The tradition and custom of Malidah has been prevalent among the Bene Israel community in one form or another probably from the time of their exodus from the land of Israel about 2,300 years ago. Originally the service was performed ritualistically as they had no prayer books. Around the 16th century C.E., however, this tradition was codified with selected prayers when the prayer books and transliterations of the Hebrew prayers became generally available to the Bene Israel community. Since then this practice has remained unchanged and is still practiced in its traditional form today.

Malidah is also performed for Tu B’Shevat and at the culmination of the Simchat Torah Service after the fruits are removed from the sukkah. Likewise it is performed when visiting the traditional Bene Israel Holy Site at Khandallah in the Konkan Region, where tradition has it that the Khandalkar family witnessed an apparition of the ascension of Elijah, the Prophet to Heaven, in a chariot of fire. The Bene Israel have a special connection to the Prophet Elijah, the last and only prophet the ancestors of the Bene Israel were aware of when they left the land of Israel centuries earlier.

Many anthropologists believe that the custom of the Bene Israel Malidah service was borrowed from other communities, but certain critical elements permit this theory to be refuted. Thanksgiving offerings and peace offerings were an integral part of Jewish ritualistic service during the period prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. At the most one may concede that the elements and components of the Malidah Service were adapted to locally available ingredients as has been the case of many Jewish customs of other Jewish communities.

Prior to the service, an oil lamp is lit called The Lamp of Eliyahu Ha Navi and a Bracha is said over it. There are a variety of methods of making the traditional Malidah plate. At its most basic form, though, the table and plate setting of the Malidah includes the following items: a plate of pounded rice soaked and drained of water and mixed with grated coconuts, powdered sugar, chopped dry fruits, grated coconuts, and white raisins surrounded by at least five types of fruits which must include dates and orange (Ha’Etz), bananas (Ha’Adama) at least one new fruit of the season (for the Shehekiyanu Bracha) and myrtle leaves or rose petals for the Atzei Besamim Bracha. Spiced boiled chicken liver and gizzard are added on the Malidah or in a separate plate. After the prayers, the liver and gizzard are cut into small pieces and distributed to all the congregants.

The inclusion of liver and gizzard is representative of a tradition established in the days of the Temple. When a person came to the Temple to offer a sacrifice the ritual slaughter was performed by a Levite, but the Levite was not permitted to charge for his services, so the liver and gizzard were reserved as his portion. If one wanted the liver and gizzard from him, they had to pay the Levite for that portion. This is similar to the custom of the ceremony of Pidyon Haben. The question then arises as to why specifically the liver & gizzard? In observing pack animals hunting, the liver & gizzard are eaten only by the Alpha Male i.e. the leader of the pack. The Levites were seen as leaders of the Jewish people; hence traditionally and without even realizing it, the Bene Israel still follow a time honored tradition today symbolizing their role as community leaders.