May 2018 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

As we approach the Jewish Holiday of Shavuot, let us pause and reflect on the challenges we face and the gifts we have received. Our world is increasingly challenging, as we, as Jews and, especially, as Greek Jews, face conflicts in the secular worlds we live in. We are forever grateful for the gift of the Torah, with its wisdom and strength, to guide us through troubled times.

Torah in Kehila Kedosha Janina, originally from Ioannina, circa 1780
This newsletter, our 110th 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 now reach close to 9,000 households worldwide, with our community of ‘friends’ continually growing 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.

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 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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Passings

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Robi Varsano, a survivor from Thessaloniki. Robi was only 15 years old when he was deported from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the beginning of April, 1943. The number etched into his arm on arrival at the concentration camp was 115365. Robi was 90 years old when he passed.

Robi Varsano

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Nina Benjamin, March 30th at the age of 98 years. Nina’s husband, David passed away in December 2017 at the age of 100. She is survived by her three devoted daughters, Ethel (Barry) Shuken, Rochelle (David) Kaplan and Jacqueline (Fred) Lieberberg; six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. She was also predeceased by another granddaughter, Nina. She enjoyed cooking, gardening and doing everything for her family. Nina was born into a Yanniote family, her father Sol Matza and her mother Rachel Coffina. She passed on her love of Yanniote cooking to her grandson, Jason Kaplan, who is a chef. Jason led a cooking class for the Greek Jewish Young Professionals Network, incorporating the Yanniote foods of his grandmother and the Sephardic foods of his grandfather, David Benjamin of Blessed Memory.

Nina Benjamin
The passing of **Rebecca Yomtov Hauser** on April 16th at the age of 95 was particularly painful for us. We were honored to have Rebecca present her book at our Yom HaShoah Commemoration in 2017. Rebecca was born into the Yomtov family in Ioannina, one of five children of Mordechai (Mordos) Yomtov and Bouneka Matsa Yomtov. Rebecca’s older sister Annetta died before the war, but her parents and three brothers died in the concentration camps. Rebecca was brought the United States by her uncles, Nissim and Jacob Yomtov, who had come to New York in the early 20th century. Rebecca is survived by her sons, Mark and Edward, and her daughter, Bonnie, along with her four grandchildren and countless people she has touched over the years, sharing her story with the world.

Rebecca, we were honored to know you and to have you visit us at Kehila Kedosha Janina to present your moving book.
Simchas

We celebrate the engagement of Mariissa (Missy) Panfel to Brian Nearnberg. Missy is the daughter of Pamela Blau and Michael Panfel, the granddaughter of Molly (Eftihia) Hametz and Jerome Blau, the great-granddaughter of Israel and Pernoula Hametz.

We were honored to host the baby naming of Lila Eden in our synagogue on April 22nd. Lilia is the daughter of Melissa Ledner, the granddaughter of Ed and Lois Genee Ledner, the great-granddaughter of Hy and Lil Genee of Blessed Memory, and the great great-granddaughter of Fani and Bechoraki Genee, both born in Ioannina.
Finally, we congratulate Mark and Laurie Serwetz on their 40th anniversary. Laurie is the daughter of Rose Capon Eskononts and Murray Eskononts (of Blessed Memory).
Our synagogue is more than “just” a place of worship and a place of study and learning, with our museum and extensive library. It is also a place to preserve traditions and customs and a living memorial to those Greek Jews who perished in the Holocaust. In addition, it as a place to welcome “Our Own.” Each month, Greek Jews, both Romaniote and Sephardic, come to visit the center of Greek Jewry in the United States, often the place their own ancestors worshipped.

In April we were honored to welcome members of the Colchamiro, Raphael, and Negrin families from the Romaniote world and members of the Sidis family from the Sephardic world.

Paul Warhit brought his daughter, Allison, to learn about her illustrious Colchamiro family and the world they came from in Ioannina Greece. A recently filled line of memorial plaques from the offspring of Elias and Speranza Colchamiro was the impetus that brought them back to Kehila Kedosha Janina, to learn about what brought Elias and Speranza from Ioannina to New York and how they fit into the growing world of Greek Jews in New York. They learned how Elias, although the youngest of the four Colchamiro brothers, was the first to come to New York, travelling with his sister Hanoula and her Kastorilis husband, Isaac Cohen. Paul is the son of Dinah Colchamiro (of Blessed Memory), the youngest of the nine children of Elias and Speranza, and Nathan Warhit.
Jonathan Pott-Negrine came from England to visit us. His branch of the Negrin(e) family went from Ioannina to Egypt to Israel to England. His father Ralph had visited Kehila Kedosha Janina in the past. Jonathan is the son of Ralph and Angela Negrine, the grandson of Moses Negrin (born in Ioannina) and Nina Cesana, and the great grandson of Solomon Negrin (born in Ioannina and died in Egypt) and Fortunee Negrin. Jonathan is a perfect example of the strength of Yanniote identity, that no matter where the Jews of Ioannina went, they kept within them the love for the land they left behind.

Avigail Raphael works for El Al and presently lives in Israel. On a layover on a flight from Israel to New York she found time to visit the Romaniote synagogue that her family in Israel had mentioned.

Ron and Pam Sidis, from Portland, Oregon had joined our Museum Director on a tour to Turkey and Rhodes in 2014. It was a joy to welcome them to their first visit to Kehila Kedosha Janina.
Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

This past April we had visitors from Yeshiva University (students of Professor Ronnie Perelis), members of the Knesset (on a tour to New York to learn about American Jewry) and distinguished visitors from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who are looking to collaborate with us in giving more exposure to the story of Romaniote Jewry.

Most of the YU students had never heard of Romaniote Jewry. Hopefully we filled that void in their education.

It was truly an honor to host members of the Knesset in our humble synagogue. Coming from Israel to learn more about American Jewry, the inclusion of our community was of utmost importance. All too often we are passed over for larger and wealthier congregations. The timing of this visit was auspicious, on the 70th anniversary of Israeli Independence, as our Museum Director shared the story of her own father who died in the War of Independence on May 8th, 1948.
On Monday, April 23, we were honored with a visit from the Unite States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Fred Wasserman (Acquisitions Curator), Diane Afoumado (Chief ITS Research) and Jaime Monilor (International Outreach Officer).

In this newsletter below, under continued research, we will be mapping out the project with the USHMM.

The Jewish Telegraph Agency recently visited KKJ and conducted a live video tour of our synagogue and museum led by Andrew Marcus, our Director of Community Development. You can watch the video here.

Past Events of Interest at Kehila Kedosha Janina

We were honored with the presentation of Jane Mushabac’s most recent literary venture, “His Hundred Years.” The event, held in our Ada Finifter Communal Room on April 8th was a great success. We still have some copies left (for sale at $12 plus $5 P&H). If you would like a copy, email us at museum@kkjsm.org.
In a community that lost so much in the Holocaust, unlike many other communities where Yom HaShoah attendance has faded over the years, we at Kehila Kedosha Janina, we never forget. Our Yom HaShoah attendance is always respectable and our programs always emotional. There is no way we can ever top the Yom HaShoah on April 15, 2018 at Kehila Kedosha Janina. We had always known the story of our dear Sol Kofinas and how he, and his brother Zino (of Blessed Memory) survived in Athens with the help of the Hatzis family. In fact, a plaque is on our Wall of Moral Courage thanking the Hatzis family. For this Yom HaShoah, we located the daughters of Antonis and Areti Hatzis in Ottawa (due to a newspaper story in the Ottawa Jewish Journal) and brought two of the daughters, Demetra and Litsa, to New York to surprise Sol. There was not a dry eye in the house.

Click here for a beautiful article written in The Lo Down.

Click here for the Ottawa article about the Hatzis family.
On April 29th we hosted Jonathan Maimon for a presentation of his documentary film “Journey From Tunisia.”
Upcoming Events of Interest at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On Sunday May 6th our street (Broome St between Allen St and Eldridge St) will be closed for our 4th annual Greek Jewish Festival. Join us for a day of music, dance, food and celebration of our Greek-Jewish roots.

In 2015, the first year of our festival, we had 2000 visitors; the second year, 6000; and last year, over 8000. We thank our friends at the Greek National Herald for a lovely article on our festival: Full article here.

"First launched in May, 2015, the Greek Jewish Festival has quickly grown into an international event that brings together the Greek Jewish community as well as the broader Greek and Jewish communities. It is the newest and largest effort of KKJ to share the culture and traditions of this community in a major public way. The festival cuts across religious, cultural, age, and geographic lines. Situated within the historic immigrant neighborhood of the Lower East Side, the Greek Jewish Festival celebrates centuries of cultural exchange that occurred in Greece and the Balkans.

More information on the Greek Jewish Festival is available online at: www.GreekJewishFestival.com, on Facebook here, and YouTube here.
Join us for an historic International Greek Jewish Shabbat on May 4-5th

Kehila Kedosha Janina invites you to an International Greek Jewish Shabbat

May 4 - 5, 2018

Join us for a very special Shabbat celebrating the Romaniote and Sephardic traditions of the Jews of Greece

We are honored to welcome community leaders from Greece, Seattle, Indianapolis, Portland, Miami, Atlanta, and Philadelphia, including the following distinguished HaHamim:
Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, Jewish Community of Athens, Greece
Rabbi Ben Hassan, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation of Seattle
Rabbi David Gingold-Altchek, Etz Chaim Sephardic Cong. of Indianapolis
Rabbi Nissim Elnekave, Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

Friday May 4
6:45pm Minha Afternoon Services
7:15pm Kabbalat Shabbat & Arvith Services

Saturday May 5
9:00am Shaharit Morning Services
12:00pm Musaf Services
4:00pm “The Romaniote Custom of Shaddayot” - Rabbi Negrin
4:30pm “Teaching Levantine Sephardic Customs” - Rabbi Hassan
5:00pm “Post-Expulsion Sephardic Philosophy” - Rabbi Altchek
5:30pm Minha Afternoon Services
6:00pm Seuda Shelishit & Rabbinic Panel Discussion
7:15pm Romaniote Songs, Arvith Services & Havdala

Kehila Kedosha Janina 280 Broome Street NYC
Please RSVP to amarcus@kkjsm.org
International Greek Jewish Shabbat

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin is currently the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Athens. He was born to a traditional Romaniote family with heritage originally from the city of Ioannina in Northern Greece. He grew up in the Jewish Community of Athens, attending the local Jewish Community School, where he received the nickname of "the little rabbi" for his inquisitiveness and passion for Judaism. He received a Bachelors of Arts in Musicology from the Technical University of Crete. He received his Rabbinic ordination from the Shehebar Sephardic Center in Jerusalem, trained in the Romaniote Hazzanut of Greece, and is a certified mohel and shohet.

Rabbi Ben Hassan is currently the Rabbi of Sephardic Bikur Holim (SBH) Congregation in Seattle, an over 100 year old community founded by Sephardic Jews from Turkey. He was born in Manchester, England to a traditional Sephardic family of Spanish Moroccan descent and received his Rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat HaMivtar in Israel. He served as the Rabbi at the historic Sassoon Yehuda Sephardi Synagogue in Melbourne, Australia, and joined SBH in 2013 with his wife Sharona and their four daughters.

Rabbi David Gingold-Altchek is currently the Rabbi of Etz Chaim Sephardic Congregation of Indianapolis, an over 100 year old community founded by Sephardic Jews from Salonika, Monastir (Bitola), and Turkey. His family is originally from the cities of Salonika and Istanbul, and he is currently collaborating on a number of projects to help revive the Sephardic community nationwide, including the Sephardic Birthright Trip. He received his Rabbinic ordination from the Shehebar Sephardic Center in Jerusalem, served as a US Army Chaplain retiring with the rank of Captain, and grew up in the Ladino Sephardic community of Florida.

Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé is an active Rabbinic educator in the New York Sephardic community, including at Kehila Kedosha Janina and the Sephardic Jewish Center of Forest Hills. He was born in Mexico City to a Turkish Ladino family and received his Rabbinical training in Jerusalem at the Shehebar Sephardic Center and Yeshivat Porat Yosef, focusing on the traditions of the Ladino-speaking Sephardic Jews of Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans. He is currently the Executive Director of the Sephardic Brotherhood and has taken an active lead in reaching out to the next generation of Sephardim and collaborating with communities across the country.

Kehila Kedosha Janina 280 Broome Street NYC www.kkjsm.org
Don’t Miss our Fourth Annual Greek Jewish Festival on Sunday May 6th
Full details at www.GreekJewishFestival.com

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

PRESENTS THE
FOURTH ANNUAL

GREEK JEWISH
FESTIVAL

SUNDAY MAY 6, 2018
12PM – 6PM
BROOME ST BETWEEN ALLEN ST AND ELDRIDGE ST
LOWER EAST SIDE NYC

DELICIOUS FOOD  LIVE MUSIC  KIDS ACTIVITIES
SYNAGOGUE TOURS  DANCING  VENDORS & GIFTS

- FESTIVAL SPONSORS -

- COMMUNITY PARTNERS -

FOR MORE INFO: GREEKJEWISHFESTIVAL.COM
On June 3rd, we are honored to welcome our dear friend, Yvette Manessis Corporon, for a return visit to Kehila Kedosha Janina for a presentation and book signing of her latest book, “Something Beautiful Happened.” Included in the presentation will be a showing of the trailer of her documentary film on the story of her journey, learning about the moving saving of Jews on a small island off the coast of Corfu, finding the Jewish family her own family saved and, then, the unfortunate story of the loss of her nephew and his grandfather in an anti-Semitic shooting in Kansas City, Kansas. Neither her nephew nor his grandfather were Jewish. How does one balance this contrast in events? Yvette does it beautifully in her book. Yvette will be present to sign copies of both her books “When the Cypress Whispers” and “Something Beautiful Happened”.

Yvette Manessis Corporon
Author of
Something Beautiful Happened
A Story of Survival and Courage
In the Face of Evil

Sunday June 3rd at 2:00pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

Yvette is an Emmy-award winning writer and producer. When Yvette presented her first book When the Cypress Whispers at KKJ, it was a true moment of fate. After hearing the story of Yvette’s family on the island of Erioussa off the coast of Corfu, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, KKJ Museum Director and President of the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry, decided to present the Association’s prestigious Award of Moral Courage to honor the Greek Christians who risked their lives to save Greek Jews during the Occupation of Greece, in Erioussa in June 2015. Something Beautiful Happened is the continuation of this story.

We are proud to announce our Museum Director was interviewed for both the book and the soon-to-be-released documentary.

Author will be present for book signing
Special autographed books will be available for $20
Refreshments will be served

Please RSVP to museum@kkjsm.org or 516-456-9336
Upcoming Events of Interest

Sephardic Heritage International DC
SHIN DC & The Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art
TO PRESENT FOR AFRICAN DIASPORA HERITAGE TALK SERIES

A Celebration of Ethiopian Jewish Heritage

ON THE 27TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION SOLOMON
SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2018 • 1:30 - 5:00PM
950 Independence Ave SW, Washington, DC 20560

Special Screening of
MEKONEN: THE JOURNEY OF AN AFRICAN JEW
(Dir. Rebecca Shore, 2016, Israel, 43 min., Hebrew with English Subtitles)

From 1984 to 1991, over 22,500 Ethiopian Jews emigrated to Israel as a part of Operations Moses, Joshua, and Solomon. Young Mekonen Abebe was one of these emigrants, alongside his family—but Abebe’s father died before he could make the trip. Follow along with Abebe’s emotional journey to see Ethiopia for the first time since leaving the country as a boy, and to finally visit his father’s grave.

Following the film, an engaging discussion will be moderated by Sephardic Heritage International (SHIN) DCs Shlomit Daniel alongside Issayas Yona Bogale, whose father Yona Bogale was the first leader of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel. Traditional refreshments and music to follow.

Registration (FREE)

Part of a regular Heritage Talk series, this screening and discussion will allow the museum to hear directly from one of its most important audiences, D.C.’s local African diaspora community. Make your voice heard!

CO-SPONSOR:
ASEFA (a., gathering) traverses the rich and rooted confluences of Hebraic and Islamic musical traditions, interweaving North African and Middle Eastern styles together on one stage. Multi-instrumentalist and ethnomusicologist Samuel Torjman Thomas, Ph.D., leads the ensemble through a repertoire of classical and modern Hebrew, Ladino, Arabic, and Spanish songs. Serpentine vocals, lush oud, haunting violin, breathy nay, resonant bass, and riveting percussion characterize their sound.

Sponsored by The Ike, Molly, and Steven Elias Foundation

WWW.ASEFAMUSIC.COM

Ta Aïdóvia
Ta Aidhonia
Wednesday, May 2nd 7:15pm
Ballâq Café Wednesdays

Traditional Songs of Mainland and Island Greece for Participatory Dancing (and Singing!)

Ramona Kohrs, Eric Heuberger, Quince Marcum, Gladys Comeau-Morales, Quinn Moss, Laura Pannaman, Zachary Wagner Scholl
Directed by Carol Freeman
Accompanied by Lauren Brody, Jerry Kissinger, Michael Ginsburg
Dance Instruction by Michael Ginsburg

455 West 56th Street Manhattan Admission $15 All are Welcome!
Articles on Events of Interest in the Sephardic World

Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad-Ikonomopoulos, was honored to speak at both the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue on East 63rd Street in NYC on April 10th for Yom HaShoah, and to travel to Indianapolis to visit the Sephardic congregation of Etz Chaim and the Jewish Community of Indianapolis for an emotional Yom HaShoah. The founders of Etz Chaim were Jews from Monastir and Salonika. Walking through the synagogue (the interior recently moved to larger and new quarters but still retaining much of the original features of the old synagogue) and the old cemetery was truly a coming home. For our Museum Director it was truly Los Muestros. Thank you Rabbi David Gingold-Altchek for the invitation and your hospitality.
"Never again," said those who attended the commemoration of the Jewish Community of Kastoria, whose members perished in the Auschwitz death camp by the German occupying forces. For the 4th straight year the events were organized by the Center for Studies of Jewish Heritage Kastoria, paying tribute to some thousand of our fellow Jews, victims of the Holocaust.

Saturday April 21, 2018 members of the Jewish Communities of Greece, America, and Turkey, the German consul in Thessaloniki Walter Stechel, members of our district, representatives of our local authorities, the Center for Jewish Studies executives Heritage Kastoria and the Central Jewish Council of Greece, representatives of cultural associations, as well as ordinary citizens, gathered at Omonia square and from there, through Metropolis Street, made a symbolic memory path to the Holocaust memorial located on the Agiou Athanasiou. There, a memorial service and wreath laying took place.

Among those who greeted the audience was the consul of the Federal Republic of Germany Walter Stechel. "These sad events, they make me feel deep sadness and shame, both as the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, and personally.”

The representative from the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece was Solomon Parente who personally lost family in Kastoria during the Holocaust.

The movie “Trezoros,” telling the story of the Jews of Kastoria, aired on PBS during the week of Yom HaShoah. Here is a link to the article in the Atlanta Jewish Times.
Thessaloniki

Short Documentary Film on the Allatini Flour Mill in Thessaloniki

Article (in Greek) available [here](#). Watch the documentary on Youtube [here](#).

![Allatini Mill](image1)

![Allatini Villa](image2)
We are saddened by the historical revisionism reflected in a recent plaque placed in the Bulgarian town of Dupnitsa. Full article here.

The plaque, put up by the Dupnitsa regional organization of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom” reads that it is a sign of tribute “to the people of Dupnitsa who saved their Jewish fellow citizens from deportation in 1943 and eased the sufferings of 4000 Jew from Greek Thrace who passed through Dupnitsa in transit to the Nazi death camps. This shall never be forgotten!”
In Memory of the Jews of Monastir who were deported by the Bulgarians in Early March 1943

On the 75th anniversary of their deportation to Treblinka, we thank Lyna Degen for passing on this article to us. Here we honor the Jewish partisans of Monastir.

Monastir During the Holocaust
Jewish Partisans

On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Heading the Regional Communist Central Committee was an open supporter of Bulgaria. The Macedonians were split over the question of annexation – did the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria mean liberation or occupation?

This dilemma continued for two years, and for a long while almost no action was taken against the fascists. A few isolated incidents of sabotage are recorded, as well as the establishment of a few groups of rebels that soon failed and broke up. Those Jews willing to join battle units went underground and organized attacks – and then fled in the face of military might. Earlier, in May 1941, about a month after the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria, approximately 100 rifles and some ammunition was stockpiled in the house of Benjamin Russo, in the hope that it would be used against the Nazis and their collaborators.

Despite their difficult circumstances and the constricted living space in the Jewish quarter, the Jews of Monastir attempted underground activities: Jewish homes were used to store and repair weapons, make copies of and distribute propaganda material, collect equipment for first aid and give shelter to the partisans.

Totaling some 10 percent of the town’s overall population, the Jews comprised close to three-quarters of all underground activists. Even though the heads of the communist parties warned the young Jews against joining combat units, many initiatives taken by the youth of Monastir to find a way to join different partisan units succeeded. The partisans fought against the Chetnics (Yugoslav units that supported the Germans), the Bulgarian, German and Italian units. Each member of the underground was given a nickname, making it is difficult to know the exact number of Jewish fighters.

The estimate is that dozens of young Jewish men and women from Monastir fought in the different units.

In 1942, Victor Meshulam (known as “Bustrik”), Mordechai Todelano (“Spiro”) and Joseph Russo (“Pipo”) joined the “Damyan Gruev” unit (named after the Macedonian hero who fought in the 1903 revolt against the Turks).

Joining the “Yana Sandrinski” unit were: Benjamin Russo (“Kiki”), Mordo-Mordechai Nachmias (“Lazo”) and Nissim Alba (“Miki”). Aharon Aroesti and Yosef Lazar were returned to Monastir with the suggestion that they continue to operate in their local underground unit.


Joining the Greek partisan units were: Shmuel Kalderon (“Bima”), David Kalderon, Marcel Demajo, Joseph Pipo Hason, Mantesh Ischach, Pinchas Ischach and Helena Leon Ishach. In addition, the brothers Albert (Avraham Segev) and Moshe Kasorela, and Joseph and Shimon Aroesti fled Monastir. They waited for a partisan unit to contact them, but when the message was delayed, they fled to Albania, where they joined the partisans after the Italian surrender.

One of the first fighters was Rafael Bationo, one of the organizers of the anti-fascist revolt in the Sanjak region. Bationo, known by his underground name as Misha Tzevtakovitch, was killed in battle in 1942. Aharon
Aroesti, Marcel Demajo, Mordechai Todelano, Mordo-Mordechai Nachmias, Estreja Ovadja, Joseph Piso, Shlomo Sadikario, Shmuel Sadikario, Yitzhak Sarfati and others also lost their lives in battle. Many of those who died were senior officers. Shlomo Sadikario, who was killed in the battle at Kumanovo, was the commissar of the brigade. His brother Shmuel, who was commissar of the parachute regiment, was killed in 1945. Among the partisans was a parachutist from the Jewish Brigade, Nisim Testa-Arazi, born in Monastir, who parachuted into Serbia in April 1944. When Testa volunteered to parachute into enemy territory, he didn't know that his entire family, which he had left behind in Monastir when he immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1939, were already dead.

Fighters in the Macedonian ‘Goce Delchev’ Brigade, among them the Jewish fighters Estreja Ovadja, Estreja (Stella) Levi, Jamila Kolonomos and Adela Faradji © Yad Vashem

Jewish partisans, Monastir, left to right: Victor Meshulam, Leiki Alba, Russo © Yad Vashem
We are proud of a recent article by Ethan Marcus, son of our President, Marvin Marcus. The apple does not fall far from the tree.

Read the article “Taking Greek Jewish Life to the Streets of New York” here
When Moshe Ha Elion sings, his clear, strong voice intones the rise and fall of a life lost too soon. His younger sister Nina was only 14 when she died after a treacherous journey by train from their native Thessaloniki, Greece to the ovens at Auschwitz. His Sephardic ballad, “La Djovenika al Lager” (or “The Maiden in the Lager”), was written in her memory. The opening line falls out like a sigh: “La linda djovenika...” This translates to “the fair, young maiden”—or, as Moshe loves to say in English, “pretty girl,” rolling the ‘r’ with a faint smile. Blonde, blue-eyed Nina perished the first day she arrived at the camp, but despite many harrowing events, illness and a nearly crippling depression, Moshe survived. Now he remembers the loss of his sister through writing poetry and setting it to music.

When I first met Moshe at his home several years ago, I was studying the ancestral language of the Sephardim, commonly known as Ladino, as a part of my PhD. True to his habit, Moshe greeted me with song. As a researcher, I recognized in that moment that music provided me the perfect way to learn more about his life, but at that point, I still did not know the role that music was going to play in our relationship.

Over a few years of conversations that Moshe and I shared drinking café turkit on his doily-covered couch, I learned that he had a dream of translating “La Djovenika al Lager” into English and having it performed. He pleaded with me to translate his epic poem of 88 couplets into rhyming verse, so that the three-part melody scheme would still correspond. “La kero en inglez, Ki ki,” he would repeat to me, calling me by my love-name, “Ke se aze en inglez.” And in English he would have it. I determined to create a workable translation into English, thinking to myself that it probably would not be hard at all. What could be so hard about writing melodic verse in iambic heptameter?

Day one, I was in for a surprise. It turns out that I was not the reincarnated Shakespeare that I thought myself to be. Moshe became petulant. With a disappointed look, he would tell me in Hebrew, “Lo, lo, lo. Not good. Lo maspik tov.” Back to the drawing table. After so little success, I became antsy too. Every time that I accidentally picked a word that was off-kilter, Moshe would tense up his entire body almost to the point of convulsing. I could not understand why the rhymes that were slightly off would unsettle him in such a visceral way. Beginning to fear that Moshe’s dream of the translation and performance would never be realized, I would sit at his little desk and pray for inspiration. One of the most laborious couplets was about the wake-up call to work at Auschwitz. We went through seemingly countless versions with minute variations:

They take them to work while, they are in step all marching,
While the orchestra beats, without even arms swaying.

They take them to work, they have to march in pace
While the orchestra plays, they cannot sway or race.

They take them to work, they have to march in tempo,
While the orchestra plays, not swaying to kommando.
After hours of singing the different versions together, I began to disassociate. Observing the contortion of his face, I watched him remember the fear of imminent death. Each time we read, it was as if Moshe were marching at Auschwitz once again. If he were out of line with the strict rhythm of the Nazi marching band, he would be shot. I witnessed the insidious convulsion of his body and the bitterness in his eyes. With every beat, he relived the marching step of that unconscionable reveille.

I do not remember how we ended work that day. It was as though Moshe’s comfortable little office had been transformed by the anguished notes of his song into something sinister. “Maspik,” Moshe said after a long day’s work. “Enough.” He went off to rest on the couch, but I was more restless than ever, feeling like the crystalline water and sands of Bat Yam, Israel could not stretch far enough before me to run the course of my thoughts.

Despite these difficulties, as we continued the translation, I grew to love Moshe’s imperious attention to rhythm. I decided to embrace the metronomic quality of his music as part of the story of his trauma, but also of his resilience. Each beat represented a shot from a Nazi weapon, but it also represented each moment that Moshe survived—each day that passed, each morning that the march was successfully completed. Sometimes, I would ignore the way the music pressed stridently forward and just close my eyes. I would let Moshe’s haunting ballad flow over my body like a stream; time and time again, his music would transform our surroundings. In the cool of late afternoons, his office became a sanctuary for me.

Now our translation is finished as best as I know how to do it. But these days, Moshe still does not rest. On November 29, I directed the first choral performance of “The Fair Young Maiden” in English at my university, but this is only a start. His dream is that the translated piece be performed before the United Nations, and I hope to help him see that dream to fruition. In the meantime, on this day, Yom HaShoah, I stop to remember the sounds of the Shoah according to Moshe. The unrelenting rhythm of his music signifies both trauma and healing. The melody descends and builds; it breaks down, but also triumphs. With each note, Moshe remembers his little sister, but he also evokes his own will to live, his indefatigable résistance and, ultimately, his dream.

Judith K. Lang Hilgartner recently completed her PhD as a Rachel Winer Manin Jewish Studies Fellow from the University of Virginia. She specializes in Latin American Jewish Studies, as well as Sephardic Studies worldwide.
The holiday of Shavuot will begin on Motza'i Shabbat, May 19th. Shavuot is the holiday of “Matan Torah” - the giving of the Torah to the Jewish nation, as well as the celebration of the pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer the first fruits of the summer harvest. The holiday of the first fruits is expressly mentioned in the Torah, while “Matan Torah” is not. However, the chronology of events and the dates of the actual revelation and giving of the Torah, in the form of the Ten Commandments, correspond exactly to the date of Shavuot. The magnificent revelation and voice of G-d at Sinai sealed our eternal covenant as G-d’s special people: "And the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone, written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words which the Lord spoke with you in the mount, out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly" (Deuteronomy 9:10).

But what "Torah" did Moses actually receive at Sinai? Our sages differ in their opinions: Was the "Torah" passed on to Moses only the detailed, divine and binding codex of religious and ethical commandments with which we are all relatively familiar, or "Torah" as the entire gamut of human knowledge in every sphere of life, both present and future?

The Jerusalem Talmud in Tractate “Hagiga”, offers a striking answer: “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levy said: [the words] “on them [the tablets]” means, Scripture and Mishnah, and Laws and Legends, even what a senior student in future generations might teach before his Rabbi, was given to Moses at Sinai....” In other words, every possible Torah thought, tidbit, innovative interpretation, past, present and future was given to Moses. This is obviously a controversial extreme, because it ostensibly leaves no room for any future innovation or free thought or creativity, which has been part-and-parcel of the Torah world for centuries.

Therefore, our classic commentators and Sages offer a number of alternatives as to how to interpret this Talmudic dictum. Some simply dismiss this particular idea as being incorrect, subsequently citing other verses and sources to show that what was given to Moses were rules and tools that could deal with any and every aspect of Torah knowledge in every generation. Thus, even a seemingly "ancient" idea could, and would, be applied to even new and modern situations to decide whether something was forbidden or permitted. And indeed, extrapolation, interpretation and derivation of seemingly outdated knowledge and Torah laws are still valuable and usable tools in the modern world.

Others try and stay with the original Talmudic idea, whereby we do believe that Moshe received every aspect of Torah, or even general, knowledge that ever existed or that would be produced, in the future. However, this was done in order to bring the holy and until then totally Heavenly Torah down to earth, and give it to Israel, as was G-d’s declared plan from the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As to dispersal of such knowledge, it was the role of each generation to discover and utilize what it needed, and more and more of this latent and now "earthly" knowledge, was revealed, as the world continued to develop. Thus, even a brilliant and novel idea in the Torah world, was actually the discovery of what already existed. This is highly esoteric, of course, but actually presents a beautiful idea that is also suggested by some Sages: If this is the case, then indeed, "Matan Torah" was not a single event, but an ongoing process that continues even today! G-d may have provided Moses with the entire gamut of Torah, past, present and future, but it is every generation’s duty and privilege to draw it out and utilize it. Therefore, when anyone studies Torah on any level, he or she is actually joining this beautiful and eternal process of discovery and learning, which is the legacy of every Jew on earth.
But we can go even further. If "Torah" includes all worldly knowledge, both present and future, and not just Jewish law and lore, this might help explain why so many Jews, despite our low numbers, always seem to be leaders in almost every field. How often do we ask why so many Jews seem to win the Nobel Prize, or how is it that Israel has become such a world center for innovative technology and world-changing innovations? This is obviously no coincidence, and perhaps the idea of "Matan Torah" can help explain these uncanny phenomena. Indeed, the same Jewish innovativeness and ability to "discover" religious and ethical rules and Torah knowledge from what G-d gave Moses at Sinai, is just as potent and present when applied to the entire gamut of worldly knowledge that apparently was also given by G-d to Moshe! Happy Shavuot to one and all!

Research

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, we will be working with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) to help gather artifacts and testimonies on Romaniote Jews. We are specifically looking for artifacts that survived the Holocaust (personal items, photos, religious artifacts) and were either kept in the family still residing in Greece or brought here to the United States after the war. We are also looking for testimonies of those who survived but may not have given their oral testimonies before. It is not too late. Your stories are important. More info will follow. Let us know if you have something you think would be important for this collaboration or if you would like to give testimony. Email us at museum@kkjsm.org

As you know, we love photos at Kehila Kedosha Janina. Here are our favorite photos from April 2018.

Salonika 1917

The Clock Tower in Ioannina
Our dear friend, Leon Saltiel, with Mayor Yannis Boutaris, in Thessaloniki with his latest book, “Do Not Forget.”
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.

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.

Your donations enable us to continue our work. You can send donations via mail directly to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 or you can donate via our website www.kkjsm.org