



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## July 2022 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry is returning to Greece in July with a lovely group of inspiring Greek Jewish Young Professionals. After a three year hiatus we are so looking forward to this. This newsletter is sponsored in honor of Rose Eskononts, President of Sisterhood of Janina, on the celebration of her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday (July 21<sup>st</sup>). In this issue we also remember the arrival of the Jews from Corfu to Auschwitz-Birkenau (July 11, 1944) and the roundup of the Jews of Rhodes and Kos on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944.



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Greece, Ioannina, 2019

---

The E-Newsletter is sponsored in honor of Rose Eskononts,  
President of the Sisterhood of Janina, who turns 88 this month.  
If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org).

---

This newsletter, our 160<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjism.org](http://www.kkjism.org).

We 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@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email [amarcus@kkjism.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjism.org) if you would like to attend, and enjoy a traditional Greek kiddush lunch after services.

Our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm. Please RSVP to [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org) if you would like to visit. Proof of vaccination and masks are required.

---

### Simchas

We joyfully celebrate two simchas from the family of Rubin Battino, and the births of two beautiful baby boys, Theodore Oren Oberman, son of Rose & Stefan Oberman, (grandson of Kathy and Maurice Askinazi and younger brother of Samuel Asser), and Mason Samuel (Chaim Reuben) Calderon (son of Michael and Roxanne Calderon, and grandson of Mark Caderon), along with the marriage of Zachary and Lindsay Myones (Zachary is the son of Barry and Mary Carol Roberts Myones ), and four special birthdays, that of Esta Varon (99<sup>th</sup>), Irene Mathios Dresner (90), Rose Eskononts (88<sup>th</sup>), and Renee Yomtov Rosenthal (85). We are thrilled to share that Baby Girl Katz, now officially known as Lauren Sophie Katz, was born on July 1 at 3:29 pm, to proud parents Ruth and Evan Katz, from the Colchamiro family.

Rubin Battino celebrated his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, only made more joyous by the graduation of his granddaughter, Ellie Battino from Rush Medical School. Ellie is specializing in family medicine. Her parents Ben and Jill are also medical doctors. Ruben is an author, a professor emeritus of chemistry and a licensed counselor specializing in therapy, hypnotherapy, and guided imagery. Rubin, of course, is the brother of Ralph, Manny, Abraham Battino and Lilian Battino Solomon (all of Blessed Memory) and the son of Sadik Battino and Annie DeCastro.



Ellie & Rubin  
Battino



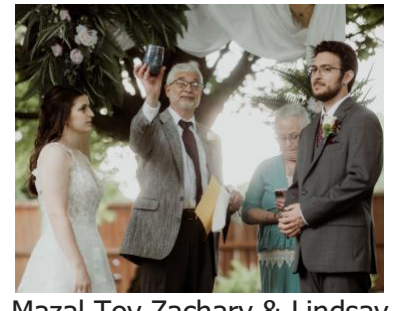
Theodore Oren  
Oberman



Michael, Roxanne  
& Mason Samuel  
(Chaim Reuben)  
Calderon



Evan, Ruth, &  
baby Lauren



Mazal Tov Zachary & Lindsay  
Myones



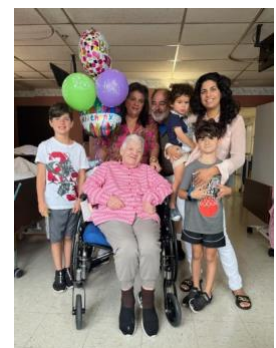
2 Renee Yomtov Rosenthal



Happy 88<sup>th</sup> Rose  
Eskononts



Irene Mathios  
Dresner



Happy 99<sup>th</sup> Esta Varon

## Passings

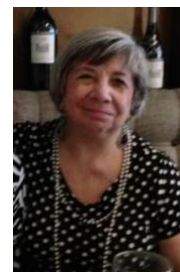
We mourn the passing of three important members of our community: Michael Matza, Dorothy Mione and Martin Negrin.

Michael Matza passed in June. He was the younger brother of Marvin Matza and the son of Hyman and Sarah Matza (both of Blessed Memory).

---

Dorothy Mione passed in June at the age of 79. She was the younger sister of Irving Mione (of Blessed Memory) the daughter of Louis and Dinah Mione, and the granddaughter of Abraham Mione and Rachel Mazza Mione. She will be mourned by her large extended family of cousins and the community of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Dorothy lived on the Lower East Side her whole life.

---



We mourn the passing of Martin Negrin just short of his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday. Martin passed in February. He was the younger brother of Mildred Negrin Froot (of Blessed Memory) and the son of Mollie Barouch and Abraham Negrin (early founders of the New York Romaniote community).

---

We mourn the passing of acclaimed Israeli Sephardic writer, A.B. Yehoshua on June 13<sup>th</sup> at the age of 85.

A.B. Yehoshua, Israeli Writer Who Explored Moral and Political Dilemmas, Dies at 85 Full article [here](#)  
In an oeuvre of 11 novels, three short-story collections and four plays, Mr. Yehoshua tackled a variety of narrative forms — from surrealist to historical — and delved into knotty or uncommon subjects.

A.B. Yehoshua, the Israeli novelist who, along with other acclaimed storytellers, planted his nation on the map of world literature with human portraits that captured the discordant condition of living in a land fraught with moral and political conundrums, died on Tuesday in Tel Aviv. He was 85.



The cause was cancer, said Avi Shushan, a spokesman for the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, where Mr. Yehoshua died. Mr. Yehoshua, who lived outside Tel Aviv, had said he was being treated for esophageal cancer that had metastasized.

Born to a Sephardi family that had lived in Jerusalem for five generations, Mr. Yehoshua came of age as the Jews of Palestine carved an independent state out of territory that had been a British mandate for 25 years and, for four centuries before that, an Ottoman-ruled region. The young nation was filling with Ashkenazi survivors of the Holocaust, as well as exiled Sephardi refugees from Middle Eastern and North African countries, all the while grappling with hostile neighboring countries and a Palestinian population both inside and outside its boundaries that believed that Zionists had stolen their land. This turbulent mix of peoples provided a wealth of material for Mr. Yehoshua and a luminous circle of authors that included Amos Oz and David Grossman. (Other prominent Israeli authors, including S.Y. Agnon and Aharon Appelfeld, tended to focus more on Jewish life in Europe and the Holocaust.)

Mr. Yehoshua was among the first writers of fiction “to give literary expression to the suffering and moral dilemmas” set off by the war that followed Israel’s declaration of independence in 1948, said Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, professor emeritus of comparative literature at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In his more explicit essays and public talks, Mr. Yehoshua affirmed the Zionist ideal of a Jewish homeland, but indicated that Israelis had to accommodate the needs of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians exiled from that land. In an oeuvre of 11 novels, three short-story collections and four plays, he tackled a variety of narrative forms — from surrealist to historical — and delved into knotty or uncommon subjects.

"Nearly every one of Buli's fictions changed the conversation and constituted an innovation in modern Hebrew fiction, either in form or content," Professor DeKoven Ezrahi, said, using the writer's nickname.

Mr. Yehoshua was known to friends as an animated talker who radiated *joie de vivre*, even though his novels and stories were often touched by heartbreak. Critics praised him for his nuanced understanding of the contradictory impulses that bedevil people and his capacity to find tender humor amid sorrow and despair.

"Laughter and tears are the best vitamins for good writing," Mr. Yehoshua observed in a video profile of him as a 2017 recipient of Israel's prestigious Dan David Prize, given to scholars, writers and others who, its sponsors say, "deepen our knowledge and understanding of the past."

In Mr. Yehoshua's first novel, "The Lover" (1977), Adam, a middle-aged Israeli, searches for his wife's lover amid the chaotic aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. A leading character is an Arab teenager, Nahim, who turns out to be the lover of Adam's daughter — a daring literary choice by the author for the time. Nahim, wrote Alan Mintz, a professor of Jewish literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary, has "an inner life that is not largely a projection of a Jewish fantasy or dilemma."



In "A Late Divorce" (1984), Mr. Yehoshua wrote of an exile who returns to Israel to obtain his estranged wife's consent to a divorce so that he can marry his pregnant American lover. The story is told by different narrators, a technique reminiscent of "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner. The opening chapter, with an epigraph from the Faulkner book, is told by a 10-year-old child, an echo of perhaps Faulkner's most striking narrator, the mentally challenged Benjy. Indeed, the literary critic Harold Bloom wrote in The New York Times Book Review that "Mr. Yehoshua writes in the shadow of Faulkner, with an admixture of Joyce."

"It is authentic storytelling, acutely representative of current social realities in Israel and marked by extraordinary psychological insights throughout," Mr. Bloom wrote.

In Mr. Yehoshua's "Five Seasons" — which was published in an English translation in 1989 and sold 50,000 copies in the original Hebrew, the equivalent of a multimillion-copy best seller in the United States — the protagonist, Molkho, has faithfully nursed his dying wife through seven years of illness, at times bathing "her scarred and tortured body," which has already turned "into some fossil of a species that had become extinct long ago." Yet he longs to be free of the burden of caring for her and looks forward to no longer having to endure her sharp tongue.

As the novelist Lore Segal noted in The Times Book Review, Molkho, while his wife is still drawing breath, has his eye on his widowed legal adviser as a "post-mortem possibility" and spends the rest of the novel in encounters with other post-mortem possibilities. Mr. Yehoshua won the National Jewish Book Award for fiction with "Mr. Mani" (1992), which traces the wanderings of six generations of the Sephardic Mani family through crucial periods of Jewish history. Each of its five chapters consists of the dialogue of a single speaker who is telling a story to another character, with that listener's missing responses implied in the first character's remarks. To complicate matters, the novel proceeds backward in time.

Though evocatively set in Israel, Mr. Yehoshua's novels are laced with themes that connect them to the contemporary Western canon. (Mr. Bloom included "A Late Divorce" in a copious list of works that make up, in his view, that canon). As the critic Jerome Greenfield wrote in 1979: "In the existential despair, the pessimism, the sense of dislocation and alienation that pervade his work, Yehoshua establishes a bridge between modern Israeli writing and a dominant stream of some of the best Western literature of our age."

Saul Bellow called Mr. Yehoshua "one of Israel's world-class writers." His books were translated into 28 languages. He won the Israel Prize, awarded annually by the state for important cultural contributions, and in 2005 he was shortlisted for the first Man Booker International Prize, then given for an entire body of work.

"In one movement of his imaginative wings," Mr. Grossman, the Israeli novelist, wrote of Mr. Yehoshua in an email, "he would show us just how banal and absurd, just how the reality — especially of ours, in Israel — is surrealistic."

Some critics saw Mr. Yehoshua's novels and short stories as allegories for his jaundiced view of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians. Others dismissed such interpretations. In a review of "A Late Divorce," Walter Goodman, a Times critic, wrote that the novel's Israeli characters, "use money, sex, food, humor, affection, cruelty to hold onto each other, to punish each other," and that the novel "has nothing to do with the West Bank." Still, Mr. Yehoshua made clear what those views were, berating Jewish settlers in the West Bank and condemning Israel's political leaders for allowing them to expand their numbers there. Late in life he argued for the establishment of a single state encompassing Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, where Jews and Arabs would have equal rights and voting powers. Mr. Yehoshua also caused a stir with his insistence that authentic identity as a Jew required settlement in Israel. He once said of the protagonist of "A Late Divorce": "Like the father who gives up his responsibilities and goes to America, Jews who leave Israel for America are escaping their responsibility."

In forceful essays and talks, he said that diaspora Jews could inhabit or discard their Jewish identity like a jacket to suit the moment, but that for Israelis, their Jewishness was fixed by a geographically defined and often embattled state and was therefore virtually immutable.

"Being Israeli is my skin; it's not my jacket," he told a symposium of the American Jewish Committee in 2006.

His remarks drew a fierce reaction from many prominent American Jews. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, then the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, said that Mr. Yehoshua's assumption that "a Jew who lives in the state of Israel will always be Jewish" while an American Jew would not was "absurd, and dangerous."

Avraham Gavriel Yehoshua — the initials A.B. were part of his pen name, and friends suggested he might have chosen B for his nickname Buli — was born on Dec. 9, 1936, in Jerusalem in British-held Palestine.

His father, Ya'akov Yehoshua, a descendant of the Sephardi community of Thessaloniki, Greece, wrote books of folklore that portrayed the lives of Jerusalemites in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His mother, Malka Rosilio Yehoshua, had emigrated from Morocco four years before Avraham was born.

Avraham grew up in Kerem Avraham, an enclave of European-style buildings outside the Old City where relatively prosperous families rented rooms to writers and artists. (Mr. Oz also grew up there.) He attended Rehavia Gymnasium, established in 1909 as Jerusalem's first high school in which subjects were taught in modern Hebrew.

From 1954 to 1957, he fulfilled his military obligation, serving as an army paratrooper during the Suez crisis, when Israel, backed by Britain and France, tried to retake the Suez Canal after it was nationalized by Egypt.

Once discharged, Mr. Yehoshua studied literature and philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and taught high school. He moved to Paris in 1963 to work toward a master's degree in French literature at the Sorbonne. He was called up as a reservist during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, again as a paratrooper. He began writing stories after his first army stint. His first collection, "The Death of the Old Man," was published in 1962. By then, Mr. Yehoshua was married to Dr. Rivka Kirsninski, a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst. She died in 2016. He is survived by a sister, Pzila Petroshka; a daughter, Sivan Yehoshua; two sons, Gideon and Nahum; and seven grandchildren. Beginning in 1972, Mr. Yehoshua taught comparative literature and Hebrew literature at the University of Haifa, reaching the rank of full professor. His last novel, "The Tunnel," was published in English in 2020.

In the interview for the Dan David Prize, Mr. Yehoshua recalled that while he was writing "Mr. Mani," notable for its one-sided conversations, friends and colleagues warned him that readers would not have the patience to figure out what was spoken in the missing half of the dialogue. But the book's success quashed their concern.

"It turns out," he said, "that when you challenge the reader, you enlist him as an important partner."

**This E-Newsletter is sponsored in honor of Rose Eskononts,  
President of the Sisterhood of Janina, who celebrates her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday this month**

The Sisterhood has always been a strong supporter of both Kehila Kedosha Janina and the Jewish Community of Ioannina. Rose has strengthened this connection during her presidency. Just recently, through Rose's proposal, the Sisterhood sponsored a new Memorial Board in the Synagogue, which will be officially unveiled in November of 2022. We stress how important it is to continue the good work of the Sisterhood (established in 1932 and celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday this year!). You can join Sisterhood (or continue your membership) by sending \$18 to The Sisterhood of Ioannina c/o Laurie Serwetz, 338 Felter Avenue, Hewlett, NY 11557. You can also supplement the Sisterhood by sending cards (birthday wishes, thank yous and in memory of) for \$5.00 each to Laurie Serwetz (Rose's daughter).



Rose and Family in Ioannina in 2014

In honor of Rose Capon Eskononts: a montage of photos. Here is to your 88<sup>th</sup> birthday - may you live to 188 and continue with your good works!



---

Correction on the sponsorship of the June E-Newsletter. Our sincere apologies for the fact that we forgot to mention Nancy, Leon Weinraub's lovely wife, who has always been supportive of Kehila Kedosha Janina.

## Visitors Return to Visit Kehila Kedosha Janina

It is a joy to open our doors to visitors, both old friends and new friends. Once you walk through our doors, you are a welcomed friend. As always, there are those from our community, Los Muestrros, Δικοί Μαç (our own) who seek us out when they are in town. In June, we made new friends with visitors from Philadelphia and a group of young people who had recently celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvot.



Of course, the most emotional of our visits are those by members of our community. In June we had visits from the extended Asser family (the daughter and grandson of Manny Asser and the granddaughter of Murray Asser) and the visit of Steven Singer from the Attas Family.



Gary Brown, Judith Asser Brown,  
Adam Hanson & Jackie Dornfeld



Adam Hanson

Something very special happened with the visit of Steven Singer (great-grandson of Calef Attas). Arlene Schulman, our resident documentary filmmaker, is also from the Attas family. An emotional connection was made when Steven and Arlene realized that they were related. It was Uncle Abbie (Abraham Attas) who provided the connection. Abbie was the brother of Solomon Attas, the grandfather of Steven. On Arlene's side of the Attas family, Uncle Abbie was a cousin of Abisai Attas, whom married into the David family (Arlene's maternal lineage).



Arlene provided us with a photo (from the Bar Mitzvah of Larry Joseph, son of Joe Josephs) where Uncle Abie appears with his first wife, Stema (in the center of the photo, Stema is wearing an attractive top with an embroidered V-Neck), sitting below, to the right of Solomon and Anna Attas (Steven's grandparents). We love the miracles that happen at Kehila Kedosha Janina.



## News from Jewish Greece

### **Leon Saltiel: Glimmers of Hope in Battling Greek Antisemitism** Full article [here](#)

'It is extremely important that over recent years Thessaloniki has assumed its share of responsibility for actions and omissions of the past...the historical wound created by indifference, complacency and antisemitism,' said President Katerina Sakellaropoulou.

When 44-year-old Leon Saltiel was growing up in the northern port city of Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest, the Jewish community, which once constituted the majority group, remained introverted and did not talk about their Jewishness, even 40 years after the city's Jews were deported and 95 percent of them were exterminated in Auschwitz.

Much of the city's Sephardic community, including the Saltiels, traced their roots to the 1492 expulsion from Spain of the Jews who had not converted to Catholicism, under the Alhambra Decree, issued by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.



Yet, there was a Jewish presence in Thessaloniki even in antiquity, and the Apostle Paul preached in its synagogue in an effort to convert them to Christianity before being expelled. Indeed, the first two of his many Epistles were addressed to The Thessalonians.

In its centuries-long history in the city, the Jewish community had a major impact on its social, political, economic, and cultural life. During the Nazi occupation, however, the city's authorities and institutions – municipal, civil, and religious – either remained completely indifferent or in many instances collaborated with the Nazis' mass deportation of the Jews, as Dr. Saltiel documents in his book, "The Holocaust in Thessaloniki: Reactions to the Anti-Jewish Persecution, 1942-1943" (Routledge Editions, 2021), which received acclaim by top professors of history, from Yale's Timothy Snyder to Princeton's Alexander Nehamas (a member of the Academy of Athens) and Columbia's Mark Mazower.

It was only in the last two or three decades that the history and plight of Greece's Jews was slowly introduced into public discourse. One of the most poignant televised and print accounts of an Auschwitz survivor, branded with number 77,102, was that in 2014 of the late Esther Cohen, then age 90, who died in 2020, taking her great, unanswered "Why?" to her grave.

"When they grabbed us from our homes and dragged us through the streets to take us to Germany, no neighbor even pulled their little curtain to see then dragging us through the streets. No one felt hurt, not a single tear was shed. What did we do to them? We were poor people, sir, the vast majority of us proper family people. We had not bothered anyone. We lived in Yannena for centuries [Ioannina was the center of the ancient Romaniote Jewish community]. No one loved us," she told the daily Kathimerini.

Her reminiscences stirred a deep public sensation and sympathy. Though many Holocaust survivors have related their stories in the Greek media for many years now, very little has been written about today's 5,000 strong Jewish community, how they live, the experience of the post-war years, and the fact that they still must deal with strong, lingering vestiges of anti-Semitism.

That was the motivation for this interview, and if there is one hopeful thing that emerges, it is that moves have been made to include the subject of the Holocaust and antisemitism in Greek high schools' history curriculum, and the Orthodox Church of Greece has included in its continuing education program for clergy a section on combating anti-Semitism.

These moves offer hope that current and future generations can finally turn a page and put behind them the blot on the country's history of anti-Semitism, which has not yet been eradicated.



## The liberating force of acknowledgement

As Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou poignantly suggested three months ago – after a march tracing the path, 79 years ago, on which Thessaloniki's were taken to the train cars that transported them to Auschwitz – the acknowledgment of the responsibility of those who turned a blind eye or collaborated is the first and biggest step to a change of heart.

"It is extremely important that over recent years Thessaloniki has assumed its share of responsibility for actions and omissions of the past. It has recognized the historical wound created by the indifference, complacency, and anti-Semitism of the inter-war years, and has condemned in the most emphatic manner the Nazi and fascist ideologies that cultivate violence and racism."



Dr. Leon Saltiel with Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou

Today, Saltiel serves as the representative of the World Jewish Congress to both the UN and UNESCO in Geneva. He has focused on the uprooting of antisemitism internationally, and naturally in Greece, where an Anti-Defamation League and other surveys have found that 67 percent of the population still harbors anti-Semitic views and subscribes to Jewish conspiracy theories.

One of his focuses has been the role of the social media in disseminating antisemitic views and the role of civil society groups in combating the phenomenon. Like Sakellariopoulou, he sees glimmers of hope in the moves of the state and its institutions to combat antisemitism in Greece, one step at a time.

What was it like growing up in Thessaloniki as a Jewish kid?

I grew up in the '80s and the Jewish community was quite introverted, so we would not express publicly our Jewishness or speak about it. People knew from my last name that I was Jewish. I wouldn't participate in the religion course at school. I attended Anatolia College [an elite Thessaloniki private school] and I graduated in 1995. Other than that, there was not much awareness or much desire in society and in the Jewish community itself to speak about it. The opening up of the Jewish community happened in the '90s. The European environment was changing and people started to want to speak about what happened during the war.

Thessaloniki in 1997 was the EU's European Capital of Culture and that is when the first Holocaust Monument in all of Greece was erected, so that epitomizes the period in which the community became extroverted and also society at large was willing to listen.

When the Jews came back from the concentration camps, in the '40s and the '50s, it was difficult to restart life. In Thessaloniki, and Greece more generally, it was hard to reclaim Jewish properties, and the first post-war years were complicated. Greece wanted to restart the economy and the country after WWII and the Greek Civil War. The Jews also wanted to go on with their lives. Then you had the [1967-1974 colonels'] junta that also did not help one speak about it, so the Jews of Greece started speaking about the Holocaust and their experiences in the '90s, In France and the rest of Europe this started in the '80s. Before that, society was not ready and the Jews were also not ready.

How many Jews are there in Greece and how organized are they, for example in social, professional, and cultural groups?

There are around 5,000 Jews all around Greece. They are organized in eight active communities. According to Greek law a community is comprised of at least ten Jewish families. They are in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Volos, Corfu, Chalkida, Ioannina, and Trikala. They all have a synagogue and in some cases a cemetery and a Jewish elementary school. Athens and Thessaloniki each have one, Larissa has a part-time Jewish school. They follow the Greek education ministry's curriculum plus Hebrew language and religion courses.

These communities are also religious communities, so for them, as we are Greek citizens, the religious element is at the core of these communities and most of them have a rabbi. At the same time, they organize cultural

events, including ones with wider public participation. On Holocaust Remembrance Day, recognized by the Greek Parliament and marked on 27 January, events are organized jointly by the communities and local Greek municipalities and prefectures. They organize various events, book presentations (and support for publishing books) and musical events among others, and they offer university scholarships. There is also a Jewish youth summer camp, which before the coronavirus period was at Litohoro, organized by all the communities together. There are also two Jewish senior citizens' homes with at least a couple of hundred residents, one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki.

How many Greek Jews live in Israel? How close is there contact with Greece and how do they feel about Greece given the fact that the overwhelming majority were deported and exterminated by the Nazis?

There were different waves of immigration to Palestine or to Israel in the last 100 years. There was a big wave in the 20's and 30's, mostly from Thessaloniki. There were port workers, poor people, and some inspired by Zionism at the time. They were assimilated very quickly in the Israeli cultural environment. Today, they would know only that a grandparent came from Thessaloniki. After the war, a lot of orphans who lost their families migrated to Israel to start a new life. The ones that migrated 20 to 40 years ago had a Greek education or have family in Greece, and they tend to keep closer contact with Greece today.

Before WWII, did Thessaloniki's Jews speak Ladino at home?

Yes. Although they spoke Ladino at home, those who were born after 1912, when Thessaloniki was incorporated into the Greek state, were taught Greek at school, and they were the ones who were exterminated in Auschwitz. We never actually had a generation of pre-war Greek-speaking Jews, because most were killed.



Over the years in Greece, we have seen desecrations of Jewish monuments like the Holocaust Memorial in Thessaloniki and graves in Jewish cemeteries.

Do you believe this is done solely by far right or neo-Nazi Golden Dawn types, or does it reflect something more broadly anti-Semitic in the fabric of Greek society?

There is widespread anti-Semitism in Greece. It has been measured in opinion polls and it ranks high compared to other European countries. One can go to the ADL's (Anti-Defamation League) Global 100 Index [an Anti-Semitism survey that includes 102 countries and territories, which states that 67 percent of Greeks still harbor antisemitic views] This percentage is declining, because now the Greek government is investing considerably in education and awareness of Jewish life. Also, with the increase of Israeli tourism in Greece, interactions between the two peoples have increased.

Having said that, antisemitism in Greece has never been violent. Though the percentage is higher than in France or Belgium, in those countries we had physical attacks with deaths.

With such a high percentage of anti-Semitism in Greece, why do you think there haven't been any physical attacks?

Anti-Semitism in Greece is mostly at the kafeneio (coffee house) level. People who discuss it speak mostly in terms of conspiracies, blaming the Jews for controlling the world or being too powerful, controlling the US, controlling the Greek government, being behind the bailout memorandums and such. All these are things that Greeks discuss and maybe some of them believe, but there has never been physical violence against Jews. In other countries, it is either the extreme right wing or extremist Muslims who carry out violent attacks.

We have seen vandalism of synagogues and cemeteries, but it is very hard to know who is behind it because there have been very few arrests. Rarely, we have seen neo-Nazi or nationalist emblems. Some desecrations happened during the Macedonian name issue protests [which were spearheaded mainly by far right or right-wing groupings] so we might link that to them. Sometimes it was done during mostly leftist anti-Israel

protests, so there was likely an anti-Israel motive, and sometimes they are linked to fringe church groups like Old Calendarists and others not part of the mainstream Orthodox Church of Greece.

It involves marginal elements of Greek society. It is not mainstream Greek society, many members of which, however, replicate and promote Jewish stereotypes. Many Greeks are fond of conspiracy theories, so to what extent are Jewish-linked ones just one part of that, and to what extent are they distinctly different? Conspiracy theories are popular in discourse in Greece, and at the heart of all of them you always find antisemitism. There is no conspiracy theory that does not lead to a Jew, or to a dark center of control and decision-making. It often takes only 15 minutes during a taxi ride for the driver to bring up an antisemitic conspiracy.

A rivalry between the sense of victimhood of Greeks and Jews

I was part of a research group that studied antisemitism in Greece, and what emerged was the sense of victimhood. The Greeks believe that they have been the victims of history, as in the Pontian Genocide and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, but that their victimhood has not been recognized, whereas Jewish victimhood has been recognized internationally.

That creates a kind of friction, and you find in opinion polls that this spurs negative attitudes toward the Jews. If you ask, "Should we create a Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki?", maybe 20 percent would say yes. If you ask, «Should we create a Museum of the Pontian Genocide?», 80 percent will say yes. They always see the two as competing. If you speak about the Holocaust, the answer will be, "You are right to speak about it, but why don't you speak about the Pontian Genocide?". The two events are always seen in very competitive terms. So, every time you speak about anti-Semitism, it is not discussed on its own merits, but always through a competitive lens.

Now that Greece and Israel have formed a strategic military partnership, there is a cooperation between the Jewish and Greek lobbies in the US. Are you aware of how that might be working?

Greece and Israel and Cyprus have created a trilateral strategic relationship which is beyond military cooperation. It includes, among other areas, economic, energy, scientific, and firefighting cooperation. Not long ago, Greek and Israeli research institutes signed cooperation agreements. Research projects take years to develop. Now they are laying the foundations for joint research institutions with sharing between students and professors, as well as academic conferences. I think very soon we will see the fruits of this cooperation.

One of the elements of this cooperation is exchanges between the diasporas and between Greece and Israel. American Jews and Greek-Americans are cooperating both in diaspora organizations and in Congress, where there is a joint pro-Greek and pro-Israel caucus. We once had a congresswoman of Greek-Jewish descent from Nevada for many years, Shelley Berkley [her mother's family were Sephardic Jews from Ottoman-era Thessaloniki]. We have Jewish American and [five] Greek-American members of Congress who cooperate effectively in the caucus.

Greece now has its first Jewish mayor, and indeed the first Jewish mayor in Europe, Moses Elisaf (a doctor and professor of pathology at the University of Ioannina Medical School), but beyond that recent example we have not seen any Jews in the Greek Parliament or in elected political positions. Why don't they get involved?

Before WWII, there were a number of Jewish MPs and Senators [the great Greek liberal statesman Eleftherios Venizelos when there was a senate in Greece had a Jewish senator in his party, Asser Mallach]. During the occupation, the Nazis executed two Jewish former MPs. They were the only Greek parliamentarians ever to be killed by a foreign occupier. After the war, the Jewish population dramatically decreased. They had other priorities and society wasn't ready to hear what they had to say.

Things over the last years have been getting much better. There was a Jewish governor of the Public Power Corporation (PPC), Raphael Moissis. Now we have some Greek Jews who are becoming prominent in the current Greek public administration.

In 1996 during the Simitis Administration, an ultra-right New Democracy MP named Yorgos Karatzaferis, in Parliament in a mocking tone called the deputy foreign minister, the distinguished Professor of Public and International Law Christos Rozakis, by his Jewish father's name, Rosenstein. Rozakis, who later became Vice President of the European Court of Human Rights, resigned at the time, not over that but because of clashes with foreign minister Theodoros Pangalos. How do you assess that incident? Is antisemitism one reason Jews don't run for office?

The question was why did it matter if your father was called Rosenstein or not? The sad fact is that almost nobody really protested at that time. Only two MPs from the left, Maria Damanaki and Fotis Kouvelis, reacted. The other parliamentarians remained silent. [When Damanaki asked the speaker to call Karatzaferis to order another ND MP asked her of what concern is it to her and whether she wanted to impose censorship in the chamber and she replied, though she is not, "I am a Jew and that is why I am interested, and as long as you attempt to let racism pass in this chamber I am a Jew."]

That was over 20 years ago, at the beginning of an awareness in Greece about the Holocaust and the existence of Jews. I think if this happened today, there would be a strong backlash from the government and the parliament speaker.

How did awareness about the extermination of the vast majority of Greek Jews develop, and who was to blame for this tragic statistic? Is it a matter concerning the personal morality of Christian Greeks who could have done more to save Jews, or do you believe there is an issue of a national guilt?

The issue is the attitude of mainstream Greek society during the war. In broad terms, and particularly in Thessaloniki which had the biggest concentration of the Jewish population, there was no official solidarity with the Jews in that period. We saw support of the Jews in other communities, but not there, and that is why more than 85 percent of the Jewish population (95 percent in Thessaloniki) was lost.

The expropriation of Jewish properties, state officials, institutions confronting antisemitism  
After the war, we had the issue of Jewish properties. They were not returned in a timely and regular manner. Only recently have we heard this guilt that you mentioned being expressed by Greek officials.

Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou visited the Jewish Museum in Thessaloniki and spoke about the fact that she felt an emotion of shame knowing that the then Greek government did not do as much as it could have done. Former Thessaloniki mayor Yannis Boutaris also used similar language. [Boutaris faced a maelstrom of criticism from various quarters when he became the first official to strongly highlight the city's Jewish past]. Only in recent years have we seen Greek officials using such language.

I think this also being internalized by the younger generation, especially now that the Holocaust is being taught in schools, and students are now investigating and discussing what their grandparents or great grandparents did during that period. After the 1990s, we have seen an explosion of memory in Greece.

In 2003, the Holocaust was recognized and 27 January was set as a national remembrance day by a unanimous vote of the Greek Parliament. Every year, we see more and more activities organized by the ministry of education and individual schools, teacher training, and visits of high school students to Auschwitz. In recent years, three factors have led to a greater sensitization of the Greek public toward these issues [of antisemitism and racism].

First was the rise of Golden Dawn, which in the context of the economic crisis reached almost 10 percent [9.39%] in the 2014 European Parliament elections. This really caused shame to a big part of the Greek population. This extreme group used very bad language and messaging, not in attacking Jews but rather the Greek Parliament, Greek democracy, and the rule of law, and actually killing people [migrants and anti-fascists] in the end. That made the Greek government realize that when you need to fight this kind of extremism within your society, you need education about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

Were you aware that the Orthodox Church of Greece in its continuing education and preparation for the priesthood program includes instruction on combating antisemitism?

Yes, it's part of the cooperation we now have with the Greek Church. Golden Dawn had borderline paganism and all these weird theories. If you want to build clergy and citizens that love democracy and the rule of law, respect minorities, and want to have peace in society, you need to speak about antisemitism. That's what we [the WJC] do around the world, in Europe, and in Greece.



Leon Saltiel with former Thessaloniki mayor Yannis Boutaris, who played the leading role in reviving the memory of the city's Jewish community

The second element that raises awareness is the relationship between Greece and Israel. Thirdly, former Thessaloniki mayor Yannis Boutaris played a significant role. (Boutaris was the first Greek to highlight the illustrious past of the Jewish community of the city that was once known as La Madre de Israel (Mother of Israel)), as until 1912 the Jewish community was not only the largest in the city, but also of the entire world).

Going back to WWII, Greece was under Nazi occupation, the government was a puppet government, and a Greek citizen in order to save a Jew from the Nazi deportation scheme would probably put his or her life on the line. Is responsibility for saving very few Jews in the Holocaust an individual moral issue or do you believe that there is a blanket social issue that Orthodox Christian Greeks did not oppose or even supported the deportations?

In my Ph.D. thesis, I try to answer some of these questions, not so much the role of individual Greeks but of institutions. We saw that the institutions in Thessaloniki – the municipality, the Chamber of Commerce, and the university for example – didn't do much for the Jews. In fact, they actively cooperated with the Germans on certain issues.

Did they have a choice?

Well, in Athens for example, the same Greek institutions did more to speak out against the plight of the Jews of Thessaloniki than the same authorities in the city itself did. In Athens, we see the petitions in support of Thessaloniki's Jews signed both by Archbishop Damaskinos and by many heads of associations and unions to the German and Greek authorities. The equivalent in Thessaloniki does not exist. So that raises questions. Why did the Greek authorities of Athens do more to save the Jews of Thessaloniki than the institutions in their own city?

What is your answer?

There was of course economic competition. WWII was 30 years after Thessaloniki became part of Greece. It is very difficult in about one generation to build links of coexistence and solidarity among the population. Moreover, when Thessaloniki was part of the Ottoman Empire, it was run under the milliyet system (recognized ethno-linguistic groups that enjoyed a certain autonomy in their capacity as members of non-Muslim religions, whose leaders played a central administrative role), under which every community was responsible for its own affairs.

Unfortunately, this milliyet mentality prevailed in Thessaloniki even until WWII, and the Greek authorities saw themselves as responsible just for the Christian population, and they left the Jews on their own. We see that in official correspondence and various decisions.

The WWII and post-war Jewish property grab

Moreover, after the war we see that Greek Christians did not return apartments and properties that belonged to Jews, and they even took advantage of the destroyed Jewish cemetery on which the University of Thessaloniki was built. (The remains of Saltiel's and others' ancestors were part of the rubble from the Jewish

cemetery used to create Thessaloniki's Nea Paralia, the extension of the waterfront). That is why it is very hard to speak of collective or individual guilt, because often these are elites.

People after the war wouldn't return the properties, and when they saw the Jews returning many said, "I wish you had become soap. Don't come back now to ask for the property." The issue of guilt is a big discussion.

When did the efforts of Greece's Jewish community to reclaim properties begin, what were the difficulties, and how successful have they been?

Greece was the first country in Europe to give up its claims to heirless Jewish property [under Greek law heirless property goes to the state]. Because of the magnitude of the Holocaust, the government didn't want to be the heir of properties that were the result of a genocide. The properties were administered by a special organization that had been created in 1945, The Organization for the Care and Restitution of the Jews of Greece, which still exists today in Athens.

The problem was that once Greece passed the law, it was very difficult to implement it, not only because it faced a lot of political opposition from the people who were actually administering the Jewish properties at the time, who were Nazi collaborators, but also because Greek courts were asking for death certificates of your family members. Of course, the Nazis in Auschwitz were not issuing death certificates. Consequently, the path toward reclaiming properties was exceedingly complex.

It would appear then that this organization and legal procedures were designed for certain people to profit from the sale of Jewish properties. It is a complex issue, and only now are historians examining the evidence carefully. Most of the properties were rented and there were rent controls and you couldn't evict tenants. The survivors could only reclaim properties to which someone else had acquired title. Most of the real estate properties were returned, but anything inside – furniture, machines, and merchandise represented 90 percent of the value – was completely plundered. Buildings and apartments were to a large extent returned, but even today there are pending court cases regarding heirless Jewish properties.

Who got the heirless Jewish property?

If there was a legal blood relation to the sixth degree with the deceased, it was the individual Jew. If there were no direct descendants, it was the organization for the restitution of Greek Jews. In the Greek Cadastre (Ktimatologio, established in 2018), it is easy to trace heirless properties, because you can see who owned it before the war, what happened during the war, and what the status is today. There are a lot of lawyers who are looking into all this now.

Are there indications that Nazi collaborators or Greek politicians, as there were a number of Nazi collaborators in the post-war Greek political class, were involved in the seizure and sale of Jewish properties?

Of course. They got the biggest and most expensive plots. I haven't found evidence of well-known Greek politicians at the time being directly involved or profiting. I found several indicators, but in my research I was never able to show that they actually profited by the building or the sale of Jewish properties.

Nazi collaborators, paramilitary units, and friendly politicians' profit

The land was only 10% of the value and most of it was merchandise. The Nazis used the revenues from the sale of that merchandise as a way to finance their Greek collaborators, the paramilitary troop units they created, but also friendly politicians. So, if any of that money went to these politicians – cash, gold, and merchandise – that I won't be able to tell you. They did not get land registered in their name. It is very probable, however that they got gold, money, and resources, because the Nazis would automatically give funding to the Greek authorities and the people who were supporting them. That is very hard to prove because I wasn't around to see shipments going to their houses.

*Note: We at Kehila Kedosha Janina have a close relationship with Dr. Leon Saltiel and applaud his work. We are proud to print this interview in its entirety.*

## Past Events of Interest

### Grand Opening of the Renovated Heritage Museum of Epirus in Astoria [Full article here](#)

Folklore exhibits with objects from a different era, which bring the visitor in direct contact with the tradition of peoples long gone, are valuable to nations and community. The updated exhibits of the renovated Heritage Museum of the Society of Epirotes "Anagenesis", which reopened its doors to the public after a year and a half, is welcoming and enlightening new visitors and old friends.



According to the President of the Association, Christos Pantazis, the space was under renovation, a decision taken during the pandemic, when due to health protocols, the possibility of visiting the site would have been limited anyway.

An official ceremony was held to mark the reopening of the museum, with those present paying tribute to all who worked for the excellent and tasteful result.

"It's the only one of its kind in New York City and we're opening it up for everyone. There was a lot of work done by everybody, not just those of us present, but those who were involved 20 years ago when the museum originally opened. We're just carrying on. We want to open it up to the Diaspora so they can come and see it," Pantazis said.



From left to right: Christos Pantazis, Eva Kantli, Vasiliki Kantli, Anastasia Mantziou and Dimitrios Moustopoulos.

The Heritage Museum of the Society of Epirotes "Anagenesis" was established in 2003 under the presidency of Christos Kotsovitsas. Most of the objects in the exhibits were collected by him, and then donations were made by other members. In addition to traditional costumes and jewelry, other typical traditional items of the Epirus heritage have been added to the collection, as well as photos from dances and activities of the Greek community in America that go back as far as eight decades.



"Most of the exhibits are of costumes of men and women of the era, worn by parents and grandparents. We also have agricultural utensils, embroidery, musical instruments, jewelry, silverware, and photographs from the previous century, from the 1930s and beyond, old dances, etc.," Pantazis said.

Eva Kantli, vice-president of the society, who was one of the members of the committee that worked intensively for the restoration of the Museum, pointed out that it is important to schedule visits, especially from schools, in order to showcase Epirus' heritage and history.

"We invite everyone to come and see the work that has been done and the heritage we are leaving to the next generation. It is very important for us that the museum is open again. You can see for yourselves; it is definitely worth it. We would love to see the schools here as well, to learn about our history and see what we want to leave as a legacy for those to come," said Kantli.

According to Christos Pantazis, the Museum will be open to the public during certain hours, probably from September, as basic staffing will have to be completed in order for it to operate properly and according to high standards.

## Greek Parade Returns to NYC after Two-Year Pandemic Hiatus

Thousands of people gathered along New York's Fifth Avenue again in June to watch the Greek Independence Day Parade. The parade, which marks Greece's 1821 declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire, runs each year along Fifth Avenue between East 64th and 79th streets. It has gone on hiatus for the past two years due to the pandemic; however, Sunday's event marked a grand return.



A unit of evzones, the Presidential Guard of Greece, also paraded in New York. "They have traveled across the ocean to join us [and] march up Fifth Avenue, and to mark our pride and glory in the Independence of Greece," Archbishop Elpidophoros said.

More than eighty associations, unions, and communities addressed a wide call to their members, and as a result, Greek Americans of all ages paraded in the American city, which was dressed in blue and white, sending a strong message that "Hellenism is alive."

### Grand Marshals of the Greek Parade in NYC

The Grand Marshals of this year's parade were: His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America in recognition of the efforts and contributions of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and in celebration of the Centennial since its founding in 1922; the Hellenic Caucus of the U.S. Congress and its co-chair, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY); Greek-American Congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY); and Greek Olympic gold medalist Fani Chalkia.

In addition, the Honorary Grand Marshals of this year's parade were: The great Greek-American organization AHEPA and its Supreme President Jimmy Kokotas, as this year, AHEPA celebrates its own Centennial with numerous contributions to Hellenism and Orthodoxy; the Cypriot organizations of the United States, namely the Federation of Cypriot American Organizations, the International Coordinating Committee, Justice for Cyprus (PSEKA), and the Pancyprian Association of America along with their respective presidents, Kyriacos Papastylianou and Philip Christopher; the Chian organizations of the USA in commemoration of the Chian Massacre of 1822, 200 years after this tragic event, the Chian Federation, Panchian Society "Koraris" and the United Chian Associations of America, as well as their respective presidents, Ioana's Kontolios, Panagiotis Gerazounis, and Dimitris Kontolios. Finally, Greek Olympic gold medalist Ioannis Melissanidis was also present.

NYC Mayor Eric Adams was also present at the parade and proclaimed that "New York is the Athens of America."





## Emotional Farewell to Consul General Koutras

It is always sad to say goodbye to a dear friend. Consul General of Greece in New York, Dr. Konstantinos Koutras served the Greek Community in New York from May of 2016 to June of 2022. It is rare that a Consul General serves for such a long period, but it is rare to have a pandemic. We were so fortunate to have such a committed individual during this extended period. We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, have fond memories of the times he visited us at our Greek Jewish Festival and hosted Jewish-themed events at the Consulate. We wish him well in his new position.



KKJ President Marvin Marcus with Dr. Koutras



KKJ President Marvin Marcus with Greek Ambassador Alexandra Papadopoulou



KKJ President Marvin Marcus with Archbishop Elpidophoros of America

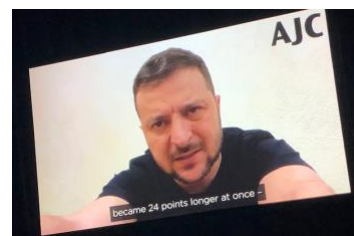
---

## American Jewish Committee (AJC) Global Forum 2022

Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad-Ikonomopoulos, is a proud member of AJC (on the Cyprus Team) and attended the Global Forum, providing photos for this newsletter.



David Harris, Outgoing President of AJC



Video message from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

---

## News from the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative (LESPI)

Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, is on the Board of LESPI and is active in preservation of historical structures and districts on the Lower East Side.

In April, LESPI joined Village Preservation, along with East Village Community Coalition and Historic Districts Council to submit a Request for Evaluation to Mayor Adams and the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission for the landmark designation of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary building, at Second Avenue and East 13th Street. This majestic historic structure is a landmark in every sense of the word. The building was designed by Robert Williams Gibson in a Romanesque Revival style and constructed in 1893, with additions and alterations dating to the first decade of the 20th century. Since then, its historic brick and limestone facades have remained very much intact. From its founding in the 1820s, the Eye and Ear Infirmary has provided care for the needy and helped advance medical science. Unfortunately, the hospital is now moving, leaving the building's future uncertain and in need of landmark protection. We'll keep you posted.



Infirmary 1904

## News of Interest from Around the World

### Israel

#### **Four rarely-seen Torahs to be featured in National Library of Israel** full article [here](#)

The featured items include fragments from a 1,000 year-old Yemenite Torah scroll, as well as one of the world's smallest legible Torah scrolls, measuring just 6 centimeters in height.

Four priceless Torah scrolls from the National Library of Israel's world-leading Judaica collection will be on display in a series of video clips over the Shavuot holiday.

The Torah scrolls – which are generally unavailable for public viewing and in delicate condition – were brought out from the NLI vaults for a few minutes to be filmed and photographed, with approval and supervision from conservation experts.

The featured items include fragments from a 1,000 year-old Yemenite Torah scroll – as well as one of the world's smallest legible Torah scrolls, measuring just 6 centimeters (2 1/3 inches) in height.



#### Rhodes Torah

Another scroll that will be shown is the Rhodes Torah, which scholars believe to have been written in Iberia in the 15th Century and brought to Rhodes by Sephardic refugees. The scroll was used for hundreds of years in the Kahal Shalom Synagogue, now the oldest synagogue in Greece.



Just a few days before the Nazis deported nearly all of Rhodes' Jews in 1944, the scroll was smuggled out and placed in the custody of the local mufti, Sheikh Suleyman Kasiloglou. The mufti hid the Torah under the pulpit of a local mosque. Thanks to his actions, the scroll subsequently survived the war, even though the vast majority of the Rhodes Jewish community did not.

#### Saul Wahl scroll

The final scroll to be featured in the series was believed to have been owned by Saul Wahl, a prominent Polish Jewish merchant and adviser to royalty who, according to legend, served as King of Poland for just one day in the late 16th century.

The Saul Wahl Torah features staves made of ivory and horns, and is decorated with silver. It also comes with its own miniature holy ark, featuring a door made from a 17th century Torah shield.

## **Pfizer boss Bourla receives \$1 Million Genesis Prize, pledges funds for Holocaust museum**

Protesting anti-vaxxers greet hundreds of guests at star-studded Jerusalem event; Bourla, son of Greek survivors, to give cash to planned Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki

Albert Bourla, the CEO and chairman of Pfizer, accepted this year's annual \$1 million Genesis Prize in Jerusalem on Wednesday evening, announcing that he would donate the funds towards a planned Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki, Greece, where he was born.

Bourla, the son of Holocaust survivors, led his company to develop the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 in just nine months.



Nearly 20 million lives were estimated to be saved by COVID-19 vaccines during the first year they became available.

The annual prize, awarded since 2014, is given to "extraordinary individuals for their outstanding professional achievement, contribution to humanity, and commitment to Jewish values." At a glittering ceremony attended by around 900 guests, including President Isaac Herzog and his wife, Michal, Bourla recalled his parents, among just 2,000 survivors of the Holocaust among a prewar Jewish population in the city of 50,000.

He credited his mother Sara, who was saved from a firing squad by a bribe seconds before she was due to be shot, for influencing his life's path by always insisting that nothing was impossible.

Lauding Bourla for his achievements, Herzog said: "He was not deterred by high stakes, by naysayers, by conspiracy or by politics. He believed in the vaccine and invested every ounce of himself in realizing what seemed at the time a far-fetched fantasy. The vaccine was developed in record speed, utilizing the technology of tomorrow to successfully hold back a devastating pandemic."

Israel was one of the first countries to vaccinate its population against COVID-19, using Pfizer's shot.

Noting his pride in being both a Jew and a citizen of Greece, Bourla thanked Israel, which he first visited 45 years ago, for providing his company with extensive data about the safety of the vaccine.

The Genesis Philanthropy Group was co-founded ten years ago by Ukraine-born oligarchs Mikhail Fridman and German Khan, and Russian-born Petr Aven. It provided a permanent endowment of \$100 million to establish the Genesis Prize Foundation.

All three men stepped down from the Genesis Philanthropy Group's board in March after being slapped with Western sanctions for their links to Russian President Vladimir Putin after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A spokesperson for the Genesis Prize Foundation stressed that GPF was a "fully independent Israeli public benefit company" and that "sanctioned individuals or entities" played no part in it.

Dozens of protesters — many of them anti-vaxxers — gathered outside the Jerusalem Theater to protest the honoring of Bourla and the use of oligarch money for this year's prize.

Inside, the ceremony began by acknowledging the "pain and suffering of the Ukrainian people," and showing an extensive photo montage of the destruction being wreaked by the Russian invasion of that country.

The event, hosted by "Suits" actress Sarah Rafferty, featured Israeli singers Yehuda Poliker — himself the son of Holocaust survivors from Thessaloniki — and Shiri Maimon.

## **My Last Cup of Coffee with A.B. Yehoshua** Full article by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila [Here](#)

For me, our meetings were almost a mirror image of the issues that came to define his life as a brilliant literary figure and outspoken public intellectual.



It was January 2020, in a small cafe in Givatayim, that I last met with the celebrated Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua, who passed away on June 14 at the age of 85.

That was January 2020 B.C.—Before COVID—so there were no discussions of pandemics, viruses or vaccines (those were the days). The only health issue we talked about was the difficult battle with cancer that Yehoshua was facing. This wasn't the first time we had met, but due to his health issues, this meeting felt different.

When we sat down for that cup of coffee (or two, or three), he asked me to recount our previous meetings. For me, those meetings were almost a mirror image of the various issues that came to define his life as a brilliant literary figure and outspoken public intellectual.

In the late 1980s, I was an undergraduate student at UCLA. Our Hillel hosted Yehoshua, and I was among the privileged students who spent an evening conversing with him on a host of Israeli political issues. These were the pre-Oslo years when the first intifada was raging through the West Bank and Gaza. All of us were active on behalf of Israel, and here we were, face to face, with one of Israel's leading writers, who was not afraid to explore in his own novels the very issues that were dividing Israeli society.

It was from A.B. Yehoshua that I had first heard the idea of a two-state solution. What struck me was how beautiful it all sounded. During our last cup of coffee (which was some 32 years after that first encounter), I told Yehoshua that only a talented author had the ability to take something as politically complicated as a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians and make it sound so ideal and pastoral. "I wish you were in charge," I told him.

Many years later, not far from UCLA at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel (where I was the rabbi), I had the privilege of moderating a debate between Yehoshua and UCLA professor David Myers. This time, the issue was not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the "Israel-Diaspora" divide. Yehoshua had recently made comments implying that only Zionists who live in Israel can experience the fullness of Jewish life today. While many in the audience challenged Yehoshua for what they deemed an insult to diaspora Jewry, I recall making a sincere effort to understand his point of view. When I mentioned that to Yehoshua at our last encounter, it brought a warm smile to his face.

I recounted it to him the afternoon before that debate when I drove him and his beloved wife Rivka around Los Angeles. I gave them a two-hour driving tour of Los Angeles, Malibu and the Hollywood Hills, and while we drove through the supposed glitz and glamour of L.A., our conversation was centered on the Holocaust, Zionism and contemporary Jewish identity.

I also reminded Yehoshua that I was surprised and perplexed by how he spent an entire evening in my synagogue—a Sephardic-Ladino synagogue—but never once mentioned his own Sephardic-Ladino background. This was strange to me, for A.B. Yehoshua was the author whose Sephardic-themed novels, such as *Mr. Mani* and *The Journey to the End of the Millennium*, gave voice in modern Israeli literature to the classic Sephardic-Ladino heritage.

It was this subject—that of Yehoshua's family heritage—that defined what became our last meeting. In my current work with the Sephardic Educational Center in the Old City of Jerusalem, we are building a museum and cultural center that will tell the history and stories of the once vibrant Ladino-speaking Sephardic community of the Old City. In doing my research, together with Jerusalem-based Edna Assis (our director of research on this project), we discovered that the history and stories of that old Jerusalem Ladino community were masterfully chronicled in 11 volumes by Yaakov Yehoshua—A.B.'s father.

A.B.'s Sephardic heritage came from both parents. His father's family—a third-generation "Yerushalmi" family—originally hailed from Greece. A.B.'s mother, Malka Rosilio, was born and raised in Mogador, Morocco, and immigrated to Jerusalem with her parents in 1932.

"While Sephardic Judaism was the very fabric of my parents' being," Yehoshua told me, "I do not recall being raised with an exclusivist Sephardic identity. We were raised as Zionist Jews in the emerging new Jewish national project. It's not that my parents tried to forget their roots, but it did not form a core feature of my upbringing."

The two Yehoshua writers—father and son—had strikingly different styles. Both were storytellers, but while the elder reveled in humorous anecdotes and folktales, the younger explored the complexity of the human condition.

"As we sit here today," Yehoshua told me, "I face the prospect of walking in the shadow of death. But during my earliest years as a writer, I walked in another shadow—that of the great writer and master of complexity, S.Y. Agnon."

Indeed, Mr. Mani is not the nostalgic journey through the Sephardic yesteryear of Yaakov Yehoshua's stories. Mr. Mani takes a more nuanced and complex look at Sephardic family identity, perhaps a reflection of the author's own complicated relationship with his Sephardic roots.

"In my older years, I've come to appreciate the value of my father's work, and how in some roundabout way it influenced my own—especially the Sephardic pieces of my writing," Yehoshua told me.

It was then that I told Yehoshua that we were planning a "father and son" exhibit—"From The Old City to Mr. Mani"—that would explore the literary legacies of two great writers. His reaction was, once again, a big, beautiful smile, and he offered to share with us any family photos, documents and memorabilia that would help bring this exhibit to life.

We dreamed of the possibility of A.B. attending the opening of that exhibit, but the combination of COVID slowing down our museum plans and A.B.'s failing health prevented that dream from becoming a reality. In loving memory, I am now more driven than ever to see that exhibit come to life.

I cherish the many autographed copies in my library of novels by Israeli authors, but the one that is most heartwarming is from A.B. Yehoshua. It's not any of his famous works of literature, but a Hebrew children's book titled "Tamar and Gaya's Mouse." Tamar and Gaya are Yehoshua's grandchildren, and when I spent that day with him in L.A. and told him I had two little children of my own, he gave me his children's book and inscribed it (in Hebrew) "Dear Shira and Ilan—this is from Tamar and Gaya's saba—A.B. Yehoshua."

A brilliant novelist, an outspoken public intellectual and a new voice for Sephardic identity, A.B. Yehoshua was also a beloved family man.

That last cup of coffee was special indeed—strong and bold—a reflection of Yehoshua's own life and writings.

May he rest in peace.

*Rabbi Daniel Bouskila is the director of the Sephardic Educational Center and the rabbi of the Westwood Village Synagogue.*

## United Kingdom - Manchester

Thanks to our dear friend Basil Jeuda, who has worked extensively with the Jewish Museum of Manchester, we are happy to include the following news:

*Welcome to Ours and Yours, our monthly newsletter sharing with you the latest news and events from Manchester Jewish Museum.*

*In June we are reflecting on the Queen's Jubilee and bringing back some memories from Her Majesty's visit to the museum, twenty years ago. We are also starting an exciting theatre costume making project with The Royal Exchange Theatre for a new play about the Cheetham Hill Road. You can also join one of our regularly meeting groups - this month we're talking TV and making cheesecake! We're also inviting you to see a fantastic travelling exhibition during the upcoming Refugee Week. Finally, we're calling for volunteers to support our brilliant Creative Producers and the award-winning Cafe Team.*

*We hope you enjoy reading and best wishes from all of us at Manchester Jewish Museum.*

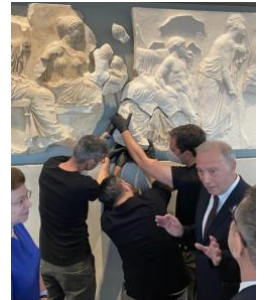


---

## Italy

Gratitude to our Italian friends and especially to the MuseumSalinas and the citizens of Palermo, Sicily! #ParthenonFrieze #reuniteParthenon #AcropolisMuseum

While the British still hold on to the parts of the Parthenon Frieze, refusing to return it to its rightful owners, Greece, Italy has stepped forward to return parts of the frieze housed in Sicily.



---

## Gershon Harris Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



This year, the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz will fall on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. However, this being Shabbat, the Fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz will be observed on Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>.

The most familiar event commemorated by the fast is the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. Then just 3 weeks later, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed by Babylonia and Rome respectively, commemorated by the saddest and most difficult fast in the Jewish calendar, the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. Therefore, the Fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz initiates a 3-week period of semi-mourning in memory of the sequence of tragic and fateful events in both 586 BCE and 70 CE that led to the destruction of both Temples. Perhaps less known, Jewish tradition and sources point out several other tragic and fateful events commemorated by the fast, since they occurred on or around the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.

In Exodus 32:19, Moshe descends from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments and breaks them when he saw the Golden Calf. Jewish tradition calculates the date of this tragedy as being the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, which is later confirmed in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit [Fasts], page 28A.

The next tragic event attributed to the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz is the cessation of the offering of the daily sacrifice in the First Temple, due to the shortage of sheep during the Babylonian siege (Ta'anit 28A), followed by the actual breach of the walls of Jerusalem the following year, in 586 BCE, by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian forces after many months of battle and siege.

In the Book of Kings II, 21:7, we read that on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz during the rule of Judean King Manasseh, who was one of the worst and most blasphemous of the Jewish kings, he had an idol placed in the Holy Sanctuary of the First Temple, which was an open and deliberate act of blasphemy against G-d. The same Talmudic source cited above relates that on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz in the time of the Roman occupation, the captain of the occupation forces, Apostomos, also placed an idol in the Second Temple, and also publicly burned a prized and important Torah scroll that may have been written by Ezra the Scribe himself at the beginning of the Second Temple era. These tragedies were subsequently followed by Titus and Rome's breaching of the walls of Jerusalem in 70 CE on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, as stated above. Later in history, Pope Gregory IX ordered the confiscation of all manuscripts of the Talmud on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz in the year 1239.

This day continued to be a dark one for Jews throughout history. During the anti-Jewish riots and pogroms that spread throughout Spain in 1391, in Toledo alone over 4,000 Jews were slaughtered on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. And in 1559, the Jewish Quarter of Prague was burned and looted on that date. And as late as 1970, the day the Libyan government ordered the confiscation of Jewish property fell on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. Many horrors of the Holocaust also occurred on, or around, the 17 of Tammuz. For example, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, 5704 (1944), the ghetto in Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, was liquidated by the Nazis. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944, the Jews of Rhodes and Kos were deported to Auschwitz only two weeks after the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, which fell on July 8<sup>th</sup> that year, and well into the tragic 3-week mourning period that culminates in Judaism's saddest day of the year, the Fast of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. Citing these particular examples is in no way meant to imply that these tragedies are any worse or more worthy of mention and commemoration than all the indescribably evil and murderous acts perpetrated on our people during the Holocaust. They simply help further illustrate the continued relevancy of the Fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, and that its significance and reason for continued observance did not end with the destruction of the two Temples so long ago.

According to Jewish tradition other events occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, including Noah sending out the first dove to see if the flood waters had receded, Moses destroying the Golden Calf, and his return to Mt. Sinai for the second time, spending 40 days pleading for Israel's forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf. So, beyond the tragedy of the destruction of our Holy Temples, we can and must commemorate the martyrdom and tragedy of so many traumatic and fateful events in Jewish history that occurred on or close to the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.

Yet as tragic as this day is, The Talmud assures that after the future redemption of Israel and the rebuilding of the third, and hopefully final and eternal Temple, all fast days will be re-dedicated as days of rejoicing and festivity, as predicted by the prophet Zechariah: the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz will become a day of "joy to the House of Judah, and gladness and cheerful feasts." May this occur speedily in our days, Amen!



**Rabbi Marc D. Angel**

The Leadership Model of Aaron: Thoughts for Parashat Hukat  
Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals – [JewishIdeas.org](http://JewishIdeas.org)

“And when the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.” (Bemidbar 20:29)

Aaron the High Priest was an honored and beloved leader of the children of Israel. At his death, he was mourned by the entire congregation, even more than the mourning that took place at the death of Moses. What were Aaron’s outstanding virtues that made him such a remarkable leader?

As High Priest, Aaron was involved on a regular basis with the Temple service. He wore distinctive priestly garments and carried himself with dignity. It would have been natural for people to feel distant from him; he was a holy man, a master of Temple ritual. Yet, the people felt close to him. He was able to maintain the gravitas of his office, while still remaining accessible to the public.

Aaron managed to balance ceremonial dignity with human kindness. He did not become a ritualized automaton; nor did he lose his sense of connectedness with the people. He could have come across simply as an impersonal Temple functionary; but he didn’t. He could have compromised the formal dignity of office by acting informally, joking around during the ceremonies, or by arriving late at the Temple service or skipping the service altogether whenever he wanted. Had he behaved in this fashion, he would not have been a respected or effective religious leader.

Aaron’s greatness, according to the Pirkei Avot (1:12), laid primarily in his sensitivity to the needs of the people. Aaron “loved peace and pursued peace; he loved people and brought them closer to Torah.” Aaron well understood that the role of a religious leader was to interact in a loving way with others. The responsibility was not to talk at them, but to listen to them and discuss with them, to make time for them, to worry about their worries and to rejoice in their joys. In spite of his heavy ceremonial responsibilities as High Priest, Aaron was there for people when they needed him. He was a soothing and comforting spirit in the community. He found ways to bring people together, to dispel controversies.

The key to Aaron’s successful spiritual leadership was his ability to balance ceremonial responsibilities with an unshakable commitment to the people. He understood the importance of religious ritual, and he also understood that religion should reflect love, compassion and inclusiveness. Carelessness in religious service undermines the meaning and holiness of the rituals. Harshness in religious leadership undermines the beauty and attractiveness of Torah.

The great Hebrew poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, lamented the negative turn in the religious life of his day in Eastern Europe: “Halakha has an angry face...Strict, severe, hard as steel—strict justice...[it] sets forth its ruling and leaves no room for differentiation: Its yes is Yes, its no is No...fossilized piety, obligation, enslavement... (quoted by Zvi Zohar, “Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East, pp. 4-5)

Aaron made sure that religion and halakha did not have an angry face. The goal of Torah is not to enslave us but to liberate us; it is not to undermine our basic humanity but to bring out the best in us. It demands dignified observance of religious ceremonies and rituals; but it also demands a spirit of love and kindness in our interpersonal relations.

Aaron’s goal was to serve God and to bring people closer to the service of God. He conducted the ceremonies of the High Priest with precision and seriousness—he thereby taught people the awe of God. He conducted his personal



life governed by love of others, by a commitment to increase peace and harmony among the community—he thereby taught the people that the face of religion is benevolent, wise and smiling.

When Aaron died, all the people of Israel mourned their loss. When the religious model of Aaron dies, so all of us become mourners. If, however, we can strive to emulate the example of Aaron, we can love peace and pursue peace, love our fellow human beings and bring the world closer to the ideals of Torah.

---

## Recipe of the Month

### Imam Bayaldi

This dish is a Turkish dish that has been absorbed into the Greek culture and is especially beloved by Greek Jews. The name means “The Imam (Muslim religious leader similar in meaning to the Hebrew “Haham”) Fainted.” The Ottoman Turks attributed this to the fact that the dish is so delicious; the Greek Jews believed that the Imam (who was known to be cheap) fainted when he saw how much olive oil his wife used in the dish!

Ingredients (serves 6 as main dish or 24 as an appetizer)

6 medium eggplants (at least 8 inches long)  
3-4 medium onions, thinly sliced  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
10 cloves garlic, cut in slivers  
5-6 large tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped  
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley  
Pinch of cinnamon (optional)  
½ cup olive oil  
Juice of 1 lemon  
1½ tablespoons of honey or sugar  
½ cup of water  
Salt and pepper to taste



Make 4 deep incisions in the eggplants, lengthwise. Start and end the cuts about 1½ inches from either end; do not remove the stems. Rub thoroughly with salt. Soak in heavily salted water for 30 minutes. Drain and rinse well.

Meanwhile, gently sauté the onions in 3 tablespoons olive oil until transparent. Add the garlic and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the parsley, tomatoes, salt and pepper. A pinch of cinnamon can also be added. Stir well and cook for 5-10 minutes. Remove from heat and cool.

Carefully stuff the incisions of the eggplant with the tomato mixture. Arrange them closely together in a large pan. Mix together the olive oil, lemon juice, honey or sugar, and ½ cup water. Pour this over the eggplant and add just enough water to cover. Simmer, tightly covered, for 1 hour, or until the liquid has been absorbed. Can be served warm or cold but is best at room temperature.

## Asking for Our Help



From Alex Winson: " *This is my Great Grandmother Rebecca Nikokiris, born circa 1890 in Ioannina. We know she had a brother named Joseph, of whom we have been able to trace relative across the generations to find relatives in Israel and the UK. We suspect there may have been a brother of Joseph and Rebecca named Solomon, born around 1892 who had children who left for the USA. I have been unable to trace any record of Solomon or indeed much on Nikokiris settlers in the US.*

*I'd be grateful for any potential info or leads.*

If you have any leads, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)

---

## Picture of the Month

From Susan Tregerman: Alyson Schwaber and Ross Schwaber  
Taken in Syosset

Alyson and Ross are the grandchildren of Matthew and Esther Colchamiro



**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. **We need donations more than ever now. You can do this online on our website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street.



**Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 160**

**July 2022**

**Kehila Kedosha Janina**

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

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

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

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