Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

Monday February 10th marks Tu BiShevat, the beginning of the new year for trees. The holiday originated in the Talmud and was based on the date chosen for calculating the agricultural cycle of taking tithes from the produce of the trees, which were brought as first-fruit offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem. Tu BiShevat has developed into an ecological holiday that reminds Jews of our connection to the earth and to our role as caretakers of the environment. Some modern practices include donating money to plant trees in Israel or planting trees locally. Such an appropriate holiday for today.

Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem where trees are planted in honor of those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust
This newsletter, our 131st 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 10,000 households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at museum@kkjsm.org

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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**Simchas**

January was filled with Simchas as we celebrated special birthdays. Hy Eliasof turned 99! Annette Binder and Cal Attas celebrated their 92nd birthdays. Cal and Norma Attas celebrated their 62nd anniversary.

Mazal Tov on the birth of Abraham Levy, son of Morris and Daniela, grandson of Dan and April Levy, great-grandson of Morris and Yvette Levy (both of Blessed Memory), great-great grandson of Rabbi Jessoula Levy and Esther Cantos Levy, both born in Ioannina.

Hy Eliasof in WWII

Annette Binder on Left

Cal Attas (far left) at the aufruf of his future son-in-law in 2017 at KKJ
We are overjoyed to post of picture of Elliot Genee, son of Jordan and Laine Genee, grandson of Marty and Marla Genee, great grandson of Hy Genee and Lil Genee (both of blessed memory), great great-grandson of Morris (Bechorakis) Genee and Fani Genee, and great-great-great grandson of Avraam Genee and Estrea Negrin.

Annette Binder’s granddaughter is now engaged. We celebrate the engagement of Melissa Binder and Justin Epstein.

Esther Colchamiro turned 101 and we share the joy with the extended Colchamiro family. Esther is the daughter of Mollie (Mazalto) Colchamiro and David Kaplan (Cartona) and the widow of Ralph Colchamiro She is the granddaughter of Jessoula Colchamiro and Rachel Galanos Colchamiro.

Correction on Simchas from January 2020: Sophie Morhaime celebrated her 100th birthday, not her 99th.
We mourn the passing of Milton Luftig, husband of Marcelynne Solomon.

We apologize for the late notices of the passing of the following: Isaac Battino and Esther Mollengarden.

Isaac Battino passed away on July 16, 2019 from pancreatic cancer. He was a Vietnam veteran and was two months shy of his 75th birthday. He leaves behind a wife, a son, a daughter, and 6 grandchildren. He was born while the family was in hiding in Livadia (about 1½ hours north of Athens).

Esther Mollengarden was born in 1923 and passed away in May of 2019. She was the daughter of Lillie Mioni and Asser Rafael (Romaniote on both sides). We thank her son Art for the information on her passing. Esther was so proud of her Romaniote heritage.

We extend our sympathies to Victor Venouziou of Thessaloniki on the passing of his wife, Sultana.

Correction:

Hi Marcia. Thank you for the informative and enjoyable publication. The notice of the passing of my brother Morris Cantos contains an embarrassing error. Our paternal Grandparents were Menachem and Mazalto Cantos and our maternal Grandparents were Hayim and Ester Myones (Mioni) from Arta. Rabbi Jesoula Levy and Esther Levy (may their memory be for a blessing) were brother in law and sister of our father Abraham Cantos. Thank you for your efforts to correct this. Best Regards, Esther
Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

As always, January brought us a variety of visitors: school groups, new friends from near and far, and members of the Greek Jewish world, who always make us a stop on their visit to New York.

ΔΙΚΟΙ ΜΑΣ – Dikoi Mas – Los Miestros

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

We celebrated a special event at Kehila Kedosha Janina in December when Jason Gould, son of Jennifer Halpern and Gabriel Gould, grandson of Carol Mathios Halpern and Barry Lissak, great grandson of Morris Mathios and Julia Coffino, great great grandson of Jesse and Astro Mathios, and great great-great grandson of Moses Matathias and Rose Negrin, laid tefillin for the first time in anticipation of his bar mitzvah. The family came up from South Carolina to perform this Mitzvah in our synagogue, the synagogue of his Romaniote relatives. We were honored
Kehila Kedosha Janina is proud to welcome

Professor Alexander Kitroeff
as Scholar in Residence for a lecture on
Greeks and Jews in Egypt

Sunday February 16th at 2:00pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

“From the early nineteenth century through to the 1960s, the Greeks formed the largest, most economically powerful, and geographically and socially diverse of all European communities in Egypt. Although they benefited from the privileges extended to foreigners and the control exercised by Britain, they claimed nonetheless to enjoy a special relationship with Egypt and the Egyptians, seeing themselves as contributors to the country’s modernization.”

Alexander Kitroeff is Professor of History at Haverford College. He is the author of numerous books, including most recently “The Greeks and the Making of Modern Egypt.”

Prof. Kitroeff was born in Athens, but his paternal grandparents were born in Alexandria, his great grandfather having left Chios in the late 19th century in order to pursue the cotton business. His family left Egypt and moved to Greece in the 1950s and 1960s when life in Egypt became difficult for the Greeks. Professor Kitroeff received his doctorate from Oxford University.

Refreshments will be served. RSVP to Museum@kkjsm.org
Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

**Bourekas Cooking Class and Tu BiShevat Celebration**

**Sunday February 9 at 3:00pm**
**Kehila Kedosha Janina**
**280 Broome Street NYC**

Join us as we learn how to cook delicious homemade Bourekas. We will also celebrate the holiday of Tu BiShevat, the Jewish New Year for trees, with a wine and fruit tasting.

Meet other young professionals from our community in this interactive delicious event.

Open to young adults in their 20’s and 30’s
RSVP to GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com
Be sure to catch the award winning film, The Romaniotes, on February 24th.

Museum of the Moving Image – February 8-9

Hellenic Film Society USA: Join Costa-Gavras as we proudly host the Academy Award winning director for a special Costa-Gavras Weekend, February 8-9 at the Museum of the Moving Image. Full details here.
Upcoming Events – Seattle, Washington

The Sephardic Studies Program in partnership with The Seattle Public Library presents

Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century

Named by The Economist as a book of the year

with author
Dr. Sarah Abrevaya Stein

in conversation with
Dr. Devin E. Naar

Explore the intertwined histories of Sephardic Jewry through the personal correspondence of the Levy family from Salonica. In this highly acclaimed book, Stein weaves together a narrative of the Sephardic diaspora through the lens of one family during the most tumultuous moment in European history.

FEB 4 | 7 – 8:15 PM

The Seattle Public Library
Central Library, Microsoft Auditorium
1000 4th Ave | Seattle

Books will be available for sale

About Sarah Abrevaya Stein

Sarah Abrevaya Stein is the Maurice Amado Endowed Chair in Sephardic Studies and Sady and Ludwig Kahn Director of the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies at the University of California Los Angeles. She is also co-editor (with David Biale of UCD) of Stanford University Press Series in Jewish History and Culture and co-editor (with Tony Michels and Ken Moss) of Jewish Social Studies. She is the author or editor of nine books, and her books and articles have won numerous prizes, including two National Jewish Book Awards, the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature, and a Cuggerheim Fellowship.
14th Annual Sephardic Winter Film Series

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

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

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

March 3, 2020. DOUBLE FEATURE INTERNATIONAL NIGHT
The Nazi Games – Berlin 1936. This Film chronicles the story of how the Nazis and the International Olympic Committee turned a relatively small, elitist, sports event into an epic global mass media spectacle. The grand themes replete with architectural grandiosity, budget overruns, corruption, bribery, collusion with unsavory characters – including dictators and autocrats – and the ill treatment of black and Jewish athletes. This is a study of deception.
English language, 61 minutes, 2016, Produced by Taglicht Media.

Holocaust Escape Tunnel. For centuries the Lithuanian city of Vilna was one of the most important Jewish centers in the world, earning the name “Jerusalem of the North”. The Nazis murdered 95% of its Jewish population. Now an international team of archaeologists is trying to rediscover this forgotten world, excavating the remains of its Great Synagogue and searching for one of its great secrets: a lost escape tunnel dug by Jewish prisoners inside a horrific Nazi execution site.
English language, 2016, 60 minutes, Produced by PBS, Speaker: Natan Meir, PSU

PLEASE NOTE THE NEW LOCATION FOR ALL SCREENINGS:
Congregation Ahavath Achim’s new sanctuary, located in Hillsdale neighborhood
6686 SW Capitol Hwy. Portland, OR 97219. Call Ron at 503-750-0888
Past Events

International Ladino Day at the Center for Jewish History – New York

Holocaust Remembrance of Greek Jewry – New York

By far, this year was one of the best annual commemoration events. Kudos to Solomon Asser of the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece and Konstantinos Koutras, Consul General of Greece in New York. The event was moderated by Jimmy Demetro. The keynote speaker was David Harris from the American Jewish Committee.
Holocaust Remembrance Day at the UN – January 27, 2020

Eastern Mediterranean Business Culture Alliance (EMBCA) – Greek and Armenian Genocide

“Besa” Event Commemorating Albanians who saved Jews during WWII – Rockville, MD

Floreta Faber - Albanian Ambassador to USA
News from Jewish Greece

Athens

Hanukkah Celebrations in Athens

“Hanukkah, as always, was celebrated in a festive manner. The celebration reached its peak on Sunday, the 29th of December, when we celebrated in an open event, inviting also our non-jewish friends, at Beth Shalom Synagogue. A large number of people attended services inside and outside the Synagogue, and the specially-made treats, loukoumades (Greek soufganiot version), were offered to everyone. The lighting of the first candle, marking the beginning of the celebration, was lit by the children of our school. Members of our youth "Athineoi", Danae and Faidon played joyful music and the event. The Hanukkah bazaar, held at the Lauder Athens Jewish Community School traditionally every year, was also full of surprises. Our school was once again filled with the voices and laughter of our children, the delicious home-made creations of our Community Members, as well as the fresh warm donuts.”

KKJ President Marvin Marcus was honored to light one of the Hanukkah candles at the Athens communal lighting with Rabbi Gabriel Negrin on the fifth night of Hanukkah.

Ethan Marcus

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin and Marvin Marcus
The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece welcomes the landmark intergovernmental agreement among Greece, Cyprus and Israel for the East Med natural gas pipeline, an agreement of historic importance which was signed in Athens on January 2, 2020.

We repeat our belief that East Med pipeline will even further stabilize and develop the productive cooperation among Greece, Cyprus and Israel, it will boost the prosperity and progress of the people in the region, while it will also work as a bridge of peace between the Middle East and Europe. Athens, January 3rd, 2020

Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece

Energy, Security, Cyprus, Turkey

Greece, Israel and Cyprus signed a deal Thursday to build an undersea pipeline to carry gas from new offshore deposits in the southeastern Mediterranean to continental Europe.

The 1,900-kilometer (1,300-mile) EastMed pipeline is intended to provide an alternative gas source for energy-hungry Europe, which is largely dependent on supplies from Russia and the Caucasus region.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who attended the signing ceremony with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, said the pipeline will offer Europe "better flexibility and independence in its energy sources."

The pipeline would run from Israel's Levantine Basin offshore gas reserves to Cyprus, the Greek island of Crete and the Greek mainland. An overland pipeline to northwestern Greece and another planned undersea pipeline would carry the gas to Italy. The project could also accommodate future gas finds in waters off Cyprus and Greece, where exploration is under way. The project, with a rough budget of $6 billion, is expected to satisfy about 10 percent of the European Union's natural gas needs. But it is fraught with political and logistical complexities.

The race to claim offshore energy deposits in the southern Mediterranean has created new tensions between Greece and Cyprus, on one side, and historic rival Turkey. Ankara has raised the stakes with recent moves to explore waters controlled by the two EU member countries. Cyprus and Greece are particularly disturbed because Turkey sent warship-escorted drill ships into waters where Cyprus has exclusive economic rights. Cyprus' Anastasiades said the pipeline affirms that Greece and Cyprus have sovereign rights in waters assigned to them under international law.

"This cooperation that we have developed ... isn't directed against any third country," he said. "On the contrary, whichever country wishes is welcome to join, on the understanding of course that it adopts the basic principles of international law and fully respects the sovereign rights and the territorial integrity of independent states."

Alluding to Turkey's stance, Anastasiades said cooperation is the only approach in an unstable region instead of embarking on a course of "self-isolation." Netanyahu said Israel is set to become a "powerhouse in terms of energy" with its offshore gas reserves. He added that the three countries have established "an alliance of great importance" that will bolster regional stability. Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz has said the EastMed pipeline would take up to seven years to build and that its advantages include being less vulnerable to sabotage and not crossing many national borders to reach markets.
Cyprus is divided into a Greek Cypriot south, where the island nation's internationally recognized government is located, and a breakaway Turkish Cypriot north backed by Turkey. The split followed a 1974 Turkish invasion after an aborted coup aiming to bring Cyprus under Greek rule. Turkey doesn't recognize Cyprus as a state and claims much of Cyprus' exclusive economic zone as falling within its own continental shelf.

Turkey is also laying claim to large tracts under Greek control in the Aegean Sea and off Crete. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said no project can proceed without his country's consent following a maritime border agreement that Ankara signed with the Libya's Tripoli-based government. The Cypriot government has licensed Italian energy company Eni, France's Total, ExxonMobil and Texas-based Noble Energy to carry out exploratory hydrocarbons drilling in the country's offshore economic zone. [AP]

Leaders of Major Jewish and Hellenic organizations meet with Mitsotakis in Athens

International Holocaust Remembrance Day - Athens

In an announcement for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Greek foreign ministry on Monday emphasized the need to “fight against the attempt to willfully trivialize or even deny the blackest page in modern European history,” and to honor the memory of millions of Jews, including Greeks, that “fell victim to the most heinous crime in modern history.”

The statement notes that “since 2005, Greece has been a full member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and, under the Stockholm Declaration, undertook the responsibility to preserve the collective memory our fellow human beings who died in the Holocaust. Greece’s upcoming presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, in 2021, is practical recognition of its role in combating anti-Semitism and defending historical truth.”

Greece will continue to fight racism, intolerance, discrimination, intimidation and xenophobia. It will continue to honor and protect the memory of those who were lost, and it is committed to working ceaselessly to ensure that those who lost their lives are never forgotten and that humanity never again experiences such horrors, the Foreign Ministry statement said on Monday.”

Issak Mizan (deported from Arta)
Hanukkah in Ioannina

Holocaust Remembrance program honoring the memory of the Jews of Ioannina. Former Mayor of Thessaloniki, Yiannis Boutaris, was an honored guest, and the poetry of Iosef Eliya was highlighted.
Unfortunately, once more we express our sorrow, outrage and concern over the new vandal attack against a Jewish site in Trikala, the second within two days. Following the desecration of the Synagogue, the Holocaust Monument was vandalized, with part of the surrounding fence been severely damaged and the ornamenting Magen David been detached. It is to be noted that in February and March 2019 the Monument had been three times vandalized with antisemitic graffiti.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece reacted swiftly and addressed letters to the Minister of Citizen Protection, the Mayor of Trikala and the Chief of the Police department in Trikala asking for the arrest of the perpetrators and their prosecution, the adoption of effective security measures for the protection of all Jewish sites -thus the Synagogue, the Holocaust Monument and the Jewish cemetery- so that such actions - that damage the image of the city both in Greece and abroad- are prevented from happening again in the future.

We hope that the city of Trikala, the Municipality, the Church and the civil society will safeguard the city’s history and heritage against the followers of intolerance and antisemitism.

Athens, January 3, 2020
Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece

Thessaloniki

In Thessaloniki, Greece, children laid roses at the Holocaust memorial, in memory of the suffering of generations before them.
Cyprus

Jewish Museum in Cyprus

“We had the pleasure of welcoming an interfaith group to our Nissen hut Exhibit this week. The group took a tour of the island’s historical Jewish sites, viewing the rich history that Cyprus has to offer. Our Nissen hut exhibit is open Monday to Thursday 9-5pm and Friday 9-1pm (excluding Jewish Holidays).”

Cyprus News

Cyprus President Anastasiades receives honorary doctorate. Outside it was rainy & cold, but inside the President delivered a warm speech, stressing that the Cyprus-Israel strategic partnership is here to stay. "It is a resilient partnership for our future."

Egypt

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, Jan. 10 - Egypt's Tourism and Antiquities Ministry reopened on Friday the Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria after fully restoring the 14-century Jewish place of worship.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by a number of Egyptian officials and foreign diplomats.
"The restoration of the synagogue is a message to the world, a message of tolerance and acceptance of the others. It is a
message that Egypt is restoring its heritage form different eras for mankind," Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled al-Anany.

The Egyptian government started the renovation work in 2017 and the overall cost of the restoration stood at 64 million Egyptian pounds (4 million U.S. dollars), according to the ministry. The synagogue was established by the Jewish community in Alexandria in 1354. It was rebuilt in 1850 after it was damaged during the French invasion of Egypt in the 18th century. The synagogue, built on an area of 4200 square meters, has two floors: a floor for men and the other for women.

After the completion of the restoration, the synagogue was equipped with the latest fire alarm and lighting systems. Magda Haroun, president of Egypt's Jewish community, said she was extremely excited to see the synagogue being refurbished and reopened. "It is great that Egypt is really taking care of Jewish heritage," said Haroun. As one of the most ancient civilizations, Egypt has been working hard to preserve its rich archaeological heritages. Read more from Times of Israel here.

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France
Nice

High in the hills of Nice on the French Riviera is a Jewish Cemetery which includes a moving and poignant memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

The Jewish community in Nice is long established, with the first synagogue being built in 1418. When the town of Nice outgrew its city walls and had to relocate in the later Middle Ages, the Jewish community was forced to live in a gated street called ‘The Street of the Jews’ (now called Rue Benoit Bunico) which was locked every night. The locals were unhappy about this, and so built tunnels with secret doors so that Jewish and non-Jewish could continue to integrate as they had always done. (France was the first European nation to emancipate its Jewish residents, just after the French Revolution of 1789.)

In 1783 the burial grounds for Catholics and Jews had to be moved due to the introduction of new rules forbidding burials inside churches, so the Catholic and Israelite Cemeteries were relocated side by side on the ruins of the old citadel high up on the hill overlooking Nice.

During World War II, Nice was incorporated into Italy and became a place of refuge for Jews. Tragically, this all changed in 1943 when the Germans took over and many were sent to their deaths.

The Israelite Cemetery in Nice is a beautiful, peaceful place with views over the red tiled roof tops of Nice on one side and the sparkling blue sea of the Baie Des Anges on the other. Next to the Christian Cemetery on the Colline du Chateau, the tall hill in Nice that once held a castle and now contains parks and open space for locals and tourists to enjoy, the two cemeteries with their ornate marble monuments and grave stones are open to the public during daylight hours.

Outside the Israelite Cemetery is a small plaque, commemorating 70 years since the creation of the state of Israel, where the ambassadors of Israel and France ‘laid the first stone of the wall of the Jewish deportees from Nice station to the death camps.’ Next to this hang two huge banners each with a photograph and a
quote. One says, “Each day, when I get up, I am happy, it is one day less that the Nazis will not have stolen from me”.

Inside the cemetery walls, right behind the entrance gate, is a small painted wooden building that looks like it has been there some time. On the walls are inscribed the words ‘The Israelite Community of Nice 1939-1945 to the heroes of the resistance and to the martyrs of persecution.’

Each side of the door are two small marble urns on slim pedestals. On one, ‘This urn contains the ashes of our martyrs killed in the gas chambers and ovens of Auschwitz’. The other urn contains ‘soap made from human fat by the Germans of the Third Reich with the bodies of our deported brothers.’

The cemetery contains many touching graves, often with grand monuments imitating Roman sarcophagi, Gothic chapels or antiqued columns, but there is nothing as poignant as those two simple urns.

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**Italy**

(JTA) — Anti-Jewish graffiti was discovered in multiple locations in Italy as the country observed International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Jan 27.

On Monday night, the words “die dirty Jew” were discovered outside the home of Maria Bigliani, 65, in Turin. “It is a terrible message, especially on Holocaust Memorial Day,” she told local media.

In Rome, a swastika and graffiti described by local media as anti-Semitic were found drawn on a high school, the Associated Press reported.

Near Vicenza, a poster was hung on a Democratic Party bulletin board that said: “January 27, the day of memory, let’s remember to reopen the ovens.” Ruben Della Rocca, vice president of the Jewish Community in Rome, said that anti-Semitism is on the rise “and we need to be more on guard,” the news agency LaPresse reported, according to the AP.

The latest incidents come in the wake of another instance of anti-Jewish graffiti last week, in which the home of Aldo Rolfi, the son of a survivor of the Ravensbruck concentration camp, was defaced. Hundreds of people carrying candles and some carrying yellow stars came out on Friday evening in support of Rolfi and to protest against anti-Semitism.
New Statue in Vatican Square

Pope Francis has unveiled a monument in St. Peter's Square dedicated to the world's migrants and refugees. The "Angels Unaware" boat by Canadian artist Timothy P. Schmalz depicts 140 migrants ranging from a Jewish man escaping Nazi Germany to a Syrian refugee fleeing the civil war.

The 20-foot sculpture was unveiled during mass on the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday. Depictions of Christ's parents Mary and Joseph have been included in the piece.

Pope Francis once famously likened the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem to the migrations of millions of refugees fleeing wars.

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Turkey

KKJ President Marvin Marcus was given the honor to help light the public menorah at the Izmir Sephardic Culture Festival with Jewish Community of Izmir President Samuel Azar in the beautiful Beth Israel Synagogue.
Morocco

Last week, King Mohammed VI attended the inauguration for Bayt Dakira, which means House of Memory in Arabic.

The port city was formerly home to a large population of Jews, who at one point making up 40 percent of the population. Most Jews fled Morocco because of the hostility they felt following the establishment of Israel in 1948 and in decades after.

Today less than a handful of Jews reside in the city.

The center is located in a restored home that houses a small synagogue and includes a museum, research center and space that will host cultural events. The project was created by Andre Azoulay, a France-educated Moroccan Jew who serves as a senior adviser to the king.

Most of the funding came from the Moroccan government, with a quarter coming from private donors.

Among a number of high-profile Moroccan Jews who attended the event and a dinner with the king afterwards were Azoulay and his daughter, Audrey, who serves as the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, Moroccan Jewish comedian Gad Elmaleh and the chief rabbi of Geneva, Switzerland Izhak Dayan.

Under King Mohammed VI, Morocco has made efforts to preserve Jewish sites. The country is home to a Jewish museum in Casablanca, which along with an adjacent synagogue was renovated and rededicated in 2016.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia names first Jewish cabinet minister.

Rasela Mizrahi appointed minister of labor and social policy, but some reactions condemned as anti-Semitic.

The nomination last week of Labor and Social Policy Minister Rasela Mizrahi to head the ministry where she has worked since 2015 follows snap elections held Friday. It earned her heartfelt congratulations, but also some rebuke from political activists that local media termed anti-Semitic.

Vidana Boskova Micevska, an activist for the left-leaning Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, or SDUM, wrote on Facebook: “I don’t mind that Rasela joined a fascist party. I’m sure the Nazis also had Jews who fought for better welfare rights for the Jews,” Republika reported.

Mizrahi belongs to VMRO-DPMNE, a center-right party that some see as nationalistic. The party is in a power-sharing agreement with the SDUM to deal with thousands of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East that have crossed into Europe since 2014.

Mersiha Smailovic, a Muslim community activist and former employee of Mizrahi’s ministry, suggested Mizrahi place a flag bearing the Star of David in her office.
“If she used the star of David, there would be no problem,” she wrote on Facebook. Smailovic was reacting to false rumors that Mizrahi had placed her party’s flag in her office.

Efraim Zuroff, the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Eastern Europe director, congratulated Mizrahi, calling her nomination “an encouraging milestone” for her community. But the “anti-Semitic reactions have been revealing and outrageous,” he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. The country is home to about 200 Jews.

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**Buenos Aires**

Iconic Buenos Aires synagogue celebrates centennial year

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The first Sephardic synagogue of Buenos Aires is celebrating its centennial anniversary. Located in the center of the Argentinean capital, the iconic “Great Temple of Piedras Street,” was established by Jewish immigrants of Moroccan origin. During Hanukkah of 1920, the temple was named “Bet El.” A wave of Moroccan Jewish immigration to Argentina began in 1891. The construction of the temple started in 1917 and ended two years later, led by the Italian architect Jose Tartaglia.

The synagogue hosted Albert Einstein during his 1925 visit to Argentina.

“The temple was considered by the press of that time as one of the most beautiful in Latin America, described as magnificent and marvelous, and to celebrate its centennial the community is restoring it in order to maintain its beauty,” Diana Serfaty, president of ACILBA, the Association of Moroccan Jews of Argentina, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Some centennial events have already been held and more will be in 2020. Last month, the synagogue building was opened to the public as part of a nighttime tour of iconic religious buildings organized by the Buenos Aires city government.

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**Israel**

Early Jewish Bread Stamp Found Near Akko

In 2011, Excavators with the Israel Antiquities Authority unearthed a 1,500-year-old Jewish bread stamp from a small Byzantine settlement near the ancient port city of Akko. The sixth-century clay stamp, excavated from the small site of Horbat Uza just east of Akko, bears an image of the seven-branched Temple menorah, while its handle is engraved with several Greek letters that likely spelled the name of the Jewish baker who used the stamp to mark his goods. “The stamp is important because it proves that a Jewish community existed in the settlement of Uza in the Christian-Byzantine period,” said Danny Syon, one of the excavation’s directors. “Due to the geographical proximity of Horbat Uza to Acre [Akko], we can speculate that the settlement supplied kosher baked goods to the Jews of Acre in the Byzantine period.”
The scourge of antisemitism is once again rearing its diabolical head to an extent not seen since the darkest of times in the 20th century. It would therefore be prudent and timely to examine how the Torah sees this phenomenon and its essence through the prism of the opening portions of the Book of Exodus, currently being read on Shabbat in synagogues all over the world.

God’s declared goal for bringing down the Ten Plagues on Egypt was twofold: to demonstrate to the enslaved Israelites God’s power to strengthen and encourage their faith, as well as to cause Pharaoh, who considered himself a deity, to see God as the one and only Master of the universe, including the fate of Pharaoh and Egypt. The use of 10 plagues of increasing intensity rather than a single event of tremendous magnitude, was meant to allow Pharaoh the opportunity to repent and see the error in his ways in rejecting God’s omnipotence, and not allow His people to worship Him as he commanded.

Pharaoh’s staunch refusal to release the Israelites, until of course the ultimate plague of the slaying of the first-born, takes on even greater significance when we recall that God’s “official” request to Pharaoh was that the entire Israelite nation be released for only a 3-day ‘holiday’ in the desert, and nothing more. However, since it was clear that God’s true intention was Israel’s absolute and permanent emancipation from Egyptian bondage, many of our classic commentators asked why God had to resort to such deception? Why not tell Pharaoh the truth?

The most logical assumption is that God knew that Pharaoh would never agree to permanently release the Israelite slaves, and therefore tried to ‘soften the blow’ by asking for much less. However, such a consideration was basically dismissed as unworthy by our sages, since the God of truth would not resort to such falsehood without a much more significant reason. And in fact, based on classic commentaries, the late Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the greatest Torah sages of the 20th century, offered an amazing answer to this question.

Rabbi Feinstein commented that it was clear to one and all, including Pharaoh, that no real economic harm would come to Egypt by allowing slaves to take a 3-day respite from their backbreaking labor. Therefore, he concludes, God wished to show that Pharaoh’s refusal to grant such a request was evidence of a more insidious reason for his stubbornness, which was Pharaoh’s evil nature and hate and contempt for God Himself, for whom the Israelites served as living proof of His existence and power. For Pharaoh, then, being “antisemitic” was tantamount to being “anti-God”, and proof of his own humanity and lack of any divine powers whatsoever. As Pharaoh declared in his first encounter with Moses and Aaron, after hearing their lofty introduction to God and the first demand to release the Israelites: "Who is God that I should listen to His voice to free Israel? I know not God, and nor will I free [Israel]!", immediately followed by worsening the already rigorous and harsh work conditions of the Israelite slaves. In his eyes, then, Israelites were at best “in cahoots” with “this God”, and at worst tangible and virtually invincible proof of the Hebrew God’s true power over the world and Pharaoh himself. This was intolerable for Pharaoh and manifested itself in his persecution of Israel as a proxy for the real enemy, God Himself.

But even more significant of course, Pharaoh’s attitudes and actions constitute the prototype for virtually every Jew-hating and Jew-baiting autocrat and dictator from ancient times till today. Historically, Jew-hatred is at its worst in dictatorships and autocratic rule, where leaders maintain strict control over society by seeing themselves as being all-powerful and even divine. The very existence of a Jewish population that sees God as being above even the highest leader anywhere is therefore intolerable for such regimes, since Jews’ faith and belief in a higher heavenly deity serves as the very antithesis of their self-proclaimed omnipotence and unquestioned authority. Anti-Semites may hate and persecute Jews, but their ultimate intention is really aimed at God, as Pharaoh already proved thousands of years ago.
Yet no matter how hard they try, and despite the sometimes unfathomable price we have paid over history for not abandoning our ancient faith and partnership with God, the anti-Semites will continue to fail and eventually disappear, like every nation or empire that has tried to destroy us, while the Jewish people will remain and continue to prosper through it all. Perhaps if more world leaders and societies would see antisemitism in this light, there might be greater success in mitigating and even eliminating the phenomenon. After all, who wants to be called an enemy of the Master of the Universe?!

Rabbi Nissim Elne cavé
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

Parashah of the Week - Shemot
A New King

And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses. (Shemot 1:11)

From time immemorial, scholars and researchers have wondered about the identity of the Pharaoh who enslaved the Hebrews in Egypt and about the events that preceded the enslavement. Philo of Alexandria, the great Jewish philosopher in the middle of the first century, (1) corrected the common mistake made by his Greek predecessors, who believed that the land of Goshen was part of Arabia. (2) Furthermore, Josephus Flavius (3) at the end of the first century, relying on Manetho, (4) an Egyptian historian, stated that the Hebrews had come to Egypt during the time of the Hyksos. The Hyksos were foreign Asiatic kings who had invaded the northern Nile Delta around 1800 Before Common Era and had coexisted with the Egyptian population for a time. The Hyksos were also known as the Shepherd Kings or simply as Shepherds. Josephus assumed that it was during this period, that Yosef brought his father and his siblings, a family of shepherds to Egypt, where they settled until the Exodus a few hundred years later. (5) (6)

In more recent periods, new historical and modern archeological research has allowed for further understanding of that time. Quoting from the historian Isaak M. Jost, (7) Rabbi Shemu’el David Luzzatto, (8) stated that based on interpretations of ancient hieroglyphics, scholars had proposed that the Pharaoh of the Exodus had come from the lineage of Raamses. Located in northern Egypt, they were the ones who had fought against the Hyksos and eventually conquered them. It is possible that Yosef and his brothers settled with the Hyksos since, they spoke a language that is closely related to Hebrew. He adds that one can conclude that the Pharaoh of the days of Yosef loved and admired Yosef and his family. Yet the descendants of Raamses, determined to retake the land, fought to dispossess all foreigners. Rabbi Luzzatto concludes that “The new king” that enslaved the Children of Israel was indeed a descendant of Raamses. (9)

In regard to modern archeology and specifically pertaining to Biblical archeology a few aspects must be taken into account. Contrary to the general perception, the study of modern archeology is only but a few hundred years old. What is more, Biblical archeology only began in the late 19th century, much remains to be uncovered and to be studied. Furthermore, it has been said that archeology is not as simple as finding a stella or a bone and immediately understanding where it came from, one must decode its meaning, its setting and context. Archeology requires a great amount of imagination from the researchers in order to grasp what is at hand. Unfortunately, anti-religious or political biases must also be taken into account. Biblical archeology has been fogged with the anti-biblical trends of the 19th century and further darkened with anti-Israel politics after Israel became independent in 1948.

Today, people might be dismayed or even discouraged when hearing claims and studies that often conclude that no evidence of these events has been found. Yet, one wonders if some of these studies are only written to dismay and
Indeed, Professor David Rohl has published startling facts that appear to support and to point to key figures and places from that period. Professor Rohl states that the chronology that has been accepted by most scholars today is mistaken, it must be readjusted and once it modified everything falls into place, Yosef was vizier to Pharaoh Amenemhat III, greatest ruler of the 12th dynasty. He writes that during excavations in northern Egypt, under the remains of edifices that belonged to Raamses, they uncovered the city of Avaris. What is so unique about this city? He explains that the city began with a small group of settlers, at the center there was a house built in the style of the structures that are found in Haran. There are no other houses like it in Egypt at the time, this is clearly a semitic house. A short time after, the house was transformed into a palace, a garden cemetery was adjacent to the palace. What is special about the cemetery? In the cemetery there are twelve principal tombs, all with special domes. One in particular is unusual, because it's a pyramid tomb. It must be noted that during this period only Pharaohs got pyramids, which is a significant honor to the individual who was buried in this tomb. After reconstructing the remains found in the tomb, a statue of a man who was clearly a Semite emerged. What's more, the Canaanite man wore a tunic colored coat. He states that to top it all, there was no mummy found in the tomb. If it was that thieves desecrated the tomb, why would they take the body, they would simply have no use for it? Or was it Moshe who took the remains with him during the Exodus as requested by Yosef?

Professor Rohl concludes that the population of Avaris grew tremendously in a short period. During the final days of Avaris, there are a number of mass graves, bodies are piled on top of each other, which is evidence of a plague. What is most interesting is that subsequently, the population of Avaris vanished, they all left the city, clear evidence of the Exodus from Egypt. (10)

It has been said that the Torah is not a book of history, it is not there to specifically teach about events that transpired long ago. But it is a divine book, the teachings given to our prophets to inspire and to uplift us and make us better people. Yet, as more discoveries become available of a time long ago, we feel more connected and strongly identify with that past. We want to know, where was Goshen, have they found it, have they found Yosef, how could Pharaoh have forgotten him?

Shabbat Shalom

(1) Philo of Alexandria, Yedidia (Jedediah) HaCohen; c. 25 BCE - c. 50 CE), also called Philo Judaeus, was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Egypt.
(2) Philo: On Joseph 42.
(3) Flavius Josephus (a.k.a. Joseph ben Matityahu in Hebrew) 37-c.100, grew up in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Common Era. He was well educated, knowing both Jewish texts and the Greek language. During the Great Revolt from 66-73 CE, Josephus served as a general of the Galilee. As a prisoner of the Romans, Josephus volunteered to write the history of the Great Revolt. General (later Emperor) Vespasian agreed. In the Jewish War, Josephus thus provided the Romans with a first-hand account of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. He mentions several times in his Greek writings that he created an Aramaic version of the events as well, but unfortunately, it is not extant. Josephus' second major work, Jewish Antiquities, described the entire history of the Jews. It included a great deal of material from the time of Alexander the Great to the destruction of the Second Temple. However, because of Josephus' proclivity to depend on hearsay and legend, scholars are never sure what to accept as fact.
(4) Manetho Greek: Μανέθων, Manethōn, or Μανέθως, Manethōs) was an Egyptian historian and priest from Sebennytos (ancient Egyptian: Tjebnutjer) who lived during the Ptolemaic era, approximately during the 3rd century BC. Manetho wrote the Aegyptiaca (History of Egypt). His work is of great interest to Egyptologists and is often used as evidence for the chronology of the reigns of pharaohs. The earliest only surviving reference to Manetho's Aegyptiaca is the Jewish historian Josephus in his work Against Apion.
(5) Manetho, Aegyptiaca., frag. 42, 1.75-79.2.
(6) Josephus Flavius: Against Apion, Book 1, section 73, 93 & 227.
(7) Jost, Isaac Marcus (1793-1860), Jewish German educator and historian.
(8) Rabbi Shemuel David Luzzatto (often referred to by the acronym of SHaDaL or SHeDaL; 1800-1865), Italian scholar, philosopher, Bible commentator, and translator. His father, Hezekiah, was an artisan at Trieste and a scholarly Jew who could claim descent from a long line of scholars. He wrote his first Hebrew poem at the age of nine. His mother died when he was 13 and his father's pecuniary status declined seriously making it necessary for the young Luzzatto to assist his father in his work. His own wife died after a long illness, and he eventually married her sister. He survived two of his children - one Philoxenus (or Filoseno), had been a young man of especially great promise. Samuel David's translation of the Ashkenazi prayer book into Italian appeared in 1821/22, and that of the Italian rite in 1829. He established a regular correspondence with the Jewish scholar, Isaac Samuel Reggio, and through the efforts of the latter, Luzzatto was appointed professor of the newly established rabbinical college of Padua in 1829. There he spent the rest of his
When Moses demanded that Pharaoh release the Israelites so that they could go and worship God, he insisted: “We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters…” (Bereishith 10:9).

A Hassidic interpretation of Moses’ words plays on the Hebrew: “binareinu uvizkeineinu nelekh.” Instead of translating “binareinu” as “with our young,” it is translated as “with our youth.” The meaning is: even as we advance in years, we carry our own youth within us i.e. we retain the enthusiasm and idealism of our younger days. We may appear to be old physically, but mentally and emotionally we are still energized by our own inner child.

In his book, “Late Bloomers,” Brendan Gill cites numerous examples of people who launched new and productive careers in their older years. Oscar Hammerstein was 64 when he wrote the lyrics to The Sound of Music. Michelangelo was 72 when he designed the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Frank Lloyd Wright was 91 when he completed work on the Guggenheim Museum. A great many lesser known individuals have made remarkable achievements while elderly. What is their secret? They carry their youthfulness within! They are filled with wonder, with creativity; they want to keep learning and keep growing and keep testing their ideas.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, in his book “Happiness and the Human Spirit,” advises readers: “The key is to think of self-fulfillment in terms of effort rather than outcome. All we can do is make the best effort possible” (p. 91). It is all too easy to avoid undertaking new challenges due to fear of anticipated failure. People think: I’m too old, I will never finish this task, I don’t have it within me to succeed any further. But this type of thinking is self-destructive. It saps life of meaning and happiness. Rather, one should rally the inner child to take a chance, to try to undertake something grand and challenging. Dr. Twerski wisely reminds us that our responsibility is to exert our best effort and not to be overly daunted by the possible outcome.

The Hassidic interpretation focused on “binareinu;” but we should also pay attention to “uvizkeineinu.” Although normally translated as “with our old,” we might also understand this as a charge to each person, regardless of age, to imagine his/her older years yet to come. How would I deal with this problem if I were much older than I am now? What wisdom or experience could I bring to this new situation? If I were to look at my present life as though I were nearing life’s end, how would I judge myself? What would I do differently? It has often been said that no one, on his or her deathbed, looks back on life and says: I wish I had spent more time in my office! If we imagine ourselves to be looking back on our lives, we can often gain important perspective on how to live our present lives more meaningfully.

When we seek freedom and the fulfillment of our spiritual natures, we need to draw on our inner youthfulness and on our anticipated elderly mature vision. Seeing our own lives through the prism of our past and our future helps us to live righteously and happily in our present. “We will go with our young and with our old,” said Moses to Pharaoh. Good advice, even today!
As the world marks International Holocaust Commemoration Day and the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz this week, I’ve thought a lot about how the legacy of the Holocaust has shaped my commitment to Greek Jewry. I see myself as having a responsibility to the more than 67,000 Greek Jews who perished in the Shoah; not only tell their story, but to ensure that their traditions and customs, my traditions and customs, not only survive, but thrive. Of the nearly 76,000 Jews that lived in Greece before the Holocaust, only 5,500 remain today, and that population is aging. And survivors like Solomon Kofinas have been role models and guides to me my entire life.

Solomon Kofinas, to me, embodies the perseverance I must emulate. If I knew my paternal grandfather, who died long before I was born, I imagine he’d be just like Sol. Born in Athens in 1936, Sol is a Holocaust survivor from Greece. A few years ago, he sat down with my brother to give his testimony of the Shoah. In 1943, three years since the start of the Nazi occupation of Greece, the Germans issued an order that all Jews in Athens needed to go to their local synagogue in order to get kosher rations given out by the Germans. I want to provide you with a brief anecdote from his story that he told when interviewed in 2011:

“One Friday my father took my sister again, they had to go buy food for Shabbat. When they went, my sister never came back. My mother was waiting, she was waiting, my sister never showed up with the groceries. At about 3 o’clock, a young man that jumped the fence of the synagogue, he came over, he knew where the Jews lived. And he was telling everybody ‘the Germans are collecting the Jews. You better get up and leave the house right away.’ So my mother, she didn’t know what to do; it was me, my older brother, and the baby, and she didn’t know where to go. So around the corner from our house, my father used to do business with the tailor, they used to show the shirts that he sold to the businessmen and we asked the man if we could stay at his place for a couple of days until the Germans released my father.

So the tailor said, ‘At night, when I close the shop, get your mattress and come over and sleep here, and in the day you go back to your house.’ So my mother said ‘okay.’ So we stayed there for a week. We slept there. But on the third or fourth day, she needed some diapers for the baby. She said to my brother ‘hold the baby I’m going back home to get some diapers.’ So she went to the house to get the diapers, and when she arrived there the Gestapo came in and grabbed my mother because they knew, they had the address where we live. My mother got scared; she went under the bed hiding, that’s what the people that lived in our house (the tenants) told us. So she started screaming ‘the baby! The baby!’ So a young boy from the neighborhood heard the commotion and the screaming, and he came over to my brother. He said: ‘your mother is screaming. She wants your baby brother.’ So my brother said ‘here, take the baby to my mother,’ and he grabbed me and we ran away. The other way, far away, away from our home.”

Sol never saw his father, sister, mother, or baby brother ever again. He and his brother fled to the outskirts of Athens, where they hid in various non-Jewish homes before finally reaching his distant family, who he survived in hiding with until the end of the war.

The amount of strength Sol must have had, and still has, is something incredible. That despite almost losing his entire family, he was able to survive the war, go to school, become a mechanic, immigrate to the United States, and start a family of his own, all while serving Kehila Kedosha Janina and the wider Greek Jewish community in New York City for over 50 years as a Gabbai and lay leader. Today, Sol is not only a father and grandfather but also a great-grandfather.
His strength and story help me continue the fight to keep the Greek Jewish traditions alive. He inspires me, and if I can live up to be half the person he is, I will have lived a truly righteous and good life.

Sol’s story is just one of the many stories of the lost Greek Jewish life. There were so many communities. In the city of Salonica, at the height of the community there were almost 50,000 Jews in the city, over a third of its entire population. The Jewish community was so influential that the main language of art, commerce, and government for decades was Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish. The Jews were so integral to that community that every Friday afternoon, the ports and major shops would close down for Shabbat. This was how it was for “The Jerusalem of the Balkans” until 1943, when the Germans deported over 40,000 Jews to their deaths at Auschwitz. I can speak about the small hill town of Veria where my family was from, and how of the hundreds of Jews that lived there before the war, only a handful returned to their homes in Greece. I can speak about the community in Ioannina, whose history dates in Greece as far as the 1st century CE and where they spoke a unique Judeo-Greco language. Of the nearly 2000 Jews who lived there before the Shoah, less than 40 remain there today. None of these words can do any of these communities justice. Each one, and many others, all had something unique, their own customs and traditions, and individuals with hopes and dreams for their own lives, something I am struggling to help preserve and sustain today.

The Holocaust defines each and every Jew in a different way. To me, it has made me realize how important it is that I not only continue to promote and serve my small Greek Jewish community, but I learn its traditions, minhagim, and love of life that so many Greek Jews did not have the chance to express themselves. These traditions and memories cannot die. For the sake of those lost, I cannot let them die.

The Rhodes Synagogue Offers Bar and Bat Mitzvah for Students with Special Needs by Rabbi Barbara Aiello

It was a beautiful Shabbat morning on the west coast of Florida, the day Chris K. made his way to the bima to celebrate becoming a Bar Mitzvah. The synagogue was filled to capacity. When the cantor called Chris to the Torah to make the blessing before the reading, the Ooooooo’s and Ahhhhhh’s, along with sniffles and sobs could be heard throughout the sanctuary. Why all the emotion? Chris K, a young visually impaired teen was about to become the first blind student to read Hebrew braille as the first Bar Mitzvah in Florida’s history.

Two years earlier Florida’s east coast had a similar reason to kvell. Shari B., a young teen with quadriplegia, paralyzed from the neck down and breathing with the aid of a ventilator, came forward to the Torah and, from her motorized wheelchair, whispered the words of her Torah portion, becoming Florida’s first girl with a severe disability to be called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah. As happened in Chris K.’s synagogue, the congregation that experienced Shari’s simcha was overcome with emotion and amazement.

In my previous life, before I became a rabbi I worked with children with special needs. I also created an educational puppet program called Kids on the Block that addressed the same issue. When I became a rabbi (21 years ago) my experiences with disabled children led me to create specialized learning programs so that children with diverse mental and physical abilities had the opportunity to experience this very important Jewish rite of passage. That’s how I came to teach Chris and Shari and officiate for their B’nei Mitzvah ceremonies.

Yet it’s not always easy, as many parents of special needs children can attest. In fact, one parent, Becca Hornstein, shares her thoughts virtually via My Jewish Learning: “Misconceptions, even prejudices, about people with disabilities linger. Some people question whether a child with a severe disability can and should have a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. They may doubt that such a person can sustain the desire to become a bar or bat mitzvah. They may harbor rigid ideas of what the ritual entails and may not be willing to adapt the ceremony to the needs and abilities of the person. They may not know that other people with comparable disabilities have had similar celebrations.”

Two programs, Masorti Adraba in Israel and Gateways, located in Newton, Massachusetts, feature teaching materials and methods geared to the learning needs of the student with special needs.

The professionals at Gateways describe their mission as providing “high quality special education services, expertise and support to enable students with diverse learning needs to succeed in Jewish educational settings and participate meaningfully in Jewish life.” These services include extensive adaptive materials that allow special needs teens to have a successful Bar or Bat Mitzvah experience.

Thanks to the unique program operated by the Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel, Masorti’s Adraba, offers specialized Jewish education and courses to prepare young Israelis with cognitive or physical disabilities to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah. The Masorti program notes that “Children with disabilities are often marginalized in Israel, especially
in traditionally religious communities.” Founded in 1995 the Masorti program boasts “an unwavering commitment to creating an Israel which is inclusive of all.”

It is within the context of inclusion that the destination Bar or Bat Mitzvah experience in Rhodes, Greece came about—a program especially designed with the needs of special students in mind. In recent years we’ve called to the Torah students on the autism spectrum, students with hearing impairments and a 19-year-old with Down Syndrome who read the Sh’mà directly from the Torah scroll.

For many families the large synagogue with hundreds of congregants can be daunting for a special needs child, while the intimate surroundings of our synagogue in the mountains of southern Italy, or the family style warmth of the gorgiously ornate synagogue on the island of Rhodes offer ideal settings for a small but meaningful family simcha. Couple this with specially arranged accessible tours and a welcoming fun-filled resort and families with children with disabilities can enjoy all that a destination ceremony and family vacation have to offer.

It wasn’t long ago when our Calabrian synagogue opened our destination Bar Mitzvah program and our hearts to welcome disabled students to the bima. We knew we were on the right track when one teen with autism concluded his reading of the transliterated Torah verse by raising his arms in victory and shouting, to the claps and cheers of our congregation, “I’m a Bar Mitzvah!”

For details on the Rhodes Bar Mitzvah program, contact Rabbi Barbara Aiello at Rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com

Kehila Kedosha Janina is proud to be part of the “World Religion Program” through the Lyons School in Brooklyn
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.