

רבי יוסף קארו—בית יוסף, שולחן ערוך

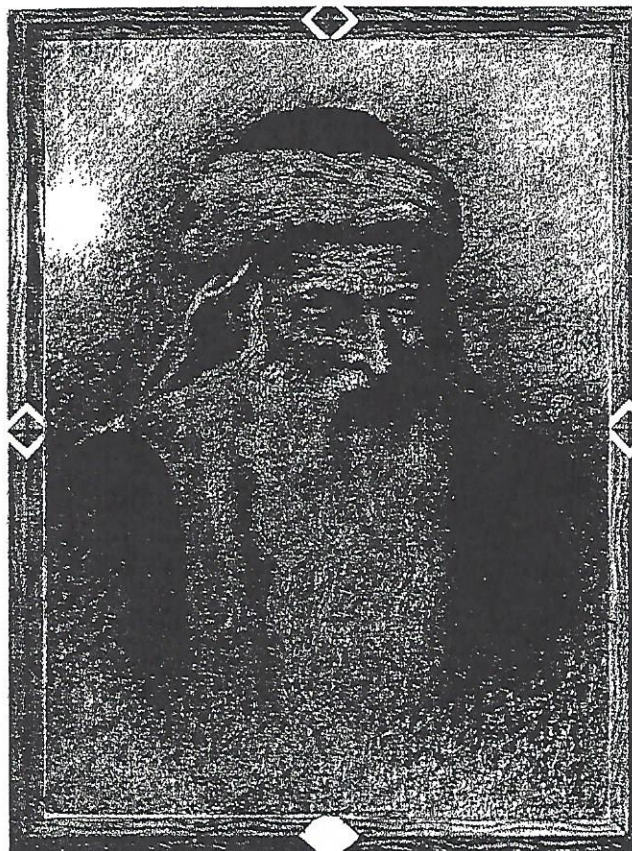
born: Toledo, Spain, 1488

died: Safed, Eretz Yisrael, 1575

Popularly known as *Beit Yosef* and *Shulchan Aruch*, for his major works. Also known as the *Mechaber*, the author. Talmudist, codifier of Halachah.

In 1492, in the wake of the great expulsion of Spanish Jewry, when Yosef Karo was 4 years old, his family was forced to flee Spain. After protracted wanderings they settled in Constantinople, Turkey. He gained repute as an eminent Torah scholar at an early age, and at age 24, while living in Adrianople, he began writing his famous work, *Beit Yosef*. It is a commentary on *Arba Turim* by Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rosh, and it took him twenty years to complete. Under the influence of the great kabbalist, Rabbi Shelomoh Molcho, he followed an ascetic life-style of fasting and pious devotion to God. In 1530 he moved to Safed, in Eretz Yisrael, where he was appointed as a member of the Rabbinic Court of Rabbi Yaakov Beirav. He established a yeshivah, counting among his students the great Rabbi Moshe Alshich and the illustrious kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (Remak). Upon the death of Rabbi Yaakov Beirav, he succeeded him as Chief of the Rabbinic Court in Safed, which served as the main *bet din* (court) for worldwide Jewry. Through his monumental books he became the acknowledged preeminent Torah authority in the world, a reputation that has not waned with the passage of time. In his work *Beit Yosef*, he compiles all the variant views on each halachah and renders a decision as to which opinion is to be the authoritative law. It is printed alongside the text of the *Arba Turim*. Rabbi Yosef Karo follows a cardinal rule in arriving at his decisions. If on a given issue Rif, Rambam, and Rosh are in agreement, then that matter becomes Halachah (Law). If they disagree, the halachah is decided according to the majority opinion. His rulings reflect his Sephardi¹ background in that they favor Sephardi customs over Ashkenazi² practices. After the completion of *Beit Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote the *Shulchan Aruch*.³ As its title implies, *Shulchan Aruch*—"The Set Table"—presents all Jewish laws and customs relevant to the present time in clear and concise Hebrew, arranged systematically according to topics. This work, consisting of four sections, is the cornerstone of authoritative Halachah to this very day. It is the Code of Jewish Law par excellence. Initially, the *Shulchan Aruch* met with resistance on the part of German and Polish rabbinical authorities because its rulings favored Sephardi practices, disregarding Ashkenazi traditions. Foremost among the critics was Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema) of Cracow, Poland, whose critical comments have been incorporated as glosses into the running text. Among

Rabbi Yosef Karo's other works is *Kesef Mishneh*, a commentary on Rambam.⁴ By clearly mentioning the sources on which his decisions are founded, Rabbi Yosef Karo has given Halachah a solid foundation. His



Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of *Shulchan Aruch*, comprehensive and authoritative guide to Jewish life.

work has stood the test of time. Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* continues to be the proverbial guide to all facets of Jewish living.

THE FOUR SECTIONS OF THE SHULCHAN ARUCH

Orach Chaim

אורח חיים

Daily prayers

Tefillin

Tzitzit

Shema

Berachot (blessings)

Grace after Meals

Shabbat, Festivals, and Fasts

Yoreh De'ah

יורה דעה

Dietary Laws

Shechitah

Salting of Meat

Meat and Dairy

Charity

Circumcision

Torah Scrolls

Mourning

Even Ha'ezer

אבן העזר

Matrimony

Marriage

Divorce

Ketuvot (Marriage Contract)*Choshen Mishpat*

חושן משפט

Witnesses

Judges

Loans

Overreaching

Creditor and Debtor

Lost Property

Partnerships and Agents

Sales

Inheritance

Gifts

