entry for the medical benefits of coffee in his *Peri Megadim* and he does not write its *Baladhur*. R. David de Silva knew what *baladhur* is as clear from the story with his grandfather (quoted soon).

R. Samuel Joseph Finn in his *Ha'otzar* explains that *chulsis* is Asa Foetida (2:93). R. Emmanuel Loew in his *Die Flora Der Juden* (3:454) translates it to mean Asa Foeitida. Dr. Katzenelson in his notes on the *Midrash Refuah* (pg. 147 is missing – by mistake – in the new reprint of this sefer) writes that *chulsis* is Asa goefida, and that Persians use it for spices. Professor Saul Lieberman also writes its Asa Foeitida (*Tosefta Kifshutah*, Shabbat, pg. 265 and *Baba Kama*, pg. 57). Yehudah Feilkeis, in his *Hazomach Vhachai Bamishna* (pg. 65), and Michael Sokoloff, in his *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramic Of The Talmudic And Geonic Periods*, translate *chulsis* to mean Asa Foeitida (pg. 456).

So it seems that *chulsis* is not the same as our *baladhur*.

So what is the *baladhur*?

R. Hayyim Vital writes *baladhur* is Anacardium. [5] Much later Ben Yehudah writes this same *baladhur* is Anacorde (*Milon*, pg. 545 "*Erech Baladhur*").

Gerrit Bos also documents that it is Anacardium which is the marking nut. Bos writes this is used even today in many medicines. Ibn Al Jazzar in his work on "Forgetfulness and its treatments" gives some exact recipes for this cure. R. Hayyim Vital gives an exact recipe for this *baladhur*. As noted above (at footnote three), Gerrit Bos brings different recipes for this cure.

People who used *baladhur*:

There is an old legend that the Rambam when he was twenty he had not learnt anything and he had been working somewhere. Than his master had to go out of town so he told him not to

eat from the *baladhur*. When the master left Moshe ate the *baladhur*. and he became smart instantly (see *Shivchei Harambam* pg 76) [Of course this story is not true at all historically and is an embarrassment to the Rambam as much has been written on another such similar legend to this in regard to the youth of the Rambam in the past few months.]

R' Avraham Kalifon, who knew the Chida personally [7], writes that the Chida, when he was young, ate *baladhur*. and as a result, the middle finger of his left hand became paralyzed (*Sefer Hachida*, pg. 185). Incidentally Meir Benayahu writes that the Chida had an incredible memory; he remembered whatever he saw (*Hachida*, volume 1, pg. 91). Others that have used it include the *Prei Chadash* and R. Chaim Saton - the author of the *Aretz Chaim* (Benayahu *Sinai* ibd).

Dangers of using baladhur:

R Avrohum Gibson in his *Omer Hashicha* writes of a person who he knew who heard of the Baladhur that it helps ones memory he went and used it incorrectly and died (pg 133). Benayhu brings that R. Chaim Saton mind was effected by his using of the *baladhur*. R Yehudah Aryeh Modena writes that people try different ways to help their memories one of the ways is thru the *baladhur*. However he does not recommend it as it's very dangerous he knew many people who lost their minds completely from using it (*Lev Haryeh* pg 13) [8]. R' Yaakov Emden says that one should be careful not to use the *baladhur*. because it's more likely that the person who takes it will lose their memory rather than gain memory (*Migdal Oz*, pg. 50).

Meir Benayhu printed a letter from a manuscript where the Jews from Fez asked R Yakov ibn Zor to write to R Yosef Konki that some of the *Talmidi Chachmim* who learn the whole day but forget some of what they learn had heard about the Baladhur. On the one hand they heard that it helps ones memory but on the other hand they heard that its dangerous if used incorrectly so they asked me to write to you R Yosef Konki being that they heard you use it successfully to explain how exactly does one use it. We do not have R Yosef Konki response (*Sinai*, 36, 1937, 67-70).

In the *Prei Megadim* of R. Dovid de Silva records an interesting story that happened with himself in regard to this *baladhur*. He had read somewhere the statement of Chazal that '*Chazor, chazor val titztarech l'Baladhur*' [more on this soon] so he went and started to eat a lot of this *baladhur*. His mother saw this and went to ask her father R Refal Malchi who was a doctor if what her son is eating is healthy. R Refal came and saw what his grandson was eating he gave it to him - telling him how could you eat something you do not know about it its something that could make you lose your mind he told him it is lucky you did not eat it wet. He told him the only way you could eat it with it causing damage is to eat it with a bird [more on this soon] (pg 58-59). [These two great people, R Dovid and R Refal will be the subject of an upcoming post.] Interestingly enough Meir Benayhu brings an old rumor that R Dovid's father the *Prei Chadash* used the *baladhur*.

Professor G. Bos brings many non-Jewish medical sources which also say how dangerous the incorrect use of *baladhur* could be. Bos even brings those who say that Galen died from using *baladhur* (pg 236). There was a 9th century Persian historian named Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri who lived at the court of the Chaliphs al-Mutawakkil and Al-Musta'in and was tutor to the son of al-Mutazz. He died in 892 as the result of using a drug called Baladhur, hence his name.

Recent Usage of *baladhur*:

In a recent printing of *Lev Ha-Aryeh*, R. E. Monzor writes (pg. 31 and on) that he asked his father and many experts in ancient seforim about this *baladhur*, and he was told that this *refuah* consists of a few different plants, and the mixture must be exact. He writes about R. Yaakov Katzin, who had a phenomenal memory. He writes that he remembers when he was young, that people heard of the *baladhur*, and there were three rabbanim who used it. These rabbanim went to consult someone who was an expert in the correct measurements of *baladhur*. After using it each one suffered from different side effects. One was cold even the summer and R. Yaakov Katzin (who was known for having an incredible memory), who was one of the three, had problems with his intestines. In the *Or Torah* Journal (Tishrei 5751): 10, there is another source which also claims that he heard that R. Yaakov Katzin used *baladhur*. In the same journal in a later issue (Tevet 5751): 280, there is a source which brings from R. Ovadiah Yosef that a rebbi of his, R. Eliyahu Lupas, went to purchase this *baladhur* and the seller told him that it does not really help.

Sources for the *Pisgam*, ‘*Chazor, Chazor V'al Titztarech l'Baladhur*’:

As I have mentioned earlier this *baladhur*, was used in a *Pisgam* (saying) to remind one to review his learnings. In regard to the sources and evolvement of this *pisgam* of ‘*Chazor, Chazor V'al Titztarech l'Baladhur*’. One of the first places to consult is as always the *Alpah Beta Kadmita D'shemuel Zeirah* of R. Shmuel Askenazi. R. Askenazi has a short comment about it (pg. 595) and then he writes more will be in the second volume. In the back of the sefer amongst the list of future topics he plans on writing about he mentions that this *pisgam* is one of the topics of the next sefer (pg. 842). For whatever reasons, as of now volume two is not happening. So I asked R. Askenazi if he could give me the material he was planning on printing but unfortunately thus far, he was unable to locate the material. So – as the saying goes – *Bemokom Shein Ish*, I will attempt to trace it a bit, in a similar style to R. Ashkenazi.

One of the first sources is found in a sefer recently printed from manuscript from R. Yosef Alashkar in his *Marchevet Hamishna* on the *Mishneh* in *Avot* (pg. 139) (see my forthcoming post at the Seforim blog on this topic) where he brings this quote רודלב לך רטצת לאו רוזה רוזה. R. Yosef Alashkar was a youngster during the Spanish Expulsion. A bit earlier, the *Abarbanel* in his commentary on *Avot*, entitled *Nachalat Avot* (pg. 351) brings this same exact quote. R. Tobias Cohen in his *Ma'aseh Tuviah* (pg. 133b) brings this quote but adds that it's mentioned in the gemara. R. David de Silva, a younger contemporary of R. Tobias Cohen also quotes this statement saying it is from Chazal in his *Peri Megadim* (pg 59). R. Jacob Emden in *Migdal Oz* (pg. 100) brings the same quote except he says רוזאלב. Professor Simha Assaf printed a letter from manuscript that a *melamad* in Italy who instructed his students רוזה קר רוזה רוזה apparently this is alluding to our *pisgam* (*Toldos Hachinch Byisroel* 2:391). R. Yehezkel Feivel, in his *Toldot Adam*, writes "that there is a famous *Mamaor* that people say רוזה רוזה רוזה (vol 1 pg 70)." Levinsohn in his *Zerubavel* already writes the source for this *Toldot Adam* is the *Ma'aseh Tuviah* (pg 42). This *pisgam* is also found in the *Tiferet Yisrael* to *Avot* 1:4.

Azariah de Rossi also alludes to our *pisgam* at the end of chapter 59 of *Meor Einayim*:
החכשה דגן רודאלבו מינינעה תנבהל תוארפרפ אלא מניאש מימעטה.

R. Yehudah Aryeh (Leon) Modena in *Lev Ha-Aryeh* brings it a bit different claiming, its from *chazal* רוזה רוזה לאו רוזה רוזה (pg 7).

R. David Pardo writes it a little different ר"ודה ל"בל ךרתסת לאו רוזה רוזה (*Shu"t Michtam LeDavid, Yoreh Deah*, pg 87b).

The *Da'at Torah* writes this *baladhur* is what the *Sefer Hakanah* is talking about when he says רוזבל ךרטצת לאו רוזה רוזה. From here the *Sefer Hakanah* is quoted by many amongst them R. Menachem Mendel Kregel (in his notes *Menachim Zion* on *Shem Hagdolim* (pg. 146, note 18), *Sefer Hameshalim V'Hapisgamim* (by C. Bialik and Y. Rivinski, pg. 167) and R. Lerner in his *Shmirat Haguf VeHanefesh* (2:794). However both Meir Benayahu and R. Shmuel Ashkenazi have pointed out that all these people are quoting it wrong, as the *Sefer Hakanah* does not talk about it, rather the **author** of the *Sefer Hakanah* does, in a different work of his, the *Sefer Hapliah*. However the *Sefer Hapliah* does not bring the *pisgam* the same way the *Da'at Torah* quotes it. Rather, he says רוזבלבמ הפי רוזה רוזה. (Volume 2, pg. 17a)

Interestingly enough R. Yisrael Tayber writes in his book *Mikveh Yisrael* (which is a biography of the author of the *Terumat HaDeshen*) that the *Terumat HaDeshen* used to say this *pisgam* to his talmidim however, he brings no source for this statement (pg. 16). R. Tauber notes that the *Ma'aseh Tuviah* cites this quote from *chazal*. R. Yosef Halpern suggests that the *Ma'aseh Tuviah* is incorrect, because it is a *Sefer Hakoneh* not a *chazal*. [11] But then R. Halpern concludes that perhaps the *Ma'aseh Tuviah* is correct because the *Sefer Hakoneh* is a sefer of *chazal* (*Kuntres Me'at Zri* pgs. 8-9). Now, R. Yosef Halpern is incorrect for a few reasons first of all, the *Ma'aseh Tuviah* specifically says it found in the *gemara* second of all, its in the *Sefer Hapliah* and not in the *sefer Hakoneh* and third of all, most agree today that *Sefer Hakoneh* and *Sefer Hapliah* are much later from the times of the late *rishonim*.

Notes:

I would like to thank Professors Gerrit Bos and Zohar Amar for their helpful articles; to Manuscript boy and R. Motti Jacobowitz for their help with finding some references; and, as always, thank you to Dan Rabinowitz and Menachem Butler of the Seforim blog for all of their assistance, especially in helping tracking down some of the more obscure sources.

[1] R. Shabsei Donlo (1:80).

[2] *Sori Haguf* was a medical work written in the late thirteenth century. Less than a year ago, Professors Zohar Amar and Yael Buchman published part of this work. The piece about *baladhur* can be found on pages 163-164 of this edition. Not much is known about this work, though Professor Gerrit Bos and Resianne Fontaine have discussed this sefer in their "Medico-Philosophical Controversies in Nathan B. Yoel Falaquera's 'Sefer Sori ha-Guf'," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 90:1-2 (July – October, 1999): 27-60.

[3] Gerrit Bos, "'Balādhur' (Marking-Nut): A Popular Medieval Drug for Strengthening Memory," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 59:2 (1996): 229-236. See this fantastic article for additional sources and complete citations.

[4] This work only in manuscript, for this quote, see Gerrit Bos, "Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena's Evaluation," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2:1 (1995): 48. For more on this author in general, see Gerrit Bos, "R. Moshe Narboni, Philosopher and Physician: A Critical Analysis of Sefer Orah Hayyim," *Medieval Encounters* 1:2 (1995): 219-251.

[5] R. Hayyim Vital, the most famous student of the Arizal, wrote many seforim, including a

nearly unknown work on medicine and alchemy. It was briefly mentioned by Gershom Scholem. The alchemist section of this book was discussed by Raphael Patai in his book, *Jewish Alchemists*. Meir Benayahu discusses it in various places in his writings (amongst them in his book on the Ari). Gerrit Boss, "Hayyim Vital's Kabbalah Ma'asit we-Alkimiyyah (Practical Kabbalah and Alchemy), a Seventeenth Century 'Book of Secrets'," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 55-112, wrote an extensive article on this book, and does an excellent job of putting each remedy into its proper categories, as the book is not published in proper order. More recently, Prof. Zohar Amar and Yael Buchman in *Sinai* 121 (1996): 231-238 and, idem., "Theory and practice in an essay by R. Hayyim Vital," *Sinai* 125 (2000): 202-215, about the various halakhic aspects discussed in this work. After that, Yael Buchman wrote her doctorate on this work of R. Hayyim Vital, and a recent article, "A Kabbalist as Healer: The Medical Practice of Rabbi and Healer Hayyim Vital (1543-1620)," *Korot: The Israel Journal of the History of Medicine and Science* 17 (2003-2004): 7-30 (Hebrew). Less than a year ago, Buchman and Amar printed part of this book, calling it *Refuah Maasios L'Rav Chaim Vital*. The only part they printed was the medical portion that contains diseases and cures. The recipe for baladhur can be found on page 262 of Buchman and Amar edition. One hopes that they will print the rest of this work in the future. What makes this work very interesting is that we see that R. Hayyim Vital was a medical doctor of sorts, who gave remedies to people for all kinds of illnesses, in all areas of health, whether asthma, infertility, etc. Much of the advice was based on real medical advice that R. Hayyim Vital had read in various medical works, other pieces of advice were based on Segulos or the like. For more on this issue see, the excellent introduction of Amar and Buchman to *Refuah Maasios L'Rav Chaim Vital*; and Gerrit Boss, "Hayyim Vital's Kabbalah Ma'asit we-Alkimiyyah (Practical Kabbalah and Alchemy), a Seventeenth Century 'Book of Secrets'," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 59-62.

[6] This piece is only in manuscript, its quoted by Gerrit Boss, "Hayyim Vital's Kabbalah Ma'asit we-Alkimiyyah (Practical Kabbalah and Alchemy), a Seventeenth Century 'Book of Secrets'," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 78. The subject of "*petihat lev*" has been discussed much in recent literature. This concept of *petihat lev* is found in many different sources where people used to do all kinds of things to help with memory and understanding Torah enabling one to understand and recall the torah effortlessly. One example something done for *petihat lev* of this are the customs relating to the educational initiation ceremony of young boys still done today in many circles.

Professor Israel Ta-Shma published a piece, included in his *Kneset Makcharim* (1:1540), from a work written in 1294 called *Sefer Hamaskil* which gives us a little insight into this *petihat lev*, which says:

ערו בוטמ בברועמ חור אוהש, תעדה יע חור חוכ לבקל ובלב מידרדה ול ונתין נושארה מדא ולכאש סויה ותואמו, שרחה תכאלמ לע הנוממ הז רדה, תחא המכח תלשממ לע הנוממ רדה לכ, ובילב מירדה המכ מדאל ול שיו מינש וא רחא רדה מתסנ. ולוכ מירדה ראש ונממ יתושו תעדה יע לכש חור לבקמה לודג רדה שי בלה תיעצמאבו תמכחב מילודג מימכח מהו מלועה תומכחב מילכס מהש מדא ינב תצק האור התא רשאכ, מהילע מינוממ מימתסנ התתשמו נשע חומה אלמתמ טשפתהל לוכי חורה נואו, סותס ולוכ יעצמאה רדההש נזמבו. מיכאלמה

Some general sources on *petihat lev* can be found in: Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood, Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press, 1998), 28; Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering through the Lattices, Mystical, Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Wayne State University Press, 2000), 140-141, 156 and 237; and in the excellent article by Yuval Harrari, "'The Opening of the Heart': Magical Practices for Gaining Knowledge, Understanding and Good Memory in Judaism of Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," in *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture* presented to Bracha

Sack, eds., Z. Gries, H. Kreisel, and B. Huss (Beer Sheva, 2004), 303–347.

[7] A younger contemporary of R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida), R. Avraham Kalfon (1735-1820) served as a rabbi in Luv. R. Avraham corresponded with the Chida for many years. Later on, he even visited him in Lorian for over a year. They had a close personal relationship. Through his sefarim, he mentions personal anecdotes and discussions he had with the Chida. He also quotes all of the Chida's works. This piece, where R. Kalfon writes about the Chida using Baladhur, was printed by M. Benayahu in the *Sefer Hachida* (a collection of articles dealing with the Chida, pages 177-184) More recently, this piece was reprinted in a sefer *Igrot V'Haskamot Rabbeinu Hachida* (pages 133-134). This book is an excellent collection of letters of the Chida and history of the Chida. One problem with this book, is that in the introduction, the editor acknowledges different sources for helping him write the book, but he doesn't give credit to his main source, the writings of Meir Benayahu. He does quote these writings extensively, but never uses Benayahu's name.

R. Avraham Kalfon authored several works, including the small work titled *Chayeh Avraham*, a collection of reasons of various *minhagim* related to *Orah Hayyim* and *Yoreh Deah* which he had gathered from many different sources. He authored another work entitled *Leket Hakatsir* on *Orah Hayyim*, which remained in manuscript form until a few years ago, when it was printed the first time in 1992. *Leket Hakatsir* is a large and excellent collection of material gathered from many sources on all topics relating to *Orah Hayyim*. R. Kalfon quotes many points that he had heard personally from the Chida. Unfortunately, this work is pretty much unused and unknown by our generation of halakhic authors. Nearly thirty years ago, Harvey Goldberg printed *Higgid Mordechai* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1978), from part of a work by R. Mordechai Cohen, entitled *Koros Luv ve-Yehuda*, and quotes many things from manuscripts of R. Avraham Kalfon.

[8] R. Yehuda Aryeh (Leon) Modena's *Lev Ha-Aryeh* was completed in 1611. The idea of this work was to develop a course for memory improvement. In this short work, Modena brings down many ways of how people went about improving their memories, all types of scientific methods, medical methods and segulos for improving memory, and mnemonic systems. For a discussion of this work, see Howard E. Adelman, "Success and Failure in the Seventeenth-Century Ghetto of Venice: The Life and Thought of Leon Modena, 1571-1648," (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 1985), 431-433, who writes that it is possible that Modena's source was an edition printed in Venice, 1603. For an extensive discussion of *Lev Ha-Aryeh*, see Gerrit Bos, "Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena's Evaluation," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2:1 (1995): 39-58. This work *Lev Ha-Aryeh* was recently reprinted by Mechon Shuvi Nafshi (2001)

[9] The *Midrash Harefuah* was written by R. Moshe Perlman, son of R. Yeruscham Leib Perlman (the Minsker Gadol), and is a three-volume-collection of all the health and medical related information that one can find in the *Talmud Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*, *Tosefta* and *Zohar*. It is incredible to see how much material R. Perlman was able to gather. More importantly, R. Perlman presents the information in an extremely organized manner and brings complete and exact quotations of each source and is careful to properly reference each citation. Additionally, in the footnotes R. Perlman has a brief explanation of some points from the text. This work was first printed in 1936 and a few months ago, thankfully, was reprinted in Jerusalem. R. Perlman writes, in the introduction, that he came to working on *Midrash Harefuah* while working on a completely different topic, and was going through the abovementioned sources in a systematic manner listing all of the statements that he needed. In

working on this project, R. Perlman noticed the many statements throughout chazal about medical and health issues. He began gathering all of the sources – without knowing that others had previously done the same, and had he known, he would likely have not bothered to put *Midrash Harefuah* together. When he finished the work he went to bring it to a great medical expert Dr. Heindis, who, at first glance, told him not to bother printing the work, as much has already been written on this topic. Dr. Heindis then started to study the work in-depth and could not put it down. Dr. Heindis then asked R. Perlman to leave the work with him for several days. When Dr. Heindis returned the book to R. Perlman, he told him he was unaware that there was so much information in chazal on these topics and this is an important work. Before printing *Midrash Harefuah*, R. Perlman sent it to medical experts Drs. Katzenelson and Mazeyah for their comments, and their notes on many of the topics are printed in the back of each volume.

R. Meir Halpern, in his excellent work on the Minsker Gadol – the topic of an upcoming post at the Seforim blog – writes about his abovementioned student, R. Moshe Perlman, he was great in learning and eventually entered into a career of business, but did not waste any of his free time. His tremendous knowledge is evident from the work *Medrash Harefuah (Hagadol Me-Minsk, pg 208)*.

[10] For more on *chulsis* and coffee: see the forthcoming work of R. Yechiel Golhavher (famous for his excellent work *Minhaghai Hakehilos*) on coffee.

What is this sefer *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* that the *Kanfei Yonah* is quoting which writes *chulsis* is coffee? R. Yaakov Zahalon (1630-1693), a graduate of medical college in Rome, became a doctor at the age of twenty-six, and for several years, was also a Rav and *Baal Darshan* in Rome. He was very involved in the famous plague in the ghetto of Rome in 1656, which he describes at length in his work, *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*. He wrote many works, amongst them *Margolios Tovos* (available at HebrewBooks.org), which has prayers for different occasions; including those for a doctor to say before he treated a patient and for a *darshan* to recite before he spoke in public. R. Zahalon wrote a book called the *Or Darshanim*, a guide for *darshanim* on how to compose and deliver sermons. Twenty-years-ago, the work was printed with an extensive introduction and English translation by Henry Adler Sosland, *A Guide for Preachers on Composing and Delivering Sermons: The Or Ha-Darshanim of Jacob Zahalon, A Seventeenth Century Italian Preacher's Manual* (JTS Press, 1987).

However, R. Zahalon's most famous work was the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*, first printed in 1683. It was the first medical work whose original language was Hebrew. This work was intended to be an encyclopedia for the doctor and layman alike. He intended to discuss every aspect related to medical and health issues. Unfortunately, only part of this work was printed only one time, thus making it a very rare book. This definition of *chulsis* being coffee attributed to him can be found on page seven in the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*. R. Zahalon included a whole section in his sefer to explain the fourth chapter of Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Deot* – all of the health related issues, including where this piece related to coffee can be found. Recently Professor Zohar Amar reprinted just this part of the work of the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* called *Shemirat Haberiut LeHa-Rambam* including many additions from an autographed copy of R. Zahalon. One only hopes someone will reprint this whole work again.

For more on Zahalon, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (Wayne State University Press, 2001), 232-239. See also, J. Leibowitz, "R. Yaakov Zahalon, Man of Rome, His Poem in Honor of the Sabbath, 1687," *Scritti in Memoria di Enzo Sereni: Studies in the History of the Jews in Rome* (Jerusalem 1970), 167-

181. See also, Professor Zohar Amar in his introduction to his reprinted edition of the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*- the part on the *Rambam Hilkhos Deot* called *Shemirat Haberiut LeHa-Rambam*.

The question is how this medical work came to R. Yonah Landsdorf. The answer is found by looking in his entry in the Chida's *Shem Hagedolim*, where he writes that R. Yonah Landsdorf – besides for being a great *Goan* – was well versed in all *chochmos* (*Erech Mil Tzedakah*). In addition to R. Yonah Landsdorf quoting the *Otzar Ha-Hayyim*, at least one other goan used *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* and quotes this definition of *chulsis* being coffee. R. Yechezkel Feivel, famous for his *Toldot Adam*, also wrote a work on the Rambam's *Hilkhos Deot* and *Teshuva*, entitled *Mussar Haskel*. In the beginning of chapter four of *Hilkhos Deot* (in a section called *Loshon Chachamim*), Feivel writes that he obtained a copy of the work *Otzar Ha-Hayyim* and will quote from it throughout the chapter. This explanation of the *Lashon Chachamim* is quoted by the *Sefer Hakovetz* in his comments on this Rambam (found in the back of most printings of the *Mishneh Torah*). R. Yechezkel Feivel and his various works will be discussed at greater length in a future post at the Seforim blog; for now, see the significant discussion in Edward Breuer, "The Haskalah in Vilna: R. Yechezkel Feivel's 'Toldot Adam'," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 7(1997):15-40.

[11] Much has been written regarding the authorship of the *Sefer Hakanah* and *Sefer Hapliah*. Some attribute it to R. Avigdor Kra (see [here](#)). See also *Sdei Chemed* (vol. 9), *Klalei HaPoskim V'HaHuraa* (15:59), *Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz* (3:375, notes 71-72), Chida in *Shem Hagedolim* (*Erech Hakanah* and *Erech Hapliah*), notes of *Menachem Zion* *ibid*, notes of Shimon Chanes in *Rav Upalim* of R. Avraham Ben Hagra (pg. 97), A. Marcus, *Hachasidus* (pg. 377), and Professor Israel Ta-Shma (*Kneset Makcharim*, 3:228).