



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

## Synagogue and Museum

### January 2020 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

We wish our friends a Happy and Healthy Secular New Year surrounded by family and friends. May 2020 bring peace throughout the world. May we continue to grow and flourish. May our wealth be counted, not in material possessions but, rather, in the love of family, friends and community.



Plaka, Athens, 1920  
One hundred years ago

This newsletter, our 130<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org).

We have now reach over 10,000 households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up by emailing [info@kkjsm.org](mailto:info@kkjsm.org) so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.

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### Simchas

Michael & Belinda Genee are thrilled to announce the engagement of their son, Ryan Seth Genee, to Erika Lynn Hershey. Ryan is the grandson of Sally & Abe Genee, of blessed memory. The happy couple are planning to be wed in the summer of 2021.



We wish Sophie Morhaime, mother of Stan Morhaime, a happy 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sophie was born into the Mevorach family of Kastoria.

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### Passings

December was a sad month. We learned of the passing of Murray Steinfink on November 3, 2019. Murray was born on July 17, 1940, the son of Stella Moses and Jack Steinfink, the grandson of Esther Genee and Abraham Moses, the great-grandson of Avraam Genee and Estrea Negrin Genee.

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Morty Morris (husband of Estelle Solomon Morris) passed away in December. Morty was born into the Eliezer/Beska family.

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Morris Cantos was born on March 29, 1927 and passed away on Thursday, December 5, 2019. Morris was the son of Abe Cantos and Sarah Myones Cantos, the grandson of Rabbi Jessoula Levy and Esther Cantos Levy and the great grandson of Menachem Cantos and Mazalto Moses. Morris will be mourned by his sons and grandchildren, and his to surviving siblings, Esther and Nat.

## **ΔΙΚΟΙ ΜΑΣ – Dikoi Mas – Los Muestros**

We welcome all visitors with open arms, but when “Our Own” show up it is a special occasion.



Danielle Ravich, Andrew Marcus,  
Dimitri Argyriades, and Rabbi Nissim Elneave



Stella Hanan Cohen from Zimbabwe

## **Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina**

December was filled with visitors from around the world, old friends and new friends.



Ricardo Farji from JC  
Buenos Aires Argentina



Nikos and Esther Kostoubanos  
from Greece



University of Connecticut



Stephen Wise Synagogue NYC



## Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

### Kehila Kedosha Janina Honors Greek Ambassador Theoharis Nicolaos Lalacos

On December 10, 2019, KKJ welcomed the Honorable Theoharis Nicolaos Lalacos, Ambassador of Greece to the United States, to our Synagogue and Museum. During his visit, we were honored to bestow on Ambassador Lalacos the title of "Honorary Romaniote" in recognition and gratitude for the Ambassador's continued support of Romaniote Jewry and his encouragement of programs that bring our story to a wider audience. Our President Marvin Marcus and Museum Director Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos presented Ambassador Lalacos with artwork modeled after a traditional Romaniote Alef (learn more about Alefs [here](#)). We were also honored to have representatives from the Consul General of Israel and the American Jewish Committee present. We express our sincere gratitude and share our best wishes as Ambassador Lalacos departs the US for his next position.



KKJ President Marvin Marcis, Ambassador Lalacos, and KKJ Museum Director Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos



Ambassador Lalacos with Jesse Colchamiro, Booni Chohavi, (Consul for Cultural Affairs of Israel in NY), Mona Abramson, Joel Negrin, Sol Kofinas, Stella Bacolas, Marvin Marcus, Anna Lalacos, Dimitri Argyriades, and Marcia Ikonomopoulos



Special Alef created in honor of Ambassador Lalacos



Ambassador and Anna Lalacos



Ambassador and Anna Lalacos



## Opening of New KKJ Museum Exhibit Shaddayoth and Siddurim: A Window into Romaniote Religious Traditions

On December 15, KKJ was honored to host a presentation on Shaddayoth and Siddurim from the Romaniote Jewish Community of New York. The exhibit will be now be part of our permanent display in the KKJ Museum. Curated by Isaac Choua and Rabbi Nissim Elnecave, the items were all brought from Greece by the immigrants to our community. The prayer books (Siddurim) show a variety of styles, both printed and handwritten. The exhibit includes Illustrated Pirke Avoth (Ethics of Our Fathers) from Shabetai Naftali of Ioannina, 1799 and a copy of "Kina Glossa," a Judeo-Greek song traditionally sung on Purim in Ioannina and Arta. The Purim prayer booklet was from Ezra M. Negrin and was printed in Salonika in 1874. The exhibit also features Shaddayoth, which are silver dedicatory plaques that were traditionally hung on the Parohet (Torah Ark curtain) in Ioannina. The Shaddayoth were locked in our safe and were only recently rediscovered! View more photos [here](#) and watch a video of the full presentation [here](#).



Illustrated Pirke Avoth, Ioannina, 1799



Purim Songs in Greek from Ioannina and Arta, 1874



Pictures from the exhibit opening



## Upcoming Events

Save the date! On Sunday February 16 Professor Alexander Kitroeff will be presenting at Kehila Kedosha Janina as part of our "Scholar in Residence" series.



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### International Ladino Day – January 12 in New York City



The Sephardic Jewish  
Brotherhood of America



American  
Sephardi  
Federation



Sephardic Home for  
the Aged Foundation

Proudly Present

## International Ladino Day: A Celebration of Story & Song

2PM on Sunday, 12 January 2020

Center for Jewish History – 15 West 16th Street, New York City



Come celebrate Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish, with  
acclaimed scholars and musicians!

Hear Prof. Gloria Ascher, who has taught courses in Ladino at Tufts University for 17 years; Prof. Dina Danon, whose new book brings Izmir's Ottoman Jewish community to life; two scenes from a New York Ladino play; a panel of Generation Y and Z Ladino enthusiasts; and musicians dear to our hearts, The Elias Ladino Ensemble and Sarah Aroeste.

Since 2013, International Ladino Day celebrations have been held around the world. January 12th marks Manhattan's Third Annual Ladino Day created by Prof. Jane Mushabac for the American Sephardi Federation at The Center for Jewish History.

Ladino is a bridge to many cultures. It is a variety of Spanish that has absorbed words and expressions from many languages, most notably Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, Greek, and French. The mother tongue of Jews in the Ottoman Empire for 500 years, Ladino became the home language of Sephardim worldwide. While the number of Ladino speakers has sharply declined, distinguished Ladino Day programs like this one celebrate and preserve a vibrant language and heritage for future generations.

© Thessaloniki (Salonika), 19th c. Sephardi & Romaniot Jewish Costumes in Greece & Turkey. 16 watercolours by Nicholas Stavroulakis, published by the Association of the Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Athens, 1986. Scan courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Greece.

Order tickets at <https://ladinoday.bpt.me/> or call 1-800-838-3006

## **Portland Sephardic Film Festival**

### **14th Annual Sephardic Winter Film Series**

Films shown TUESDAY EVENING, each month at 7PM  
SHOWING AT: 6686 SW Capitol Hwy. Portland, 97219  
ADMISSION & SEPHARDIC DESSERT ARE FREE!  
For Information call Ron 503-750-0888

Sponsors: Jewish Federation of Portland, NCSY Organization, OJCF, Albert J. & Esther Menashe, Richard & Judi Matza, Oregon Kosher, Ron & Pam Sidis, Renee Ferrera, Jose Behar  
Eve Stern & Les Gutfreund, Michael Menashe, Ruben & Elizabeth Menashe, Barry Menashe, Gevurtz Menashe Attorneys and Albert A. Menashe & Shawn Menashe,

January 14, 2020.

A Kiss To This Land. This fascinating film narrates the story of Jewish immigration to Mexico 1920-1930. It is a tribute to an entire generation of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews who built communities and new lives and dreams after leaving their homes in Europe and the Middle East. This film has humor, love, adventure, joy and sadness.

Spanish w/ English subtitles, 83 minutes, Producer: Daniel Goldberg, Speaker: Jose Behar

February 11, 2020.

GI JEWS: Jewish Americans in WWII.

This film tells the story of 550,000 Jewish American men and women who fought in World War II. In their own words, veterans both famous and unknown bring their war experiences to life; how they fought for their nation and their people, struggled with anti-Semitism within their ranks, and emerged transformed, more powerfully American and more deeply Jewish.

English, 90 minutes, 2017, Producer: Lisa Ades Speakers: Rick Cohen & Bobby Brown

March 3, 2020. DOUBLE FEATURE INTERNATIONAL NIGHT

The Nazi Games – Berlin 1936. This Film chronicles the story of how the Nazis and the International Olympic Committee turned a relatively small, elitist, sports event into an epic global mass media spectacle. The grand themes replete with architectural grandiosity, budget overruns, corruption, bribery, collusion with unsavory characters – including dictators and autocrats – and the ill treatment of black and Jewish athletes. This is a study of deception.

English language, 61 minutes, 2016, Produced by Taglicht Media.

Holocaust Escape Tunnel. For centuries the Lithuanian city of Vilna was one of the most important Jewish centers in the world, earning the name "Jerusalem of the North". The Nazis murdered 95% of its Jewish population. Now an international team of archaeologists is trying to rediscover this forgotten world, excavating the remains of its Great Synagogue and searching for one of its great secrets: a lost escape tunnel dug by Jewish prisoners inside a horrific Nazi execution site.

English language, 2016, 60 minutes, Produced by PBS, Speaker: Natan Meir, PSU

PLEASE NOTE THE NEW LOCATION FOR ALL SCREENINGS:

Congregation Ahavath Achim's new sanctuary, located in Hillsdale neighborhood  
6686 SW Capitol Hwy. Portland, OR 97219. Call Ron at 503-750-0888



## News from Jewish Greece

### Ioannina

In November the Mayor of Ioannina, Moses Elisaf, on the occasion of his visit to Cyprus, met with Limassol Mayor Nikos Nikolaidis and discussed various issues to enhance the cooperation of the two cities. At the same time, he had the opportunity to talk with government officials.

The story of Ioannina and Limassol intertwined on December 6, 1912, when the then mayor of Cyprus, Christodoulos Sozos, fell heroically in the battle of Byzantium for the liberation of Ioannina. In 1984 the two cities signed a twinning protocol. Note: for additional information on the Cypriot hero, Christodoulos, see article under Cyprus in this newsletter.

During his visit, the Mayor of Ioannina and internationally renowned Professor of Pathology participated in the 6th Pancyprian Congress of Pathology on 30.11.2019 where he was awarded for his contribution to the medical community.



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### Athens

#### Conference of the Athens Philosophical School on Anti-Semitism

From 27 to 29 November 2019 the Laboratory of Political Philosophy: From Theory to Practice (EPOFI) of the University of Athens School of Philosophy organized a scientific symposium on "Anti-Semitism, Holocaust and Philosophical Thought".

Contributors' suggestions on the topic of anti-Semitism were multifaceted and particularly interesting and focused mainly on the issue of anti-Semitism in contemporary political rhetoric and theatrical scene, on forms of anti-Semitic violence in post-war Greece and its role in shaping children's subjectivity, deep roots of anti-Semitism in Europe, Nazi medicine and the ethical limits of biomedical research, as well as the Holocaust and the collapse of the European world.

At the opening of the Conference, the Israeli and Cypriot Ambassadors addressed their greetings. Yossi Amrani and Kyriakos Kenevezos and on behalf of Greek Judaism the Secretary General of KISE Mr. Victor Is. Eliezer, IK Vice President Mr. Danny Emmanuel of Athens and the President of the Second Generation of the Holocaust Descendants Mr. Marios Sousis. Click [here](#) to read the greeting of the Secretary-General of KISE, Mr. Victor Is. Eliezer.

Also present were: Rabbi Athens, Mr. Gabriel Negrin, KISE First Vice President Mr. Nachman Alhana, Bene Berit President Mr. Victor Batis, KISE President Mr. Benjamin Albala, as well as representatives, professors and students of the University.

The keynote address was made by the Chairman of the Board of the National Library of Greece, author Mr. Stavros Zouboulakis on "Anti-Semitism yesterday and today".



## International Conference of Jewish Women – European Conference

ICJW's 16th European Conference was held on November 3 – 5, 2019, in Athens, Greece, an Ever-Changing City, with the theme: "Learning from the Past, Inspired by the Present, ICJW Prepares for the Future". This was ICJW's first event in the home city of its newest affiliate, ICJW Greece.

55 women from all over Europe and beyond attended the 2-day conference in Greece, which was followed by an ICJW Executive Meeting. The opening dinner was held in a building in the centre of Athens that used to house the Jewish Museum. We were welcomed by the President of the Athens Jewish community and the Secretary-General of the Central Board of the Jewish communities in Greece. The main speaker was Niki Kerameus, the Greek Government Minister in charge of Education and Religious Affairs. After dinner, we were entertained by a display of traditional Greek dances from different regions.



Next morning, we met at the Jewish community centre and heard a fascinating Dvar Torah on the importance of names. This was followed by a presentation on the role of Jewish women in the history of Greece. Our speakers continued despite a local power cut, which meant no microphones or presentations! We then heard from the Deputy Chief of Mission from the Embassy of Israel in Greece about bilateral and trilateral relations. Ms Sawson Hasson, from the Druze community in Israel, emphasised that relations were excellent, providing many opportunities for local cooperation. This was followed by a fascinating panel on new Jewish projects in post-Communist countries."

## Costumes of Evzones from Thrace unveiled in Athens

The Greek Presidential Guard, the Evzones, on Tuesday added the region of Thrace's official battle uniform to their range of dress uniforms honoring different parts of the nation for their battles for independence and union with Greece.

In a ceremony in Athens attended by Prokopis Pavlopoulos, the President of the Hellenic Republic, the local uniform was presented by members of the elite Greek unit along with other traditional Evzone costumes. "It is an important moment for both the Presidential Guard and Thrace," Prokopoulos noted in his remarks at the event.



"Today, we give Thrace what it deserves. And we are doing so in the context of an emblematic anniversary: 100 years since the liberation and integration of Thrace into our nation," the Greek president added. The centennial of the union of Thrace with Greece will be celebrated in May of 2020.

**Fascinating Photo of Syntagma Square in 1926.** Photo colored professionally



A striking image shot by Greek photographer Christos Kaplanis in 1926 at Athens' Syntagma Square has resurfaced in glorious color and has already gone viral around the globe.

The photograph, which has been retouched to add color, was apparently taken during the late morning in the summer of 1926 at a time when Greece was still reeling from the Asia Minor disaster of 1922. It was a time when Athens, together with other Greek cities, was trying to cope socially and economically with an enormous influx of refugees from Smyrna, Pontus and elsewhere in the Greek world.

Social media users are commenting on two main things which stand out like sore thumbs to modern onlookers, the first being that the dress code at the time was so much more formal and elegant. Almost all the men seated in Syntagma Square drinking their coffee are wearing beautifully-tailored suits. And secondly, it's hard not to notice that there are only three women among the hundreds of men.

Clearly, it was a time well before the onset of women's liberation in Greece. In any event, It is a beautiful photograph of a lost time in Athens, a time when life was a great deal slower — and much more elegant.

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**Volos**

On Monday, December 9 at 9:30 am, the students of a public school in Volos gathered to honor the memory of Rabbi Moshe Pessach and Metropolitan Bishop Ioakeim, who worked to gether to save a large number of Jews in the city during the German Occupation.





**Greek Jewish Hanukkah Is Not A Paradox** by Ethan Marcus. Full article available [here](#)

I am sure people wonder how you can be Greek and Jewish, especially around Hanukkah, a time when we're taught that the Maccabees proudly rose up against the pagan Greeks and regained Jewish independence. But it has never been a problem for me.

I'm a proud Sephardic Jew and grew up in the small but robust Greek Jewish community in New York. My congregation, Kehila Kedosha Janina, remains the only Greek Jewish Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. Unlike Sephardic Jews like me who arrived in the former Ottoman Empire after the expulsion from Spain and spoke Ladino, Romaniote Jews have had a continuous presence in Greece and the former Byzantine Empire for over 2,300 years. These communities only spoke Greek or a Judeo-Greco dialect and practiced unique Jewish customs not found in any other communities.



I don't think my Papou (grandfather), born in the small town of Veria in what is today northern Greece, would've recognized anything about the celebratory practices of "American" Hanukkah. Most of what we mistakenly call American Hanukkah traditions are actually Ashkenazi in origin and, other than lighting the menorah, are quite different than what I grew up with.

In Ioannina, a city in northern Greece that was once a major hub for Romaniote life, Hanukkah was a relatively minor holiday but still celebrated proudly. Romaniote Jews would often cook delicious loukoumades, a classic Greek dessert of fried dough balls in oil with honey and sugar, as opposed to the conventional sufganiyot in Eastern European communities. Growing up in New York, my father would make bimuelos, the Sephardic equivalent of fried dough or matzah meal made for Hanukkah as well as Passover. These delicious treats are what I think of when Hanukkah comes to mind.



Greek loukoumades

Don't get me wrong, there were in fact communities in Greece that grappled with the use of language surrounding Hanukkah, especially with the creation of the modern Greek state. Dr. Devin E. Naar, the Isaac Alhadeff Chair of Sephardic Studies at the University of Washington, wrote that on the eve of the Holocaust, the Jewish community of Salonica, once home to more than 50,000 Jews, published a new prayer book called Sha'are Tefilah. In the Hanukkah section, Naar notes that the author had changed the classic references in Maoz Tzur from the enemy Greeks to Syrians as a way to avoid sounding anti-Greek, as technically our persecutors were Hellenized pagans living in the region that's today's Syria. Naar also notes, "In the Al ha-Nissim prayer added to the Hanukkah liturgy that refers to the miracles associated with the holiday, the traditional reference to the 'wicked Hellenic government' is quietly changed to the 'wicked government.'"

Yet despite these changes in the Salonican prayer book, I, like many other Greek Jews, reject the notion that being Greek and Jewish is a paradox on Hanukkah. In fact, many theologians in the Greek Orthodox church look at the Maccabees as martyrs who modeled Christian monotheism against evil paganism.

These Hanukkah traditions are a testament to the diverse history and perseverance of the Jewish people, as well as our coexistence with local communities throughout the diaspora, particularly in Greece. This highlights something so rare in today's Jewish world. Indeed, my hope is that as the Jewish community in the United States continues to develop into the 21st century, the conventional Jewish narrative no longer defaults to Ashkenazi Jewry and its traditions. Perhaps this Hanukkah, you'll plan to cook some loukoumades or bimuelos with your children and sing the Ladino holiday song Ocho Kandelikas.

## Veroia

Beautiful photos from a newspaper article on Veroia in a local Greek newspaper



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## Albania

**Jewish group to repair earthquake-struck home of Albanian Muslim whose father saved Jews.**  
Full JTA article [here](#)

An Albanian Muslim man whose house was destroyed in an earthquake will have it rebuilt by a Holocaust commemoration group in honor of his father's rescue of Jews.

The home of Muhamet Bicaku, 83, was devastated during the Nov. 26 calamity that claimed the lives of at least 55 people in the Balkan nation. During the Holocaust, Bicaku's father, Mefail, and older brother, Njazi, sheltered about 20 Jewish families from the Italian and German occupation forces in Qarrishte, a town located about 50 miles east of the capital Tirana.

From the Depths, a Poland-based organization that focuses on celebrating the actions of rescuers of Jews, has raised \$10,000 to restore the house, the group's founder, Jonny Daniels, wrote in a statement Wednesday after visiting Albania as part of a humanitarian mission following the earthquake. The total cost will be \$45,000 and fundraising is ongoing, he said.

Muhamet Bicaku, who was 5 when his father began harboring Jewish refugees, is now living in crowded conditions in a home of one his children in Durres, 20 miles west of Tirana.

In 2007, he received on behalf of his family the Anti-Defamation League's Courage to Care Award. His father and brother were recognized in 1996 by Israel as Righteous Among the Nations, the country's title for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

"They offered our people the most basic of human needs, shelter, during their difficult times, saving their lives," Daniels wrote. "It should be obvious for us today to come together and return that favor."



Jonny Daniels, third from left, with the Bicaku family in their home in Durres, Albania, Dec. 11, 2019. (Courtesy of From the Depths)



## Kosovo

### Kosovo's Jews in Race to Preserve Heritage. Full article by Jakob Weizman [here](#)

At a time of relative peace and stability, Kosovo's few remaining Jews have set about preserving what remains of their heritage.

On Pristina's Mother Teresa Boulevard, across the road from the parliament where lawmakers of Europe's youngest state convene to debate legislation, a small plaque marks a piece of history little known to most passersby.

There are few other traces of the extensive Jewish community that once lived in Kosovo, a community that traced its roots to the 15th century and the migration of Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal and may have numbered as many as 3,000 at the beginning of the 20th century.

The plaque stands at the site of Kosovo's last synagogue, torn down by the Yugoslav Communist regime in 1963 at a time when many other old buildings including the old city bazaar were razed. By then, Jewish communities across the Balkans had been decimated by the Holocaust.

Today, some 80 Jewish families live in Kosovo, according to Ruzhdi Shkodra, president of BET Israel Jewish Community in Pristina, including an estimated 60 Jews in the southwestern town of Prizren, once a prosperous trade centre under the Ottoman Empire. Now, Shkodra and others in Kosovo's Jewish community are waiting for the green light from the Pristina municipality to build a new synagogue in the capital. The government, meanwhile, has provided Prizren's Jewish community with a building that will be transformed into a museum and synagogue.



Note: These photos of the Jewish Cemetery in Kosovo are from the 2018 tour of the Balkans done through The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry



"We are working on promoting the project and to get funds so that we can start with the renovation," Ines Demiri, one of the founders of the official Jewish Community in Kosovo, said of the project in Prizren. Just over a decade since Kosovo became an independent state, the country's last remaining Jews are racing against time to preserve their history and heritage, so much of it already lost to war and repression. "Much of the heritage was destroyed, but some is still there," said Dardan Islami, director of the 2009 documentary *Rescue in Albania* that chronicled the efforts of Albanians to save Jews during the Holocaust. "I believe that the local government in Pristina should do more to preserve what's left."

### Refuge from WWII

Islami's film looks at how some Jews from the Balkans found refuge from the Holocaust in Albania, aided in part by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Hysen Prishtina, mayor of Pristina during World War Two, provided safe passages for Jews from Kosovo to Albania, where they were given shelter by Albanian families under fake names provided by the authorities. According to some reports, over 2,000 were saved.

Votim Demiri, the President of the Jewish Community of Kosovo said that prior to WWII, Jews “practiced various professions as active members of society”.

“Beside the languages of the countries that they came from, they learned Albanian, Serbian and Turkish, he said” “Living and working in many parts of Kosovo, they had their own synagogues which survived the Ottoman period but were demolished by the Communist regime in 1963. They had their own Yeshiva [Jewish educational institution], municipality, cemeteries and private properties,” she said.

But while some found refuge during the Holocaust, many did not. According to Demiri, 258 Jews were imprisoned in Pristina, transferred to the Sajmiste concentration camp in Belgrade and then on to Bergen-Belsen in Germany, “where 92 Jews from Kosovo lost their lives.”

Demiri’s own mother, Ruth Bahar, was saved by an Albanian named Gani Demiri, who later became her husband. Three family members, however, died in the Holocaust. Of 300-400 Jews who remained in Kosovo after WWII, many eventually moved to Israel, while the population dwindled even further during the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia.

Erased from memory

The preservation of Jewish heritage has been severely neglected by the countries that emerged from the ashes of federal Yugoslavia, mainly Muslim Albanian Kosovo among them.

In 2018, a US State Department report criticised local authorities in Kosovo for failing to maintain Jewish cemeteries in line with the law – in Novo Brdo/Novobërde, Lipjan/Lipljan, Kamenice/Kamenica, Prizren, Mitrovica/Mitrovica, and Gjiilan/Gnjilane.

The United Nations Development Programme has stepped in, leading a rehabilitation project on a cemetery in Pristina containing many Jewish graves.

“Weather and time have left their marks at the cemetery,” Maria Suokko, UNDP head in Kosovo, said in a speech at the site.

“As a result, the history, the stories, the memories and, slowly, the identity is disappearing. Cemeteries are among the most valuable of historic resources as they reveal us information about historic events, religions, and genealogy.”

Others have taken a different approach.

In 2014, Berlin-based artist Elana Katz held an exhibition in Pristina’s old boxing club, which is believed to have once belonged to the city’s Jewish community. The exhibition, ‘Spaced Memory’, was part of a seven-year project in the Balkans addressing themes of memory, post-memory and the absence of history.

“In the Balkans there were once significant Jewish populations that no longer exist, both as a result of the Holocaust as well as immigration to Israel,” Katz told BIRN. “In this work I am interested in looking into the void left in societies where there was once a sub-culture that is now gone.”

“I consider, very importantly, this to be not only a Jewish topic but a human topic; as in many contexts and regions, sub-cultures, sites, and histories have been lost and/ or erased from collective/ national memory.”

Synagogues side by side with churches and mosques. Kosovo’s Jewish community is formally recognised under the country’s Law on Freedom of Religion and Shkodra, the president of BET Israel Jewish Community, said instances of anti-Semitism were rare compared with other European countries.



"We celebrate every holiday of the Jewish religion here in Kosovo: Rosh Hashanah [Jewish New Year], Hanukkah, Passover and we observe Shabat every Friday in our own homes," Shkodra told BIRN.

Even during Hanukkah, a menorah, a nine-branched candelabrum, is set up on the stairs of the national theatre to mark the eight-day holiday.

"We live in tolerance," said Shkodra. "Everytime I walk on the streets, I keep my Jewish hat [Kippah] on and everyone respects it."

He noted one incident in 2017, when a mayoral candidate in western Kosovo from the Vetevendosje party that won Kosovo's last election wrote on Facebook that Israel would be "vanished from the earth". The remark was widely condemned within Kosovo. The previous year, President Hashim Thaci banned the sale and distribution of books deemed anti-Semitic.

Despite Israel's refusal to recognise Kosovo as independent, Demiri said the Jewish community had worked with Kosovo's Ministry of Science, Education and Technology on sending Kosovar history teachers to Israel to see firsthand how the history of the Holocaust is taught.

And Flori Dedoni, whose mother's family was originally from Izmir in Turkey, said he had started a basic Hebrew class in Pristina. "The last time we had a Jewish school here was before World War II," he said. Islami, the filmmaker, said it was just the beginning.

"Synagogues in Pristina and Prizren need to be completed, rebuilt in the same places with the same stones, as soon as possible," he said. "For many centuries, the original synagogues existed side by side with the churches and mosques."

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## Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**The Bosnian Muslim scholar who saved the Sarajevo Hagaddah** Full article [here](#)

This is the story of Dervis M Korkut, a scholar who helped save Jewish lives and preserve their heritage in Bosnia.

One morning in early 1942, German military authorities called and informed the National Museum in Sarajevo that the Nazi General Johann Hans Fortner, commander of the 718th division, was going to visit the Museum. Jozo Petrovic, the Museum director, conveyed this to his colleague and Museum curator Dervis Korkut. Korkut immediately asked for the keys to the safe. Together they went to the basement, opened the safe, and Korkut took the Sarajevo Haggadah and hid it in the waistband of his trousers.

After a tour of the Museum, General Fortner demanded they give him the Haggadah. Although accounts differ, none of which can be confirmed categorically, what is certain is that the Haggadah was not given to Fortner. Korkut brought it home, after which he gave it to a trustworthy imam in a mountain village mosque, who protected it until it was safe.

Hailing from an influential religious family, Korkut studied in Istanbul and spoke several languages. Istanbul at that time, was awash with revolutionary ideas and dissidents. Korkut, along with other students, witnessed this turbulent era and graduated around the same time that a Serb terrorist assassinated the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914.



Dervis M Korkut

The war was already underway when Korkut returned to Bosnia, and he soon became a military imam in the Austro-Hungarian Army, spending time on the frontlines with the Bosniak regiment. After the First World War, the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed. Elections were held on November 1920, and Korkut campaigned for the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, the largest Bosniak political party.

During the elections, Milorad Draskovic, the Serb Minister of Interior, initiated a process to strip Yugoslav Jews of their voting rights. During the electioneering in the town of Derventa, Korkut gave a speech in favour of Jews and spoke against Draskovic's policies.

The Yugoslav Muslim Organization performed well in the election and recommended that Korkut be made the head of the Muslim Department in the Ministry of Religions. However, Korkut's work at the Ministry was not well received by Serb nationalists, and after three years the Serb Radical Party managed to have him removed. Korkut returned to work as a teacher and soon became a curator at the National Museum in Sarajevo. Over the next ten years, he would change jobs on many occasions, including a one year stint as the Mufti of Travnik. It is believed the regular change of employment was ascribed to his forthright manner.

In 1937, he would return to the National Museum in Sarajevo. On the eve of the Second World War, anti-Semitism in Yugoslavia was growing, with the Belgrade authorities initiated laws that targeted the Jewish population. This atmosphere also slowly spread to Sarajevo, so Korkut reacted by writing an article "Anti-Semitism is foreign to the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina", published in Belgrade in 1940, on the eve of the war.

In October 1941, Korkut would reiterate his stand by co-signing the Sarajevo Resolution, alongside several members of the Sarajevo Bosniak Muslim social elite – a public condemnation of and distancing from Nazi and Ustasha crimes.

Korkut didn't just talk the talk.

In November 1941, a friend of Korkut brought Donkica Papo, a young Jewish girl, to Korkut and asked if he could help her. Her parents had been sent to a concentration camp, and she was a member of a Partisan group that had been decimated by Nazi security forces. Korkut brought her home and told his wife Servet that she would be staying with them for a while. She was to be presented as Servet's cousin from Kosovo, who did not speak Bosnian. Papo was kept safe until Korkut managed to get her a false ID and send her to an Italian-occupied area of the country.

By 1943, the number of Bosniak Muslim refugees from eastern Bosnia, survivors of genocidal Serb Chetnik campaigns, was overwhelming in Sarajevo. Korkut, along with his colleagues, started collecting humanitarian aid for the refugees, most of whom were women and children.

At this point, Korkut's principles were getting him into trouble at the museum. Members of the Ustasha administration wanted to get their hands on the museum's rich library but, according to archival documents, Korkut refused to hand over the library, often citing legal or administrative reasons. In short, he became a liability to the regime, and in 1944 he received an order, signed by the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelic, to be transferred as a librarian to the Zagreb National University Library. However, Korkut's sources warned him that this was a foil to incarcerate him and his family in the Jasenovac camp, the largest and most brutal Ustasha-run camp where thousands of Jews and Serbs were murdered. Korkut managed to evade the transfer by taking sick leave and then going into hiding with his family in Sarajevo until the Partisans liberated it in April 1945.

After the establishment of the new Communist state, Korkut continued working at the Museum. The new government's policy was to create a new Communist elite. To do that, they attempted to dispose of or retire previous non-Communist elites by putting them on trial for "collaboration with the occupiers."



Germans entering Sarajevo

Korkut criticised the new government for decisions related to the destruction of cultural heritage in Sarajevo. He met with the British consul in Sarajevo and asked him to intervene with the Allies to provide international legal protection, similar to the 1919 Saint Germain Minority Protection Treaty, for Yugoslavian Muslims. Korkut was arrested and tried in 1947. It was a short trial in which several prominent Bosniak intellectuals were accused of collaboration with the Ustashes. Korkut's primary sin was the conversation he had had with the British consul, and he was sentenced to 8 years in prison with hard labour.

After his release, Korkut started working at the Sarajevo City Museum, where he worked until his death in 1969. He passed away at the age of 81.

The story of his life and saving the Haggadah and Donkica Papo was unknown until the Bosnian War when, in 1994, Papo wrote a letter to Yad Vashem and told the story of Korkut. On December 14, 1994, Yad Vashem recognised Dervis and Servet Korkut as Righteous Among the Nations.



Sarajevo Hagaddah

Korkut lived and worked according to what he believed in and never compromised on his principles. He did not calculate self-preservation into his decisions and sacrificed his work and life to do what was right. The least we can do is to remember him and honor his memory.

## Izmir, Turkey

### Izmir's New Synagogue Şaar Aşamayim has Opened its Doors

Izmir Alsancak Şaar Aşamayim Synagogue which was rebuilt and turned into a 'Jewish Community Center' has opened its doors with a ceremony on December 1st.

Translation by Janet MITRANI

Five-story Community Center

Alsancak Şaar Aşamayim Synagogue which was demolished and rebuilt again due to a critical weakness in its columns was reopened with a crowded ceremony. The new five-story building will also serve as a community center.

Modern and Useful

Şaar Aşamayim's Sefer Torah is replaced in its position in the synagogue that is transformed into a modern and useful building with the efforts of the architect Roni Ruso.





Şaar Aşamayim Synagogue which was basically a house with a garden bought in 1960, was demolished a few years ago due to a critical weakness in its columns. Thanks to the possibility provided by the reconstruction terms, the synagogue building is rebuilt as a brand new five-story 'Jewish Community Center'. Though not fully completed, the center has begun to serve the Izmir Jewish community with full capacity for a few months now.

The synagogue and community center building, observed as a modern and useful structure, brought to life with the efforts of the architect Roni Ruso, was greatly appreciated by the visitors. In my personal opinion, Roni Ruso's name, who carried out all the architectural services pro bono, despite his being a capable and professional architect, should be placed on a plate in the synagogue. This important work can only be memorialized this way.

Many guests including the Israeli Consulate Representative in Istanbul Consulate Ehud Moshe Eitam, Spanish Ambassador Juan Gonzales Barba, General Manager of Foundations Dr. Adnan Ertem, Foundations Izmir Regional Manager İsa Güven, prominent names of Izmir Jewish community and honorary consuls attended the opening ceremony last Sunday. I am not mentioning Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva and the Turkish Jewish community's co-president Ishak Ibrahimzadeh as guests since they were among the important actors of the ceremony together with Izmir Jewish community president Sami Azar.

The ceremony began with Chief Rabbi Haleva's entering the synagogue with the Sefer Torah in his hand under the chuppah, following the guests' taking their places. The Heichal Kodesh, where the Torah Scrolls are kept in the synagogue, was opened by Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, and the Sefer Torah brought was placed in the Heichal Kodesh after the traditional ceremony.

Minchah prayer before and Arvit prayer after the opening ceremony was recited all together. During the ceremony, President Sami Azar thanked all the contributors and wished for the new synagogue to be propitious to the community. Chief Rabbi Haleva gifted the synagogue a modern silver Kiddush glass and Co-president Ibrahimzadeh gifted a silver 'Puntero - Reading Stick'. Taking this opportunity, I, as the president of the Quincentennial Foundation gifted President Sami Azar the 'Besamim (an object used after the Shabbat to take people back to daily life with its scent)' shaped like a bird, made out of clay by the ceramic artist Sara Aji. The ceremony ended with a Maftirim song (a Sephardic song) after the Arvit prayer.

The ceremony where the shofars sounded was conducted by Hazan Nesim Beruhiyel. In the ceremony Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva and the Turkish Jewish community's co-president Ishak Ibrahimzadeh gave delightful speeches. Also during the ceremony Izmir Jewish Community President Sami Azar, previous term president Jak Kaya gifted General Manager of Foundations Dr. Adnan Ertem a silver 'Puntero' used to read the prayers. A wonderful cocktail was presented to the guests after the ceremony in the hall downstairs. The photographs were taken by Berk ERALTAN

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## **Istanbul, Turkey**

### **Jewish Museums in Istanbul Focus on Upside of Integration** Full article [here](#)

The synagogues, art nouveau Camondo steps and apartment buildings owned by Jewish families in the posh street of Serdar-i Ekrem — the 2019 edition of the European Day of Jewish Culture in Istanbul opened Sunday, Nov. 24, with a morning walk through the Jewish landmarks of Galata.

The Galata neighborhood was built and fortified by Italian merchants from Genoa in the Middle Ages on a steep hill overlooking the Golden Horn. Then it gradually acquired a sizable Jewish population of both Spanish and Eastern European origins. In the 19th century, it evolved into the financial center of the Ottoman Empire, where bankers and traders prospered. Nowadays the Jews of Istanbul — around 20,000 — live all over the city, but Galata is where their history and heritage are the most immediately visible, in religious structures as well as in private palaces.

Back at the synagogue and cultural center of Neve Shalom (which means oasis or valley of peace), opened in 1952 just under the shadow of the Galata tower, visitors were welcomed by a dense program of talks ranging from Jewish cinema to the Holocaust, concerts presenting both sacred and tango music and exhibitions depicting religious rituals and ancestral lands through photos and figurative patchworks. Even lunch was a cultural experience, a degustation true to tradition: signature dishes of the Sephardim — Jews of Spanish ancestry — such as a cold tomato and rice stew called “armi de tomat,” meatballs with leeks, “kashkarikas” made of squash peels, aniseed biscuits or pastries with Turkish delight for dessert.

The European Day was coordinated by the Quincentennial Foundation, the main cultural actor of the Jewish community in Turkey. It was established to commemorate and celebrate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, many of whom settled in the Ottoman Empire soon after, free to practice their religion.

Its president, Silvyo Ovadya, told Al-Monitor that the foundation wants to explain the history and values of Turkish Jews to a wider public through a full calendar of exhibitions, concerts, films, conferences and talks all year long. Indeed, participants at Sunday's program were representative of many segments of Turkish society. The foundation also manages the Museum of Turkish Jews, which opened in 2001 in the former Zulfaris synagogue in Galata and in 2016 moved inside Neve Shalom's premises, in three floors of an annex with a window view over the main hall.

The museum was completely renewed. Decorated in bright colors, the museum uses multimedia to bring the history of Turkish Jews alive. Prominent community figures and objects are featured with rigorously checked and updated information.

Even the basic narrative changed in some respects. First of all, as its director Nisya Isman Allovi explained to Al-Monitor, the history of Turkish Jews as recounted in the museum now begins with their more ancient presence in Anatolia in the fourth century BCE and not with the 1492 exodus, as they were in the region even before Turks arrived in 1071.

Above all, even though the main story is still that of a model friendship — almost a romance — between Jews and Ottoman/Turkish institutions and society, illustrated by the personal stories of Jewish parliamentarians or of Jewish soldiers during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922), some black spots have been added to the narrative, most of them quite recent, such as the infamous 1942 capital tax targeting minorities and the 2003 al-Qaida bombings against synagogues in Istanbul, including Neve Shalom itself.

Most visitors are students who are shown precious and revered religious objects such as parchment scrolls and Torah cases, traditional marriage costumes, tools used to perform circumcisions, fragments of everyday lives in sepia photographs. They learn how sultans welcomed and protected Jews, how Jews celebrate Passover and Kippur and how Jews contributed to architecture and journalism. “We want to communicate similarities, to avoid prejudices,” said Isman Allovi.

The Museum of Turkish Jews is mainly focused on the Sephardim's practices, recipes and language — Ladino, a mix of Spanish and Hebrew. For the Ashkenazim, Jews of Eastern European ancestry, there's only one summary panel in the historical section. But that is not surprising, as Neve Shalom and the Quincentennial Foundation are Sephardi institutions.

A more recent project has given cultural relevance and dignity to this other side of the history of Jews in Turkey. Another synagogue turned into a cultural center, the Schneidertempel (or Tailors' Synagogue) in Galata, is gradually taking the shape of a second Jewish museum.

Since May 2019, the balcony of the temple hosts a permanent exhibition or a “living archive” entirely devoted to the Ashkenazi community. They arrived in Anatolia later than the Sephardim, most of them in the 19th century. They fled pogroms from Austria and Germany, then from Poland and Ukraine. They spoke a different language, Yiddish; their traditions and everyday customs were different, their religious and civil institutions distinct.

The project started two years ago, when the grandson of an Ashkenazi Jew from Istanbul living in the United States donated the prayer books and documents of his grandfather to the Schneidertempel. “We decided to turn that first donation into a collective effort,” Izel Rozental, a caricaturist who curates the center's cultural program, told Al-Monitor.

Members of the community were asked to contribute objects, photographs and personal memories. They are shown in glass cases, put in context with interpretative texts: the ram's horn blown for the Jewish New Year, Torah scrolls, birth certificates, school papers, sheet music, commercial posters and even Ukrainian money.

The narrative flows through thematic fragments chronicling first migration stories and then depicting the Ashkenazim's happy life in Istanbul: their synagogues and schools, their social aid associations and sports clubs, their high-quality shops and the sounds and flavors of their music and cuisine. A specific section tells the story of the 1942 Wealth Tax and the conscription of non-Muslims into labor battalions. Another one remembers "the Ashkenazim who contributed to science and arts in Turkey."

Giuseppe Mancini is an Italian political analyst and freelance journalist based in Istanbul. He has written extensively on art, archaeology, public memory and cultural management.

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## Cyprus

As mentioned in the article about Ioannina Mayor, Moses Eliasof meeting with Limassol Mayor Nikos Nikolaidis, the hero Christodoulos Sozos was discussed. Here is a short article about Christodoulos Sozos. Christodoulos Sozos was born in Limassol on 10 March 1872. His father and grandfather had fought as volunteers in the Cretan Revolt (1866–1869) and the Greek War of Independence respectively. He studied law at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and worked as a lawyer before the beginning of his political career. He served as member of the Cypriot Legislative Council from 1901 until 1911, and represented Limassol–Paphos constituency as an MP during the same period. In April 1903, he exploited the absence of a single Turkish Cypriot member of the council to pass a resolution which declared that the people of Cyprus aspired to reunite with their motherland (Greece). He also served as the mayor of Limassol from until 1908 his death, his most notable achievements being the erection of the city's first public garden as well as the electrification of the street lighting, the first such occasion in Cyprus. Upon returning from his visit to Great Britain in June 1912, he became convinced that the only way for the Enosis between Cyprus and Greece was an intermediate step of autonomous rule. His stance drew sharp criticism from his political rival Nikolaos Katalanos who described the supporters of autonomy as madmen and traitors.

### Balkan War

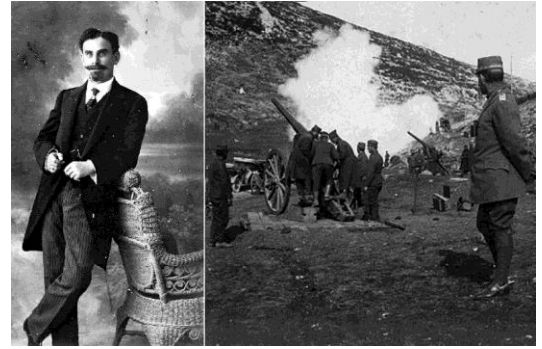
At the outbreak of the First Balkan War, Cyprus was nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire, while in fact being administered by the British Empire as agreed in the Cyprus Convention of 1878. On 17 October 1912, Sozos departed from Limassol as part of a small unit of the Cypriot Red Cross which headed to Athens in order to assist the Greek army which at the time fought against the Ottomans. His wife Ermioni Sozou, his 4-year-old son Zinon and 7 sisters were not informed about his decision as he feared that they would not allow him to leave. The ship made stops at Alexandria and Patras before arriving to its final destination on 23 October. On 7 November, he took part in an hour long official meeting with the Greek prime minister Eleutherios Venizelos. Venizelos became emotional and eventually gave in to his pleas, allowing him and Larnaca MP Evaggelos Hajioannou to enlist in the 1st Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Infantry Division as privates. On 1 November his unit reached Thessaloniki, on 13 November he was dispatched to Agioi Saranta. He fought at Delvino before taking part in the Battle of Bizani. On 6 December, Sozos was killed in action on the Profitis Ilias height, Manoliassa, outside Bizani. Despite multiple search missions his body was never recovered. News of his death reached Cyprus in the second half of December. His wife Ermioni received hundreds of telegrams offering condolences from both Cyprus and abroad, among them was one from the British High Commissioner to Cyprus Hamilton Goold-Adams. Greek



Limassol Balkan Wars Memorial.  
Sozos' name is inscribed at the top



schools and courts suspended their activities, a court in Nicosia also raised a flag in honor of Sozos thus breaking the law as Britain maintained a neutral stance in the conflict. Ironically Nikolaos Katalanos delivered a speech during Sozos' mnemosynon where he described him as a hyperpatriot. Mnemosyna were also held in dozens of villages across Cyprus, as well as in Cypriot communities in Athens, Egypt and Sudan. Greek Cypriot newspapers were swept with nationalist fervor comparing Sozos with Pavlos Melas. Goold-Adams and his successor as British High Commissioner to Cyprus John Eugene Clauson, praised Sozos in their last and first addresses respectively. A photo of Sozos was placed in the Hellenic Parliament. Streets were named after Sozos in Limassol and Ioannina, a statue honoring Sozos was also erected in the former. Sozos' death left a lasting mark on the Enosis movement, being one of its most important events before the 1931 Cyprus revolt.




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### News of Interest about Italian Jews

A Holocaust Survivor Received Anti-Semitic Threats, So Thousands of Supporters Rallied Around Her  
Full article [here](#)



Liliana Segre, an 89-year-old Auschwitz survivor and senator-for-life, center, attends with Milan's Mayor Giuseppe Sala, fourth from right front row, an anti-racism demonstration in Milan's Victor Emmanuel II arcade in northern Italy that was joined by mayors of some 600 Italian towns, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2019.

AP Photo/Luca Bruno

MILAN (AP) — A Holocaust survivor who has been put under police protection due to anti-Semitic threats was escorted Tuesday evening through the center of Milan by hundreds of Italian mayors and thousands of ordinary citizens behind a banner reading: "Hatred has no future."

"I have known hatred. I have known what it means to be a reject of the society to which I believed I belonged," Liliana Segre, an 89-year-old senator-for-life who survived Auschwitz as a child, told the crowd. "I heard the words of hatred, hateful and insulting, and I saw with my eyes the realization of a ferocious program prepared from hatred," Segre said.

Segre said she now looks for hope in the eyes of school children when she tells her story, and in the eyes of mayors and ordinary citizens "who came here to shout, 'Enough hatred.' "

Segre was given a police escort last month after a stream of anti-Semitic posts and threats were aimed at her after she championed a new parliamentary panel against racism, discrimination, anti-Semitism and online hatred.

"Let's leave hatred to the anonymous ones at the keyboards," she said to cheers in front of City Hall.

Milan Mayor Giuseppe Sala told thousands in the crowd, including about 1,000 mayors, that such demonstrations would continue "until this climate of hatred changes."

The mayors, wearing sashes in the Italian green, white and red, were applauded as they entered the arcaded Galleria, and the crowd chanted "Liliana" when Segre met the mayors below the central glass dome. Thousands of ordinary Italians joined the march or cheered from the sidelines, singing the anti-fascist anthem "Bella Ciao," as the march proceeded through the 19th century Galleria to the square in front of City Hall. The march was organized by the Italian mayor's association and was meant to cut across party lines. But the role of League leader Matteo Salvini in fomenting anti-migrant and racist sentiment was recognized. Bologna Mayor Virginio Merola told The Associated Press that rising racism in Italy could be traced to the country's long economic crisis along with the League's provocative rhetoric. Bologna is the largest city in Emilia-Romagna, a traditionally left-wing stronghold that faces tough regional elections next month, where Salvini is poised to make strong gains.

"There is too much racism, hatred and anti-Semitism in Europe, and Italy," Merola said. "We need to react and show citizens that the way to live together is through civil cohabitation."

Segre said the history of Italian Jews was represented in each of the 8,000 towns and cities in Italy "in the names of the streets, to the headstones, to the rare Jewish vestiges," that will remain when there are no more survivors to bear witness.

It was a reminder made more poignant by recent anti-Semitic incidents involving just such markers of Jewish life. The city council of Schio, north of Vicenza, last month blocked as "divisive" the town mayor's move to put up so-called stumbling stones to remember Schio's Holocaust victims. And vandals in Rome defaced street signs that had been rededicated to honor two Jewish female scholars and an anti-fascist professor. The streets had previously been named after anti-Semitic scientists.

Segre is backing a National Museum of Resistance, which was announced this week to be built in Milan. "It is a moral commitment to support and carry forward the memory," she said.

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## News from Greek-Jewish Israel

### Moshav Tsur Moshe

The village was founded on 13 September 1937 by a group of 20 immigrants from Kastoria, Greece as part of the tower and stockade settlement program. It was named after Moshe Kofinas, a Greek MP and president of the Greek branch of the National Zionist Organization in 1919. He raised money from local Jewish donors and funded the purchase of part of the land to be used for the project (funds were also offered by the Carasso family from Thessaloniki), as well as for the Hasmonean city of Tzuran which was located in the area. Kofinas died in 1924, before he could see the plans fulfilled.

Kofinas' unfinished work was carried on by his faithful following: Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir, Chai Uzziel, David Florentine, Yosef Uzziel, Moshe Carasso and Leon Recanati, who joined ranks and called themselves by the name, The Dr. Moshe Kofinas Organization of Greek Immigrants for Settlement. They worked to obtain all the necessary permits, and by 1934 the first immigrants associated with this group arrived in Magdiel. In 1935, the Jewish Agency provided a plot of land for the group near Beit Shean, where they began to build their farming settlement. However, after one year, they were redirected to a place in the Sharon Valley, where they eventually founded the present settlement in September 1937.

The Moshav was recently visited by Jews from Greece to plant a tree in memory of Daniel and Samuel Eskenazi. Matilda Eskenazi and her husband John Kalef Ezra (both of Ioannina) were there for the cemetery, along with Elias Messinas and Yvette Nachmias, who worked to create Athens 2004 at Tsur Moshe.





## News of Interest for Everyone

### David Amato, a Hanukkah Baby Who Spread his Wings

The story of an exceptional man honored with Mexico's Order of the Aztec Eagle

Full Jerusalem Post article by David Geffen [here](#)

On December 11, 1917, the second day of Hanukkah 5678, the two main headlines on page 1 of The Atlanta Constitution underlined the great victory across the seas: "Jerusalem Falls into the Hands of British Troops"; "Jerusalem Is Freed from Turk after Virtually 12 Centuries – British Capture the Holy City."

Further down on that same front page was a story linking Jerusalem and Atlanta: "Jerusalem's Fall Brings Happiness to Atlanta Father" was the headline, and the underline read "With city in British hands, Amato believes he will be able to bring his wife and children here."

Aware of the situation of this Atlanta native, the newspaper played a role in this joyous event. "With a face wreathed in smiles, A. (Abraham) Amato, at his quaint little shoe shop, 85 Capitol Avenue, received the glad tidings of the capture of Jerusalem, from a Constitution reporter yesterday afternoon."

It was to take almost four years for the family to be reunited, but members of the Atlanta community were now personal witnesses to the meaning of the "capture of Jerusalem."

Abraham Amato was born in 1893 on the isle of Rhodes – a place Sephardi Jews had lived since the year 1000 – where he developed a deep love of Zion growing up in his formative years under the influence of Zionism. Whereas his contemporaries immigrated to the US, he chose Eretz Yisrael and made aliyah in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

His granddaughter, Leah Amato Franco of Atlanta, writes: "Since Abraham had a beautiful/operatic tenor voice, he found an unusual type of employment. He would climb a minaret and call the Arabs of Jerusalem to prayer, three or five times a day." Then his fortunes changed.

"When his shoes wore out, he went to a cobbler in the Nahalat Zion neighborhood late one Friday afternoon before Shabbat," says Leah. "The owner of the shop, Mr. Amin, struck up a conversation with my grandfather. Mr. Amin was appalled how Abraham was earning a living. My great-grandfather, to be, said to him that singing in the minaret was not the type of vocation a young Jewish man should have."



Amin made it clear that Abraham could work for him, and "I will teach you my trade." An invitation was made to join the family for Shabbat. "The other objective of this kindness was to introduce Abraham to Leah Amin, who was to become my grandmother." Abraham and Leah were married in 1908 and lived in Nahalat Zion near the Amin family. Their first child, a daughter named Kaden, was born in 1909. The second, a son, David, Leah's father, was born on the first night of Hanukkah 5673, December 4, 1912. Abraham became a successful shoemaker in Jerusalem, but there was too much competition. He decided to take his family to America. He applied for visas and was surprised to learn that he could receive a visa to immigrate to the US, but his wife and children, as Turkish citizens, could not.

In 1915, he left alone to start a business in Atlanta, which was chosen because a number of Jews from Rhodes had moved there. It was a very difficult goodbye, but he saw no other choice. By October 1915, Abraham Amato had opened a shoe store in Atlanta and advertised it in the American Jewish Review, an Atlanta monthly.

The British and Turks were battling for Jerusalem. David was wounded seriously. His daughter, Leah Amato Franco, who lives in Atlanta, explains: "When dad was five years old in 1917, he was hit in the head by a truck during a battle in the city. My father was in a coma for about a month. Since the truck hit him on the left side of the head,

the right side of his body was paralyzed. Eventually, he gained limited use of his right arm and leg. With limited medical equipment available, he could not begin rehabilitation until the family moved to Atlanta in 1921."

After the war ended, the American consulate in Jerusalem was overwhelmed by requests for visas. Leah, Kaden and David Amato joined Abraham in Atlanta only in 1921.

"My grandfather, Abraham, had been waiting for his son, David, to reach Atlanta since there was a Shriner's Hospital for Cripples in the city, and south of Atlanta there were the therapeutic waters at Warm Springs," Leah says. "The extensive therapy helped my father acquire more use of the right side of his body. He studied in the Atlanta public schools, graduating high school in 1931."

David transformed the treatments he underwent into a way of dealing with the challenges of life. In his first report in 1941, as an employee of the US Department of Labor, he wrote that statistics prove "that people who go through physical rehabilitation can become even better workers in their fields of endeavor." That became his credo.

After graduating high school, he was awarded a scholarship to George Washington University in Washington. Upon graduating college in 1935, David made a romantic decision: to return to Rhodes to find a bride. Leah's mother, Rose, was chosen by David. They were married in January 1936 and honeymooned on a ship voyage back to the US. David had forebodings about the future of the Jews of Rhodes. It took three years, but he obtained visas for Rose's mother and sister to join them in America.

In a newspaper article, David described the character of the elders of Rhodes. "They exported brains by encouraging their children to seek their fortunes elsewhere.... These people have enriched the countries to which they migrated." Amato is most dramatic when he writes that "this foresight" of sending the children away "was heavenly inspired... for all the 4,000 remaining Jews on Rhodes were slaughtered by the Nazis."

The life of David Amato, the Jerusalem Hanukkah boy, was one of dramatic service and exceptional achievement. His first position was with the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor in Washington. At a conference in October 1941, he made the chilling pronouncement that because of 90,000 individuals suffering permanent impairment and 1,782,000 temporary disabilities, 125,240,200 man-days of employment were lost in the US in 1940.

When World War II began, he was invited to become a member of the National Labor Board, where he assisted in creating methods to transform vocational rehabilitation into a key proponent for providing sufficient workmen to man the military industries of the country.

In 1952, Mexico needed help to develop its rehabilitation facilities so that the graduates could more readily enter the nascent industries in the country. David was offered a position in the American diplomatic corps to bring his expertise to Mexico.

This was an exciting step forward for him, and he took it gladly. The Amatos – David, Rose and their daughters, Leah, 14, and Diane, 9 – moved to Mexico City that year, where David's career was meteoric as he fashioned for the Mexican government and people a modern sense of what rehabilitation can achieve in all fields. Not only did David work in his chosen field, he became a correspondent for The News, an English-language newspaper in Mexico, writing hundreds of articles both in his area of expertise and on many aspects of Israel and Judaism.

In 1989, David was awarded the Order of the Aztec Eagle, Mexico's highest decoration given to foreigners, by the president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In 1998, the Mexico-Israel Institute, celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the State of Israel, presented the Mexico-Israel award to 25 people in different fields. One of those honored was David Amato.

The great love he had for Israel can be seen in the many newspaper columns he wrote and in the many visits he made to Israel. David died in 2012 in Atlanta, a few months short of his 100th birthday. "Throughout his 99 years of life, nothing stopped him from trying," Leah says. On the 107th anniversary of his birth on Hanukkah in Jerusalem, I quote from one of his most powerful articles, titled "Jerusalem, a Unique City."

**Gershon Harris**  
**Hatzor Haglilit, Israel**



As we enter the new calendar year, the weekly Torah portions continue to deal with the story of Joseph and his brothers, which is one of Judaism's most famous narratives. One of the reasons for this is that Joseph's life and experiences in Egypt were seen by our Sages as a precursor and model of Jewish life and continuity in the Diaspora, even under the most ominous and difficult circumstances.

Joseph is a visionary, and already at age 17 dreamed dreams where he becomes the master of those around him, including his own family. Due to his brothers' fierce envy and anger at what they perceived as arrogance and even disrespect toward their father, they conjure up a plot to be rid of Joseph without killing him, and to lead their father to believing that he was killed by a wild animal. They do this by selling him to an Ishmaelite caravan, who ultimately sell Joseph as a slave to Pharaoh's chief-of-staff so to speak - Potifar, who rapidly discovers how talented and loyal Joseph is, subsequently entrusting him with total authority over his household. This episode of Joseph's life certainly was a sign for the future, since Jews were also often victims of circumstance and forcibly brought to strange lands as slaves. And like Joseph, Jews rapidly proved their talents, acumen and loyalty to their masters as they helped create economic prosperity for their host societies as they gained the trust and even admiration of local leaders.

However, Joseph is falsely accused of rape by Potifar's wife when Joseph resists her attempts to seduce him, and nothing Joseph can say will help. He is unceremoniously thrown into prison, and remains there for two full years, when he is called to Pharaoh's court to interpret two ominous but obviously significant dreams. This episode is also a clear precursor for the very precarious nature of Jewish life in the Diaspora, whereby virtually overnight, the local Jewish population could go from being privileged to hated pariahs, often as a result of false and wild accusations, and which was the terrible fate of all too many Jewish communities over the centuries.

But Joseph's uncanny ability to interpret dreams and his exceptional wisdom cannot be matched, just as has been the fate of Jews the world over, and Pharaoh appoints him as viceroy to Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself in authority and power. Joseph proves more than worthy of his task but there is a price: Joseph must become "Egyptian" in both dress and practice if he is to succeed in gaining the people's and Pharaoh's confidence. This is no small task, as Jews learned time after time later in history, since the pull of full assimilation was often irresistible and even forced. Yet Joseph succeeds in keeping his faith in God as a bearer of the legacy and faith of father Jacob, grandfather Isaac, and great-grandfather Abraham. He becomes Egyptian on the outside, but within himself remains true to his own identity and beliefs as an Israelite, i.e. Jew. This true test of Jewish identity and loyalty to Judaism is a clear precursor of what Jews later experienced in almost every country of sojourn. And straddling a thin line between adapting oneself to the local society while remaining separate and resistant to complete assimilation still characterizes Jewish life throughout the Diaspora.

Finally, though, Joseph's life in Egypt ultimately reflected a sad but apparently inevitable fact of life as a Jew in a foreign land and culture, no matter how successful and even admired the Jew may be. A short verse in the Torah clearly reveals that despite Joseph's job, authority and closeness to Pharaoh, he was never fully accepted by Egyptian society as a 'native' son. At a certain point, though his brothers do not recognize Joseph, they do note that at a festive meal he hosted for them and his Egyptian staff, Joseph sits with his brothers and not the Egyptians, because, as the verse in the Torah explicitly states, it was an abomination for an Egyptian to dine with a Hebrew – even the viceroy of Egypt. Thus, no matter how assimilated or acculturated we may become in any land, ultimately, we remain a people and faith apart, with Joseph's life and faith in God being a model for us all.



**Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé**  
**Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America**



Parashah of the Week – Veyeshev  
Inspired to Succeed

Beginning from Parashat Vayeshev, the narrative of the Torah focuses mainly on the life of Yosef, the oldest son of Rahel. Yosef's personality indeed stands out for the many events and the drama that his life is composed of. The Torah relates that Yaakov loved dearly and at first glance, it appears that Yaakov's love for Yosef was based on him being Rahel's firstborn. Yet one wonders, was this the only reason for why Yaakov felt so connected to Yosef and why he decided to single him out from the rest of his children? As we read in our Parashah, we find that Yosef rejected the numerous attempts of his master's wife to seduce him and to be with him. The Torah has given us a physical description of Yosef and also of his good character. In his commentary to the Torah, Shemuel ben Hofni Gaon, develops further the understanding of the verses describing Yosef and his actions.

The Gaon begins by quoting from the verse, "And Yosef was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon (Bereshit 39:6): the verse explains the physical beauty of Yosef in addition to his intellect, his insight and his other mental prowess, as Pharaoh would later tell him (later on 41:39) "There is none so discreet and wise as you". And the beauty of [his] faith, like it says (42:18) "For I fear G-d".

In this excerpt, Samuel ben Hofni Gaon explains the Torah's description of Yosef. The verse says that he was "of beautiful form and fair to look upon." This is Yosef's physical beauty and not his only beauty, as the Gaon proves from additional verses. Yosef also possessed a keen intellect and analytical skills as Pharaoh praised him for them saying, "There is none so discreet and wise as you" (Ibid 41:39). Furthermore, Yosef remained strong in his faith even while away from his family as he told his brothers "For I fear God" (Ibid 42:18). Besides for physical beauty, intellect and unwavering faith, Yosef also possessed the proper character traits. His traits were balanced; he was not too much to one side in any of his traits but straddled the middle road. This enabled him to weigh decisions and apply common sense before jumping to conclusions. Yosef's balanced traits provided him with patience, courage and integrity and through his traits he upheld his morals in the presence of Potiphar's wife (Ibid 39:7-20).

Samuel ben Hofni Gaon supplements Bereshit 39:6 with additional verses from the following chapters to form a complete picture of Yosef. He was good looking. He was also intelligent, discerning and faithful to his father's faith. Lastly, he had good qualities and balanced them, not leaning towards either extreme. This balance provided him with patience, courage and integrity which enabled him to overcome obstacles.

Indeed Yosef had an outstanding personality. He was able to overcome all the many hurdles that he encountered, while at the same time building towards a future and becoming an extremely successful individual. The lessons that can be drawn from Yosef life and personality are indeed numerous. Yet, we might conclude, that one of the greatest lessons that we can learn from the story of Yosef, is how simple and how real the Torah makes it sound for anyone to grasp.

Shabbat Shalom

(1) Shemuel ben Hofni Gaon or Shemuel ha-Kohen ben Hofni; died 1034. Samuel ben Hofni, thought to be the last Gaon of Sura, apparently was the next-to-last gaon. He came originally from Pumpedita's academy, when Sherira's son, Hai,

was appointed as gaon. Some time later, Hai married Ben Hofni's daughter, and soon after Ben Hofnil became gaon of Sura in 997 CE.. Although most of Ben Hofnil's works are lost, his reputation survives because other scholars have made several references to his work. Some fragments have been found in the Cairo Geniza. Ben Hofnil possessed an orderly, analytical mind which is reflected both in his talmudic and exegetical works. He shows a special predilection for systematic, numbered classification of subjects under discussion. Ben Hofnil wrote the first introduction to the Talmud, summarizing and classifying its basic principles. This work is mentioned by early scholars and is currently being recovered from the Geniza. Ben Hofnil wrote a book of precepts based on the commandments and some 15 other works on various subjects are known because fragments of some of them have been published. Ben Hofnil translated and wrote a commentary on the Torah in Arabic, which was used widely by Abraham ibn Ezra, Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon, Bachya ben Asher and the unknown author of the Midrash ha-Gadol. Ben Hofnil, well acquainted with the classical philosophic writings, was a rationalist. Maimonides and his son Abraham refer to his philosophic concepts in support of their own ideas. Ben Hofnil makes use of the ideas of the philosophers in his Bible commentary, though he does not quote them directly. There is some uncertainty as to whether he wrote a specific polemical work against the heretics of his time. His books, however, contain direct and indirect refutation of the arguments advanced by numerous skeptical or atheistic groups. Ben Hofnil died in 1013 CE.

(2) Page 88 from Vayhi Yosef yefeh toar.

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## **U.S. House recognizes Armenian genocide, backs Turkey sanctions**

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to recognize the mass killings of Armenians a century ago as a genocide, a symbolic but historic vote instantly denounced by Turkey.

The Democratic-controlled House voted 405-11 in favor of a resolution asserting that it is U.S. policy to commemorate as genocide the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923. The Ottoman Empire was centered in present-day Turkey.

The vote marked the first time in 35 years that such legislation was considered in the full House, underscoring widespread frustration in Congress with the Turkish government, from both Democrats and President Donald Trump's fellow Republicans.

Shortly after the Armenian genocide vote, House lawmakers from both parties also overwhelmingly backed legislation calling on Trump to impose sanctions on Turkey over its offensive in northern Syria, another action likely to inflame relations with NATO ally Turkey.

The fate of both measures in the Senate is unclear, with no vote scheduled on similar legislation. Turkey accepts that many Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed in clashes with Ottoman forces during World War I, but contests the figures and denies that the killings were systematically orchestrated and constitute a genocide.

Ankara views foreign involvement in the issue as a threat to its sovereignty. For decades, measures recognizing the Armenian genocide have stalled in Congress, stymied by concerns that it could complicate relations with Turkey and intense lobbying by the Ankara government.

U.S. lawmakers have been fuming about Turkey, however, in recent months, because of its purchase of a Russian missile defense system in defiance of U.S. sanctions and, more recently, its incursion into northern Syria to fight Kurdish forces after Trump abruptly announced he was withdrawing U.S. troops from the area.



## **QUICK CONDEMNATION BY TURKEY**

Turkey quickly condemned both resolutions, saying the genocide resolution “is devoid of any historical or legal basis,” and adding: “As a meaningless political step, its sole addressees are the Armenian lobby and anti-Turkey groups.”

Its Foreign Ministry said the sanctions measure, which targets senior officials and the Turkish armed forces, was “incompatible with the spirit of our NATO alliance,” and contradicted a ceasefire agreement for northern Syria reached with the Trump administration on Oct. 17.

“We urge the U.S. Congress, not to exploit bilateral issues for domestic political consumption and to act in line with the spirit of our Alliance and partnership,” the ministry said in a statement, urging the Trump administration to take action to prevent a further deterioration in relations.

Turkey views the Kurds in northern Syria as a security threat. Many members of Congress were furious about the assault against Kurdish troops, who until recently were fighting alongside U.S. forces against Islamic State militants. Democratic U.S. Representative Adam Schiff, whose California district is home to a large Armenian-American population, has sought passage of such legislation for 19 years. He urged support for the measure in an emotional House speech that referenced the Kurds.

“When we see the images of terrified Kurdish families in northern Syria, loading their possessions into cars or carts and fleeing their homes headed to nowhere except away from Turkish bombs and marauding militias, how can we say the crimes of a century ago are in the past?” he said.

“We cannot. We cannot pick and choose which crimes against humanity are convenient to speak about. We cannot cloak our support for human rights in euphemisms. We cannot be cowed into silence by a foreign power,” Schiff said.

Reporting by Patricia Zengerle; Additional reporting by Tuvan Gumrukcu in Ankara; Editing by Chris Reese and Peter Cooney

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### **Going Greek on Chanukah – Sephardic Recipes** by Jennifer Abadi full article [here](#)

A twist on the pancake/doughnut option, with extra virgin olive oil and red wine.

Preparing dishes made with oil, such as the traditional fried potato pancakes (latkes) and jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot), naturally recalls the miracle of the oil that lasted for eight nights instead of one — the heart of the Chanukah story. But there is also the less direct symbolism of incorporating dairy products into the Chanukah menu as a way to honor Judith, who saved the Israelites from the Assyrians.

Judith seduced the enemy general Holofernes with generous amounts of cheese and wine, and when he passed out she cut off his head with his own sword. Even though this story supposedly took place a couple of hundred years before the Chanukah event, it parallels the theme of courage over fearfulness.

Going back at least as early as the fourth century B.C.E., the Romaniote Jews (from the old term Romaioi that once referred to people of the Eastern Roman Empire) are considered to be the oldest Jewish community from Greece, as well as one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world today. They spoke their own dialect called Judeo-Greek, and were a different community from the Spanish/Ladino-speaking (Sephardic) Jews who came to Greece in the late 15th century when fleeing the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.





Chanukah has traditionally been a minor Jewish holiday. But because of its proximity to Christmas on the calendar in the Western world (especially in North America), Chanukah parties and the custom of gift-giving have become more popular. Although most of the older individuals I spoke with shared with me that the holiday was not such a “big deal” in their home while growing up, they did recall eating a special food during that time that had some symbolic connection to the Chanukah story.

Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, whose family has Sephardic roots from Salonika, shared that she always ate Prasa Keftedes (Ladino for “leek fritters” with eggs and matzah meal) and Boumwelos/Bumuelos (Ladino for “fried dough pastries” from the Old Spanish verb *abuñolar* meaning “to brown”) drizzled with honey. Rashel Cohen, whose family comes from the cities of Lárissa and Vólos in the Thessaly region recalls eating leek fritters with a kosher sheep’s milk cheese called kasseri. On the first night she also ate fried balls of dough doused with honey and cinnamon called Loukoumades (likely from the Arabic *luqma* meaning “mouthful/morsel”).

In “The Cookbook of the Jews of Greece,” Nicholas Stavroulakis lists a whole wheat pancake recipe from Ioannina called Tiganites that is made with honey, ouzo and walnuts and fried in olive oil. In all of these special foods we see how the use of olive oil has been incorporated to recall the vessel of pure olive oil found by the Maccabees in the Second Temple after their victory over their Hellenistic/Greek oppressors. The following is a recipe I developed that’s perfect for Chanukah but a departure from the more common fritter/pancake or fried doughnut, as it is fried in extra virgin olive oil rather than butter or vegetable oil. I also add milk and red wine to recall the dairy and wine that Judith fed to Holofernes to get him drunk before killing him in order to save the Israelites.

Although this style of cake fits more into the family of sweet breads like zucchini bread or carrot cake, the combination of olive oil and red wine with cinnamon, cloves and lemon zest creates an earthy flavor that is not overly sweet.



Chanukah Wine Cake with Olive Oil, Cinnamon and Lemon Zest

**So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.**

If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) made out to *Kehila Kedosha Janina*, to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

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When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street. We are open for services every Saturday morning at 9:30am and all major Jewish holidays and our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm and by appointment during the week.



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**280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002**

**Website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)**

**Email: [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)**

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