April 2020 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This month, we celebrate Pesah (Passover), the story of survival, endurance, confronting adversity and how G-d protected us and led us out of Egypt and into Eretz Israel. This year, around the world, Pesah will be quite different in most households as we continue to fight the spread of the coronavirus. Many of us may have to miss the large family gatherings that are symbolic of the Holiday. Our Christian friends may also be deprived of their traditional church services and family dinners. We are all in this together. We have suffered worse in our history. We will survive this. Just know that our thoughts and prayers are with you. Please note that both our synagogue and museum are closed until further notice. Understandably, this has caused severe financial hardship. If you see it in your heart to send in a contribution, we would be most grateful. You can donate via our website www.kkjsm.org and info on contributions is listed throughout this e-newsletter.

Haggadah from Corfu 1940
This newsletter, our 133rd 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.

We have now reach over 10,500 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

Hopefully, we will soon be open for services again. When we are, 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 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.
Simchas

March and February were filled with simchas. We love to celebrate with our community throughout the world. This month we celebrate the birth of three new members of our Greek-Jewish community. To their families we say “na sas zisen.” They should live for you (they should bring joy into your lives).

Miriam McCullough Levy was born on February 29th, 2020. She is the daughter of Joshua and Colleen, the granddaughter of Daniel and April Levy, the great-granddaughter of Morris and Yvette Levy (both of Blessed Memory), the great-great-granddaughter of Rabbi Jessoula Levy and Esther Cantos.

Shana Attas and Michael Brous gave birth to a baby boy, Eli Benjamin Brous, born March 17, 2020. The new addition is the grandson of Nelli and Dr. Lew Attas, the great grandson of Cal and Norma Attas, and the great-great grandson of Solomon Attas and Anna Cohen (both of Blessed Memory).
In March, we celebrated the 93rd birthday of Evelyn Vitoulis Kaplan. We thank Evelyn for her help in filling in the blanks on the Vitoulis family tree. Evelyn is the daughter of Morris Vitoulis and Lydia Saporta Vitoulis (both of Blessed Memory). Morris was one of Yanniote pioneers, arriving in 1905 with his father, Samuel. Evelyn is the granddaughter of Samuel Vitouls and Esther Vitoulis. She is also the sister of Roslyn Honan and Samuel Vitoulis and the mother of Shelley Mercado.

Passings

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Eliyahu Kassorla Nussbaum of Bedford, NH. Eliyahu was the beloved husband of Craig Nussbaum and dear son of Rabbi Hayyim and Jodi Kassorla and stepson of Dr. Yael Kassorla.

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Sylvia Ringel (from the David family of Ioannina) on March 12, 2020 at the age of 91. Sylvia was born November 25, 1928 in the Bronx, part of the Yanniote community. She had her roots in both the David and Barouch families and was very proud of her Greek-Jewish heritage and her large extended family. We were honored when Sylvia traveled to Greece with us as part of a large David family reunion. Sylvia’s husband of nearly 68 years, Sam Ringel passed away five months ago. Sylvia raised her family in White Meadow Lake NJ and lived for a number of years in Tamarac, Florida. She is survived by her three sons (David, Jonathan and Alan and her grandchildren,
It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Dario Gabbai (September 2, 1922 – March 25, 2020). He was a Greek Sephardi Jew and Holocaust survivor, notable for his role as a member of the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz. He was deported to the camp in March 1944 and put to work in one of the crematoria at Birkenau, where he was forced to assist in the burning of the hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews that were deported to the camp during the spring and summer of that year.

Gabbai remained at Auschwitz until its evacuation in January 1945. He was liberated from Ebensee concentration camp in Austria by the United States Army and spoke publicly about what he witnessed and experienced during the Holocaust. He was among the last remaining survivors of the Sonderkommando.

Gabbai was born in Thessaloniki to a Greek mother and an Italian father and was educated in Italian schools in Greece. At the age of 21 or 22 years old, Gabbai and his entire family were detained by the Nazis on March 24, 1944 in Athens, where they had fled from Salonika, and on April 1 they were sent to Auschwitz in cattle wagons. Ten days later, this transport arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they faced the selection process. With the exception of Gabbai himself, his brother, and two of his cousins (brothers Maurice and Shlomo Venezia), the entire family were selected for extermination and gassed the same day. Gabbai watched his parents being loaded onto the trucks that would take them to the crematoria and gas chambers. Gabbai was registered into the camp as prisoner 182568. Gabbai and the three other young men were selected to be Sonderkommandos and quarantined in Block 13 (known as the Sonderkommando-Block) in the men's camp of Birkenau for approximately 1 month.

At the end of the war, Gabbai was one of around 90 surviving Auschwitz Sonderkommando members. He moved to the United States under the sponsorship of the Jewish community in Cleveland, and in 1951, relocated to California. Gabbai’s retirement life consisted of visiting the gym daily, which he described as therapeutic: "When I'm sweating, everything goes away...my problems are over". He has compared the "lingering pain of what happened at Auschwitz to a virus that lies dormant [in him] until something triggers it", and said that there were moments when his Sonderkommando cohorts would have preferred to die, but then reconsidered, knowing that if they survived they would be able to tell the world what they witnessed. He has been described as a survivor who "combines incredible strength with a vulnerability and fragility that become apparent when he bears witness."

Gabbai features throughout "Auschwitz - The Final Witness", a 2001 NY Festival winning film made by Sky for Channel 5 which reunited him with his two Sonderkommando cousins as they revisited the death camp together for the first time in over 50 years, Auschwitz: The Nazis and the 'Final Solution', a 2005 BBC six-episode documentary film series, and also makes an appearance in the 1998 Steven Spielberg Holocaust documentary, "The Last Days".
Gabbai was also featured in a 2010 documentary film, Finding Nico, about the Greek-American actor, Nico Minardos. Gabbai and Minardos met while emigrating from Greece to the States after the war and became close friends and roommates in Los Angeles in the 1950s. Gabbai was reunited with Minardos while attending a special screening of the documentary at the Motion Picture & Television Country House and Hospital, where Minardos was convalescing after a stroke.

Gabbai died on March 25, 2020, at the age of 97.

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Manolis Glezos, a Greek Resistance Fighter who our Museum Director was honored to meet in 2000.

Greek News
Greek resistance hero Manolis Glezos, passes away aged 98

Manolis Glezos, Greek left-wing politician best known for his participation in the World War II resistance, passed away on Monday morning aged 98. ERT has reported that the wartime icon, who had been hospitalized earlier this month with gastroenteritis and a urinary infection, died of heart failure.

In 1941 during Greece’s occupation by Nazi Germany, Glezos was just 18-years-old when he and his friend Apostolos Santas, a 19-year-old law student, climbed onto the Acropolis in the middle of the night and tore down the flag bearing the swastika unnoticed.

After the war, Glezos was repeatedly elected to Greece’s parliament with communist, socialist and leftist parties over a 60-year period.

In 2014 Glezos was elected to the European Parliament with the leftist SYRIZA party, becoming its oldest deputy at the age of 91.
Purim Celebration

Our synagogue was filled for the celebration of Purim. We had a lot of fun with plenty of bourekas and Ouzo!
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

WILL BE CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

After much deliberation, and in response to guidance from officials from the New York State Department of Health and the CDC, we have decided to close our Synagogue and Museum effective immediately. There will be no Shabbat prayer services nor museum tours on Sundays. We are actively monitoring the situation and will continue to re-evaluate and advise.

Even as our “social distancing” increases, our “social caring” should become closer. We can and should stay in touch with loved ones, friends, neighbors. We are all in this together and we need to draw on the strength of communal solidarity, friendship and concern. We stand together with our community in New York, the United States, Greece, and around the world.

May the Almighty bring healing to all who are ill; may all of us be blessed with good health and happiness, for ourselves and our loved ones. Amen.
In these difficult times, Kehila Kedosha Janina is working hard to reach out to those confined to their homes. We are a Kehila (a community) and we look forward to the day when we can gather together once again.

Three times every weekday we read this prayer. In these difficult times we ask God to fulfill this prayer and answer the call of all of those in need.
Historical Anniversaries in March

**March 3 and 4, 1943**: Round up for deportation of the Jews from Thrace and Eastern Macedonia

In the early morning hours of March 3rd, the Jews of Kavala, Drama, Xanthi, Komotini, and Alexandroupoli were roused out of their beds by the Bulgarian Occupying Forces, herded into tobacco warehouses and prepared for transport to Treblinka. The Bulgarians would hand them over to the Germans to cross the Danube in barges. Between 97-99% of Jews from these towns would perish in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

**March 15, 1943**: First deportation to leave Thessaloniki. Between March 15th and July of 1943, there would be 19 deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau. 97% of the Jews of Thessaloniki would never return.
March 24 and 25, 1944: Deportation of the Jews of Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, Patras, Athens, Chalkis, Kastoria, Larissa, Trikala and Volos

March 25th is Greek Independence Day and, in 1943, it coincided with the beginning of Pessah. March 25th was specifically chosen to show the Greeks how meaningless their concept of Independence was. This was the largest transport from Greece. For those in the west of Greece (Ioannina, Arta, Preveza) the Jews would cross the mountains to Larissa, where they would be kept in a warehouse. For those of Patras, Athens and Chalkis, they were kept in Haidari, a former military base taken over by the Germans and used as a detention camp during the Occupation. The Jews of Kastoria and Thessaly (Volos, Larissa and Trikala) were sent by train to Thessaloniki. For all, their final destination would be Auschwitz-Birkenau.

When we put these stories on our Facebook page we had over 60,000 hits! Thank you for appreciating what we do. If you see it in your heart to make a donation to help us through these troubled times, we would be greatly appreciative. You can do it right online on our website: www.kkjsm.org by hitting the donate button in the upper left on our homepage.
From the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America:

These past few weeks have been difficult for all of us in many ways. One of the challenges we've collectively faced is the temporary closure of our Sephardic synagogues and community institutions. We have to be physically distant from each other, even at a time when we want to come together to support one another. Just because these physical spaces must be closed and our interactions limited, does not mean that we must be completely separated from our communities.

We're excited to announce the launch of our Sephardic Digital Academy, a new national partnership to connect and educate our Sephardic community institutions, synagogues, Rabbis, educators, and members across the United States.

We are partnering with more than a dozen affiliated synagogues and institutions to bring you new weekly classes and series on Sephardic Torah, Halakha, traditions and customs, Ladino language instruction, Sephardic cooking, and so much more. All classes are FREE and open to all, with participation via zoom and live-streamed on our Facebook Page and posted on our Youtube Channel. As we continue to connect and develop new programs, we will be updating you on weekly additions to our class schedule, including finalizing an online calendar for easy access. We hope that this new program will help you feel a little more connected to our Sephardic Community, identity, history, and heritage.

If you're interested in learning more about the Sephardic Digital Academy, including opportunities for sponsorship or becoming a contributing educator, please reach out to info@sephardicbrotherhood.com.

Click Here for the full class schedule
Our Museum Director was hoping to visit Kavala this June and stay in the Tsimino family’s former home and was looking forward to seeing Vasilis Rizaleos. Still hoping that can happen.

The Last Letter From Albert Kabili – Written in Ladino
Full details at Yad Vashem here

17 March 1943
Gorna Dzumaja, Bulgaria

"We don't know when we are leaving. They are constantly telling us to prepare for a long journey."

These words were written by Albert Kabili in his last letter from Gorna Dzumaja to his brother Nissim, a prisoner at the Belitsa labor camp.

Yaacov-Jacko and Doodoo Kabili lived in the city of Kavala, Greece, with their children: Israel, Rachel, Daniel, Albert and Nissim. Yaacov owned a grocery store, as well as a number of residences in the city.

On 6 April 1941, the Germans invaded Greece. Within a few days, the area of Kavala was occupied. The town and five adjacent cities were part of the territory annexed by Bulgaria until the end of the war, and its Jewish residents were subjected to racial laws. They were forbidden from traveling along the main streets and were no longer permitted to earn a living in trade. Their houses and businesses were marked as Jewish. In 1942,
the anti-Jewish measures worsened: Jews were forced to wear a yellow star on their clothing, and to carry a special ID card. Their property was looted, and young Jewish men were seized for forced labor.

In January 1943, 40 young men, among them Nissim Kabili, were taken from Kavala to forced labor camps in Bulgaria. That March, the Jews of northern Greece, including Kavala, were rounded up and taken to the Bulgarian city of Gorna Dzumaja, pending their deportation to Poland. The deportees included the remaining members of the Kabili family. The deportation trains passed close to the Belitsa labor camp, and rumors about them reached Nissim and his friends. They succeeded in locating the trains, climbed aboard and met with their families. Unaware of their final destination, their parents instructed their sons to return to Belitsa, Yaacov Kabili included. The Bulgarian policemen accompanying the transport alighted the train and forcibly removed Nissim and his friends. They never saw their families again.

Albert Kabili managed to send a letter to his brother Nissim at Belitsa in Bulgaria. It was to be his last letter. On 18-19 March, after some 20 days in Gorna Dzumaja, the Jews were transported by train to the port city of Lom on the banks of the Danube River. At Lom, the prisoners were handed over to the Germans. The Germans deposited the Jews on four ships, which took them along the Danube to Vienna, a journey of five to eight days. The prisoners were deported from Vienna to Treblinka, where they were all murdered upon arrival. Nissim survived the war and moved to Sofia after liberation. He immigrated to Eretz Israel (Mandatory Palestine) in 1945 and lived together with survivors from Thessaloniki in south Tel Aviv, where they worked at Tel Aviv's port. Shem Tov Levy, an Auschwitz survivor and friend of Nissim's, introduced Nissim to his sister-in-law, Jerusalemite Simcha Cohen, and they got married in 1953. They had two sons and a daughter and settled in Holon.

In 1999, Nissim Kabili, the sole survivor of his family, submitted Pages of Testimony in memory of his father Yaacov, his mother Doodoo his sister Rachel, and his brothers Israel, Daniel and Albert. After Nissim's death, his sons found the last letter his brother had sent him. In 2011, Yaacov Ramot Kabili, Nissim's son who was named after his grandfather, donated the original letter to Yad Vashem for posterity.

Page from the Registry of the Population Census of the Jews of Kavala, carried out by the Bulgarians in 1942

To our dear brother Nissim,
Nissim, we want you to know that we are all in good shape, health wise. We wish the same for you. I came here from [Perin] and met everyone in Gorna Dzumaja.
We didn't write to you quicker [earlier], because we don't know when we are leaving. They are constantly telling us to prepare for a long journey.
Nissim, you should know that they are transferring us to concentration camps without bread, without anything, and we are suffering greatly for want of bread and other things. They give us just 300 grams of bread per day and Czorba [a kind of soup]. They don't let us buy anything. If you come to meet us, equip yourself with bread and other things. Buy food with the money that you have.
If you are with Jack, son of Leah, tell him that we are with his family members and that he should do as you do.
I have nothing else to write. We send hugs and kisses to you all.
A Kabili

Nissim, it would be best if you didn't get up [move] from the place where you are now.
Albert

Send regards to Samuel Levy and tell him that everyone is well, and that he shouldn't worry about them.

Coronavirus lockdown in Greece will last “way beyond” April 6

Greek Minister of Development and Investment, Adonis Georgiadis announced that the lockdown will last “way beyond” April 6, the original end-date envisaged when the lockdown was applied.

In an interview on Open TV, he said that the situation in Greece was much better than in other countries, but added that this fact did not mean all needed measures should not be taken to curb the deadly virus.

Georgiadis also noted that the vast majority of citizens adhere to the lockdown measures. He said that open markets are functioning as they should, but that additional measures might have to be taken to relieve crowds in supermarkets.

Speaking about the availability of essential items, the Minister noted that Greek soap company Papoutsanis has already started producing sanitizers and that imports of masks, including donations, notably from China, have created an inventory of about 2 million masks.

Italy

Everyday, Italy is in the news as the number of victims of coronavirus continues to grow. We feel it is important to tell you about the effects of coronavirus on the Jews of Italy.

For Italian Jews, the ‘smell of death’ is all around

By Cnaan Liphshiz March 26, 2020

(JTA) — At least twice a day, Micol Naccache breaks down in tears over what the coronavirus is doing to her city of Milan and its Jewish community.

A high school teacher and mother of two, Naccache describes herself as “an optimistic person.” But she is struggling to stay positive following the death of one of her friends from the disease, whose outbreak in Milan earlier this month forced all of Italy into a lockdown that has been in force now for three weeks.
“I smell death around me, it’s the first time something like this has happened to me,” said Naccache, 48, who begins each day by disinfecting her entire home with alcohol spray, partly for protection and partly as a distraction. “It’s like in a war, where you walk on and people are dying around you. I don’t see them dying but I can feel it, death all around me.”

More than 7,500 (note: the figure has now climbed to over 10,000) people have died in Italy of COVID-19, the largest death toll of any country. Some 800 people are dying each day of a disease that has overwhelmed local health services.

Isolated and worried, thousands of Italian Jews have turned to their communal media and institutions for a lifeline and sense of solidarity.

One of the victims last week was Giorgio Sinigaglia, a friend of Naccache and fellow member of the Jewish Community of Milan. Sinigaglia was a 54-year-old engineer and father of four. The week before that, the virus claimed Michele Sciama, a former leader of the community.

The pandemic has killed at least five Jewish people in Milan, and all of them have been buried at the Jewish cemetery, said Alfonso Arbib, the community’s rabbi. Their bodies have not been prepared in accordance with Jewish religious laws, or tahara, which involves washing the corpse, among other rituals.

“It’s not safe,” Arbib said, “and preserving life is the most important thing right now.” Several others from the community have died in recent days, he said, though it’s not immediately known if their passing was due to COVID-19. Arbib also said that among several others who have contracted the virus, some are fighting for their lives.

Last week, images of army trucks bringing bodies to be cremated in the northern city of Bergamo stunned Italy. Arbib said the scenes were particularly shocking for Jewish Italians, whose faith forbids cremation. “So far, we’ve been able to prevent this because burials are still allowed under certain conditions, but it is a concern that this would no longer be possible if the death toll keeps climbing,” he said.

Funerals are limited events these days, with only 10 mourners from the immediate family allowed to attend. The customs of sitting shiva and nichum aveilim – Judaism’s seven days of mourning at the deceased’s home and visits there during the period by relatives, friends and acquaintances – have been made impossible because of the country’s lockdown.

“Losing a loved one without saying goodbye is really painful,” Stefania Sciama, the daughter of the former community leader of Milan, told The Times of Israel in an interview published Thursday. “My father died alone and now I can’t even comfort my mother.” Her mother, Viviane, is alone at her home and keeps in contact with other relatives through video chats. The prospect of sharing Sciama’s fate is terrifying Liliana Segre, 89. She’s a Jewish senator from Milan and a Holocaust survivor.

“I have to tell the truth, the thing that scares me the most is to die alone,” she told Moked, the Jewish-Italian news service, on Tuesday. “I have already seen those who died alone, but I didn’t think I, too, would be on the frontline.”

Milo Hasbani, the president of the Jewish Community of Milan, a nonprofit representing most of the city’s Jewish institutions, is feeling “powerless to help the people I’m responsible to help, and it’s a very difficult feeling,” he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.
"There is actually little I can do in practical terms when I can't leave my house. It's very tough." The community in Milan did manage to organize an assistance service for the elderly who were left alone, including the delivery of groceries and medicines to their homes. It also has harnessed video chat and streaming platforms to preserve a sense of togetherness. Arbib gives daily lessons on the Torah over Facebook to dozens of viewers. Each time one of his congregation members dies, he dedicates the following lesson to the deceased and delivers an obituary as his followers add their own words in text comments.

The Milan community’s website, Mosaico, has published an obituary about each person it has lost to the disease and invited readers to add their own words in the comments. The one about Sinigaglia, the engineer, has received about 200 comments, including by close friends recalling moments they shared with him. Encouragements and condolences have been sent to his widow and children.

“I’m not a fan of Facebook and internet communication, I’m more of an old-school guy, especially when it comes to offering condolences,” Hasbani said, “but now we have nowhere but the internet to come together to mourn. So that’s what you’re seeing.” At a “difficult moment of social isolation and solitude,” the website is geared toward facilitating “emotional closeness and sharing of pain,” said Fiona Diwan, the editor in chief of the website and Milan’s Jewish monthly, Bet Magazine.

“When hugs, sociability and the possibility of burying one’s loved one are missing, only the written words remain,” she said. Naccache, the teacher, tunes in to lessons by a rabbi and author from Rome, Benedetto Carucci Viterbi. “He gives beautiful lessons that really resonate with me and give me power to go on,” she said.

Her children, aged 8 and 10, attend Milan’s Jewish school, La Scuola Ebraica, which has 500 students. Like most other schools in Italy, it has switched to remote studying, but “it’s very difficult for students to concentrate,” said Naccache, who also teaches law and economics remotely at a different school.

On March 9, hundreds of Italian Jews tuned in to a livestreamed reading of the Scroll of Esther for Purim carried on the Zoom video chat platform. Rabbi Ariel Finzi of Naples read the text while sitting on a baroque-style couch, presumably at his home. Participants from all across Italy left encouraging words on the chat’s text box.

“It was a powerful moment, we were all in our homes but you could really feel the community around you,” said Adam Smulevich, a journalist for Moked, the news and information service of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, which represents the country’s approximately 30,000 Jewish citizens. Moked, which was founded in 2009, has become a central vehicle for connecting households grieving over the coronavirus crisis in isolation.

Following the lockdown, Moked upped its production of articles and launched video editions that are streamed on Facebook. It also produces at least three newsletters each day with content from its some 100 contributors, as well as a magazine and a children’s newspaper each month. “At first it was farther away and now it’s coming closer, it feels pretty close now,” said Daniel Reichel, a Milan-based journalist who is on Moked’s staff of five. Italian Jews are coming together through their community’s websites, media and streamed sermons, but “also on family WhatsApp groups,” he said. Reichel’s family, which is spread across Italy and in Israel, created its first such family group to stay connected through the crisis.

But Reichel, 33, has limited time to use it and engage with his relatives. These days, Moked’s journalists wake up at the crack of dawn and work until about 10:30 p.m., he said. “Our responsibility is important on normal days, but now it’s double: We need to provide information, of course, but also offer encouragement, sometimes a distraction, fight loneliness, inspire and fight fake news,” Reichel said. “But it’s also about offering a lifeline, being present in the lives of people who became very alone, very fast.”
Israel

Netanyahu Announces New Restrictions Barring Gatherings of Over Two

Death toll at 16 as total number of COVID-19 cases in Israel rises to 4,695 ■ West Bank cases rise to 106 ■ Netanyahu tests negative ■ Government presents $22 billion rescue package

As the highly contagious coronavirus spreads around the world, Israel and the Palestinians struggle to contain a local outbreak that has virtually halted daily life and led to tens of thousands of people entering quarantine.

■ 4,695 Israelis have so far tested positive for the coronavirus, with the vast majority of cases mild and 161 recoveries. 16 patients have died and 79 are in serious condition. One Israeli tourist died in Italy.

■ In the West Bank, 106 cases have been diagnosed so far. One woman in her 60s died. The Palestinian prime minister ordered a lockdown as of Sunday night. In Gaza, nine cases were diagnosed, the first two after returning from Pakistan, while seven came down with the virus after coming in contact with them.

Cyprus

Cyprus, Israeli hospitals to cooperate on coronavirus treatment Full article here

Two Cypriot hospitals will cooperate with a hospital in Israel to share treatment protocols and expertise in fighting coronavirus.

The Health Ministry said that at the suggestion of the dean of the Medical School of the University of Nicosia and the director of Sheba Medical Centre of Israel, Sheba Medical Centre and Famagusta General Hospital which are both the referral hospitals for Covid-19 in their respective countries will exchange expertise in treatment methods.

Moreover, the Health Ministry announced the ICU of Nicosia Hospital and the corresponding unit at Sheba Medical Centre will exchange treatment protocols and experience to better support patients.

Cyprus will supply Israel with a quantity of Chloroquine while Israel in turn will be sending ventilators to Cyprus, government spokesman Kyriakos Koushios announced on Friday.

He said that President Nicos Anastasiades had agreed to a request from his Israeli counterpart Reuven Rivlin to send a quantity of the pharmaceutical.

He added that the Israeli president had responded positively to a request from Cyprus and that he hoped it would soon be possible for Israel will send 50 ventilators. The two presidents spoke on the telephone today to discuss how each country was dealing with the coronavirus outbreak.

The Health Ministry had announced yesterday that there are sufficient quantities of Chloroquine, which is manufactured locally, to cover possible short-term and long-term needs of patients with chronic diseases and to possibly use to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.
Portugal

**Portugal declares official commemoration day for inquisition of Jews** Full article [here](#)

The Portuguese Parliament has approved the passage of a law to officially commemorate the inquisition of Jews in the country on 31 March every year. The law received broad support from across the political spectrum.

The date 31 March was chosen as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Inquisition because it was on that day in 1821 that the Inquisition in Portugal was officially disbanded.

The expulsion of Jews from Portugal in 1497, subsequent massacres of the Jews there, and the Portuguese inquisition which began in 1536, brought Jewish life in the country to a catastrophic end, with tens of thousands of Jews fleeing the country.

Some Jews, despite being forcibly converted to Christianity, preserved their Jewish practices and traditions in secret throughout the intervening centuries.

The Portuguese expulsion and inquisition followed similar events in Spain which began with the inquisition there in 1478 and the subsequent expulsion in 1492 in which tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Jews fled Spain.

Reconectar, an organization which seeks to reconnect the descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish communities with the Jewish world, welcomed the passage of the law.

“This is a historic and important decision, because finally there will be official memorialization of the tens of thousands of victims of the Inquisitorial regime which hounded and hunted our people for 275 years,” said Ashley Perry (Perez), President of Reconectar.

“Hopefully, this day will create greater awareness of this dark chapter of Jewish and Portuguese history which still casts a giant shadow across the world with tens of millions of descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish communities still disconnected from any knowledge of their ancestry.”

The Inquisition operated in Portugal from 1546, during the reign of King João III, until March 31, 1821. Over the course of 275 years, the Portuguese Inquisition alone opened around 45,000 cases, mainly against the Jewish population.

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Barcelona

**The Hidden Stories of Barcelona’s Jews** Full article [here](#)

Stephen Burgen traces the Jewish past of the Catalan capital

For 600 years, the main street in Barcelona’s former Jewish quarter was named Sant Domènech to “celebrate” the massacre of 300 Jews there on his saint’s day in 1391. But last year Barcelona city council renamed the carrer Sant Domènech del Call, the main street in the city’s former Jewish quarter, after the former chief rabbi Salomò Ben Adret. Was it a sign of a new era for Jews in the Catalan capital.
There were pogroms all over Spain in 1391 but they were especially intense in Catalonia. In Barcelona, a community that had thrived for centuries and made up around 15% of the population, was wiped out through an all too familiar process of murder, exile and forced conversion.

For the next six centuries Jews were effectively non-existent in Barcelona. Well, not quite. The fascinating study Voces caídas del cielo (Voices from Out of the Blue) by local historian Manu Valentín, published last year, reveals that for a brief period from the late 19th century until the end of the Second World War, Barcelona became a refuge for both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.

Valentín, who is a member of Mozaika, a Jewish cultural association based in Barcelona, was researching a book on George Orwell’s stay in the city during the Civil War when he stumbled upon a document dated 1918. It recorded the formal foundation of the Barcelona Jewish Community as an association and the establishment of a shopfront synagogue. He noticed that most of the 17 signatories had Sephardic surnames and discovered they had fled the Ottoman empire.

Prior to this, various Spanish diplomats in Istanbul initiated a phase of what Valentín calls “philo-sephardism” in which they encouraged the government to offer shelter to the thousands of Sephardim in Turkey who had escaped pogroms in southern Russia.

Adolfo de Montaberry, the Spanish consul in Istanbul from 1867 to 1869, wrote concerning “Jews descended from those that our Catholic kings uprooted from Spanish territory not only still speak the language of the elders, although they write it with Hebrew script, many of them still have the keys and deeds to their houses in Spain, where they hope to return with the tenacious perseverance of their race and with the same stubborn faith that they await the Messiah.”

In the end, Spain only took in a few hundred, mostly well-connected businessmen who, it was claimed, could give a much-needed boost to the Spanish economy.

Writing in the Barcelona newspaper La Vanguardia in 1915, Antonio Suqué, the Spanish consul in Salonica, commented that there was no point in bringing industrialists or farmers “who can’t teach us anything. I believe the only mutually beneficial employment would be in the Barcelona export houses where, thanks to their knowledge of the Orient and their commercial practices they could make an important contribution to our trade relations with those countries that unjustifiably disdain our products.”
However, in the end it wasn’t 19th-century philo-Sephardism that brought Ottoman Jews to Barcelona, but the rise of the Young Turks in 1908.

“The Young Turks were nationalists who wanted to homogenise Turkish society,” says Valentín. “They also insisted that minorities such as Armenians and Jews were no longer exempt from military service.”

Sephardim who had long since settled in Istanbul, Salonica and Smyra packed up and left. They first went to France as most Ottoman Jews were francophones having been schooled in French at the prestigious Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. But with the outbreak of the First World War they crossed the Pyrenees to Barcelona. Centuries after being expelled from Spain, they still spoke Ladino.

“Most of them arrived in Barcelona with nothing but a suitcase but they never intended to stay,” Valentín explains. “The plan was to go to America, so within a few years many of the people who signed the document that established Barcelona’s Jewish community had left for Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and other Latin American countries.”

While a few, such as the Metzger brothers who sold industrial machinery, became prosperous businessmen, most of those who remained in the city were poor. Many worked as hawkers around the Sant Antoni market while others, especially Yiddish-speaking refugees from the Russian pogroms, were forced into prostitution in the Barri Xinés, Barcelona’s red-light district.

What little good fortune the Ottoman Jews had in Barcelona was short-lived. In 1919, fearing that the contagion of the Russian revolution would spread, Spain started expelling “undesirable foreigners”; in effect, any foreigner who had no visible means of support.

It charted the Manuel Calvo to ship 200 “undesirables” to Odessa. Among them, at the instigation of the Turkish consul in the city, were 40 Ottoman Jews who had been living in Barcelona for at least three years. The ship never reached its destination. A week after sailing from Barcelona it struck a mine off the Turkish coast and sank with the loss of 105 lives, 71 of them deportees.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 it spelled the end of what had been a brief flowering of Barcelona’s Jewish community. Many were caught in the middle between left and right. Those who had prospered were condemned as capitalists and many of the wealthier Jews left or saw their businesses collectivized. Meanwhile, the right-wing press pointed the finger at poor Jews as suspected communists and anarchists.

Still, as some Jews left the city, many more arrived from all over the world to defend the Republic and, above all, to fight fascism. “Jews from England, the United States and elsewhere made up a disproportionate number of the International Brigades,” says Valentín. “To many, fighting fascism in Spain was merely a continuation of fighting the black shirts on the streets of London. Many died defending the republic.”

The Naftali Botwin company, which formed part of the 150th International Brigade, was made up almost entirely of Jews. It was named after Naftali Botwin, a Polish Jew who was executed for killing a police informer. The idea of forming a Jewish-only company was proposed to the commissar general of the International Brigades by Albert Nahumi (Arieh Weits), a Jewish leader of the French Communist party. The idea was well received and the company was inaugurated on December 12, 1937, made up of volunteers from Poland, France, Belgium, Palestine and Spain.

Valentín describes how during a lull in the fighting the Botwin company was billeted for two months in the tiny village of Pradell in Tarragona. There, to the amusement of their Spanish comrades, they produced concerts and plays in Yiddish, recreating, as Valentín puts it, “shtetl life on the Ebro.”
When Franco’s troops entered Barcelona in January, 1939 they sacked the two synagogues and stole everything inside them as spoils of war. After their victory, the Spanish fascists announced that all Jews who had entered the county since 1931 would be expelled. Jewish children were banned from public schools and births could only be registered if the babies were baptized. From the start of the Civil War until 1942 Franco gave the Gestapo carte blanche to operate on Spanish soil.

As early as 1937 the Franco regime ordered the construction of concentration camps for “layabouts, miscreants, politicians, masons, Jews and enemies of the fatherland. Not one Jew, mason or red will remain in our territory.”

In 1940, José Palomo, an Ottoman Jew was arrested by the secret police in Barcelona and taken to the concentration camp at Miranda del Ebro which was run by Paul Winzer, the head of the Gestapo in Spain. Palomo’s business had already been collectivized and he was imprisoned without charge until 1943. On his release he left for Israel with his family. The Miranda del Ebro camp didn’t close until 1947.

By 1942, as it became clear that Germany was unlikely to win the war, Franco toned down his wholehearted support for the Nazi regime, aware that Spain would need new allies — the United States in particular — once the war was over.

“The Franco regime began a marketing campaign about its treatment of Jews,” says Valentín. “Various individuals had protected Jews despite the government opposing such actions. After 1942, the government began to assume these individual acts as its own.”

More recently, the Spanish state’s more recent bout of philo-Sephardism came to end last September when its offer of Spanish citizenship to descendants of Jews expelled in 1492 closed. The law was passed in 2015 and by the cut-off date of September 30 the government had received over 150,000 applications, half of them in the final month.

The vast majority of applications came from Latin America, with 33,000 from Mexico, 28,000 from Colombia and 22,000 from Venezuela. A total of around 6,000 applications have been successful so far. During a process that was far from straightforward applicants had to appear in person in Spain. Ironically, given that for centuries Spain used every possible means to persuade Jews to abandon their religion and culture, applicants also had to demonstrate that they had maintained their faith during the intervening 500 years.

Under the post-war Franco regime, Jews were tolerated but were expected to be discreet. To this day the Barcelona community, which may now number 4,000, although no one really knows, maintains a low profile and there are virtually no prominent Jews in the city’s political or cultural life. “It’s a habit from years of coexisting under a Catholic dictatorship,” believes Valentín, who says the city’s community is made up largely of Jews from the Maghreb, Argentina and Israel. “It’s very heterogeneous, but also very divided.”
Ten Famous Americans with Greek or Turkish Jewish Heritage

These actors, designers, musicians, business leaders, and even a former member of Congress have all played a role in the American Jewish narrative.

By Ethan Marcus, March 11, 2020 Full article [here](#)

We’ve all heard of the many Ashkenazi Jews who have and continue to make an impact in American society—think Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Chuck Schumer, Jerry Seinfeld, and Yitzhak Pearlman, just to name a few. But did you know that American Greek and Turkish Jews have and continue to have an impact in American life, too? Actors, designers, musicians, business leaders, a living Medal of Honor recipient, and even a former member of Congress have all played a role in the American Jewish narrative. Most of these individuals and their families come from the Ladino-speaking Sephardic communities of the former Ottoman Empire. Here are the stories of ten of these famous Greek and Turkish Jews.

Hank Azaria

Best known for his recurring voice acting role on The Simpsons as some of the show’s most beloved characters, including Moe Szyslak and Chief Wiggum, Azaria was born Henry Albert Azaria in Queens, NY to Albert Azaria and Ruth Altschek. Both of Azaria’s immigrant grandparents were from the Jewish community of Salonika (today known as Thessaloniki in northern Greece), which was at one point one of the largest Jewish communities in the Balkans at nearly 50,000 Jews before World War II. His grandparents were some of the founding members of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, a Sephardic organization dedicated to helping new Jewish immigrants from the Mediterranean get access to jobs, educational scholarships, burial needs, and social welfare benefits. Azaria was brought up speaking Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish language native to the Sephardic communities of the former Ottoman Empire. The comedic actor has also made a name for himself and his Sephardic identity in films like The Birdcage, where he used his knowledge of Ladino and Sephardic culture to shape his Latino character.

Diane von Furstenberg

Born Diane Simone Michelle Halfin, von Furstenberg is well known for her designer fashion line, creation of the wrap dress, and former marriage to a German prince. She is less well known as the daughter of two Holocaust survivors from Europe. Her mother, Liliane Nahmias, was born in Salonika. Just 18 months before von Furstenberg was born, her mother was rounded up with Salonika’s other 50,000 Jews and sent to Auschwitz. After the war, her mother moved to Belgium and met her father, a Belgian Jewish Holocaust survivor. Von Furstenberg has written extensively on how her mother’s experiences have impacted her life, as well as her personal connection to the city of Salonika, particularly in her memoir, The Woman I Wanted to Be.

Murray Perahia

A classical pianist and conductor, Perahia was born in the Bronx. His first language was Ladino, and as a child he was known as Moshiko—little Moshe in Ladino. His family emigrated from Salonika in the 1930s, surprisingly late and at a time when Jewish emigration from former Ottoman lands to the United States was all but blocked due to the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. His grandfather was an integral leader of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America and raised funds for El Fundo Secreto, the Secret Fund in Ladino, that was created to help the neediest Sephardim who couldn’t make ends meet during the Depression. He started playing piano at a very young age, and later on studied under the famed Polish-American pianist Mieczysław Horszowski. He
has won two Grammys and numerous other awards for his compositions. In 2009, Perahia was appointed the President of the Jerusalem Music Center.

Mitch Julis

Unlike the majority of the people on this list who are Sephardic Jews, Julis is a Romaniote Jew. While Sephardim migrated to what is today Greece after the expulsion from Spain in 1492, Romaniote Jews have lived in Greece and Anatolia for over 2,300 years, making them one of the oldest Jewish communities still in existence today. Julis grew up in the Bronx among his Greek-speaking Romaniote Jewish family. The family of his father, Maurice Julis, emigrated from the city of Ioannina at the turn of the 20th century. Julis’s father grew up on New York’s Lower East Side, attending the Romaniote synagogue Kehila Kedosha Janina, before moving to the Bronx. Julis attended Princeton University, Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School. He went on to become the co-founding partner of Canyon Capital Advisors, an LA-based hedge fund. In 2018, Forbes listed Julis among the top 25 highest earning hedge fund managers in the United States. He is also known as a generous philanthropist, supporting numerous non-profit institutions and his alma maters.

Jack Jacobs

A retired colonel in the United States Army and a Medal of Honor recipient, Jacobs’s paternal grandparents immigrated from the city of Ioannina in today’s northern Greece. He has spoken in public about the influence his Greek Jewish heritage has had on him, particularly through his paternal nona, whose food and stories always resonated with him. (Nona is the term many Sephardic and Romaniote Jews use to refer to their grandmothers.) As the firstborn son, Jacobs was named for his living paternal grandfather, as is traditional within the Romaniote and Sephardic communities. He also went by the nickname pasha, a term of endearment that roughly translated to “prince.” He was born in Brooklyn and later attended Rutgers University, where he joined the school’s ROTC program. After graduation, Jacobs joined the Army as a Second Lieutenant. During his first deployment in Vietnam, his company came under heavy fire. Despite heavy casualties, he was able to single-handedly save more than a dozen of his fellow soldiers, including his commander, from a Viet Cong attack. He was also wounded in the attack. For his act of bravery, he was promoted to Captain and awarded the Medal of Honor. He would receive two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars, and two Purple Hearts throughout his military career. Today he serves as a military analyst for NBC News and MSNBC.

Martin Elias

The family of real estate investor Martin Elias came from the Jewish community of Kastoria, a small town in northern Greece. Prior to World War II, the small but robust Jewish community was an active center of Sephardic life in Greece. His company, Elias Properties, holds commercial property in more than 15 states, totaling over two million square feet. He has been particularly active in Greek Jewish and Sephardic philanthropy through the Ike, Molly, and Steven Elias Family Foundation. He also serves on the board of the American Sephardi Federation and co-produced Trezoros: The Lost Jews of Kastoria, a film that premiered in 2016.
Selya Benhabib

Born and raised in Istanbul, Benhabib is the Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and Professor of Philosophy at Yale University. She attended Brandeis University and received a PhD from Yale. Her grandfather was a Turkish rabbi, and her family was well integrated into the Jewish community of Istanbul for generations. She has spoken about how growing up at home, she and her family could easily shift from speaking Turkish to French to Ladino and eventually to English—a multilingualism that demonstrates the cultural diffusion that was present in many Sephardic communities in former Ottoman lands. She is well known for her work on political philosophy, including the politics of gender, human migration, and democratic norms. She has won several awards for her work and has written nearly a dozen books on political science and philosophy. She has also spoken about how her heritage has influenced her work, saying of the legacies of the Spanish Inquisition that drove her ancestors out of Spain to the Ottoman Empire: “[It] makes me aware of the fragility of good political institutions. I never take them for granted. I am always attentive to the ways in which, particularly, collective ideologies of purity—be it religious purity, racial purity, or national purity—can go wrong.”

Joel Benoliel

The former chief legal officer and senior vice president of Costco, Benoliel grew up in Seattle’s Sephardic community, which primarily consists of Jews from the Island of Rhodes and what is today Western Turkey. Both his parents were Sephardic Jews from Turkey and the UK, with roots in northern Morocco and Gibraltar, all hubs of Sephardic communal life. He attended the University of Washington for college and law school, and shortly after graduating he entered general practice law and commercial real estate. In addition to playing a major role at Costco for 22 years, he was recently elected the chair of the University of Washington Board of Regents. Benoliel is the first Sephardic Jew to serve on the UW board. He has also been an extraordinary advocate for the Sephardic community, co-producing the Rhodes-Turkish Siddur Zehut Yosef prayer book series with his cousin Hazzan Isaac Azose, co-founding the Seattle Sephardic Network, and helping to initiate the Sephardic Studies Program Founders Circle at the University of Washington.

Lea Michele

Believe it or not this famous triple threat actress best known for her role in the TV show Glee has Sephardic and Greek Jewish roots. Born Lea Michele Sarfati, her paternal grandparents emigrated from Salonika in the early 1900s. In a 2016 episode of the TLC show Who Do You Think You Are?, Michele learned of distant Sephardic relatives from Salonika who perished in the Holocaust. Her great-grandparents were also active in the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America at the beginning of the 20th century.

Shelley Berkley

A former Congresswoman from Nevada’s 1st Congressional District from 1999-2013, Berkley grew up in New York City and later moved to Nevada with her family. Her maternal grandparents emigrated from Ottoman-controlled Salonika in the early 20th century. She briefly served in the Nevada State Assembly and on several local education boards before running for Congress. During her Congressional tenure, she focused on issues like affordable healthcare in the United States as well as advocacy for Israel. She ran an unsuccessful Senate campaign in 2012 to unseat then-Nevada Senator Dean Heller. Today she serves as CEO and Senior Provost of Touro University Western Division in California and Nevada.
Musician Renan Koen: Composers of Terezín Concentration Camp Show How to Resist Positively

Full article here

World renowned concert pianist Renan Koen, who played piano at UN headquarters in New York for Holocaust Remembrance Day Jan. 28, also participated in a special congressional event organized by SHIN DC: Sephardic Heritage International DC at the Rayburn House Building in Washington D.C., Jan. 30.

Answering our questions in D.C., Koen said that she has been influenced by composers Pavel Haas, Zikmund Schul, Gideon Klein ve Viktor Ullmann who wrote music despite being captive in the most dire circumstances in 1941-1944 in the Czech town of Terezín that was used as a concentration camp by the Nazi regime.

“Despite of everything, they relied on their own souls, creativity and education to keep on writing music and left the world wonderful pieces of art. They also told us what happened there. I call this positive resistance because they resisted with music despite the great torment,” she said.

Interpreting their music both in Turkey and the world since 2015, Koen also started a unique training, called “Reality of Holocaust and positive resistance,” for young people. Koen also takes young people who join the training to Terezín Camp. “My only desire is to encourage them to discover their talents and bear fruits,” said. Among Koen’s latest works is an album that she collected the piano compositions of her instructor Ali Damar.

New Books for Sale – Kehila Kedosha Janina

Sephardic Lives: $30 plus P&H within Continental USA

This ground-breaking documentary history contains over 150 primary sources originally written in 15 languages by or about Sephardi Jews—descendants of Jews who fled medieval Spain and Portugal settling in the western portions of the Ottoman Empire, including the Balkans, Anatolia, and Palestine. Reflecting Sephardi history in all its diversity, from the courtyard to the courthouse, spheres intimate, political, commercial, familial, and religious, these documents show life within these distinctive Jewish communities as well as between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Sephardi Lives offer readers an intimate view of how Sephardim experienced the major regional and world events of the modern era—natural disasters, violence and wars, the transition from empire to nation-states, and the Holocaust. This collection also provides a vivid exploration of the day-to-day lives of Sephardi women, men, boys, and girls in the Judeo-Spanish heartland of the Ottoman Balkans and Middle East, as well as the émigré centers Sephardim settled throughout the twentieth century, including North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. The selections are of a vast range, including private letters from family collections, rabbinical writings, documents of state, memoirs and diaries, court records, selections from the popular press, and scholarship. In a single volume, Sephardi Lives preserves the cultural richness and historical complexity of a Sephardi world that is no more
The Jews of Spain: $30 plus P&H within Continental USA

A classic by Professor Jane Gerber. The history of the Jews of Spain is a remarkable story that begins in the remote past and continues today. For more than a thousand years, Sepharad (the Hebrew word for Spain) was home to a large Jewish community noted for its richness and virtuosity. Summarily expelled in 1492 and forced into exile, their tragedy of expulsion marked the end of one critical phase of their history and the beginning of another. Indeed, in defiance of all logic and expectation, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain became an occasion for renewed creativity. Nor have five hundred years of wandering extinguished the identity of the Sephardic Jews, or diminished the proud memory of the dazzling civilization which they created on Spanish soil. This book is intended to serve as an introduction and scholarly guide to that history.

Hidden Child in Greece: $30 plus P&H within Continental USA

Six-year-old Yolanda Avram is rescued by righteous strangers during the Holocaust in Greece. This is her story of courage and survival in the context of dozens of other rescues and shows Jews saving themselves and others in audacious and often heroic ways. Her story is uplifting and focuses on those flickers of light in the vast darkness of evil, known in Greece as the Persecution. This little-known saga of the common folk outwitting the Third Reich is a powerful and important story, told simply and movingly in cinematic episodes. The book is incandescent with empathy and gratitude.

Family of Strangers: $20 plus P&H within Continental USA

Family of Strangers draws on hundreds of newspaper accounts, articles, and oral histories to provide the first comprehensive account of Washington State's Jewish residents. The first Jewish immigrants came in a small trickle during the middle of the nineteenth century, and then in larger numbers during the open-door era that stretched to 1924. They included Ashkenazim primarily from the cities, towns, and shtetls of central and eastern Europe and Sephardim from the Mediterranean Basin. Followed by European Jews fleeing persecution by the Nazis and discrimination by the Soviet Union, they grew in number with the arrival of American Jews who were part of the great westward movement in the postwar era. Isolated from the large centers of American Jewish life, speaking different languages -- German, Yiddish, Ladino, and others -- and following different religious customs, initially these groups had little in common other than their identification as Jews. Yet they succeeded in developing a community whose members made notable contributions to the civic and cultural history of Washington State. Regional politics, lively neighborhood histories, local responses to the plight of Europe's Jews during World War II, commercial and business enterprises, detailed histories of congregations, organizational philanthropy and social work, and the contributions of Washington's Jewish musicians and artists are presented in this generously illustrated book, often through the voices of those who took
The vibrant life stories of dozens of notable local individuals are embedded in the overall context of how the Jews of Washington State organized a group of complementary and thriving cultural and religious communities. Molly Cone is the award-winning author of more than forty books for young readers. A native of Tacoma, she counts five generations of her and her husband's families born in Washington State. Lawyer and historian Howard Droker is the author of Seattle's Unsinkable Houseboats and numerous articles on Seattle's early Jews. Jacqueline Williams, also an award winner, is author of Wagon Wheel Kitchens, The Way We Ate, and The Hill with a Future: Seattle's Capitol Hill 1900-1946, and lectures widely about pioneer life in the Pacific Northwest. All three authors live in Seattle.

**Family Papers by Sarah Abrevaya Stein: $25 plus P&H within Continental USA**


"A superb and touching book about the frailty of ties that hold together places and people." --*The New York Times Book Review*

**An award-winning historian shares the true story of a frayed and diasporic Sephardic Jewish family preserved in thousands of letters**

For centuries, the bustling port city of Salonica was home to the sprawling Levy family. As leading publishers and editors, they helped chronicle modernity as it was experienced by Sephardic Jews across the Ottoman Empire. The wars of the twentieth century, however, redrew the borders around them, in the process transforming the Levys from Ottomans to Greeks. Family members soon moved across boundaries and hemispheres, stretching the familial diaspora from Greece to Western Europe, Israel, Brazil, and India. In time, the Holocaust nearly eviscerated the clan, eradicating whole branches of the family tree.

In *Family Papers*, the prizewinning Sephardic historian Sarah Abrevaya Stein uses the family’s correspondence to tell the story of their journey across the arc of a century and the breadth of the globe. They wrote to share grief and to reveal secrets, to propose marriage and to plan for divorce, to maintain connection. They wrote because they were family. And years after they frayed, Stein discovers, what remains solid is the fragile tissue that once held them together: neither blood nor belief, but papers. With meticulous research and care, Stein uses the Levys' letters to tell not only their history, but the history of Sephardic Jews in the twentieth century.

**Recipes of my 15 Grandmothers: $25 plus P&H within Continental USA**

Recipes of My 15 Grandmothers is a collection of recipes and stories from the times of the Crypto-Jews who were hiding and pretending to be Catholic during the Spanish Inquisition while practicing their Judaism underground through the present. The grandmothers of the family devised clever ways to disguise the fact that they were still keeping kosher while appearing to be eating pork. Until modern times, the family pretended to be devout Catholics, yet passed many of the Jewish customs on, sometimes in the form of these recipes, their true legacy. For several hundred years they hid their fasts and celebration of Jewish holidays, revealing them only via their recipes and some kosher kitchen customs. This collection was found recently, hidden away at Genie Milgrom's mother's house.
Believe it or not, one of the greatest halachic controversies of the 19th and 20th centuries revolved around matzah! The story begins in the town of Ribeauvillé, France in 1838 when the first matzah baking machine was invented by a French Jew named Isaac Singer. Till then, of course, all matzah, whether soft and thick or dry and thin, was made by hand, as had been done for thousands of years all over the Jewish world. However, this was also very laborious, requiring many people for each step of the process, and rather strong hands for entering and removing the matzah from special ovens, since the entire process from kneading to baking had to be completed in minutes to ensure that no part of any matzah became ‘hametz’. And of course, no matter how meticulous people were, hand-baked matzah meant a high percentage of ‘rejects’ and rather low production of strictly kosher matzahs. Obviously, this all meant that matzah production was a very high-cost enterprise, leading to high prices for matzah that vast numbers of Jews in those days could ill-afford, and many relied on charity to obtain matzah just for the Seder.

Singer’s machine changed all that, as well as the very look of matzah, from traditionally round to square. On the technical side, the machine matzah was drier, flatter and in fact, almost totally risk-free in terms of any danger of becoming hametz. On the economic side, the impact was even greater, because since matzah production more efficient and less wasteful, production and labor costs were lowered tremendously, and matzah suddenly became readily available to everyone.

The immediate reaction of local French Rabbis was to approve the machine, and in nearby Germany, the Rabbis in Furth, a major yeshiva center, approved the machine as well. In fact, in France, Germany and other western European areas, approval of the machine was the norm, and for all the reasons cited above.

However, since the 19th century was also the height of the ‘Enlightenment’ and the founding of original Reform Judaism in Germany, as the machine moved eastward to much more conservative Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, certain Rabbis vehemently opposed it on several levels:

1. The halachic issue of the necessity of baking matzah for the Seder with proper religious intent, which was stated aloud by the bakers: “This matzah is being baked for the mitzvah of matzah on the first night of Pesah”. How could this ‘intent’ come from a machine?
2. The broader issue of the machine’s origins in more ‘progressive’ France and approval in Germany, with some accusing the inventor and those Rabbis who approved it as being ‘Reformers’, thereby condemning the entire concept of machine-baked matzah.
3. The problem of proper cleaning the machine between baking sessions to ensure no leftover unbaked dough was stuck within its parts.
4. The very fact that the matzah was square, another ‘dangerous’ change in tradition, which in their view had its own intrinsic holiness that was forbidden to change.
5. The social issue of all those who depended on hand-baking matzah for their livelihood.

It is worthy to note that even approving Rabbis did not take these objections lightly, and in fact each contention was carefully examined by major halachic authorities of the time. Though they were ostensibly problematic in halachic terms, all were ultimately seen as surmountable by the majority of halachic authorities. As for the issue of proper intent, most Rabbis agreed that, as long as the person operating the machine stated this intent before beginning the entire process, this solved the problem. Also, the fact that machine matzahs were much safer in terms of possible hametz problems, was of paramount importance; The Orthodox Jewish ‘pedigree’ of the
approving Rabbis was indeed examined, and no clear association with Reform could be found; The cleaning problem was obviously one of meticulous inspection and not difficult to solve; No Talmudic or other halachic source could be found that matzah must be round. The custom was very strong and had some Kabbalistic sources, but halachically there was no problem; The labor issue was indeed a major dilemma, ultimately but other work could be found, and the number of people affected was clearly miniscule compared to the number of Jews who benefitted from industrial production of matzah.

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that today’s matzah machines are sophisticated, electronically controlled, hi-tech apparatus, there are still authorities who insist that to fulfill all Rabbinical and halachic requirements, hand-baked matzah is mandatory, which is very prevalent amongst Hassidim today. On the other hand, the virtual impossibility of having any chance of hametz in machine-made matzahs vs. hand-baked, as well as costs and availability of matzah to the masses, has led to many Rabbis to use ONLY machine-made matzahs. And Many people use both: hand-baked for the Seder night and machine-baked for the rest of the holiday. This is the common position amongst Sephardic authorities, led by the late Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who recommended using only hand-matzah for the Seder night, but agreed that this was not necessary for the entire holiday, and if no hand-baked matzah is available, using machine matzah on Seder night is permitted and fulfills the mitzvah of eating matzah.

Whichever is your custom, may you merit eating your matzah in joy and good health, and may the Holiday of Redemption be a sign for the end of Corona!

Rabbi Nissim Elnecave
Sephardic Brotherhood of America

Parashah of the Week - Vayikra
How to Pray

When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, (Vayikra 1:2)

This week we begin to read Sefer Vayikra, the third book of the Torah. Vayikra is also known as the book of Leviticus since it largely deals with issues that are connected with the services and the system of worship at the Tabernacle. Amongst other issues, Leviticus discusses the sections that composed the Tabernacle, its transportation, the function of the Priests or Kohanim and the Levites, their garments and their obligations. It also discusses the laws of purity and impurity when accessing the Holy places, and how the Jewish nation was to sacrifice and worship in this Holy precinct.

Rabbi Yishak Arama (1), one of the leading minds in Spain during the fifteen century, asks, what is distinct about Jewish worship and sacrifices?

He states (2) that in antiquity people would bring sacrifices for a number of reasons. Rabbi Arama explains that in some instances people would bring sacrifices as a bribe to the gods, believing that it would change the minds of the deities. On some other instances, people would bring sacrifices out of fear and in order to appease the deities. People feared the punishments of the gods and hoped that the sacrifices would turned their anger away. Some believed that the gods would actually eat and feast from the sacrifices. Others
brought sacrifices in order to befriend those that served at the temples, seeking their favour or their charms and prayers.

Rabbi Yishak Arama says that the Torah changes this understanding. Quoting an anecdote from the Midrash he states, Rabbi Berakhiya ben Ezra said, there were two chefs that prepared a dish for the king. The king tasted the first dish and then the second and when he asked for the second dish to be prepared again it was understood which one he liked better. Noah was the first one to bring a sacrifice thanking G-d at the end of the flood and this became the preferred sacrifice by the Torah. Arama explains that according to the Torah, Korbanot are brought out of gratitude and not out of fear. But even while people could offer their produce and their cattle as an act of gratitude, they were forbidden from bringing human sacrifices or even impure animals.

He further comments that according to the Torah, sacrifices have no effect on G-d. He does not consume or feast over the sacrifices, G-d does not become angry, happy or sad by any offerings. There is no bribing G-d, He does not change His mind.

Rabbi Arama concludes that Korbanot as the rest of the Misvot, are there to instruct man to become better. Sacrifices were instructed for our benefit, we learn to be honest and to be true when we stand in front of G-d. We learn to be thankful and to know that we have a chance to repent and mend our ways. We get a better understanding of G-d's omnipotence and infinity and we also learn that G-d will always remain kind and merciful to all his creation.

Shabbat Shalom

(1) Rabbi Yishak Arama (c. 1420 - 1494) was a Spanish Rabbi and author. He was at first principal of a rabbinical academy at Zamora (probably his birthplace); then he received a call as rabbi and preacher from the community at Tarragona, and later from that of Fraga in Aragon. He officiated finally in Calatayud as rabbi and head of the Talmudical academy. Upon the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, Arama settled in Naples, where he died in 1494. Arama is the author of Aḳedat Yiẓḥaḳ (Binding of Isaac),[1] a lengthy philosophical commentary on the Pentateuch, homiletic in style. He also wrote a commentary upon the Five Scrolls, and a work called Ḥazut Ḳashah (A Difficult Vision), upon the relation of philosophy to theology; also Yad Abshalom (The Hand of Absalom), a commentary on Proverbs, written in memory of his son-in-law, Absalom, who died shortly after his marriage.

(2) Rabbi Yishak Arama, Akedat Yishak, Parashat Vayikra

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In his short story, “The Intelligence Office,” Nathaniel Hawthorne describes a group of people who make requests from an intelligence officer. Some are seeking worldly things, and others are seeking truths of one kind or another.

One of the clients states that he wants a place. The officer explains that there are many vacant or soon to be vacant places, but he needs more information from the petitioner as to what he is looking for.
The client responds: “I want my place! My own place! My true place in the world! My proper sphere! My thing to do, which nature intended me to perform when she fashioned me thus awry, and which I have vainly sought all my lifetime!” The intelligence officer could not satisfy his wishes and the man left dejected. One after the other, clients expressed their wishes and goals, and one after the other their requests were logged in the record book. But no help was offered. Each person ultimately had to solve his/her own problem. The record book of the Intelligence Office would be an amazing reflection of the needs and wishes of human beings. Hawthorne writes: “Human character in its individual developments—human nature in the mass—may best be studied in its wishes.”

What do we wish for? Good health (physical, spiritual, emotional), good family, friends, happiness, love, wholeness, self-worth, usefulness, a feeling that our lives mean something...that we each have our own unique and valued place in the world.

We are not only what we seem to be; we also are what we aspire to become, what we wish for. Ideally, we have worthy aspirations; ideally, we conduct our lives so as we can best reach toward those aspirations. In this week’s Torah portion, we begin the book of Vayikra...and we read about many forms of sacrifices that took place in the Mishkan of the ancient Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. Obviously, their primary wish at that time would have been to enter the Promised Land and get settled there. This was a practical and sensible wish.

But the Torah emphasizes the necessity of spiritual aspirations. It describes the offerings as a way of reminding the Israelites of the primacy of their relationship with God. In order to have a proper physical place, it is vital to have a spiritual place. It is imperative to have aspirations that transcend time and space, that reach toward the Being of all beings.

One of the Hebrew terms for God is “haMakom,” which means the Place. The Bereishith Rabba (68:9) indicates that haMakom connotes that “God is the place of the world, and His world is not His place.” This phrase seems to mean: God encompasses the entire universe but is not limited to it. In Ezekiel’s vision, the angels bless God’s glory “miMekomo,” from His place. His place is far beyond us...i.e. in Heaven.

The Temple sacrifices of old were a way for the Israelites to internalize a personal relationship with God. They learned to think beyond their immediate physical needs and wishes, and to place their lives in a spiritual, transcendent context.

Since the destruction of our ancient Temples in Jerusalem, our spiritual “place” has been found in our synagogues, study halls, in our homes and hearts. Our prayers— the classic liturgy of the siddur as well as our own private devotions—are a means of our finding our own place in the world. Our prayers—our wishes and aspirations—obviously relate to our physical needs. But for us truly to find our own “place” in the scheme of things, our prayers must bring us into relationship with the ultimate Place.

To paraphrase Nathaniel Hawthorne, our character as individuals may best be studied in our wishes, in our prayers and aspirations.

PRAYERS AT THIS TIME OF PANDEMIC: As we all pray for a speedy end to this crisis, please join in reciting these prayers each day: https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/prayers-time-crisis
Seeking Help

From Sy Rotter: Filmmaker (It Was Nothing, It was Everything)

25 years ago rescue efforts during the Holocaust of Greek Jews by Christian Rescuers were filmed in Greece by Sy Rotter for distribution by the "Foundation for Moral Courage". Narrated by Irene Papas, the film is titled "IT WAS NOTHING...IT WAS EVERYTHING"

The English language version of the film is now also available with subtitles in Greek. An effort is underway to identify a mail address for each of the Rescuers and Rescued who appear in the film to receive dvd copies. At this time all, with the following exceptions, have been identified. Any guidance to reach one or more, or their descendants, would be greatly appreciated:

Archbishop Damaskinos, Athens;
Bishop Meliton, Athens;
Stratos Paraskevaidis, and Marika, his wife, Thessaloniki;
Dimitris Zannas, Thessaloniki;
Stylianos & Damaskin Xirouchakis, Kasteli, Crete;
Maria Kotsovou, Argos;

The film can be viewed here.
For more information please contact syrotter@wlosa.net

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Picture of the Month

Salonika 1916
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.

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy.

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.