



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

December 2023 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

In December Jews throughout the world celebrate Hannukah, the story of our triumph over oppression. This year, as we light the candles, the story is even more poignant. Along with the traditional blessings over the candles of the Hannukia, we will say our prayers for the release of all the hostages, and for peace in Israel.

שלום



This newsletter is sponsored by Joe Josephs in memory of Joe I Josephs and Anna Solomon Josephs.

If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at museum@kkjasm.org.

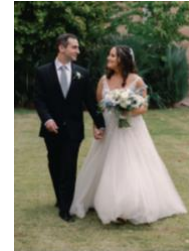
This newsletter, our 177th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjasm.org.

We now reach thousands of 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

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email 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. If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at museum@kkjism.org.

Simchas

Del and Bob Matsil take pleasure in announcing the marriage of their grandson Andrew to Ms. Erica Strauss. Andrew is the son of Ira and Liz Matsil of Dallas. Andrew's great grandparents are Isaac and Anna Matsil, and Abraham and Sophie Malta. All four from Ioannina. Erica is the daughter of Wendy and the late Gary Strauss of Philadelphia. The happy couple will live in Dallas.



Andrew & Erica



Del Malta & Bob Matsil Wedding NYC 1963

We wish a Mazal Tov on the birth of Eliahu, the first born son of Nechama and Yechiel Zirkind. Nechama is the eldest daughter of proud grandparents Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid and Elisheva Smith. Elisheva is the daughter of Rochelle Rosen nee Colchamiro and Michael Rosen, making them great grandparents. Rochelle Rosen is the daughter of Esther and Ralph Colchamiro, making Esther Colchamiro sheyichieh, great-great grandmother of Eliahu, with the great merit to see and hold her great-great grandson spanning 5 living generations in the 3000 year chain of our precious Jewish heritage, Baruch Hashem! We are looking forward to celebrating the 105th birthday of Esther Colchamiro, b'Ezrat Hashem, on Feb.1, 2024 (Hebrew birthday Rosh Chodesh Adar).



Passings

Dorothy Deena Matathia passed away October 4, 2023. She lived a joyous life for 85 years filled with love and care for others. Dorothy was married to Michael Matathia (son of Behor and Sophie Matathia) who passed away February 6, 1984. Dorothy was the mother to Marilyn Matathia Shearer who cared for her in her later years. Dorothy was also a very loving grandmother to Michael David Shearer, Matthew Ryan Shearer and Dana Claire Shearer who are all devastated by their loss. Dorothy was a selfless individual and provided endless support to her family and friends. She adored animals and gave much of her time to the local shelter until she was no longer able.



David Camhi passed away at the age of 84 on November 12, 2023. He is survived by his children, Steven Camhi (Yolanda), Robert Camhi, Michael Camhi, Nancy Camhi, Arielle Camhi (Jordan Rosenberg), Rachelle, and his girlfriend Ellen Feldberg. Born and raised in East New York, Brooklyn, David was among the first generation of his family born in America. His parents Sam (Shabetai) and Alice (Allegra) had origins originally from Monastir and Ioannina. David started his decades-long career in the garment center by working in a button factory at age 9. He ultimately worked his way up from an entry-level job in the garment district to founder of multiple successful companies. He was famous for always chasing a good deal. David was a proud Sephardic Jew and loved his family immensely.



Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

In November, we had visitors from all over the United States, as well as visitors from Great Britain and Israel.



Andrew Colon & Friend



Jonathan & Karen Dorman



Sharon Simantov & Husband



The Wolf Family

We were so delighted by the visit of Moshe Levi and his wife Patricia from Israel. They had left Israel to visit their family in the USA just before the tragic events on the 7th of October. Moshe is from the Levi family of Ioannina and high on his list was a visit to Kehila Kedosha Janina.

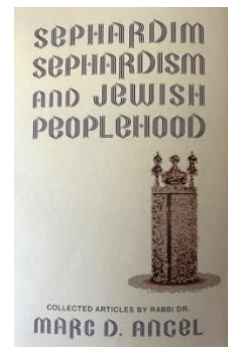


We were honored to host a group from the Sisterhood of Temple Emanuel on November 19.



Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On November 19th we were honored by the visit of Rabbi Marc D. Angel, who presented his latest book "Sephardim, Sephardism and Jewish Peoplehood." Rabbi Angel is the Rabbi emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue and is the Founding Director of the Institute of Jewish Ideas and Ideals. He is the author of more than 30 books. Learn more here: <https://www.jewishideas.org/> Kehila Kedosha Janina has copies of his latest book available for \$20 each with no extra charge for shipping. Email museum@kkjism.org if you wish to order a copy.



Support KKJ on Giving Tuesday



#GIVINGTUESDAY™

Help Us Continue Our Traditions and Grow Our Community

Donate Today to help ensure we can continue to serve the
Romaniote and wider Greek Jewish Community in America

We Need Your Help. Please Donate Today

[DONATE HERE](#)

KKJ is grateful to participate in the annual Giving Tuesday Campaign this year. #GivingTuesday is a global giving movement that has been built by individuals, families, organizations, businesses, and communities in countries around the world. Millions of people have come together to support and champion the causes they believe in and the communities in which they live.

The past month has been extremely challenging for our Jewish community - for our brethren in Israel and for Jews here in the US. Despite threats to the Jewish community, we have persevered and we continue to bring our community together for services, educational programs, celebrations, and gatherings. Thankfully, with G-d's help, we have continued our regular operations with weekly Shabbat services and our traditional kiddush lunches. We have welcomed hundreds of visitors and community members through our weekly museum tours. Earlier this year we embraced thousands who attended our Greek Jewish Festival with live music, Greek dancing, delicious food, and kids activities. We continue to welcome new and familiar faces as people join us to reconnect over our cherished traditions.

During this holiday season, we humbly ask for your support to help us continue our efforts to maintain our traditions and grow our community. We at KKJ are passionate and dedicated to serving our Greek Jewish community through Shabbat and Holiday Services, Museum Exhibits and Tours, Community Programs and Events, Education and Research on Greek Jewry, and so much more. All of this work depends on your support. On the global day of giving, #GivingTuesday, please consider making a donation and aiding our efforts to preserve our Greek Jewish heritage. Our small but strong Kehila relies on you to help educate the next generation within our community and around the world. Your support can make all the difference.

Help make sure that the only Romaniote synagogue and museum in the Western Hemisphere remains a beacon for research, prayer, culture, and love of our Greek Jewish traditions in the United States. Donate today!

[**DONATE HERE**](#)

Past Community Events

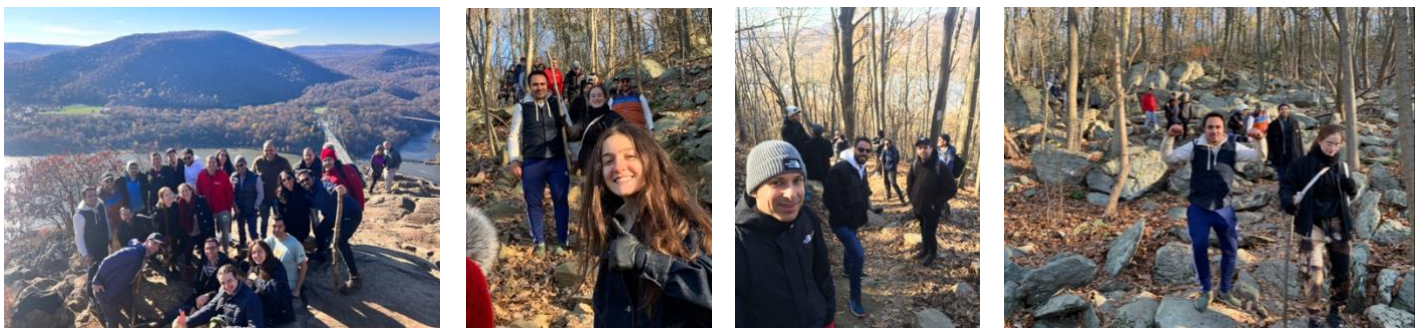
March for Israel in Washington DC

On November 14, members of Kehila Kedosha Janina, the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network, and the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America were proud to march with 290,000 people in Washington DC to stand with Israel, stand against antisemitism, and call for the release of all the Israeli hostages. It was an incredible day and was the largest Jewish gathering in US history.



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

Thank you to everyone who joined the Young Professionals nature hike last month. They had an amazing time with gorgeous weather and great company, and can't wait to see everyone again soon!



Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

International Shabbat of Unity – December 15-16

Join us for a special Shabbaton program on Friday evening December 15 and Saturday December 16 when we will be honored to welcome Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, Chief Rabbi of Athens, Greece, along with Jewish community members from across the US and abroad. Please register online: www.tinyurl.com/ShabbatofUnity



The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood of America
La Ermandad Sefaradi



Kehila Kedosha Janina
Synagogue and Museum

Sephardic Shabbaton of Unity

FRIDAY DECEMBER 15 - SATURDAY DECEMBER 16
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street
New York City

**Shabbat Dinner - \$54 Per Person
MUST RSVP IN ADVANCE
RSVP HERE: tinyurl.com/ShabbatofUnity**

Join us for a very special Shabbat of Unity for Israel
and the Jewish People in New York City as we come
together as a global Sephardic Community

Friday December 15
Minha Afternoon Service - 4pm
Candle Lighting - 4:11pm
Special Afternoon Class with Rabbi Negrin - 4:20pm
Kabbalat Shabbat Evening Service - 5:20pm
Shabbat Dinner (**by RSVP & Payment ONLY**) - 6:30pm

Saturday December 16
Shaharit Morning Service - 9am
Community Lunch - 12pm
Class with Rabbi Negrin - 2pm
Minha Afternoon Service - 4pm
Arvit & Community Avdalah - 5pm



SPECIAL GUEST HAHAM GABRIEL NEGRIN
THE RABBI OF ATHENS, GREECE

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

Lebanese Jewish Presentation and Cooking Class – December 24 at 1pm

We are honored to host our dear friend, Rabbi Isaac Choua for a special event on Sunday December 24 at 1pm on the story of Lebanese Jews. Please RSVP to Museum@kkjism.org

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM
PRESENTS**

LEBANON ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE

**A HISTORIC AND CULINARY PRESENTATION ON
LEBANESE JEWISH CULTURE BY RABBI ISAAC CHOUA**

SUNDAY DECEMBER 24 AT 1PM

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC**



Kehila Kedosha Janina is honored to host our dear friend Rabbi Isaac Choua to present a lecture and cooking class on Lebanese Jews. In addition, the program will highlight the family story and recipes from the famous NYC store Sahadi's.

Originally from Lebanon, the Sahadi family first established their store in Manhattan's "Little Syria" in 1895. Sahadi's is now located in Brooklyn, but we are bringing their treasures back to Manhattan on December 24th. Sahadi's award-winning cookbook "Flavors of the Sun" will be available for purchase. Rabbi Isaac Choua will not only give a lecture on Lebanese Jews, but will also cook a traditional Lebanese dish.

Rabbi Isaac Choua holds multiple positions at the World Jewish Congress, including Middle East & North Africa Communities Liaison. He earned his master's degree in Medieval Jewish History with a concentration on pan-Sepharadi Studies from Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School, and holds a BA in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Abrahamic Religions from CUNY.

**COOKBOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE AT A SPECIAL DISCOUNTED PRICE
ADMISSION \$10 PER PERSON. RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJISM.ORG**

New Siddur Publication and Lecture – January 7 at 1pm

KKJ is honored to welcome Hakham Dr. Isaac S. D. Sassoon and Rabbi Steve Golden of the Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst to celebrate the launch of a new siddur, Siddur 'Alats Libbi. Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM AND
THE SEPHARDIC JEWISH BROTHERHOOD OF AMERICA**

ARE HONORED TO WELCOME

HAKHAM DR. ISAAC S. D. SASSOON

FOR A SPECIAL LECTURE CELEBRATING THE



**LAUNCH OF SIDDUR
'ALATS LIBBI**

SUNDAY JANUARY 7 AT 1PM

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA - 280 BROOME STREET NYC

The sages of old did not conceive of Jewish prayer as incantation, but as 'service of the heart' and as a vehicle through which we are invited to speak our hearts before Hashem. Join us for the official launch of the new Siddur 'Alats Libbi, edited by Rabbi Dr. Isaac Sassoon & Rabbi Steve Golden.

One of the world's leading Torah scholars, Hakham Dr. Isaac Sassoon synthesizes rigorous traditional study with scrupulous academic and historical scholarship. A prolific writer for TheTorah.com, Hakham Sassoon is the author of several critically acclaimed books.

Hakham Sassoon's initial education was under the tutelage of his father - the renowned scholar Rabbi Solomon David Sassoon, Hakham Yosef Doury, and others. He studied at the prestigious Gateshead Yeshiva and various yeshivot in Israel. Hakham Sassoon received semikhah from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Lisbon.

Continuing his family's tradition of academic achievement, Hakham Sassoon has published on topics ranging from Scriptural commentary and history, to issues of current concern to the Jewish community.

**SIDDURIM WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE & SIGNING.
REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED. RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG**

**The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry
is Proud to Present the 2024 Tour to Jewish Greece**

View the full itinerary [Here](#). Email Museum@kkjism.org for more information.

Tour of Jewish Greece Summer 2024



The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

Tour of Jewish Greece June 17 – June 26, 2024

Includes Corfu, Ioannina, & Thessaloniki

Reconnect with your heritage and experience the beautiful sights and
Jewish communities of Greece

To register and learn more information email Museum@kkjism.org

**Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network
Hanukkah Party**



Greek Jewish & Sephardic
Young Professionals Network

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

HANUKKAH PARTY



**TUESDAY DECEMBER 12 AT 7PM
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

**CANDLE
LIGHTING**

**LIVE GREEK &
SEPHARDIC MUSIC**

**DRINKS &
SWEETS**

**"SECRET SEPHARDIC" GIFT SHARE
BRING A GIFT VALUED UP TO \$25 AND RECEIVE A GIFT!**

Meet other young members of our community as
we come together to celebrate Hanukkah
Open to Young Adults in their 20s and 30s

RSVP to GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com

**This Newsletter is sponsored by Joe Josephs in memory of
Joe I Josephs and Anna Solomon Josephs**

As in our tradition, Joe Josephs is named after his grandfather, Joseph Josephs, who was President of Kehila Kedosha Janina and a founding member of the synagogue.

Joe Joseph arrived in the USA on the SS Alice on November 8, 1911. He was 18 years old, making him born in 1893. The closest relative left behind in Ioannina is his father, Isaac. He was going to meet his older brother, Jacob, at 128-30 Allen Street. In the 1930 census he is listed as living at 2165 64th Avenue in a home listed as valued at \$185 with his wife Anne and two young sons (Irwin, age 5 and Lawrence, age 3). Joe Joseph's father Isaac, and his mother, Esther, arrived in 1915.

Joe would become a successful businessman, an ardent supporter of Kehila Kedosha Janina and a philanthropist. In his New York Times obituary of August 14, 1968, there is mention of his presidency of United Kimono Company on W. 18th Street, his Vice Presidency of the Sephardic Home for the Aged, his Presidency of Kehila Kedosha Janna and his Board Chairmanship of the Sephardic Center of Mapleton. In a newspaper article on the 50th anniversary of the Brotherhood of Ioannina (1957), it is highlighted that he served with the Greek War Relief, the Janina Relief Fund, and the Athens Division of the Joint Distribution Committees. He also personally assisted some of the victims of Nazi persecution. Joseph Josephs personally sponsored two young sisters who were left orphaned by the Holocaust.

At a time when there was no workman's compensation, David Solomon Bellel died in an accident on the site of Joe Joseph's factory. It was October 12, 1932. Joe Joseph paid compensation to the family to enable them to survive.



Joe and Anne Josephs



Joe Josephs holding son Irwin



Detail of Chair in KKJ dedicated to Joe Josephs in 1929



The Miles sisters brought to USA by Joe Josephs after becoming orphans during the Holocaust

Details of Joe Josephs helping the widow and children of David Solomon Bellel

News from Jewish Greece

Athens

Thousands march through Athens to mark 50 years since student uprising crushed by dictatorship Full AP article [Here](#)

Athens, Greece (AP) — Thousands of people marched through central Athens on Friday to mark the 50th anniversary of a pro-democracy student uprising that was violently put down by the military dictatorship ruling Greece in 1973.

The annual march started from the Polytechnic campus, which was the headquarters of the uprising, and headed toward the U.S. Embassy. America is still widely blamed in Greece for supporting the 1967-74 rightwing dictatorship during the Cold War.

Many of the protesters Friday carried Palestinian flags, while the march was preceded by a group of students carrying a blood-spattered Greek flag that flew at the Polytechnic during the events of 1973. The march is often marred by rioting by far-left supporters and thousands of police were on duty Friday to maintain the peace.

Tensions have been simmering in recent days, after the fatal police shooting of a Roma teenager following a high-speed car chase in central Greece. Police were stationed outside the embassy building, located just off a major Athens thoroughfare, to prevent protesters from getting close.

The Polytechnic uprising, which came a year before the collapse of the dictatorship, was crushed by the Greek military and security forces who used a tank to smash through the campus gates. Dozens of people were killed by government forces before and during the violent crackdown, though the precise number of victims is still a matter of dispute.



Premier of "My People" Film by Anna Rezan in Athens

On 11/28/2023, the premiere of the historical documentary "My People," by the actress and director Anna Rezan, took place at the Athens Concert Hall, under the auspices of the Hellenic Parliament, in the presence of parliamentarians, people of the spirit and culture, journalists and members of the Greek Jewish Community



The award-winning documentary presents the history of Greek Jews, focusing on the period of World War II, through its creator's search for her family history. In an inventive way, Anna Rezan recreates the Occupation and the Holocaust through testimonies and memories of survivors - Nina Benroubi, Isaac Mizan, Nina Negrin, Stella Cohen, Makis Matsa and Moises Constantini. Anna Rezan's footsteps brought her to the cities - milestones of Greek-Jewish history, but also to Auschwitz, where she began the investigation into the fate of her grandmother. With an abundance of historical elements and a "masterful montage that combines archive film, documents and narratives", as EME President and film producer Mikis Modiano pointed out in his address, the documentary renders history in the light of micro-history.

Before the start of the event, which was presented by Tilda Isaiah, G.G. of KISE's Victor Eliezer, who addressed the documentary's ever-present messages about anti-Semitism, noting its resurgence after the

October 7 Hamas terror attack on Israel. As characteristically pointed out, among others, G.G. of KISE: "Anna Rezan's film 'My People' beyond memory and knowledge about the past is also a resounding call for the release and return of the hostages to their homes."

EME president Mikis Modiano spoke about the documentary and the excellent and meticulous work of its creator, Anna Rezan.

This was followed by the screening of MY PEOPLE and the event was concluded with a few words from Anna Rezan, who was visibly moved and spoke about what the creation of the documentary means to her and how much she was shocked by the progress of her research, her tour of the Holocaust landmarks and her contact with the survivors - her own people - who also provided the inspiration for the title of the work.

Rhodes

The University of the Aegean Department of Primary Education organizes the **Aegis 2024 Summer School**. Designed for international young Greek language learners, the course offers four weeks of intensive Greek lessons in different levels. Classes are held between May 13 and June 6, in Rhodes. The course includes interaction with Greek students and other native speakers; educational trips, lectures, guided tours in museums and archaeological sites, participation in various cultural events; accommodation in central hotel with two meals per day. Registration till **Dec 31, 2023**. More info at: <https://summer-schools.aegean.gr/AeGIS2024>

Themistoklis Aravossitas, Course Director, Modern Greek
Department of Languages, Literatures & Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies

Cyprus

We feel safe here': Cyprus becomes 'haven' after Hamas attack Full article in the Guardian [Here](#)
Israelis flee to island only a 40-minute flight away that looks set to play critical geopolitical role amid Middle East unrest.

In quieter times, the four-story building that houses the Jewish community center in the heart of Larnaca is an oasis of peace.

If visitors drop by, it is usually to pray, enjoy the center's kosher food, or learn more about the British-run detention camps in which over 53,000 Holocaust survivors were interned on Cyprus between 1946 and early 1949, when the last 10,000 were evacuated to the new Israeli state.



But these days, as the go-to place for thousands fleeing the country following the October 7 Hamas attack, the center has gone into crisis mode, its corridors and recreation spaces teeming with evacuees, some young, some old, but all bonded by a common desire to seek solace on an island barely a 40-minute flight away.

"Around 1,000 people are arriving every day," said Arie Zeev Raskin, the island's chief rabbi, in his book-lined office at the center. "More than 16,000 people have now arrived in Cyprus in search of peace of mind since that terrible day," he said of the unprecedented incursion by Gaza-based Islamist militants that would see 1,200 people die, over 240 taken hostage and propel the region into renewed bloodshed.

"There are single mothers, traumatized children, people who can't cope with the sound of rockets going off every day. We offer them whatever we can, be that a bed, food, temporary accommodation."

In the month that has elapsed since the conflict erupted, ever more families have reached Cyprus, many spurred by fear of reprisals in the wake of the Israeli military's ferocious counter-attack against Hamas in Gaza, an offensive that has so far killed more than 11,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamas-run health ministry, and left countless wounded.



But Rashi, who first settled on the island when popular sentiment was decidedly more pro-Palestinian, said the Israeli arrival was not all in one direction. Foreign-based reservists responding to Benjamin Netanyahu's call to arms had also transited through Cyprus as they headed the other way.

"We've had young men, young Jewish reservists from the likes of Argentina, show up," said the rabbi, reaching for his snuff box. "I could write a book about what I have seen, acts of incredible generosity from Cypriot people, acts I have not seen in all of these last 20 years put together."

Others seeking release are also flying in. "We needed to get away from all the noise, the rockets, the fighting, so me and my friends flew over to spend five days in Ayia Napa," said Israel Pertz, aged 23, referring to the resort in the island's south as he waited to board a flight back home at Larnaca airport. "We feel safe here."

It is not only Israelis who in recent weeks have arrived in Cyprus.

Amid mounting fears of the conflagration spreading, western embassies in Nicosia, the nation's war-split capital, have also been on an emergency footing in anticipation of the strategic Mediterranean island once again becoming an evacuation hub and nerve center for the distribution of humanitarian aid. In 2006, the EU's most easterly member state acted as a transit point for over 30,000 foreign nationals fleeing war in Lebanon, a role reprised when thousands of British passport holders were airlifted from Sudan to the country earlier this year.

The foreign minister, Constantinos Kombos, has raised the specter of more than 100,000 people being evacuated to Cyprus from Lebanon, and other parts of the region, in the event of the conflict escalating. Addressing MPs, he said over 1,000 men, women and children from 35 countries had been brought to the island since 7 October.

SAS troops and other special forces from Germany and the Netherlands have been placed on standby in military bases that the UK retains in its former colony. The elite teams are believed to specialize in hostage rescue missions.

"Cyprus has proved to be a safe haven, the eye of the storm when the region elsewhere is in flames," said Professor Hubert Faustmann, who teaches history and political science at the University of Nicosia. "But the game changer could be if large numbers of refugees from Syria and Lebanon flee to Cyprus, are not accepted by other EU member states, and ultimately get stuck here. Real war could bring real chaos to the island."

Like Athens, Nicosia's approach was for years more pro-Arab than pro-Israeli. A sea change prompted by deteriorating relations between Israel and Turkey, and the discovery of gas reserves off the Israeli coast, has since paved the way for closer ties and an energy alliance that has gone from strength to strength.

The Cypriot president, Nikos Christodoulides, and the Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, were quick to decry the Hamas attacks while publicly supporting Israel's right to self-defense.

But the two leaders have also sought to strike a diplomatic balance. Increasingly, Mitsotakis has expressed alarm over the extent to which innocent civilians have been killed, injured, or displaced by the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. Christodoulides has proposed that Cyprus set up a humanitarian sea corridor to the

besieged coastal strip with the aim of shipping “a sustained, secure, high-volume flow of humanitarian assistance to Gaza in the immediate, medium and long term”.

Officials say shipments could be dispatched from Limassol, the country’s main port, to Gaza, just 255 miles away, as soon as there is a pause in combat and the situation on the ground allows.

“Cyprus, by virtue of its geography, has a critical role to play,” said Ian Lesser, the Brussels-based vice-president of the German Marshall fund US, during a visit to the island on Wednesday. “If the EU is serious about becoming a more significant geopolitical actor, the major test will be here in the eastern Mediterranean.”

Turkey

November 30 marked the 20th anniversary of the Synagogue Bombings in Istanbul. The Sephardic community in New York held a memorial for the victims: “This week, the Sephardic Brotherhood in partnership with the American Friends of Turkish Jewry and Sephardic Congregation of Fort Lee held a special memorial program commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Istanbul Synagogue Bombings, which took the lives of 24 people, six of them members of the Jewish Community of Turkey on November 20, 2003.



We held Arvit Evening Services led by Rabbi Ilan Acoca, followed by words of reflection from Brotherhood National President Sedat Behar, an Ashkavah prayer in memory of the victims, and a memorial candle lighting. Included in the lighting were special candles designated for the victims of the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting as well as the victims of terror from the October 7th Massacre in Israel.



Special thank you to the Sephardic Congregation of Fort Lee for hosting the memorial in their beautiful Kahal. Ke Sus Almas Repozen en Ganeden - May Their Souls Rest in the Garden of Eden.”

Israel

Letter from Presidents of Israeli Universities

Dear Colleagues,

We, the heads of Israeli universities and research institutes, write to express our deep concern about the discourse expressed in academia following Hamas' devastating attack on Israel on October 7 and the inadequate – in many cases – response of academic leadership.



In those darkest days, in a tragedy unprecedented in Israel's 75-year history, Hamas terrorists infiltrated the country and murdered more than 1,400 people, including infants, children, students, and the elderly—Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The attack also involved the kidnapping of 240 civilians of all ages in Gaza. Additional missing persons have not yet been located and registered. In the wake of these horrific events, we find it alarming that some narratives from academic institutions misrepresent the situation or, at worst, actively target Israelis and Jews.

We are facing a war that has two fronts: one against Hamas' atrocities and another unfolding in the global arena of public opinion. Unfortunately, we have seen a worrying trend in which Israel, despite its right to self-defense, is wrongly labelled an oppressor. This is a false equation between the actions of a murderous terrorist organization

and the right of a sovereign state to defend its citizens, which unfortunately results in the loss of innocent Palestinians. Any attempt to justify or question Hamas' barbaric and heinous actions is spiritually and morally unacceptable.

Many universities have become a breeding ground for anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiments, fueled largely by a naïve and biased perception of conflict. It is ironic that the very halls of enlightenment in America and Europe, ostensibly the bastions of intellectual and progressive thought that are your universities, have adopted Hamas as cause célèbre (main issue) while Israel is demonized. Universities, as hubs of enlightenment and rational discourse, must take responsibility for the views they perpetuate.

There is no moral equivalence here. Let us be clear: Hamas does not share values with any Western academic institution. Hamas is an organization that has repeatedly pledged to exterminate Israel and its people.

Its ideology is contrary to the values of human life and the liberal values we love. Hamas directs international aid to arming, not to the well-being of its citizens. While Israel uses its weapons to shield its citizens, Hamas uses its citizens as shields for its weapons — which it hides in hospitals, schools and mosques. It is important to distinguish between Hamas' terrorist objectives and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood. The confusion of the two only serves to feed hatred and ignorance.

Academic institutions stand like beacons in the spiritual landscape and we ask you to illuminate them. Your roles as leaders of these institutions bring with it an extraordinary responsibility: to guide the moral development of your students, to imbue them with the ability to think critically and to discern the nuances that separate right from wrong. Free speech is a cornerstone of academic freedom, but it should not be manipulated to legitimize hate speech or justify violence.

We urge you to draw the line between constructive discourse and destructive propaganda and promote evidence-based, multi-layered thinking that challenges simplistic narratives. Expose false justification for terrorist acts. Demonstrate and condemn disingenuous statements, reject hypocritical voices that justify murder, rape and destruction in the name of "resistance."

Moreover, we expect Israeli and Jewish students and professors at universities and colleges to receive the same respect and protection as any other minority. The principles of university integration and security must undoubtedly be extended to include Israeli and Jewish members of your academic communities. Just as it would be inconceivable for an academic institution to advocate the protection of free speech of groups targeting other protected groups, demonstrations calling for our destruction and glorifying violence against Jews should be explicitly prohibited and condemned.

What the world saw on October 7 were not methods to help suffering people build a better future for themselves. The events of this terrible day should be taken as a wake-up call to all the dangers of nihilistic organizations such as Hamas and ISIS that represent the exact opposite of freedom.

As heads of Israeli universities, we cordially received clear declarations of solidarity and support for Israel, which are, from the heart, declarations of solidarity with humanity, enlightenment and progress. At the same time, we call for a radical change in transparency and truth in academia on the subject of Israel's war against Hamas, so that light triumphs over darkness, now and always.

The undersigned,

Prof. Arie Zaban, President of Bar-Ilan University. Chairperson of Association of University Heads – VERA
Prof. Daniel A. Chamovitz, President of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Prof. Alon Chen, President of Weizmann Institute of Science
Prof. Asher Cohen, President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Prof. Leo Corry, President of the Open University of Israel
Prof. Ehud Grossman, President of Ariel University
Prof. Ariel Porat, President of Tel-Aviv University
Prof. Ron Robin, President of University of Haifa
Prof. Uri Sivan, President of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology

Women March in Tel Aviv in Support of Israeli Hostages in Gaza Full article [Here](#)

Speakers at the demonstration called on women and international organizations to speak out and condemn Hamas' hostage-taking.

Thousands of women gathered in Tel Aviv on Sunday to draw attention to the plight of the 239 hostages held in Gaza. "Now, now, now!" chanted the demonstrators assembled at what supporters of the hostages have begun calling Hostages Square. The rally headlined "Speak Up for Your Sister," was spearheaded by several Israeli women's organizations in support of the hostages.



Cochav Elkayam-Levy, a law professor and international human rights expert, addressed the rally and slammed the "silence" of the international women's groups and human rights organizations that have refused to unequivocally condemn the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7 and its continuing violation of human rights standards in holding the hostages and refusing to allow the Red Cross to see them. The crimes against the victims of October 7 "were not only crimes against Jews and Israelis, but crimes against humanity," Elkayam-Levy said.

"Their silence doesn't only turn their back on these women and children, but on women and children everywhere," she urged those organizations to speak out. "It's late – but it's not too late for them to raise their voices." Elkayam-Levy said there was a "direct line between this lack of condemnation and the waves of hate and antisemitism we see around the world right now."

The rally's host, Israeli Arab broadcast journalist Lucy Aharish, choked back tears as she introduced hostages' mothers, who proceeded to share their pain. A film was screened in which mothers told their stories, with Aharish translating their words into Arabic as they appealed to their captors to set their loved ones free and for people in Israel and worldwide to speak out on their behalf.



"Our fight to release the hostages is your fight, too. It is the fight for freedom, for the human spirit. It is a fight for hope," she declared to a global audience in English, Hebrew, and Arabic.

Aharish noted that there are over 100 women among the hostages – 22 of them under the age of 17 and 18 over the age of 65.



"They are daughters, mothers, grandmothers, soldiers – but they are all our sisters," Aharish said. "We, the women of Israel – of all religions and ethnicities – are calling for the return of the girls and women stolen from us, as well as all of the boys and men taken from us. Bring them home now."

Another speaker was former beauty pageant winner Linor Abargil, who won the Miss World crown shortly after being raped and has served as an international spokesperson against sexual violence. She echoed the call for women around the world to condemn Hamas and speak out more forcefully for the release of the hostages.

"Where are all the women's organizations? Where are all of the female leaders in key positions in the world, prominent in the media?" Abargil asked. "There are so many women in power today. Where are they? We are here as women calling on the women of the world. These hostages could be you. They could be your sister, your mother, your daughter. Speak up!"

Leah Yanai, whose sister was kidnapped from the Nova Music Festival in Re'im, pled for more voices to join the fight. "I'm here, and my little sister is in Gaza," she said. "It's too much to bear. Every day that passes is an eternity for us families. I beg you to join our cry. All Israelis – religious, secular, left-wing-right wing, everybody. Nothing is more urgent than bringing them home."

The rally was held on the eve of a press conference scheduled for Monday, raising awareness of the medical conditions of several of the women and girls being held hostage – their need for specialized care for pre-existing conditions and the expected “mental scars of sexual abuse, humiliation, and continuous trauma.”

The organizers of the rally and press conference put out an appeal “for their immediate release to safeguard their fundamental human rights and provide them with the essential medical and psychological care they require to heal from the profound physical and emotional consequences of their ordeal.

“Up to this point, as far as we know, no contact between the Red Cross and the hostages has been established,” they wrote. “This inhumane situation places the hostages at an elevated risk of experiencing further violence, torture, and neglect. At the very least, we demand to receive, through the Red Cross, assurances that all abductees have access to medical services and that their families receive signs of life.”

In First, Archaeologists Extract DNA of Ancient Israelites Full article in Haaretz [Here](#)

A rare First Temple-period family burial opens the door to genetic studies on the true origin of the ancient Israelites - and their links to modern Jewish populations.

For the first time, ancient DNA has been recovered from the bodies of ancient Israelites living in the First Temple period, Haaretz has learned.

This achievement, a Holy Grail in the study of lost civilizations, was enabled following the discovery near Jerusalem of a rare family tomb dating to the Iron Age.



So far the collaboration of archaeologists and geneticists has been able to extract genetic material from two individuals, producing partial information, which is a tiny sample indeed. But it promises to pave the way for further research on longstanding questions about the origins of the ancient Israelites, their links to earlier populations living in the Levant, as well as to modern-day Jewish people.

Preliminary results from the excavation and the DNA study were expected to be presented at a conference about new archaeological discoveries in Jerusalem and its environs on Wednesday, and Haaretz has obtained an advance copy of the researchers’ paper. The conference has since been delayed due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza.

This story begins in 2018, when the Theft Prevention Unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority discovered a tomb in the village of Abu Ghosh, which is right next to the biblical settlement of Kiryat Yearim, some 15 kilometers west of Jerusalem.

The tomb had been badly damaged, first by construction and then by looting, so the archaeologists conducted a hurried salvage excavation. Although only a fraction of the tomb had survived, the researchers uncovered some 150 pottery vessels, including bowls, jars and lamps, as well as the jumbled skeletal remains of at least 10 individuals, the archaeologists report.

Those interred in the tomb included six adults, three men and three women, and four children, including two babies, one infant, and an adolescent. This is consistent with the high mortality rate of children in ancient times, the researchers note.

Based on the pottery typology used in the funerary offerings it seems that the tomb was used for a prolonged period, around 750-650 B.C.E., placing it in the late Iron Age, or late First Temple period according to the biblical chronology.



The tomb is an important find in its own right, given that burials from this period are rare and tend to be from slightly later times, generally closer to the fall of Jerusalem and the First Temple to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., says Israel Finkelstein, an archaeologist at Tel Aviv University and the University of Haifa.

Finkelstein was called in to lead the research on the tomb as he was already heading a dig at Kiryat Yearim, a settlement which is mentioned in the Bible as having housed the Ark of the Covenant before it was brought to Jerusalem.

"I suppose that we are dealing with a family tomb, likely from the elite of Kiryat Yearim, whose members were buried there over a long period of time," Finkelstein says. "We don't know how big it was originally, because most of it was destroyed in recent years."

Together with Prof. David Reich, a geneticist at Harvard University, and mathematician Dr. Arie Shaus, Finkelstein embarked on a quest to extract DNA from the people interred in the Kiryat Yearim tomb.

Who is an ancient Jew?

The technique of extracting genetic material from ancient bones, teeth and other organic remains began to emerge over 20 years ago, and has since reached such sophistication that researchers are even divining (some) information on creatures that lived over a million years ago. It is rare for bones to be preserved well enough to provide any genetic material at all, yet the ability to extract and sequence genetic material from ancient remains has given researchers major insights into the origins, migrations and history of human populations, as well as prehistoric hominins, animals and plants.

But big questions remain when it comes to the genetic history of the Jewish people. Looking far into the past, inquisitive minds have long asked: Who were the ancient Hebrews, the inhabitants of the biblical Kingdoms of Judah and Israel in the Iron Age (12th-6th century B.C.E)? From which population did they descend and how were they connected to their neighbors, the Philistines, Edomites, Moabites and so on?

Looking at the present, we wonder what the genetic link between First Temple-period Israelites and today's Jews is, and which other populations intermingled with them over millennia of exile, wanderings and persecutions. And then there is the big mystery surrounding the origin of modern Jewish groups, particularly of Europe's Ashkenazi population, whose communities first emerged in the Rhineland at the height of the Middle Ages. What is their ancestral connection to the Israelites of yore?

By the way, these questions exist independently of the political conflict over competing claims to the Holy Land, although these issues are often coopted and distorted in the toxic debate over which modern population has the greatest link to the ancestral inhabitants of the Levant.



A bona fide Israelite bone

Over the years, scientists have found some indirect evidence pertaining to the genetic origins of the Israelites – more about this later – by looking at the DNA of modern Jews as well as Bronze Age Canaanites, who preceded the formation of the ancient Israelite identity. But direct access to ancient Israelite DNA and all the information contained therein has so far eluded researchers.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, well-preserved DNA is harder to find in the hot Middle Eastern climes. But this technical issue was partly overcome by the 2015 discovery that the petrous bone, a part of the skull located behind the ear, contains a much higher concentration of DNA than other bones, meaning that at least some genetic material may survive in it even in warmer weather.

That game-changing revelation allowed scientists to shed light on everything from the genetic history of the earliest Neolithic farmers in Anatolia to the origins of the Philistines, the biblical enemies of the Israelites. But not much headway had been made on the ancient Hebrews.

That has been partly because of the rarity of ancient Hebrew graves and largely because in Judaism, excavating or disturbing graves is a big taboo. Particularly in Israel, human remains are not considered antiquities by law, and

archaeologists who find ancient graves are often pressured by ultra-Orthodox groups to quickly rebury any bones they unearth.

At Kiryat Yearim, it was indeed the precious petrous bone that yielded genetic information about two of the individuals buried there, the researchers report. But before we look at the – very preliminary – results we have wonder whether we can be sure about the cultural identity of the tomb's residents.

It's true that no ancient Hebrew inscriptions were found in the burial confirming that the deceased were Israelites. However, the pottery assemblage is typical of what is found in late First Temple-period burials in Jerusalem, Finkelstein explains. Together with Kiryat Yearim's proximity to what was then the capital of the Kingdom of Judah, this suggests that the locals can indeed be identified as ancient Hebrews, he says.

"Of course, cultural identity and genetic background are not the same," Finkelstein adds. "Genetic background can be revealed by an ancient DNA study. Identity is about culture, geography and can change through the ages. This is also true in the present: just look at the population of modern Israel."

There is also a question as to whether Kiryat Yearim was controlled by Judah or its larger, and often rival, northern neighbor, the Kingdom of Israel. Finkelstein's recent excavations at the site have revealed a large artificial platform at the top of the settlement, which is typical of the northern kingdom's urban planning. This suggests that Kiryat Yearim was initially under the control of Israel, at least until that kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E.

In any case, the genetic data from Kiryat Yearim offers a first glimpse of how directly sampling remains from the First Temple period can shed light on the history of the ancient Hebrews, Israelite or Judahite.

The two sampled individuals were one male and one female. The conference paper only discusses data from the Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA, sections of the genome that are inherited only from the father and mother respectively. Data gleaned from the rest of the genome will be provided in an upcoming scientific publication.

"This is only partial data with a more detailed paper coming in the future," Reich says. "Sampling DNA from ancient Israelites is exciting, as it should make it possible to test how they relate genetically to previous groups, to contemporary non-Israelite groups, and to people living today.

And the Canaanites begat Abraham

The highlight of the very partial results is that the Y chromosome in the man belongs to the J2 haplogroup, a group of closely-related DNA sequences that is believed to have originated in the Caucasus or Eastern Anatolia, a vast area including modern-day eastern Turkey, northwest Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and southern Russia.

his is important because, as mentioned, researchers have already mapped the DNA of ancient Canaanites, showing that they had a strong ancestral connection to modern-day Jewish and Arab populations. That research, published in *Cell* in 2020, also showed that the Canaanites in the Middle and Late Bronze Age (before the emergence of the Israelite identity) descended from a mix of Neolithic inhabitants of the Levant and a group that immigrated from the Caucasus or Eastern Anatolia.

This migration was already in motion in the Early Bronze Age, around 2900-2500 B.C.E., and is also visible archaeologically, with pottery from this period exhibiting strong influences from Anatolia and the Caucasus. It continued in the Middle Bronze Age, as seen in the study of ancient DNA of individuals from Megiddo and other places, and is evident in the mention in historical texts of Canaanite officials in the Late Bronze Age, with names that are not Semitic and originate in the northeastern Middle East, Finkelstein says.

While it's too early to draw conclusions based on limited data from a single Israelite sample, it is of note that the First Temple-period individual from Kiryat Yearim still carried the same genetic variations that the Canaanites displayed centuries earlier and which they in turn had inherited from the Caucasian newcomers.

"As limited as it is, we cannot ignore this piece of evidence, that there is a connection between the genetic background of this person at Kiryat Yearim in the first millennium B.C.E. and the Canaanites in the second millennium B.C.E.," Finkelstein says. "It's not a complete surprise because we have evidence from other lines of inquiry, but it is another, small piece of evidence showing that the genetic pool is the same. Of course, at this time we cannot say if this is representative of the entire population."

If researchers gather more data confirming that most Israelites indeed shared this ancestry with the Canaanites, it would support something that experts have strongly suspected for a while, that in fact the ancient Hebrews descended from the Canaanites.

The biblical stories stress a discontinuity between the Canaanites, often depicted in a negative light, and the pious Israelites, described as non-local descendants of a Mesopotamian-born patriarch, Abraham.

Out of Anatolia

Yet archaeologists have long noted that the similarities between Canaanite and Israelite material culture, language and settlement patterns all suggest that the latter simply grew out of the former.

"In the last 30-40 years there is a general understanding that the Hebrews were mostly of local origin, which means they were Canaanites and became Israelites in an identity-forming process that probably took a long time," Finkelstein says.

This process started at the end of the Bronze Age, around the 12th century B.C.E., when the so-called Bronze Age Collapse saw the destruction of multiple civilizations across the Mediterranean and the withdrawal of Egypt from Canaan, which the pharaohs had controlled for centuries. In the ensuing power vacuum, the local Canaanites formed new cultural identities around the emerging territorial entities we are familiar with from the Bible: Moab, Edom, Aram, Ammon and of course Judah and Israel (the partial exception here being the Philistines who do appear to have received an influx of Aegean migrants).

As for the mitochondrial DNA, which is inherited from the maternal side, the two individuals at Kiryat Yearim displayed two different haplogroups. One, T1a, is a very ancient ancestral haplogroup, with similar counterparts already found in individuals living in Jordan some 10,000 years ago and in southeastern Europe around 7,000 years ago, says Shaus. In later samples it is found in Iran and in those Canaanites sampled in Israel, as well as all the way to the Baltic and Ural Mountains.

This suggests that this haplogroup's initial source may have been somewhere in Neolithic Anatolia or the Levant, and slowly spread with early farming, Shaus says.

The second mitochondrial haplogroup, called H87, hasn't been previously detected in ancient DNA samples but is found in modern-day Basques, Tunisian Arabs, and Iraqis. This may point to an origin in the Mediterranean or the Near East, perhaps in the Arabian peninsula, he says. If so, this particular haplogroup may have spread with nomadic populations, Shaus concludes. In other words, the samples from two ancient Israelites hint at ancestry from peoples in both Anatolia and Arabia.

Much more data and research are needed to understand how significant these results are whether they truly represent the ancestry of the region's population at the time – and what they mean for our understanding of the broader story of the emergence of ancient Israel.

Sarajevo

In Bosnia, gentile musicians work to preserve the country's Sephardic Jewish tradition Full article by David I. Klein [Here](#)

A cadre of Bosnian musicians have realized that with the death of Ladino music's most famous singer, an essential part of Bosnian culture was in danger of being lost forever.

Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (RNS) — When Flory Jagoda, the superstar of Ladino music, died in 2021, it was a wakeup call for Vladimir Mickovic.

Mickovic, a Bosnian musician from Mostar, realized that with Jagoda's death, the music of Sephardic Jews was in danger of being lost forever. "The Sephardic music and culture, their proverbs and literature, is a part of our culture here in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Mickovic told Religion News Service.



Last year, he released a tribute album called "Kantikas de mi Nonna," or "Songs of my Grandmother," referring to Flory as the "nonna" of the Sephardic musical world. The album is also an attempt to recreate the pre-Holocaust Jewish musical tradition of the western Balkans.

In the West, Jewish music is often associated with Klezmer, the folk music of Central and Eastern European Jews that came to the United States with Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants. But in Spain and across southern Europe, the entirely different music of the Sephardic Jews once thrived.

Though there were much larger Sephardic communities in Turkey and pre-Holocaust Greece, Jagoda, who was born in Sarajevo, became the best-known musician working in the Ladino language and music. Her Hanukkah song, "Ocho Kandelikas" ("Eight Little Candles") is a modern classic and has been covered by Pink Martini and Idina Menzel.

When Jagoda, named Flory Papo, was born in 1923, Sarajevo belonged to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Sarajevo at the time was known as the "Jerusalem of Europe" for its skyline adorned with the towers of mosques, churches and synagogues. Its population was nearly 20% Jews, most descendants of exiles from Spain at the close of the 15th century who were welcomed to the Balkans, when it was part of the Ottoman Empire. Their language, Ladino or Judeo-Spanish, is a mixture of medieval Spanish, Hebrew and Aramaic, peppered with Turkish, Greek and Serbo-Croatian influences, among others.

Music was almost as important a tool in transmitting Sephardic traditions, according to Eliezer Papo, a Sarajevo-born Jew who today leads the Ladino studies program at Israel's Ben-Gurion University. (Papo said he and Jagoda are not related — or no more than any two people hailing from Sarajevo's small Jewish community.) The Bosnian Sephardic musical tradition had its roots in the singing clubs of medieval Spanish synagogues — the karaoke of its day, Papo explained. Jewish men would gather before morning prayer to sing contemporary Hebrew poetry, which fit better with the Arabic musical styles of their time than the biblical psalms used in their liturgy.

Coming to Sarajevo after the Expulsion of 1492, the music continued to evolve. As men continued to sing about religious themes, women addressed everyday life. During Havdalah, the ritual that ends the Sabbath, men would sing traditional prayers in Hebrew followed by women who would sing their own Ladino tunes.



Eliezer Papo

"In most Sephardic homes, at least once a week, the women would sing," Papo told RNS.

For Bosnian Jewish women, who before the 20th century had few opportunities for formal schooling, songs were also essential educational tools, transmitting the history, culture and worldview of Sephardic Jewry. "For

men, their music gave beauty to life, but for women it imparted wisdom,” Papo said. Those educational songs and poems were known as Komplas. “There are Komplas about the land of Israel, there are Komplas about Shabbat, about the festivals, about Moses, about Purim, and so on,” Papo told RNS. In fact, one of the most famous Ladino songs, “Kuando El Rey Nimrod,” which tells the story of the biblical patriarch Abraham, is a Kompla.

Sephardic singers would both give and take from local musical traditions. In Bosnia, that resulted in “Sevdah” or “sevdalinka,” an emotional and melancholic type of folk music that mixes Ottoman and Slavic influences with Iberian and Andalusian tunes brought into the region by Sephardic Jews. Some in Bosnia have argued that Sevdah should be added to UNESCO’s list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Most of Bosnia’s Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and the few survivors like Flory, who spent much of her adult life in the United States, emigrated soon after the war. The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s led to another wave of emigration from the small community left behind. Today, fewer than 1,000 Jews remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and few of them are involved in musical pursuits.

But Mickovic, with the help of a small cadre of other Bosnian musicians, has pieced together an authentic Bosnian sound from Sephardic music from elsewhere in the Balkans. “We went back to those days, the pre-war and after World War era and tried to remember and find materials of how it actually sounded, this traditionally Bosnian Sephardic music,” he said. “But there are actually no recordings, so I found something from Thessaloniki and from Istanbul and so on.” The final result was an album that traced Flory’s life story and her escape from the Holocaust, which took her from Sarajevo to what is now Croatia and later Italy. But it also tells the whole history of Bosnian Jewry’s trek first from Spain, through Greece and Turkey, to Bosnia and today throughout the world.



Vladimir Mickovic

Since the release of his Flory album, Mickovic has released several more and is now researching the works of another early 20th-century Jewish composer, this time one from his hometown of Mostar, for a similar tribute album. Zorana Guja, a musician and ethnomusicologist, has also been researching Sephardic music and its influence on wider Bosnian music. Along with her band, Zorana and the Ethno Orchestra, she produced an album of Balkan Sephardic songs known as “Sephardica.”

For Guja, the lost history of Bosnia’s once-thriving Jewish community, which she said echoed the similar experience of genocide that Serbs faced during World War II, inspired her to undertake the project. “The Sephardic musical tradition had a strong influence on wider Bosnian culture because it managed to merge the musical traditions of both Christian and Muslim populations in urban areas,” Guja told RNS.

If it is forgotten, “Bosnia and Herzegovina will lose not just its vital (Jewish) culture which shaped urban areas and various domains of social life through centuries, but also its Jewish music which is a crucial part of the Bosnian musical tradition as a whole,” Guja said. For Bosnian Jewry, both at home and beyond, seeing the outpouring of interest in their traditions is welcome news. “It’s an interesting fact that there are many gentiles, more gentiles than Jews basically, who are working to preserve and record these Sephardic musical traditions,” Igor Kozemjakin, the cantor of Sarajevo’s sole synagogue, said. “I feel very proud that it is considered as their heritage by others who are working on this preservation.”

Papo, however, says he isn’t too surprised and traces this interfaith interest in preserving Bosnia’s Jewish culture to the unique Yugoslav brand of socialism that dominated the Balkans for half a century. “In Yugoslavia, you mustn’t forget we were raised with 50 years of socialism when we were taught that everything was everyone’s,” Papo said.

“As a result, any Bosnian musician who wants to sing Bosnian Sephardic songs treats them as his own — and he should, because they are. I am happy about that. Just as his beautiful Mosques are mine, our beautiful Sephardic songs are his.”

France

More than 180,000 people across France march against soaring antisemitism amid the Israel-Hamas war

Paris (AP) — More than 180,000 people across France, including 100,000 in Paris, marched peacefully on Sunday to protest against rising antisemitism in the wake of Israel's ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, representatives of several parties on the left, conservatives and centrists of President Emmanuel Macron's party as well as far-right leader Marine Le Pen attended Sunday's march in the French capital amid tight security. Macron did not attend, but expressed his support for the protest and called on citizens to rise up against "the unbearable resurgence of unbridled antisemitism."



However, the leader of the far-left France Unbowed party, Jean-Luc Melenchon, stayed away from the march, saying last week on X, formerly Twitter, that the march would be a meeting of "friends of unconditional support for the massacre" in Gaza.

The interior ministry said at least 182,000 people marched in several in French cities in response to the call launched by the leaders of the parliament's upper and lower houses. No major incident has been reported, it said.

United Kingdom

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage will conduct a review process about the future of the historic but disused Middle Street synagogue in Brighton.

Brighton & Hove Hebrew Congregation (BHHC), the owners of Middle Street synagogue in Brighton, has commissioned the Foundation for Jewish Heritage (FJH) to conduct a review process in order to assess what future function the opulent but disused synagogue could serve.



The FJH said a Steering Committee has been formed and plans "to commission a Feasibility Study to research and evaluate the various options that could bring the building back into regular use and provide a sustainable future." The Grade II* listed building was designed by Thomas Lainson and opened in 1875. It is located in Brighton city center conservation area. Named by Historic England in 2015 as one of the 10 most beautiful synagogues in Great Britain, it was closed for regular worship nearly 20 years ago.



Since then it had hosted community events, but it closed in early 2020 because of the pandemic and remains closed because of its deteriorating condition, in part the result of water damage that took place during the pandemic lockdown. An emergency fundraising campaign last year to carry out repairs and restoration only raised around 35 percent of the £250,000 goal.

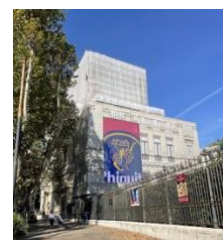
With the fundraiser, the BHHC said it wanted to restore the synagogue and use it "as a center for Education, Prayer and Social Action; including Holocaust Studies and providing soup kitchen facilities for the many homeless and deprived in the area." At the time, the Jewish Chronicle wrote that some potential stakeholders or concerned individuals had raised concerns about the BHHC's plans and felt that an independent charitable trust should be set up to manage the synagogue.

An earlier fundraising campaign had been launched in November 2019 "to raise funds to address urgent remedial care to the building to make it safe for the winter, to obtain professional advice to develop the wider strategy for restoring the building, to upgrade the electrics and to make the building accessible to all and fully compliant with DDA and Health and Safety requirements. "

Italy

Italy: Rome’s main synagogue, the Tempio Maggiore, presents a striking image swathed in scaffolding and sheeting for maintenance and restoration.

With its tall square dome, the monumental Tempio Maggiore or Great Synagogue in Rome is usually a striking city landmark on the bank of the Tiber River. These days it is still notable — but for another reason: its exterior is undergoing maintenance and restoration work, and almost the entire building is swathed in scaffolding and protective sheeting. It presents a striking image! The work is being carried out by [REMI](#), a firm specializing in the maintenance and restoration of cultural heritage. Almost the entire building is covered up — with the synagogue’s windows and other features traced on parts of the cover. Changing advertisements are also shown on the scaffolding. Designed by Vincenzo Costa and Osvaldo Armanni, the synagogue was inaugurated in 1904, on the site of the historic (and insalubrious) ghetto where Jews had been forced to live for centuries and which had recently been torn down. A so-called “cathedral synagogue,” it demonstrated by its prominence and grandeur the new-found freedoms won by Jews after full emancipation.



Greece Travel News

MCA’s New Initiative for Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Cyclades [Article Here](#)

Athens – Cycladic Identity is the new initiative of the Museum of Cycladic Art (MCA), which aims to protect the cultural and natural heritage of the Cyclades and to preserve, restore and promote their unique identity. Focusing on Culture, Biodiversity and Intangible Heritage, the initiative serves as a platform for attracting and allocating resources to programs implemented by organizations active on the islands.

The initiative represents a natural evolution of the MCA’s many years of work. This is the Museum’s first organized effort to expand its mission to give back to the Cycladic islands, where the Cycladic civilization was born 5,000 years ago by supporting impactful projects. Recognizing Culture, Biodiversity and Intangible Heritage as structural elements of the Cycladic identity, the initiative seeks to create a lively dialogue with the local communities of the islands in order to map their needs and support programs aimed at preserving this identity.

The evaluation of the submitted proposals is carried out by the Scientific Committee of Cycladic Identity, which consists of four members with deep knowledge and understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of the Cyclades, due to their long-term professional activity in the field: Dr. Demetrios Athanasoulis, Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades; Dr. Michael Boyd, Senior Research Affiliate, Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute; Demetres Karavellas, CEO of WWF Greece; and Dr. Angeliki Kosmopoulou, Archaeologist, Executive Director of the Athanasios C. Laskaridis Charitable Foundation. The final selection of proposals involves the Advisory Committee of the initiative, which has provided, since its inception, significant funding and contributes to the development of its strategy.



As stated by MCA President and CEO Sandra Marinopoulou: “The Museum of Cycladic Art would not exist without the Cycladic islands and their civilization. We wish our Museum to give back to the Cyclades, in a sustainable and meaningful way. That’s how the idea of the Cycladic Identity initiative was born. We feel that it is important to be part of the Cyclades, to protect them in order to preserve their Cycladic identity. Our goal is to stay close to local communities and to identify their needs. To be their supporters and their partners. Today, local societies are more vulnerable than ever to increased tourism, the abandonment of traditional customs and their rituals, but also climate change. Cycladic Identity seeks to provide the means and motivate the islanders to actively participate in the preservation of their own heritage. Its elements are what has shaped local communities from the past to the present and hold the potential to lead them to a sustainable future.”

At the beginning of its action, Cycladic Identity addressed an invitation to the representatives of the local government of the islands and presented its vision and operating mechanism to mayors, deputy mayors, and councilors. The initiative also met and discussed with 34 organizations that it subsequently invited to participate in the call that opened at the beginning of the year. The submission deadline was February 20, 2023, and Cycladic Identity received 24 complete program applications, covering a total of 14 islands within the Cyclades. These applications were evaluated on the basis of a predetermined list of criteria by the members of the Scientific Committee and on March 31, nine proposals were selected on eight Cycladic islands, specifically Amorgos, Andros, Donoussa, Ios, Kea (two programs), Mykonos, Paros, and Sikinos.

The programs are: Ancient Quarries of Paros – Stability and Accessibility of Underground Tunnels by the NGO Paros Ancient Marble Quarries Park; Traditional Water Management Practices in the Central Mountainous Area of Andros: Recording, Preservation, Interpretation and Promotion Actions by Andros Research Center; Recounting and Documenting the Art of Dry Stone Walling ('Xerolithia') by the Municipal Enterprise for the Environmental Protection, Education and Development of Mykonos; Recording Traditional Instrument Players of Kea to Safeguard, Preserve and Promote Traditional Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Municipal Public Benefit Organization of Kea; Development of a Website for Hosting, Maintaining, and Promoting the Oral History Archive of Donoussa by Poseidon Cultural and Environmental Association of Donoussa; Listen to the Story... by the Center for the Study & Dissemination of Myths & Folktales, Kea; Paths of Culture in Sikinos: Creation of a Navigation and Information Application by the Hellenic Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage; Intangible Cultural Heritage of Amorgos – Recording Traditions by the Municipal Public Benefit Organization of Amorgos; and Cycladic Youth Gaze by Cinemathesis, Ios.

The implementation of these programs has begun and is monitored through reports and field visits for the in-person confirmation of the works. The next funding period covers the year 2024 and concerns proposals to be submitted under the second call sent to the organizations in September. The selected programs will be announced at the beginning of the new year. More information is available online: www.cycladicidentity.gr

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



One of the most frightening manifestations of Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza is the fierce explosion of virulent antisemitism that has emerged, especially in the 'enlightened' West. Going far beyond any so-called protest on behalf of Gaza against the State of Israel, all demonstrations and anti-Israel rhetoric and actions involve loud and open cries to kill Jews, not just Israelis. This is unadulterated antisemitism of the worst kind that has shocked American Jewry in particular.

The fact is that Judaism and Jewish literature have always dealt with the hatred of Jews and Israel. And while there is no pat nor simple answer or explanation of the rhyme and reason of this eternal hatred of Jews among too many of the world's nations, reading our Sages' ideas and thoughts over the ages may help us better understand at least certain aspects of antisemitism and help us not only cope with our apprehensions and emotions as members of the Jewish nation, but also provide a glint of hope and help us understand how special we truly are.

One of those who deals with a very common aspect of antisemitism is the Sephardic Torah commentator name Rabbi Bahye ben Asher (Saragossa, Spain, 1255-1340). He relates to the experiences of our forefather Yitzhak in his encounter with Avimelech the King of Gerar, described in the Torah portion of "Vayeitze" read on November 25th, from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 26, verses 14-24. Incidentally, the Biblical Gerar is identified as today's Western Negev and the border with Gaza, making his thoughts particularly pertinent.

In this segment, the Bible describes how, as a result of Yitzhak gaining wealth and prosperity in Gerar thanks to his own hard work and God's help, the king, and people, of Gerar became jealous and hateful of Yitzhak. The action the people of Gerar take to express this jealousy and hate is to block and fill up the wells that our Father Avraham had dug many years before with dirt. It is clear from both the text and commentators, among them Rabbi Bahya, that the motivation for this destructive act was to ensure that Yitzhak and any future descendants would never be able to use these wells and continue to prosper. Yet in this act of pure jealousy and hate, the people of Gerar actually harmed themselves more than Yitzhak. Gerar is in the Negev, and water was and still remains a scarce commodity. Avraham had found and dug the wells for the benefit of the entire area and population, and not just for himself. And for years, the people of Gerar used and benefitted from this essential asset, as did Yitzhak when he first came to reside in Gerar. But the hatred and jealousy of Yitzhak's prosperity, which was associated with these wells, was so intense that the people willingly sacrificed their own livelihood in this despicable act. And so has been the pattern among antisemites since, reflected further on in Scripture in the story of Yakov and Lavan, Pharaoh and the Israelites, and many more. Such self-destructive behavior by antisemites continued throughout, no matter what the consequences for the persecuting power. One shining example of this lies in the dramatic and very harmful effects the Expulsion of the Jews of Spain had on Spanish economy at the time. Any in virtually every other case in history of other expulsions and massacres of entire Jewish communities, the subsequent economic downturn often harmed the persecutors much more than the persecuted. And one of the most recent and exceptionally clear examples of this phenomenon comes from Gaza itself. In the evacuation of the Jewish presence in Gaza in 2005, the IDF demolished private homes, but all synagogues, public buildings and greenhouses were left intact. Logic would hold that the Palestinians were utilize such invaluable resources to jumpstart their own economy and prosperity, building on the achievements of the now evacuated Jewish settlements. Yet the fierce hatred of Israel by the Palestinians led to the immediate and total destruction of all such facilities, leaving the Gaza strip with no possibility of self-support and economic prosperity, becoming one of the world's most dense and hopeless dens of poverty and hardship, from which it never recovered. Likewise, due to Hamas unbridled antisemitism and desire to destroy both Israel and Jews, any and all of the tens of billions of dollars and other resources "invested" by almost every foreign country in Gaza to build schools, factories, hospitals and more have been usurped by Hamas for the sole purpose of promoting hate, death, and destruction to Israel, its own citizens be damned. Astonishing as this may seem, we need only look at the precedent set by Avimelech of Gerar, where hate and jealousy of Israel and Jews override all logic and reason.

Yet despite being deterred, discouraged, and expelled from Gerar by Avimelech, Rabbi Bahya explains that Yitzhak's reaction was to move on and dig another well, and when that was also disputed, to dig another and another until Avimelech and his people relented. The Bible also informs us that Yitzhak gave the same names to the wells that Avraham had given, as opposed to choosing his own. In this act, Rabbi Bahya sees tremendous merit for Yitzhak, not only because it honored Avraham, but symbolized Yitzhak's determination and resolution to continue his father's legacy and mission to build the Jewish nation, despite all the difficulties. The parallel to today is clear. While antisemitism wears many hats and is rooted in a complex compendium of reasons and theories, the bottom line is that the Jewish nation, no matter what the circumstances, dangers, and miniscule chances, always 'dares' to succeed out of our belief in God's help and our tenacity to remain hopeful and loyal to the Abrahamic covenant and heritage. We must fight antisemitism with all our might and do our best to convince the entire world of the evil and danger of Jew hatred for humanity itself. But when faced with the most horrible manifestations of antisemitism, like Yitzhak, the Jewish response is to continue to build and rebuild, despite the tremendous and horrible price we pay for our determination. We have overcome every hateful obstacle, massacre, expulsion, and even attempted genocide against us, which in no small measure do to being directly affected and inspired by our ancestors' own experiences. And just like Yitzhak, we refuse to be defeated in fear and despair as we continue to live up to our legacy and heritage as descendants of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah. Not only does *"Am Yisrael Hai"* here and now, we will continue to live, build, rebuild, and prosper, and no hatred will deter us from this holy mission.



Rabbi Marc D. Angel
Light and Shadows: Thoughts for Hanukkah
JewishIdeas.org

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) records a famous debate between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel as to how to light the Hanukkah lights. Bet Shammai rules that we should light 8 lights the first night, and then subtract one light each ensuing night. After all, the original miracle of the oil in the Temple would have entailed the oil diminishing a bit each day.

Bet Hillel rules that we should light one light the first night, and then increase the number of lights night after night. (This is the accepted practice.) A reason is suggested: in matters of holiness, we increase rather than decrease. The miracle of Hanukkah is more beautifully observed with the increasing of lights; it would be anti-climactic to diminish the lights with each passing night.

Increasing lights is an appealing concept, both aesthetically and spiritually. But the increase of light might also be extended to refer to the increase in knowledge. The more we study, the more we are enlightened. When we cast light on a problem, we clarify the issues. We avoid falling into error. The more light we enjoy, the less we succumb to shadows and illusions.

Aesop wisely noted: Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow. It is all too easy to make mistaken judgments by chasing shadows rather than realities.

Professor Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner in Economics, has coined the phrase "illusion of validity." He points out that we tend to think that our own opinions and intuitions are correct. We tend to overlook hard data that contradict our worldview and to dismiss arguments that don't coincide with our own conception of things. We operate under the illusion that our ideas, insights, intuitions are valid; we don't let facts or opposing views get in our way.

The illusion of validity leads to innumerable errors, to wrong judgments, to unnecessary confrontations. If we could be more open and honest, self-reflective, willing to entertain new ideas and to correct erroneous assumptions—we would find ourselves in a better, happier and more humane world.

In her powerful book, "The March of Folly," Barbara Tuchman studied the destructive behavior of leaders from antiquity to the Vietnam War. She notes: "A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by government of policies contrary to their own interests." She points out: "Government remains the paramount area of folly because it is there that men seek power over others—only to lose it over themselves."

But why should people with political power succumb to policies that are wrong-headed and dangerous? Tuchman suggests that the lust for power is one ingredient in this folly. Another ingredient is an unwillingness to admit that one has made a misjudgment. Leaders keep pursuing bad policies and bad wars because they do not want to admit to the public that they've been wrong. So more people are hurt, and more generations are lost—all because the leaders won't brook dissent, won't consider other and better options, won't yield any of their power, won't admit that they might be wrong. These leaders are able to march into folly because the public at large allows them to get away with it. Until a vocal and fearless opposition arises, the "leaders" trample on the heads of the public. They are more concerned with their own power politics, than for the needs and wellbeing of their constituents.

The march of folly is not restricted to political power. It is evident in all types of organizational life. The leader or leaders make a decision; the decision is flawed; it causes dissension; it is based on the wrong factors. Yet, when confronted with their mistake, they will not back down. They have invested their own egos in their decision and will not admit that they were wrong. Damage—sometimes irreparable damage—ensues, causing the organization or institution to diminish or to become unfaithful to its original mission. The leader/s march deeper and deeper into folly; they refuse to see the light.

Bet Hillel taught the importance of increasing light. Shedding more light leads to clearer thinking. It enables people to see errors, to cast off shadows and cling to truth.

It takes great wisdom and courage to avoid having the illusion of validity. It takes great wisdom and courage to evaluate and re-evaluate decisions, to shed honest light on the situation, to be flexible enough to change direction when the light of reason so demands.

The lights of Hanukkah remind us of the importance of increasing the light of holiness and knowledge. As we learn to increase light, we learn to seek reality and truth---and to avoid grasping at shadows and illusions.

News from Our Community

Ethan Marcus, Managing Director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, spent an extraordinary week and Shabbaton visiting with the Sephardic Community of Cape Town, South Africa a vibrant and historic Ladino-speaking Sephardic Kahal. The Sephardi Hebrew Congregation of Cape Town, originally founded by Jews from the Island of Rhodes and Turkey who immigrated to the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and South Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the early 20th century, is the only Sephardic synagogue in Cape Town.

200 Families strong, the Sephardic Community of Cape Town is doing extraordinary things, with dozens of native Ladino-speakers still actively teaching their children and grandchildren the importance of their Sephardic traditions, daily Sephardic minyanim, and delicious borekitas baked every week!

Ethan had the opportunity to meet with the Community leadership, discussing new innovative project ideas for historic preservation, Ladino language cultivation, Sephardic children's education, and telling the history of the Sepharadim of Africa. He toured the Holocaust Museum of Cape Town and the Jewish Museum of Cape Town, discussing how to better represent the Sephardic experiences in both museums. He met with the Head of School of the city's main Jewish High School, sharing new educational resources that can be integrated into the Jewish Studies curriculum.

He had the extraordinary opportunity to meet with the senior members of the Community, including Jojo Mallel, Ray Hasson, Lucie Soriano, and Rhodesli Holocaust survivor Lina Amato, among many others. On Shabbat, he spoke to a crowd of over 120 people on the importance of building a global Sephardic community, investing in Sephardic youth education, and connecting with de los maestros throughout the United States.

A big thank you to the leadership of the Sephardi Hebrew Congregation of Cape Town, Peter Greenberg, Avi Levy, Cedric Castro, Serge Franco, Luis Levy, and Julian Segall for the incredibly warm welcome. Special thank you to the hard work of Rabbi Naftali Silver and Office Manager Elisa Meltz for making this visit possible, and Si Kere El Dio - to many more exciting things to come!



New Website for the Jewish Museum of Kastoria

Moments frozen in time: The nostalgic charm of daily life in 1930s Kastoria. Echoes of the Past: Ordinary life, extraordinary stories in 1930s Kastoria. Discover more at <https://eran-jmk.com/en/>



The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War Message from Linda Matsa Berger

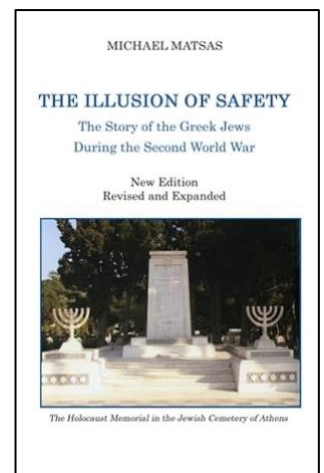
Dear Friends and Family,

Two years ago, my father decided to republish his book, *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*, because there had been a resurgence of Holocaust deniers, increasing antisemitism and low rates of Holocaust education. He felt it was important to learn the stories of the survivors, the victims, and the resistance fighters so that their memories would be preserved and so that the horrors of the past would not happen again.

Dad has created a small webpage to go along with his new book. In it he created an index of what he feels are some of the most important people, places and events. The page numbers correspond to the new edition. In addition, we have collected some of his online interviews and published articles. The page can be viewed at illusionofsafetygreece.com. If you know of someone interested in the subject, please share.

Warm regards,
Linda Berger

Kehila Kedosha Janina is proud to sell the latest edition of "The Illusion of Safety" at the special price of \$20 including P&H. Contact us for a copy at museum@kkjasm.org



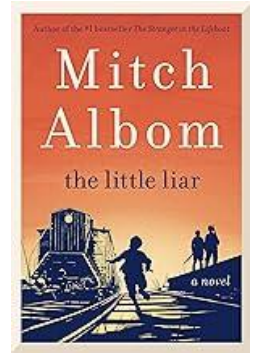
New Book

Mitch Albom enters new Jewish territory with Holocaust novel 'The Little Liar'

(JTA) — For more than two decades, Mitch Albom has been perhaps the best-selling Jewish author alive — even as his books tend to embrace a much broader and more amorphous definition of “faith.”

But now, Albom says he’s ready to embrace his “obligation” as a Jewish writer: to publish a novel set during the Holocaust.

“The Little Liar,” which comes out on Tuesday, follows an innocent 11-year-old Greek Jewish boy named Nico, who is tricked by Nazis into lying to his fellow Jews about the final destination of the trains they are forced to board. It was written before Oct. 7 but comes at a time when Jews are again grappling with the aftermath of tragedy in the wake of Hamas’ attack on Israel and Israel’s ensuing war against the terror group in Gaza.



Albom is a Jewish day school alumnus, and Judaism has featured in his prior books, if less centrally. “Tuesdays With Morrie,” his 1997 memoir that rocketed up the bestseller charts and made him a household name, focused on his relationship with Morrie Schwartz, his Jewish mentor at Brandeis University. A follow-up memoir, 2009’s “Have A Little Faith,” discussed Albom’s relationship with his childhood rabbi, interspersed with his friendship with a local priest. He has also involved Jewish faith leaders in his many charities, including an orphanage he runs in Haiti, to which he has flown Rabbi Steven Lindemann of New Jersey’s Temple Beth Shalom.

In his fiction, though, the Detroit author, sportswriter, radio personality and philanthropist has taken a more ecumenical approach to morality and the afterlife. Sometimes Albom’s characters wander through heaven, which can be a physical place (“The Five People You Meet In Heaven” and its sequel). Sometimes they are granted the ability to spend time with their dead relatives (“For One More Day”), are admonished for turning their backs on Godly ideas like living each moment to its fullest (“The Time Keeper”), or are asked to put their blind faith in figures who may or may not themselves be God (“The Stranger In The Lifeboat”).

“The Little Liar,” by contrast, is a squarely Jewish story. Like the 1969 Holocaust novel “Jacob the Liar,” by Jurek Becker, the story pivots on a Jew lying to his people about the Nazis. But unlike other Holocaust novels, Albom traces the repercussions of that moment for decades following the events of the Holocaust itself, through four central characters who wrestle with the trauma and violence of their past.

Even as it includes a great deal of historical detail — from the descriptions of the thriving prewar Jewish community of Salonika, Greece, to several real-life figures such as the Hungarian actress and humanitarian Katalin Kárády and Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal — the book also has plenty of Albom-isms. It’s largely structured as a giant morality tale about the nature of truth and lies, and is narrated by “Truth” itself. Aphorisms like “Truth be told” abound throughout the text.

“I didn’t want to write a ‘Holocaust book’ per se,” Albom told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency during a phone conversation earlier this fall. “With each one of my books, I tried to have some sort of overriding theme that I wanted to explore and that I thought might be inspirational to people.”

Yet he admits that, “as a Jewish writer,” he felt compelled by the subject matter to create “a small, small, small contribution to getting people not to forget what happened.”

This interview was conducted prior to the Oct. 7 Hamas attack in Israel and has been edited for length and clarity.

JTA: You’ve written two memoirs about Jewish mentors of yours, but this is the first time you’ve incorporated Judaism so openly into your fiction. Can you tell me about your own Jewish upbringing?

Albom: I was raised in South Jersey and Philadelphia. Growing up I had what I think would be kind of a typical Jewish upbringing of that time, during the 60s and 70s. [At] 11 years old, I was sent to a Jewish day school. Half the day was just Jewish studies in Hebrew. And in fact, it was mostly done in Hebrew, and so for from sixth grade until 11th grade, with the exception of one year where I left and went to public school, I went to that school.

So I had a very deep and thorough Jewish education. We learned everything from not only Hebrew and Jewish studies and Jewish history and things like that, but we learned to read the commentary on the Torah... I had to learn those letters. Don't ask me to do it now, but I was pretty in-depth: Moses, Maimonides and all that. So I graduated and I went to Brandeis University, which was a still predominantly Jewish school.

At that point, having spent so much time with my Jewish roots and education, I kind of put a lid on it, and said, "OK, that's enough." And I wasn't particularly practicing from that point for a couple of decades. It wasn't really until I wrote the book "Have A Little Faith," [when] my childhood rabbi asked me to write his eulogy, I got more drawn back to my Judaism.

Why did you decide to tell a Holocaust story now?

I think as a Jewish writer, I almost felt an obligation, before my career was over, to create a story that hopefully would be memorable enough, set during the Holocaust. That it would be a small, small, small contribution to getting people not to forget what happened. And people tend to remember stories longer than they remember facts. I think people remember "The Diary of Anne Frank" longer than they remember statistical numbers of how many Jews were slaughtered or how many homes were destroyed by the Nazis.

But it took me until now to find a story that I felt hadn't already been done. There's so many books now. And even there's been a recent rash of them over the last five to 10 years, you know, "The Tattooist of Auschwitz" and "The Librarian of Auschwitz," many other things, all of which are great books and wonderful reads. But I just felt like so much ground had been covered that I couldn't really come up with an original setting, original idea, until "The Little Liar."

Something that sets this book apart from the others you mentioned is the setting of Salonika, the Greek city where the vast majority of its 50,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis. What drew you to that as a setting?

Two things. One, I lived in Greece when I got out of college. Through a series of weird and unfortunate events, I ended up as a singer and a piano player on the island of Crete. I could just spend my days in the sunshine and eating the amazing food and being amongst the amazing people. So I've always loved Greece. And number two was, I didn't want to tell a story that began in Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto, all the familiar backdrops. I just didn't want to tell a story that people said, "I've kind of seen this before." So I thought, well, this will be fresh. I'll be able to at least get people to, if nothing else, when they close the book, say, "I had no idea that the largest Jewish majority population sitting in Europe was Salonika, Greece, and even that was wiped out by the Nazis."

If there was ever a city that looked like it was impenetrable, it would have been that one. Go back to 300 BCE, and there are Jews. They have been there for so long, and yet the Nazis wipe them out in about a year or less.

Crafting entirely fictional narratives around the Holocaust is pretty fraught territory. I've interviewed John Boyne, the author of "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas," about some of the backlash he's gotten. What was your own approach to doing this in a sensitive way?

First of all, there's no such thing as "purely fictional" when you're coming to a Holocaust story, because you're setting it during a real event. So you have to rely on real accounts, from people and books, in order to create a world that feels real. I don't think anybody could write a Holocaust story and never have read a Holocaust book, never have listened to a Holocaust survivor, just sat in a room and imagined what this event might be like — just as you don't set a book during the Civil War and not study the Civil War.

For me the premise of the book was what came first, and I should point out, I didn't want to write a "Holocaust book" per se. With each one of my books, I tried to have some sort of overriding theme that I wanted to explore and that I thought might be inspirational to people. And the theme with this one had to do with truth and lies, and that actually goes back to the original inspiration of it, which was a visit to Yad Vashem.

You know, they have the videos on the walls and different people telling stories, and there was a woman who was telling the story about the train platforms, and she said that the Nazis would sometimes use Jews to calm the people on the train platforms and to lie to them to say everything's going to be alright, you can trust these trains, you're going to be OK. And that stayed in my mind, more than anything that I saw. Just the idea of being tricked into lying to your own people about their doom. I thought, one day I want to write a story that centers on someone who had to do that, and what would that do to their sense of truth.

You don't end the narrative with the liberation of the camps; the story continues decades later. There are scenes of a Jewish character trying to reclaim his old home, of America sheltering Nazis after the war. These are the parts of the history of the Holocaust that I think are harder for people today to come to terms with.

Yeah, that was another way I wanted to make the story fresher. I didn't want it to begin with the night that the house was invaded and end with the day that the camps were liberated. I wanted to begin it before that, which I did, and I wanted to end it way after that.

I went to Salonika and I talked with people there about what happened when the Jews came back and, did they get their businesses back? Did they get their houses back? No, the businesses were gone and were given away. The houses, most of the time, were already sold off to somebody else. And I thought, sometimes we think the whole story, the Holocaust, the price that people paid, it ends on the day of liberation, and everybody runs crying and hugging and kissing into each other's arms and now we're free. We're free. In many ways, that's when the problems began, you know, and a whole different set of problems.

I've known survivors all my life. I grew up with them in my neighborhood and interviewed many of them over the years, and they've told me about their haunted dreams and sometimes in the middle of the night they just wake up, or in the middle of the day, just start crying, or how certain things they don't want to talk about. And so I tried to be respectful and reflect some of those challenges in the years after the Holocaust, because I don't think you can tell a complete story, at least not one about survivors, if you don't talk about what happened to them after they tried to resume their normal lives.

In the book you point out that the Holocaust was built on a "big lie." You're framing truth as the ultimate ideal. But of course your Jewish characters are also surviving the war in part by lying about their identities. And we know that's true of many real-life Holocaust survivors as well. Do you see that as a contradiction?

No, I see it as fascinating. You know, it's a fascinating interwoven web of truth and deception. There is nobody who has never told a lie on this earth. And that's why Nico was kind of a magical character to begin with. He's 11 years old and has never told a lie — he's almost an angel. And that's where the parable feel to the story comes in.

Your writing has become associated with the concept of "faith," and in your fiction you often render heaven as a physical place where the dead are finding ways to interact with the living. Is that a more Christian outlook on the afterlife, even though you say you were inspired by a vision an uncle of yours had about his own relatives? How do you think about your own depictions of heaven?

Well, the books that I've written about heaven, there was "The Five People You Meet in Heaven," "The Next Person You Meet in Heaven," which was a sequel to it, and "The First Phone Call From Heaven," which, if you read that book, you know that it isn't what it seems. You know, I always looked at "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" as kind of a fable. My uncle Eddie, who was the main character — it wasn't a true story but he inspired the character. He had told me a story that he had had an incident where he had died on an operating table. For a brief moment, he remembered floating above his body and seeing all of his dead relatives waiting for him at the edge of the operating table. So I always had that story in mind whenever I would think of him. It was meant to be a fable about how we all interact with one another.

A lot of Christians have embraced your work, right?

A lot of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and atheists.

I've seen evangelical writers refer to your body of work as part of a "Judeo-Christian tradition," which is a term a lot of Jews have different kinds of feelings about. Do you think about the faith of your readers at all, or how they perceive your faith?

I write for anybody in the world who has a desire to read my book. I welcome them. I would never make a judgment on any reader. I'm happy to have someone pick up my book and read it.

Kehila Kedosha Janina is selling this book for \$25 including P&H. Email us at museum@kkjms.org if you are interested.

New Website Celebrating the Jewish Legacy in the Middle East and North Africa

Check out this important new website Celebrating the Jewish Legacy in the Middle East and North Africa, presented by our dear friend Rabbi Isaac Choua.

For too long, the significant contributions of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been overlooked. As artists, intellectuals, and musicians, they have been central to the cultural and societal fabric of the region for centuries. We're excited to announce a new website dedicated to exploring and illuminating this rich history. It not only highlights their profound impact but also delves into the complex narratives that have shaped the MENA region.

This is just the beginning. We plan to expand the website with more countries and notable figures, as we continue to explore this vast and intricate history. Join us in this journey of discovery and understanding.

<https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/legacy-of-jews-in-MENA>



Closing with a positive note. We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, as individuals and as an institution, support Israel. We will continue in every way that support. Many of us have families in Israel and have been devastated by what has happened. We must remember that Israel is strong and we will come out of this even stronger. When we say "Never Again," it will now include the recent atrocities of Hamas and the completely unacceptable anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric of universities and other educational institutions in our own country, in our own city. Before you make a financial donation in support of your alma mater, check what their policies are and whether they are allowing students on their campuses to denounce Israel without condemning that rhetoric.

Do remember that we have friends and support these friends.



We are so proud of our community's turnout in Washington DC for the support of Israel.

עם ישראל חי

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. **You can do this online on our website: 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 177
December 2023
Kehila Kedosha Janina
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