



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## November 2023 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

On October 7th, just before the beginning of Simchat Torah, the day when Jews around the world begin the celebration of the "Joy" of the Torah, Israel was brutally attacked by Hamas, as they entered kibbutzim, slaughtering Israeli families and gunning down young people attending a concert in the south of Israel. In addition, over 200 Israeli hostages were taken into Gaza. This E-Newsletter is, therefore, quite different. We will, as always, give you news of importance to Greek Jews around the world with upcoming events, and coverage of past events, but a good portion of this newsletter will be devoted to the ongoing war. We pray for the safety and success of the IDF, we pray for the safe return of all the hostages, we pray for the recovery of all those who are wounded, and we pray for peace in Israel.

**WE STAND**



**WITH ISRAEL**

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This newsletter, our 176<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.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@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email [amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjsm.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@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org).

## Simchas

This is Shiloh Asher (Great-Grandfather Oscar's birth name) Donenfeld. Son of Emmeline and Edan Donenfeld, Great-Great-Great grandson of Jessula Mattathias Colchamiro and Rachel Galanos Colchamiro, Great Grandson of Muriel and Oscar Colchamiro, Grandson of Pearl and Walter Pappas, nephew of Jane Pappas. Born in Israel the week that War was declared, his name means "peaceful one". Let us hope he and this new generation obtain peace in their time.



Am Yisrael Chai



Our dear friend, Marc Calderon was blessed with his second grandson, Lucas Dylan Calderon, born on October 4<sup>th</sup>. Lucas' parents are Michael and Roxanne Calderon.

We celebrate the birth of a new member of the Genee Family. Michael and Belinda Genee are thrilled to announce the birth of their beautiful granddaughter, Ellie Leah Genee born on October 20, 2023. Ellie is the daughter of Ryan and Erika Genee, and the great granddaughter of Sally & Abe Genee, of blessed memory. We are waiting for a picture of the beautiful baby.

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## Passings

We mourn the passing of Roslyn Honan. Roslyn was born 7/9/1928 and passed on October 7, 2023 at the age of 95. She was the daughter of Morris Vitoulis and Lydia Saporta, and the granddaughter of Morris Samuel Vitoulis and Esther Cohen Vitoulis. She was the widow of Rabbi Bernard Honan. We are grateful to her daughter, Sarah Crocker, for this touching obituary:



"On behalf of my brother and sister, I would like to thank you all for coming out today to support our family. My mother, Roslyn Honan, was an amazing person. She was born in the Bronx, New York, to Morris and Lydia Saporta Vitoulis, who were both from Greece. Roslyn has an older sister, Evelyn, and a younger brother, Sam. They had lots of aunts, uncles and cousins that all lived mostly within a few blocks of each other. They were all a very close family.

Mom was very proud that she was able to attend Hunter College in New York, and receive her undergraduate degree, and then go on to receive her master's degree in special education from the University of Alabama. She went on to teach special education. She was a very compassionate and gentle lady and all of her students loved her and hugged her when they saw her.



Mom loved people and especially children. Whenever we would go to a restaurant, if she saw a child, she would stop and talk to them. Sometimes she would even sing to them. She used to love to sing karaoke every Tues. Her favorite songs were New York, New York, and L.O.V.E. We would listen to a lot of different music, Il Divo (one of her favorite groups), Greek and Spanish music, even songs like Viva la Vida by Cold Play.

When mom and I were alone at home, we would talk about her old memories of Van Cortland Park in NY, and the Greek weekends there. Most of her family and friends would bring a picnic lunch/dinner and they would sing and dance to the music they knew. She still talked about those days.



She met the love of her life, Bernie, on a blind date at a mutual friend of each of their family's home. They fell in love and married on their 3rd date, since dad lived in VA and mom was living in NY, and it would be difficult for them to see each other. She was the perfect rebbetzin to the most wonderful rabbi. They had 3 children, Sara, Michael, and Lydia, whom they adored. We did everything together as a family and loved and supported each other, no matter what. We moved 4 times from the time we were born through my college years. No matter where we were, we stayed very close as a family and with our cousins, aunts, and uncles. We would spend as much time as possible with our extended families, but it was a little difficult, since they lived in NY and we were living far away. No matter what the situation, we stayed close. When I lost my father, and when my mother was dying, my siblings, niece, nephew, aunts, uncle, and my cousins stayed connected to see how mom and I were doing. They will never know how much I appreciated them. My brother, Michael, sister, Lydia, my husband, Charlie, sister-in-law, Roxanne, niece, Rachel and her husband, Parker, and nephew, Benjamin were my rocks. They called, brought me food, made sure that things that needed to be taken care of got done. Mom loved you all and was so proud of you.

Mom loved her friends and tried to treat them like family. She had a friend from the neighborhood that would call to see if she wanted to go for a walk around the community. Mom looked forward to those calls, walks and talks. She would always go with me when I would meet friends for coffee or lunch. She had another very dear friend that would send her the most beautiful pop-up cards and flowers that she loved. Another couple would take mom out so that Charlie and I could attend an event. I want to personally thank all of you for your calls and cards over the years and always asking about her.

I got to share special names with my mother, such as Kouklamou and Dollymou. Koukla means doll and mou means my in Greek. I never knew if she was going to be Kouklamou or Dollymou and I would be the other. Mom lived life to the fullest every day of her life....that is how I will remember her.

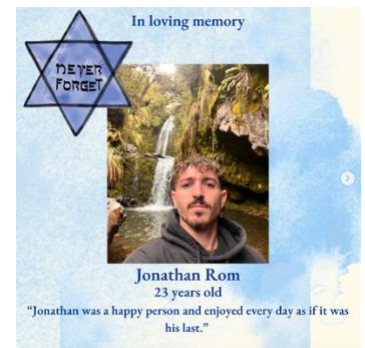
I would also like to thank a very special set of angels, my longtime friends who were by my side the whole time and the people at Huntsville Hospital Hospice Family Cares, including both the in home and in-patient groups. I do not know what I would have done without you. Thank you all so much for your help and support.

In closing, I have to share 2 stories with you. Upon moving from the hospital to the hospice facility, I told mom that we were going on vacation and had a beautiful hotel to go to and that we had some people that were going to move us to the hotel. The ambulance driver took the least bumpy roads that he could, but mom was not thrilled with the transportation since she had broken ribs and the least little bump hurt her. When they moved her into her bed at the hospice facility, she said she was never going on vacation again.

The last thing that I want to share with you was when I was on my way home at 3:30 am, after she passed away, I got to the bottom of the Hampton Cove side of Cecil Ashburn, and I saw my father on the right side of my windshield with the biggest smile on his face and my mother was coming towards him from the left side. This is how their beautiful love story came to an end, but continues with no pain. It is such a comfort to me to know they are together again for eternity.

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We mourn along with the entire nation of Israel for the more than 1,400 innocent souls killed on October 7<sup>th</sup>. We must remember each individual and the lives cut short. These are just a few faces of the unbearable number of those lost. May their memory be for a blessing. [This page](#) is dedicated to shedding light on the beautiful souls lost during the Hamas terror attacks on Israel to make sure they are never forgotten.





## Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

October was a very busy month with hundreds of visitors and multiple tour groups. We now have a wait list for our lunch tours! We had a beautiful group from Nyack on Oct 22 and a group from Westchester on Oct 29. In addition, on Oct 22 we were proud to participate in the annual citywide program Open House New York, which features unique landmarks and historic sites across the city, when we welcomed more than 100 visitors. Group tour dates are booked through the end of the year, and we are now booking for the Spring. In light of the threats going on around the world and in New York City, we have increased our security and are in continual contact with the NYPD.



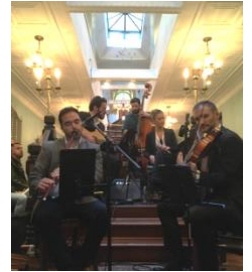
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## Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On October 15 we hosted a moving concert led by the musical group Sounds of Cyprus. All proceeds raised were donated to the Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces. The Board of Kehila Kedosha Janina has also voted to send additional funds to Israel. At a time when help and friends are most needed, we were so glad that our dear friends from Cyprus were able to join in this aid. Sounds of Cyprus is a special group, playing beautiful Cypriot music and showing their love for Israel by joining us in this venture.



Kehila Kedosha Janina in partnership with the Consulate General of Cyprus in New York hosted a beautiful Concert of Cypriot music this past Sunday thanks to the Sounds of Cyprus Band. The program began with community prayers for the State of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces, and for the safe release and return of the more than 200 people currently held captive in Gaza. Avram Pengas led us in singing Hatikvah. Proceeds gathered from the concert are being donated to help aid our fellow Jews in Israel. You can watch two video clips from the concert on our Facebook page [Here](#).



## Past Events in New York

The Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst hosted a special exhibit on the Jews of Rhodes organized in partnership with the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation. Over 160 religious, cultural, historical, and communal artifacts were on display curated by Aron Hasson. The exhibition was followed by a presentation by Aron and a delicious Rhodesli lunch, with a special appearance made by the incredible Stella Levi, a 100 year old survivor from the Island of Rhodes. Thanks go to the entire Sephardic Temple team, Rabbi Steven Golden, Lloyd Denenberg, Isaac Mayo, and Howie Franco for bringing this event to the New York community.



## Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

We are honored to host Rabbi Marc Angel, Rabbi Emeritus at Congregation Shearith Israel, as he presents his latest book, "Sephardim, Sephardism, and Jewish Peoplehood." The event will take place at Kehila Kedosha Janina on Sunday November 19 at 2pm. Signed books will be available. Please RSVP to [Museum@kkjism.org](mailto:Museum@kkjism.org)

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM  
IS HONORED TO WELCOME

**RABBI MARC D. ANGEL**

FOR A SPECIAL PRESENTATION  
ON HIS LATEST BOOK

**SEPHARDIM SEPHARDISM  
AND JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD**



**SUNDAY NOVEMBER 19 AT 2PM**  
**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA**  
**280 BROOME STREET NYC**

"Imagine an authentic vision of Judaism fully rooted in tradition. A vision that properly represents the particularistic covenant between God and Israel through the Torah and halakhah. A vision that properly represents the universalistic aspect of God as Creator of the entire cosmos, where Israel has a role to play in the community of nations. A vision that learns from the best of traditional Jewish thinkers - Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and beyond, so that we may broaden our discourse in discussing complex contemporary issues.

For over half of a century, Rabbi Marc D. Angel has taught that we can realize this vision. After a long and distinguished career as Rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, he founded the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals in 2007 to promote his religious worldview to a much wider audience." - Rabbi Hayyim Angel

This newly published collection of articles reflects many of Rabbi Angel's "greatest hits" in representing his grand religious worldview, his Sephardic role models, and the central tenets promoted through the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

**SIGNED BOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE.**  
**REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED. RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG**



## Upcoming Events in the New York City Area

### An Evening Honoring Sephardic Culture

In partnership with the Consulate General of Spain, the World Jewish Congress cordially invites you to an evening Honoring Sephardic Heritage and Jewish Life in Spain.

Date: Wednesday November 15, 2023 at 6:30pm

Location: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place, New York, NY 10280

Event Highlights include: Live Performance by Sarah Aroeste, Panel Discussion on the historical and current ties between Spain and Sephardic Jewry with our dear friend Rabbi Isaac Choua participating, and a Reception with Sephardic cuisine featuring an exquisite blend of flavors and spices.

The event is hosted in partnership with:



Sarah Aroeste

RSVP Here: <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/honoring-sephardic-heritage>





**Greek Jewish & Sephardic  
Young Professionals Network**

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

# **SEPHARDIC YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SHABBAT LUNCH**

**SATURDAY NOVEMBER 4  
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

**10AM - SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES**

**12:30PM - LUNCH**

**2PM - TOUR OF KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA MUSEUM**



**JOIN US TO WELCOME ACCOMPLISHED SEPHARDIC COLLEGE  
STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE US THROUGH THE SEPHARDI  
HOUSE FELLOWSHIP AND CONNECT WITH OTHER YOUNG  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS WE CELEBRATE SHABBAT.  
ENJOY A DELICIOUS TRADITIONAL GREEK JEWISH LUNCH**

**SPACE IS LIMITED**

**OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR 20s AND 30s**

**RSVP TO [AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG](mailto:AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG)**





**Greek Jewish & Sephardic  
Young Professionals Network**

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

# **BEAR MOUNTAIN FALL NATURE HIKE**

**SUNDAY NOVEMBER 12  
ANTHONY'S NOSE, BEAR MOUNTAIN NY**

**ESCAPE THE CITY FOR THE DAY AS WE VISIT TRAILS IN THE  
HUDSON VALLEY AND ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL FALL FOLIAGE**



**FULL DETAILS PROVIDED WITH RSVP  
OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR 20'S AND 30'S  
RSVP TO [GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM)**



THE  
SEPHARDIC JEWISH  
BROTHERHOOD OF AMERICA

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO OUR

# International Sephardic Community Gala

AN EVENING DEDICATED TO BUILDING THE  
NEXT GENERATION OF SEPHARDIC LIFE



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023

6:00 P.M.

MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE:  
A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST  
36 BATTERY PLACE, NEW YORK CITY

## Guests of Honor



RABBI MARC D. ANGEL  
COMMUNITY LEADER &  
SEPHARDIC EDUCATOR



HOWARD BEHAR  
FOUNDING PRESIDENT  
STARBUCKS INTERNATIONAL



DR. DEVIN E. NAAR  
PROFESSOR OF  
SEPHARDIC STUDIES

EARLY BIRD TICKETS UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30 - \$250

GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS - \$360

YOUNG ADULT TICKET - UNDER 35 - \$180

ORDER TICKETS ONLINE AT

[WWW.SEPHARDICBROTHERHOOD.COM/GALA](http://WWW.SEPHARDICBROTHERHOOD.COM/GALA)

## News from Jewish Greece

### Athens

Greece Stands with Israel  
The flag of the State of Israel projected on the Greek Parliament



"Our lives changed as we knew them. Never again was actually happening. Like everyone, Israelis and Jews living in the diaspora, we are horrified, angry, sad, frustrated, puzzled at the massacres taking place in Israel, thinking of our loved ones there and the 229 kidnapped innocent Israelis. We, the Jews in Greece, have been impacted as well. As always. We didn't think we will as this was a clear violent one sided act but... Communities and Jews across Europe and USA have been also struggling with rising antisemitism, hidden for as long as Israel was strong and thriving, but reappearing at a blink of an eye when they "found" the chance. But we are working hard to support Israel on several fronts: through the media with many of us speaking up, organising solidarity events, raising funds, collecting supplies, increasing local security measures and assisting Israeli families arriving to Athens in any way we can. Lots of them! We need to find the strength to continue, as all our ancestors did, thriving again and again against the various enemies throughout history. And we will thrive again, because Kol Yisrael Arevim Ze La Ze and Am Israel Chai!"

- Taly Mair, Director Alvertos Taraboulous, President

### Memorial service held at the Athens Synagogue for the victims of the Hamas Attack

In an emotional atmosphere, a memorial service was held at the Jewish Synagogue of Athens on 12.10.2023 for the victims of Hamas' attack against Israel. "We came here today to the Synagogue of Athens to express our sympathy with the grief of the families in Israel who are mourning the loss of newborn babies, children, siblings, parents, grandparents who were brutally massacred and murdered by Hamas terrorists," said the secretary-general of the Central Jewish Council of Greece, Victor Eliezer, shortly before the rabbi of Athens proceeded with the memorial service, praying, among other things, for "true just and lasting peace". Israel's ambassador to Athens, Noam Katz, after thanking for the solidarity, underlined by gleaning some of the tragic stories that have become known in recent days, that "every Israeli has felt the impact" of the Hamas attack. "Our families are hiding in shelters and many have been called to duty," Katz said. "The barbarity of Hamas' attack on Israel is beyond imagination. More than 1,200 innocent Israelis, men, women, children, have been brutally murdered in their homes, at music festivals, in the streets. For many of them we do not know their names. But we have to remember each one individually," Katz said. "Hamas exposed its true nature as a genocidal, murderous, criminal organization, as ISIS of Gaza. Hamas is ISIS," Israel's ambassador to Athens said. He also thanked Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the Greek people for their solidarity. "Today we have gathered to remember those who lost their





lives. Also, to strengthen our resolve, together with the support of the international community. We will prevail against the forces of terrorism and extremism. Let this be a demonstration of the resilience of democracy and the unbreakable will of the Israeli people. Life will prevail," Katz concluded.

The president of the Central Jewish Council of Greece, David Saltiel, said he was "shocked by the unprecedented events that have unfolded in recent days in the state of Israel," adding that "unprecedented savagery and merciless hatred have wiped out any meaning of the word man." "Behind the masked and uncovered faces of the brutal murderers, there was hatred and hatred against Jews, without any discrimination whatsoever." Men, women and children had to be executed, beheaded, pilloried, deprived of any trace of dignity. They were no different from the Nazis. They are their successors," Saltiel said. He appealed to the international community not to remain "apathetic as it was then, when Jews are deported to Nazi extermination camps" and stressed: "Do everything possible to free the 200 Israeli hostages held by terrorists and no one knows what their fate is. Stand by Israel in the struggle for its existence, for its survival."



"I wish we didn't all have to be here today in these circumstances. If only terrorist attacks, heinous and unholy crimes committed in recent days against Israeli civilians and defenseless civilians, remained a thing of the past. I wish we did not unjustly mourn so many human lives," said the president of the Jewish Community of Athens, Albertos Taraboulou. He stressed that "the rise of terrorism does not start or stop in Israeli territory. It is a threat to human civilization, international peace and global cohesion. At this time, our duty is to remain united and committed everywhere in the world against our common enemy." Moreover, he welcomed the "warm support of the Greek state to the Israeli people from the very first moment" and concluded: "Let's finally build a world that does not have to cost human lives."



Present at the event were the President of the Parliament Konstantinos Tassoulas, the Minister of State Makis Voriadis, the Minister of Tourism Olga Kefalogianni, the Minister of Interior Niki Kerameus, the Minister of Labor Adonis Georgiadis, the Minister of Citizen Protection Yiannis Economou, MPs, representatives from SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance and PASOK, representatives of the City of Athens, the military leadership and Archbishop Ieronymos. As part of the memorial service, attendees observed a minute's silence while singing "The Song of Peace" and the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah, meaning hope, and the Greek national anthem were played. On their way out, those gathered lit candles in memory of the victims.

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### Sukkot Celebrations in Athens



## **Greek Prime Minister: 'Israel can count on our support and our help'**

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis met with his Israeli counterpart in Jerusalem.  
Oct 23, 2023 Full article [Here](#)

Last month Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated: "Prime Minister, my good friend, Kyriakos, it's very good to see you here. I always say that the best thing about standing with Israel is standing in Israel. And you're doing that. I appreciate the solidarity of you, your government, the people of Greece at this darkest hour. It's a battle against civilization. It's civilization against barbarism. We're on the side of civilization. We have to unite, all together, against Hamas, which is ISIS."



Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis stated, "Dear Bibi, I come here not just as an ally, but as a true friend. What happened was truly horrible, and we, from the very first moment, defended and supported the right of Israel to defend itself in line with international law. And we drew a very clear distinction between Hamas and the Palestinian people. We will continue to be able to support you and hope that whatever happens happens without too much of a humanitarian cost. But you can count on our support and our help."

The Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Director of the National Security Council, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, the Prime Minister's Military Secretary, the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser, and the Greek Foreign Minister, Minister of State, Diplomatic Adviser and Ambassador to Israel also attended the meeting.

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## **Thessaloniki**

We were greatly saddened to learn that one of the victims of the massacre at the music festival was Eden Ben Rubi, 23 years old. She lost her life during the Hamas attack on Israel's Supernova music festival.

A young woman born in Thessaloniki, Greece was found dead as a result of the Hamas attack on Israel's Supernova music festival. In total, more than 1,400 bodies of men and women were reportedly recovered. Friends and acquaintances shared their grief as they reflected on the life of the 23-year-old victim.



Details of this tragic incident became known to the Greek media from the story of a friend of hers. The Israeli woman, who was from Thessaloniki and had been living in Israel since she was a child, had spent every summer in Greece. She was among the approximately 3,500 young people who were at the music festival disrupted by Hamas terrorists. She, like other Supernova festival-goers, was reported to have attempted to escape. Unfortunately, as the woman ran, she was shot dead in the back. The Israeli Embassy in Greece confirmed the tragic situation, saying the victim, Eden Ben Rubi, was shot by Hamas militants as she ran for her life.

## **Anti-Semitic Graffiti in Thessaloniki**

On 24.10.2023, the President of KISE (Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece) and President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, David Saltiel, and Gen. Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Thessaloniki, Sibylla Bendig, participated in the erasure of anti-Semitic graffiti made a few days ago – on the occasion of Israel's war with the terrorist Hamas, on the mural on Michael Kalou Street, on the deportation of the Jews of Thessaloniki during the Holocaust.



The German Consul and the President of the Jewish Community erased the graffiti on the Holocaust mural. With brushes in their hands, symbolically the Consul General of Germany in Thessaloniki Sibyl Bendik and the president of the Central Jewish Council and the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki David Saltiel, erased the slogans written by unknown persons on the mural of the Holocaust of the Jews in Thessaloniki.

"I am shocked, anti-Semitism is unacceptable, especially in this city," German Consul Sibyl Bendik said, adding that "Germany stands with the Jewish community here and around the world. Those who vandalized the mural must be punished."

"We came symbolically to erase those anti-Semitic words they wrote on the mural of the Holocaust of the Jews, which has become a symbol for the city. We want to show that we are against anti-Semitism and racism. We are free people and we want to coexist together in love", underlined the president of the Central Jewish Council and the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, David Saltiel.

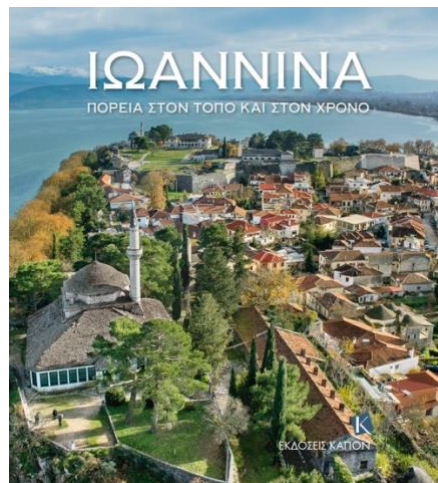
Referring to what is happening in Israel, he noted: "Israel for us is our second homeland. We support Israel's struggle for survival. More than 1,400 innocent people were brutally killed, and it was an event they had not foreseen and that means we must always be vigilant. It's a carnage." He stressed that "the Jewish community is not only supported by Germany and Greece, as the Prime Minister visited Israel yesterday, but also many states with the visit of their presidents and prime ministers supported Israel's just struggle for existence. Unfortunately they want to eliminate this state and it is not possible to return it."

Municipal crews have begun early in the morning the restoration of the mural honoring the victims of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki during World War II. With yellow paint, they erased slogans spray-painted by unknown persons against Jews and in favor of Gaza ("Free Gaza" and "Jews = Nazis").

Article [Here](#)

## Ioannina

Presentation of a new book by Capon Publishers, "Journey to the Place and Time." The presentation took place on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.



Ο Δήμος Ιωαννιτών και οι Εκδόσεις Καπόν σας προκαλούν στην παρουσίαση του βιβλίου

**IOANNINA**  
ΠΟΡΕΙΑ ΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΠΟ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΟΝ ΧΡΟΝΟ

την Δευτέρα, 23 Οκτωβρίου 2023, στις 7 μ.μ.  
στο ξενοδοχείο Grand Serai, Διαδώνης 33, Ιωάννινα

Χαιρετισμό θα απευθύνουν:  
Αίνα Μενδάνη, Υπουργός Πολιτισμού  
Δημήτρης Παπαγεωργίου, Δήμαρχος Ιωαννίνων

Συντονιστής-ομιλητής:  
Τάσος Τέλλογλου, Δημοσιογράφος

Ομιλητές:  
Ραχήλ Μισδραχά-Καπόν, Εκδότρια  
Βικτωρ Ισαάκ Ελιέζερ, Δημοσιογράφος -  
Γ. Γ. Κεντρικού Ισραηλτικού Σαββαίου Ελλάδας  
Ηλίας Καλοβός, Αναπληρωτής Καθηγητής, Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης  
Βαρβάρα Παπαδοπούλου, Δρ Αρχαιολόγος, Διευθύντρια Εφορείας  
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ΔΗΜΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΙΝΩΝ

## Turkey

### War in Israel: Erdogan's Dilemma

With the Palestinians and Hamas, or with the economic benefits of rapprochement with Israel? As much as he seeks to appear as a "mediator" for peace, the dramatic developments embarrass the Turkish president.

As much as he seeks to appear as a "mediator" for peace, the dramatic developments in Israel embarrass the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. On the one hand, his intense effort to re-approach Israel, bearing in mind the channeling of Israeli gas to Europe via Turkey, and on the other hand, the excellent relations he maintains with Hamas, which Israel and the West characterize as a terrorist organization.

Referring to the war in Israel and Erdogan's role, the German Press Network (RND) points out that it will be identified with the goals of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, which is now "dictated primarily by economic factors", according to the German network.

"For years, Erdogan presented himself as a protector of radical Islamist movements. After the fall of the Mursi government in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood was banned, Turkey hosted thousands of members of the Islamist movement. Today about 20,000 Egyptian Muslim Brothers live in exile in Turkey, while Erdogan naturalized many of them," RDN notes, stressing: "The Turkish president characterizes Hamas, which is considered an illegal terrorist organization, not only in the West but also in many Middle Eastern states, as a liberation movement. Israel, on the other hand, is often referred to as a "terrorist state," in rhetoric that time and time again takes on an anti-Semitic connotation.

However, as RND points out, "since last year, the head of the Turkish state has been seeking rapprochement with Egypt, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Israel. As far as Israel is concerned, energy policy plays a key role. Erdogan wants to funnel gas from Israeli areas to Western Europe via Turkish pipelines. In doing so, it seeks to thwart plans by Greece, Egypt and Cyprus to export gas from the eastern Mediterranean to Europe bypassing Turkey.

Analysts believe the Turkish president will not return to his extreme rhetoric against Israel, as happened after 2010 and the deadly raid by Israeli commandos against the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara and five other boats carrying humanitarian aid to the besieged Gaza Strip. At the time, Erdogan called Israel a "terrorist state," with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying Erdogan "is among Hamas' big supporters and certainly fully understands terrorism and massacres."

This was followed by a complete cooling of relations between Israel and Turkey, with the recall of ambassadors and extreme rhetoric between them. During this period, Ankara claimed an influential role in the Arab world as protector of the Palestinians, with Hamas operatives finding refuge on Turkish soil and receiving a Turkish passport. All this until recently, when Turkey made a thematic effort to rapprochement and improve its relations with Israel as well, aiming at the desired cooperation in the field of energy.

On Monday, at the inauguration of a church of the Syriac Orthodox community, Erdogan said he was seeking to intensify diplomatic efforts to achieve de-escalation in clashes between Israeli and Palestinian forces, stressing that "a two-state solution is the only way to achieve regional peace," designating Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state.

"The realization of an independent state of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with geographical integrity and with (eastern) Jerusalem as its capital, is a need that can no longer be postponed," he said, urging Israel and Hamas to "support peace" and protect civilians.





On Tuesday morning, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan had a phone call with his Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog, following an earlier conversation with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

According to a statement from the Turkish presidency, Erdogan stressed to Herzog that "any actions indiscriminately affecting the people of Gaza will intensify the suffering and further escalate violence in the region," calling for restraint.

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## 'Jews not allowed': As Erdogan praises Hamas, antisemitism rises on the ground in Turkey.

BY DAVID I. KLEIN AND MATT HANSON OCTOBER 30, 2023 Full article [Here](#)

ISTANBUL (JTA) — "Jews not allowed," read the sign in English and Turkish above Rağman Şahaf, a used book store next to Istanbul University and not far from the city's famed Grand Bazaar.

Even after the sign was taken down on Friday, the store's owner said he stuck by the message.

"I do not want to buy anything from Jews right now, I do not want to sell anything to Jews right now, this is how I tell them," Ozkan Mustafa Küçükkural told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "Maybe it should have said Zionist or Israeli, but I was angry and emotional," he added. "My brothers in Palestine are dying."



Anti-Israel banners and graffiti, along with Palestinian flags, have become commonplace across Istanbul, as many of its citizens fume over Israel's response to the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7 that left over 1,400 dead. Images have also circulated of taxis with signs saying that their drivers would not serve Israelis.

Antisemitic incidents have taken place beyond Istanbul, too. In Izmir — a city once home to tens of thousands of Jews now in the midst of a small-scale Jewish revival — a synagogue was defaced with graffiti that read "Murderer Israel" on Saturday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has had an up and down relationship with Israel over the course of his 20 years as Turkey's head of state, has come out firmly defending Hamas' actions on Oct. 7, calling the terrorist group a "a liberation group." In response, Israel recalled its diplomats from Turkey on Saturday.

It has all amounted to a tense atmosphere for Turkish Jews, who now number around 15,000 and descend mainly from Sephardic families but also include Ashkenazi, Romaniote and Mizrahi communities. That number was close to 80,000 in the founding year of Turkey's republic in 1923 — exactly 100 years ago on Sunday.

Antisemitic rhetoric has spread throughout Turkish politics, too. A day after a hospital in Gaza was hit by rocket fire on Oct. 17, a politician from Turkey's ruling AKP party, Süleyman Sezen, representing a small municipality called Atakum in the Black Sea city of Samsun, said at a public hearing that he was praying for the soul of Hitler, adding that the world will find peace when it is cleansed of Jews and that the Holocaust was "unfinished." Evidence showing that the explosion was likely from a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket has not nullified such outbursts.

"The Hitler rhetoric is not new in Turkey," said Turkish-Jewish publisher and author Rifat N. Bali, who has written about political Islam's portrayal of Jews. "I cannot say that it comes from ultranationalist political fractions... Why? Because they are fed day in, day out, pictures of 'babies killed by IDF'".

On Oct. 10, Huda-Par parliamentarian Şahzade Demir addressed the Turkish parliament, calling to revoke citizenship for Turkish Jews if they volunteer for the Israeli military. Days later, Yeni Akit, a far-right media

outlet, called for Turkish Jews to be denaturalized, under the false claim that they all have dual Israeli citizenship. (The Hrant Dink Foundation, a Turkish NGO devoted to minority issues in the country and named after a murdered Armenian-Turkish Journalist, has called out Yeni Akit as among the most prolific publishers of hate speech in Turkish media.)

"This fear scenario is not new. It was also brought up during the Mavi Marmara controversy, and the issue of citizenship of Jews who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and who served in the Israeli army was brought to the agenda," said Serdar Korucu, who writes a column on antisemitism in Turkey for the Jewish site Avlaremaz. He was referencing a deadly clash between the Israeli army and a flotilla of pro-Palestinian activists from Turkey in 2010. "There has never been such a practice in the history of the Republic of Turkey. The harshest sanction would be to prevent them from doing military service in the future."

Several large pro-Palestinian protests have taken place in Istanbul since Oct. 7. In one demonstration, Turkish protesters briefly breached the fence of the Israeli consulate before being dispersed by Turkish police. Erdogan, who had warmed to Israel in recent years, has regularly met with leaders of Hamas, which is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and most Western powers. His foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday that it rejects the idea that its rhetoric on Israel has been antisemitic.

"We reject the baseless accusations of anti-Semitism, and the slander and insults against our President and our country," read the statement released on Sunday. "It is known to everyone that Türkiye's track record on this issue is spotless — unlike many countries that support Israel unconditionally today. "It is a truth acknowledged by all historians that Türkiye has been a safe haven for all those who were oppressed throughout history, including the Jews," it added.

In 1492, the Ottoman Sultan, Bayezid II, sent ships to Spain to ferry exiled Spanish Jews to his empire, resulting in the country's large Sephardic community of today. But Turkish Jews have also faced several periods of oppression, including an infamous tax in the 1940s and pogrom in the 1950s which have become the subject of a popular Turkish Netflix series.

The local Jewish response to the situation has not been all shock and dismay. Jacob Behar, a Turkish Jew who owns a shop around the corner from the Istanbul shop that had the "Jews not allowed" sign, expressed disappointment at the sign but said it did not make him feel insecure. "It doesn't represent the general ideals of Turkish society," he told JTA. "My family has been here over 500 years; we would not still be here if we did not feel safe. Of course, there are individual things, but there are also individual things in Israel."



## Cyprus

Cyprus will make every attempt to deescalate the situation in Israel, President Nikos Christodoulides said, adding that he condemns the terrorist attacks by Palestinian extremist organization Hamas against Israel. Full article [Here](#) from October 17.

In a written statement issued after an EU Council teleconference on the situation, Christodoulides said that Cyprus has already taken on an active role aiding the evacuation of foreign nationals from more than 26 countries, following Hamas' surprise attack on Israel. He added that there is a need to avoid further civilian deaths on all sides, and that the crisis needs to deescalate.

"A decisive element would be the unconditional release of all hostages," he said. Since violence erupted on Saturday, October 7, Hamas has taken scores of Israeli hostages, while Israel has begun an air strike campaign against the organization in Gaza.

Christodoulides said that Cyprus, as the nearest EU member state, and as a state that has excellent relations with the countries in the area, will make every attempt, in the framework of its abilities, to work for a de-escalation of the crisis and secure peace in the region. He added that the EU should be much more active and more substantial, a position he has repeatedly expressed in previous European Councils in relation to the Middle East.

Christodoulides also referred to the important humanitarian role Cyprus is playing in this crisis, noting that so far authorities have responded to numerous requests from third countries, contributing to the evacuation of citizens from 26 countries.

At the same time, he conveyed Cyprus' readiness to provide humanitarian aid in the region, including Gaza, taking advantage of the geographical proximity, but also the status as an EU member state.

"The close and continuous cooperation with the states of the region, mainly with Egypt, with Jordan, but also with the United Nations, in the common effort to avoid further escalation of the crisis, is imperative," he said.

In this context, the president referred to the continuous communications he had with leaders of the countries of the region, during which they exchanged views on the actions that can be jointly undertaken. He added that he had telephone calls with regional leaders and conveyed messages from the Prime Minister of Israel, the King of Jordan, and the President of Egypt to the European leaders.

In relation to Tuesday's long telephone conversation with the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Christodoulides emphasized the need for support for Egypt from the European Union, as a country of critical importance for the wider region. Finally, the president emphasized to European partners that the recent flare-up is tangible proof of the importance of the Southern Neighborhood for the peace and security of the EU itself and the consequent need for a more regular and methodical engagement with the region.

Meanwhile, European Council President Charles Michel, responding to a reported Israeli strike on a Gaza hospital, said that attacks on civilian infrastructure were not in line with international law. After an emergency video conference of European Union leaders, Michel said the report "seems to be confirmed" and added: "An attack against civilian infrastructure is not in line with international law."

Authorities in Gaza said an Israeli air strike killed at least 300 people at Al-Ahli al-Arabi Hospital in Gaza City on Tuesday. Israel's military said it was "still ironing out all the details" on reports of strikes on the hospital and a school. Prior to the meeting Christodoulides said that the EU had been slow to react, and it had taken days to organise a meeting of all of its leaders.

The meeting, which started with a minute of silence, was called by EC president Charles Michel to coordinate between member states in the delivery of humanitarian aid, preventing the spread of hostilities and returning to efforts for sustainable peace, in addition to the possibility of new refugee flows.

A source said the reason why there was no earlier meeting of the leaders as it was considered that the Foreign Affairs Council, which met informally via video conference and physical presence in Oman, had set the EU's priorities, but what was agreed was not respected.

An official also said that for member states the condemnation of Hamas is a given, but so is the separation between Hamas and the civilian population, as well as the separation of humanitarian aid from development aid.

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## Albania

### **Albania has long been a pro-Israel country. Will the Hamas war change that?**

BY LARRY LUXNER OCTOBER 25, 2023 4:43 PM Full article [Here](#)

TIRANA, Albania (JTA) — Hidden behind a wooden gate in Tirana's Toptani district, construction workers are busy converting a 19th-century Ottoman mansion into the Besa Museum — a long-planned shrine to Albania's embrace of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution during World War II.



About 100 miles south, in the Adriatic port city of Vlorë — nestled among trendy cafés along a cobblestoned street where Jews once lived — a multimedia museum designed by Tel Aviv-based architects will soon portray the richness of Albania's Jewish history, from the Spanish Inquisition to the Holocaust.

The building of one, let alone two, such museums in an impoverished Balkan country that is home to more than a million Muslims but only about 60 Jews is a remarkable turn of events. The Marxist regime that ruled Albania from 1946 to 1991 outlawed all religions in 1967 — including Judaism — and reviled Israel as the "little devil" of the United States.

But Albania is also known as the only European country that had more Jewish residents after World War II than before it. In recent years, officials have looked to promote that narrative and cultivate ties with Israel. The story stems, in their view, from their nation's culture of "besa" — Albania's medieval code of honor, which requires people to welcome any guests, including foreigners, as their own.

"The rescue of the Jews during World War II is one of the most beautiful pages in the history of the Albanians. Christians and Muslims sacrificed everything to protect them," said Elva Margariti, Albania's minister of culture, when announcing the Besa Museum earlier this year. "For Albanians this is besa. It is a value that we will pass on to our children, telling them this extraordinary story."

Albania's warm feelings toward Israel will be tested in the weeks and months to come. Pro-Israel sentiment is already dropping in the wake of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, which was sparked by the terror group's bloody incursion into southern Israel on Oct. 7.

An online survey of Albanians conducted Oct. 13 by Tirana pollster Eduard Zaloshnja showed relatively strong sympathy for Israel in the war's first week. Of the 2,320 people who responded to what Zaloshnja concedes was a "quick and dirty, not scientific" questionnaire, 50% said they were pro-Israel, 36% identified as pro-Palestine and 14% said they were "undecided."

However, support for Israel has since fallen, Zaloshnja said, especially since an explosion at a Gaza City hospital that Hamas immediately blamed on Israel. Video and other evidence have led to the widespread



assessment that the blast, which may have killed hundreds, was caused by a misfired rocket launched by the Islamic Jihad terror group.

On Oct. 16, the United Nations Security Council rejected a resolution that condemned Israeli airstrikes on Gaza and demanded an immediate ceasefire. Five countries including China and Russia voted in favor while four — the United States, France, Germany, and Japan — voted against it because the resolution failed to specifically condemn Hamas. Albania, which currently has a seat on the body, was one of six countries to abstain.

Two days later, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama tweeted that although “Hamas is a cancer in the body of humanity,” there is no excuse for “turning a blind eye” to the Israeli response.

“In this conflict, Albania and the entire democratic world stand firmly on the side of Israel, barbarically targeted by the depravity of Hamas terrorists!” wrote Rama, whose party is often described as center-left. “However, the democratic world must also be a guarantor of the truth and the justice for the hundreds of victims of the bombed hospital in Gaza.”

On Friday, hundreds of Albanian Muslims converged on Skanderbeg Square, Tirana’s main plaza, shouting pro-Palestinian slogans and waving “Free Gaza” placards.

“I’m reading comments on Albanian social media accounts that local Islamists are inundating with conspiracy theories,” said Zaloshnja. “My personal feeling is that there is an older generation of Albanians who were indoctrinated by hatred toward Israel and support for the Palestinian cause. That generation is still alive.”

#### A Jewish community scattered

In 1991, Albania’s Marxist regime collapsed, in a year that marked the end of communism in Eastern Europe. The new democratic government immediately established diplomatic relations with Israel, but it took another 21 years for an Israeli embassy to open in Tirana.

Today, Albania has three honorary consuls in Israel: one responsible for Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and the central region; another in Haifa, covering northern Israel; and a third in Eilat for southern Israel and the Negev. Some 54 Israeli companies currently operate in Albania, including drip irrigation firm Netafim, and the Balkan country has become a popular destination for Israel tourists, with seasonal nonstop flights linking Tel Aviv and Tirana.

But Albania has another, more complicated side to its history and its ties to the Middle East. Terrorists belonging to the Palestine Liberation Organization used to train in Albania for six months of guerrilla warfare at a military base in Zall-Herr, just north of Tirana. More recently, between 50 and 60 Albanians — mostly from very poor villages in the southeast — were recruited to fight for ISIS.

News articles often portray Albania as a majority-Muslim country, but the reality is more nuanced. About half of Albania’s 2.6 million inhabitants do not identify with any religion, a legacy of the atheism imposed by Enver Hoxha, who ruled the country from 1946 until his death in 1985. Of those who do, roughly 50% are Bektashi — an Islamic Sufi mystic order — while 21% practice traditional Islam and the remaining 29% consider themselves Christian Orthodox or Catholic.

The Jewish presence in Albania was always tiny. Before World War II, Albania was home to perhaps 300 Romaniote Jews — a Greek-speaking ethnic community. Most of them lived in Vloera, with a smaller community in Tirana and scattered Jewish families in other cities and towns.

At its peak, perhaps 3,750 Jewish refugees from Greece, Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, and the former Yugoslavia lived in Albania. Some Jews fought as partisans against the Nazis, and their memories are honored in a special exhibit at Albania’s National History Museum fronting Skanderbeg Square.

After the war, Albania's Jewish population quickly dropped back to around 300 as foreign Jews left. In 1991 — as soon as the communist regime collapsed — nearly the entire community fled en masse to Israel.

Today, not a single Jew is left in Vlora — a city that recently renamed the street of Rruga Phoma Byko to Rruga Ebrejve, or Street of the Jews. Nearly all the Jews who have stayed in Albania reside in Tirana, said Amos Dojaka, president of the Albanian Jewish Community. The group's official design is a merged menorah and Albanian double-headed eagle.

"Albania was closed for more than 50 years, so for that reason nobody knew the story" of the rescue of Jews from the Nazis, said Dojaka, 56, a Tirana businessman who works in the import-export sector.

"Saving Jews was very dangerous, so it's good for the younger generation and also tourists to know about this," said Dojaka, who lived for two years in Ashdod, Israel, during the late 1990s.

He thinks that "most people here" still support Israel. "Our two countries have similar histories, and nobody here supports terrorism," Dojaka said. Prince Leka II — the grandson of King Zog, who ruled Albania from 1928 until fascist Italian occupiers forced him into exile in 1939, never to return — said he was proud that his grandfather allowed Jewish refugees into the country in the 1930s and provided for them.

"He risked his position as king but refused to be a puppet," Leka explained over coffee at the Maritime Plaza Hotel's Queen Geraldine Room, which is named after his grandmother. "That's why he had to leave Albania after the invasion."

Another prominent Albanian Jew is Geri Kureta, 55, owner of a chain of kids' clothing and toy stores. He has five outlets in Tirana, one in Vlora and one in the resort city of Durres. For 16 years, Kureta lived in Karmiel, in Israel's Galilee, but decided to return to his native Albania in 2007. His 82-year-old father and 76-year-old mother are still in Karmiel.

"I am very worried," said Kureta, who speaks fluent Hebrew. "Everyone knows I have family in Israel, and all of them call and ask me about them. People here see a lot on TV about Gaza. I do not think Israel has explained itself very well. Of course I blame Hamas, but at the end of the day, it is a war. Sometimes we do not have any other choice."

Blendi Gonjxhi, head of the government office that oversees Albania's road transport services, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that Israel was completely justified in striking back at Hamas after its bloody rampage.

"Things must be seen as they are," said Gonjxhi. "If you see how much money Hamas spent to prepare for this attack, you will understand why Gaza is so poor. You cannot build tunnels and rocket launchers in a crowded neighborhood and then complain that this neighborhood is being bombed, or ask the people you attacked to supply your water and electricity."

#### A tale of two museums

When Nazi troops occupied the country, Albania's inhabitants gave shelter to local Jews as well as refugees, hiding them in their homes, dressing them in native costume and even giving them Muslim names to fool the Germans — in keeping with the tradition of besa. To honor that tradition, Albania is building the Besa Museum, which will be dedicated to the stories of Albanian citizens who saved Jews during the Holocaust.



The museum, which will be located in what is now a badly dilapidated mansion in Tirana — was announced in March by Rama during a visit to Jerusalem. But few details are available, and an onsite security guard refused to let a reporter in to take photos of the site.



Likewise, the 21,000-square-foot Jewish Museum of Albania, slated to open in 2025, will soon rise on the current site of Vlorá's Ethnographic Museum, which is located in the middle of a small plaza. For now, graffiti is scrawled on nearby walls next to the Sophie Caffé and other boutique shops.



"For 30 years, I have been dreaming of this. I never thought my idea of a Jewish museum would really happen," said Anna Kohen, a retired New York dentist and author of the autobiographical "Flower of Vlorá: Growing Up Jewish in Communist Albania." Now 78 and living in Florida, she pitched the museum concept to city officials years ago.

The \$2.5 million Vlorá project is financed by the Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF) and is being designed by Israeli architect Etan Kimmel, whose Tel Aviv company beat four European firms for the winning bid.

"We've always been aware that it was necessary to have something to remind people of the long-term relationship between Albania and the Jews," said the AADF's project manager, Alketa Kurrizo. "This will be a 21st-century Jewish museum that talks not only about history and what we have done, but about Albania's Jewish history going back to medieval times. This museum is one all of us will be proud of, and we are sure that people from Israel will also come to visit."

Upon completion, the museum will consist of one underground floor and four floors above ground as a modern glass extension to the existing historic building. Besides a permanent exhibit area, plans call for classrooms, office space, a library, and an auditorium.

"This will be our first museum outside Israel," said Kimmel, whose projects include the National Memorial at Mount Herzl, the Natural History Museum in Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem's Tower of David Museum, as well as numerous Israeli embassies around the world.

Both of the two planned museums are being financed by taxpayers in Albania, which despite a dramatic jump in tourism this year remains one of Europe's poorest countries. Prince Leka insists it is crucial for Albanians to know their past in order to prevent future atrocities — particularly in Europe, where violent assaults against Jews and firebombing of synagogues and other Jewish and Israeli targets have skyrocketed since the current war began.

"We have a huge amount of sympathy for Israel today," he said. "What happened on Oct. 7 was not a military attack, it was a terrorist attack. Armies do not rape women; they do not abuse children. Anyone who justifies these criminal acts is on the wrong side of history."

## Bulgaria

**With gala ceremony, the restored Vidin synagogue, which long stood derelict, opens as the Jules Pascin Cultural Centre** September 4, 2023 – Full article [Here](#)

Monday marked a day that many skeptics doubted would ever happen — after years of delays and false starts, the long-derelict synagogue in Vidin, on heights overlooking the Danube, opened after a full restoration as a multipurpose cultural center dedicated to the Vidin-born Jewish artist Jules Pascin. The gala opening ceremony was attended by hundreds of people and a long list of dignitaries, including Bulgaria's President Rumen Radev, along with Vidin Mayor Tsvetan Tsenkov, Bulgaria's Culture Minister, Israeli Ambassador Yosef Levi Safari, Jewish leaders including the country's chief rabbi, who blew a shofar, and Vidin's Orthodox Metropolitan Daniil. Israel's President Herzog sent greetings by video.



"Vidin has been waiting for this moment for decades – the day when the magnificent Vidin Synagogue will be able to shine again in its authentic form," Radev said in his speech. And I am sure that only people who have seen with their own eyes the ruins of the temple until recently can realize the enormous work that has been done, appreciate the efforts of the institutions, of the local government, of Mr. Tsenkov and his team, to admire the craftsmanship of the restorers of the Synagogue.

Maxim Delchev, Chair of Bulgaria's Jewish umbrella organization, also thanked Tsenkov "and the entire team of Vidin Municipality" for accomplishing the restoration. "[T]he fact that at the beginning of the 20th century the Jewish community in newly liberated Bulgaria decided that it would invest its members' money in beautiful and large synagogues – like the one we are standing in front of now and like those in Sofia and Plovdiv – is indicative," he said in his speech. It was indicative of how relaxed and accepted our great-grandparents felt at the turn of the century in this country. About how all of them, our ancestors, were ready to participate in the important processes for the Bulgarian society and to pass on the important values. This synagogue symbolizes exactly that – the exceptional place of the Jewish community in Bulgarian society at that time. And I think so today.



The synagogue, with four corner towers and a large arch dominating its facade, was built in eclectic style in 1894, designed by an architect identified as V. Kitov. Left empty after WW2, it was damaged by an earthquake in 1976. Plans were long in the works — and long stalled — to restore it. Renovation work sponsored by the government started in 1983 but was abandoned in 1989, after the collapse of the communist regime. Workers had already removed the building's roof, leaving the building unprotected and open to the elements.

In 2004, the synagogue was added to the World Monuments Fund Watch list — a list of historic sites around the world that are under particular threat. It was announced in 2012 that it would be transformed into a cultural center, but little moved forward. During an official ceremony in November 2017, the Bulgarian Jewish community formally transferred the ownership of the synagogue to the municipality, hoping that the restoration and conversion works could finally start.

Ground was finally broken and work begun in May 2021. The restoration of the synagogue and transformation into the Jules Pascin culture center — whose budget was approximately €5 million — was implemented under the Operational Program "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020 (OPRG), which includes financing from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and national co-financing. Bulgaria's Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works is the Managing Authority for the Program. It comes under the OPRG's section focusing on the development of regional tourism related to cultural heritage of international significance.



## Portugal

### Portugal moves to end Sephardic Jewish citizenship law

Bill terminating country's citizenship law passes first reading amid heated debate, may take effect January 1, 2024  
Full article by ORGE CASTELLANO [Here](#) 8 October 18, 2023

MADRID (JTA) — Portugal's parliament has advanced a bill that would end the country's citizenship law for descendants of Sephardic Jews who were expelled during the Spanish Inquisition.

The bill, which could take effect on Jan. 1, passed a first reading on Friday with backing from the ruling Socialist Party after heated debate. It will next be reviewed and potentially amended by parliament's Constitutional Affairs, Rights, Freedoms, and Guarantees Committee.



Speaking to parliament on Monday, Justice Minister Catarina Sarmento e Castro said the citizenship law has been a "fair recognition" and a "duty of historical reparation." But she argued that it has served its purpose, saying it was a "symbolic gesture intended to mark a recognition that has been fulfilled through a generous time window."

Discussions in parliament over the next several weeks could push the end date for applications to Dec. 31, 2024. According to the latest figures, approximately 262,000 individuals had applied for naturalization under the law by the end of 2022, and around 75,000 were granted citizenship. Even since the introduction of stricter regulations in September 2022, over 74,000 applied in the past year. Notably, nearly 21,000 applicants were Israeli citizens, as highlighted by statistics from the Portuguese Immigration and Border Service.

Some members of parliament expressed reservations about the move to close the citizenship pathway. Representative Patrícia Gilvaz of the Liberal Initiative party argued against shutting down the law so soon, suggesting a postponement until 2025. Pedro Delgado Alves from the Socialist Party acknowledged the need for a review, suggesting a three-year residence requirement in Portugal for applicants rather than the standard five years.

But the Communist Party's Alma Rivera questioned the law's continued relevance. In contrast, Paula Cardoso from the Social Democratic Party suggested addressing abuses of the application system without repealing it altogether.

Portugal introduced this route to citizenship in 2015, rooted in 2013 legislation, and Spain soon followed suit with a "Law of Return." Unlike Spain's version, Portugal's law was less stringent, demanding only a clear criminal record and verifiable Sephardic lineage certificate, typically vouched for by major Jewish communities in Lisbon or Porto.

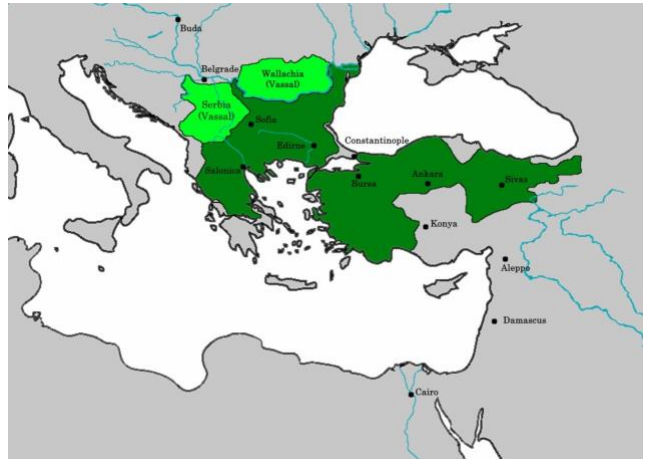
That application process faced skepticism last year following allegations of fraud and corruption. One high-profile case involved Roman Abramovich, a Russian-Jewish billionaire whose Portuguese naturalization drew criticism amid geopolitical events, particularly Russia's Ukraine invasion, as it emerged that his European citizenship could potentially help him avoid European sanctions on Russian oligarchs.

In light of the controversies, the vetting process tightened. Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva noted that Sephardic Jewish applicants had to establish a "genuine connection" with Portugal. The stricter regulations also spurred divisions within the country's Jewish communities, leading to legal investigations into Porto's application review process and the detention of the Porto Jewish community's Rabbi, Daniel Litvak.

Spain stopped accepting applications for its Sephardic citizenship law in 2021.

## Jewish Genealogy in Greece: Reconstructing the Mijan Family by Michael Waas – Full Article [Here](#)

Jews have been living in what is now Greece for over 2,200 years since the time of the Second Temple. The Romaniote (Ρωμανιώτες, רומניוטים) community claims this ancient Diasporic community as their ancestors. The name "Romaniote" originates with the period of the Roman Empire when Jewish diasporic settlement expanded in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean region, particularly during the time of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) in what is now Greece, Turkey, the southern Balkans, and parts of Southern Italy.



Of course, the story of Jews in Greece does not end with Romaniote Jews. During the later years of the Eastern Roman Empire, small communities of Ashkenazi Jews also settled in the region, joining the rich tapestry of Jewish communities in the Empire. By the last century of the Eastern Roman Empire, significant changes in the political and socioeconomic landscape were occurring with the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. By 1451, the Ottomans had taken control of almost all of the Romaniote and Ashkenazi communities that had settled in the Aegean region.

The 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople under Sultan Mehmet al-Fatih (the Conqueror, who ruled from 1444-1446 and again from 1451-1481) left a profound impact on Jewish history and genealogy in the region. As I explain in my presentation *In the Lands of Osman: Jewish Genealogy in the Former Ottoman Empire*, this marked a pivotal moment. The Sultan ordered much of the Jewish community in his realm to relocate to Constantinople, making Istanbul the largest community of Romaniote Jews in the Empire.

In the generations that followed, while the Romaniote population remained centered in Constantinople, many individuals and families returned to Greece, re-establishing communities in places such as Arta, Chalkida, Ioannina, Larissa, Trikkala, and Volos, and rejoining existing communities like Chania and Corfu.

The most dramatic demographic shift was still on the horizon: the arrival of the Sepharadim, the Jews of Iberia. While it is widely believed that Sultan Bayezit II (1481-1512), who succeeded his father Mehmet al-Fatih, supposedly stated upon the issuance of the Alhambra Decree:

"You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler," he said to his courtiers, "he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!"

in actuality, there is no evidence of this and the story likely originated in the mythmaking of the 400th anniversary of the Decree. In 1892, the Jews of the Empire marked the anniversary by honoring the ancestors of Sultan Abdulhamit II (who reigned from 1876 to 1909) for their role in providing sanctuary to the refugees during their time of desperation.

The truth, as reality often is, is far more complex. It was shaped by a period of cultural development during the 16th and early 17th centuries. Many diverse Jewish communities either migrated or were absorbed into the growing Ottoman Empire. These groups included Italian Jews (Italkim), Sepharadim (1492 refugees), Portuguese/New Christians, Jews from Sicily, and Calabria, Jews from the Eastern or Arab world (Mustarabim), as well as the aforementioned Romaniote and Ashkenazi communities. Later, Jews of the Caucasus (Kavkazim), Yemenite Jews (Temanim), and Persian Jews (Parsim) would also be absorbed or emigrate to the Empire. During this time, these disparate communities would come to form a Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, speaking community in the Ottoman heartland (Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, and the Holy Land) with a shared origin story of 1492.

## Jewish Genealogy in Greece

Pursuing Jewish Genealogy in Greece is rewarding but difficult. Unlike in Christian Europe where a modern civil registration dates to the early 19th century in most cases, civil registration in the Ottoman Empire really only dates to the Hamidian period (1876-1909), with standardization achieved more or less in the early 20th century. In modern Greece, outside of some exceptions, civil registration generally dates from 1925 onward (as per Gregory Kontos of Greek Ancestry). Prior to civil registration, the responsibility of maintaining any records fell on the Jewish community. Unfortunately, many of these archives were lost, destroyed, or fragmented during the Nazi Occupation or, in the case of Salonika, heavily damaged in the Great Fire of 1917.

Jewish genealogy in Greece can appear positively daunting. However, a lot more exists and is just waiting to be uncovered in your journey. Many communities have manuscripts or archives that have survived in places like the Jewish Museum in Athens, the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Yad Ben Zvi, or countless libraries and private archives globally. Additionally there are the Ottoman Archives in Turkey and the State Archives System of Greece, both of which hold extensive documentation of Jewish history in Greece, spanning from the 15th century to the present day. There are also secondary archives like the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, diplomatic archives all across Europe, and, of course, records and documents produced by individuals from the communities globally that record names and information seemingly lost over time. Finally, DNA testing for genealogy (Y-DNA, Mitochondrial DNA, and Autosomal DNA) which can reconnect families and strengthen construction of family trees where the documentation no longer exists or is heavily fragmented.

In the next section, I will dive into a fascinating case study utilizing my own family history to demonstrate the incredible potential of working with diverse archives, languages, and data sources in Greece.

### The Mijan Family of Larissa

In order to grasp the full scope of this research journey, we must begin at the beginning. As a teenager, my great-uncle Morris told me that his mother, my great-grandmother Rebecca Angel, was born in Larissa, Greece. She was the only daughter of her mother, Mazaltov Mijan, and third child of her father, Moise Angel (whose family I will discuss in a future article about Jewish Genealogy in Greece). Rebecca, as I would come to discover, was named for her father's first wife, Rebecca Sami, who had passed away. Mazaltov and Rebecca arrived in America on August 21, 1910 aboard the Martha Washington. Their arrival contact was their brother-in-law and uncle, respectively, Moise Kabeli.

For additional information, access the Full Article [Here](#).

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## Tunisia

### **Historic Synagogue in Tunisia heavily damaged in rioting tied to Israel-Gaza war** Full article [Here](#)

October 18, 2023

(JTA) – A historic but defunct synagogue in Tunisia was reduced to rubble on Tuesday amid mass rioting after an explosion in Gaza that Hamas blamed on Israel.

Hundreds of people were filmed setting fire to a synagogue in the central Tunisian city of Al Hammah in the hours after the explosion, at a Gaza City hospital where Hamas said many people died. Videos that circulated widely on social media showed people planting Palestinian flags and chipping away at the synagogue building's stone walls, all without any police intervention.



Some users shared the video of the arson alongside a "#Palestine" hashtag. A video taken Wednesday shows heavy damage to the site, including to the fenced-off grave of a 16th-century rabbi that been a historic pilgrimage site for some Jews.



The incident, which has deprived Al Hammah of a key vestige of its Jewish past, comes amid attacks on other Jewish and Israeli sites around the world — including Germany, France, Portugal, China, and Australia — as Israel retaliates in the Gaza Strip following Hamas' sweeping, deadly attack on Israel Oct. 7.

Protests against Israel ramped up Tuesday night after the hospital explosion. Dozens of rioters targeted the Israeli embassy in Amman, Jordan. Riots also broke out in Palestinian areas of the West Bank, Hebrew media reported.

Israeli and U.S. officials said they believed with near certainty that the blast was caused by an errant rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The Al Hammah synagogue was not an active site of worship, as no Jews live in the city; however, it is the site of the tomb of 16th-century Kabbalist Rabbi Yosef Ma'aravi. The same site was previously damaged during the 2011 Arab Spring protests, which were not about Israel.

The American Jewish Committee denounced the vandalism in a statement.

"We are horrified by the burning and destruction of the Al Hammah synagogue in Tunisia," the group said on X, adding that it was "closely monitoring the situation" and in touch with Tunisian Jewish community leaders.

Tunisia's small Jewish population of around 1,000 also contended with a deadly terrorist attack earlier this year when a gunman stormed a synagogue on the island of Djerba. Five people died, including two Jewish pilgrims who had traveled to the area from Israel and France, and wounding several others.

In response to the Djerba attack, Tunisia's president, Kais Saied, pledged he would increase security for the country's Jewish residents. Saied also drew criticism for using the occasion of the attack to criticize Israel.

Since the latest explosion of violence in Israel and Gaza, Tunisians have taken to the streets in large numbers to support Palestinians. Tunisian schoolchildren have saluted the Palestinian flag, and Saied has pledged to stand by Palestinians while continuing to snuff out any talk of normalization with Israel, a path that four Arab countries took in 2020.

## Atlanta's Sephardic Community Was Built on the Heels of Shoes

In the 1930s and 1940s, Sephardic-owned shoe repair shops dominated downtown Atlanta. Full article [Here](#)

When the first Sephardic Jews came to America around the beginning of the 20th century, they took whatever jobs they could find. Many of them spoke only Ladino, a dialect of Spanish that is written with Hebrew characters, and had a limited education.

But some of those who came to Atlanta in those early years had worked as shoemakers, one of the trades Jews were permitted on the island of Rhodes which was a part of the Ottoman Empire of Turkey, where many of the immigrants were born.

While some started out as bootblacks, shining shoes for a few pennies, others worked to repair the heavy leather shoes that were worn then. They had a strong work ethic and as their English improved and they prospered, they opened their own small stores. By the early 1930s, two-thirds of the shoe stores in Atlanta, by one estimate, were owned by Sephardic Jews.

One of them was owned by Dan Maslia's father, David, who was struggling in his shop to make a living during the height of the Great Depression in 1933 when Dan was born.

Dan Maslia says he literally grew up in the shop, shining shoes when he got older in what his father called, "The Shoe Hospital – making sick shoes well," on Auburn Avenue.

It was just one of the many Sephardic shoe shops, Maslia says, that crowded the city's shopping district. Most of them were simple shops crowded with merchandise and machinery. They were often no more than 15 to 20 feet wide and 30 to 40 feet deep. And, as Maslia recalled, they seemed to be everywhere.

"You could go downtown during the 1930s and 1940s and practically every block there was a shoe shop. Almost all of them run by Sephardic Jews. My dad was on Auburn Avenue and Lucky Street. But they were on Broad Street, all up and down Whitehall Street, Trinity Street, Mitchell Street. I don't know how they all stayed in business."

Most of them were just a short walk from where the Sephardic community lived just south of downtown Atlanta, near what is now the former Turner Field complex. In the days before air conditioning, on a hot summer night, the streets where they lived would come alive with conversations outside the closely spaced homes and apartments in the neighborhood.

"We would sit on our porches at night," Maslia says. "The houses are so close together that you would talk to your neighbors, your Sephardic neighbors. Some lived across the street, others lived next door. And we'd go to each other's houses. Maybe 60 percent of the houses on Pryor Street and on Central Ave were Sephardic. It was like it was a ghetto. It really was a ghetto. But everybody knew everybody."

At the center of the community was the Orthodox Sephardic synagogue, Congregation Or Ve Shalom, which was founded in 1914. It was the hub of a closely knit community that rarely needed a formal invitation to a bar mitzvah or other important event. Everyone, says Maslia, just showed up at the synagogue.

But, by the 1950s, the synagogue, like most of the community, had moved on.

Today the synagogue, located on North Druid Hills in Brookhaven, still has a number of congregants from the original families, but it's adding new members, including many who are not Sephardic from the neighborhood off I-85.



During the 1930s, more than two-thirds of the shoe repairmen in Atlanta were Sephardic Jews.

Few of the children of the initial wave of immigrants had any interest in shoes or shoe repairing. After the Second World War, when many of the younger generation finished their military service, they went to college on the GI Bill. After graduation, they had a professional career or were in business, where they prospered; Maslia worked for 40 years at Associated Credit Union, where he was the CEO when he retired.



Five years ago, he published Or Ve Shalom's Founders Map project, a detailed description of his old neighborhood, which listed each home and each business, including the old shoe stores. He spent two years on the painstaking project, which has made a major contribution to the history of the Sephardic community in Atlanta.

One of the last links to that era, Bennies Shoes, which had its origins over a hundred years ago, just closed its doors on Piedmont Road at the end of September. Three generations of the Shemaria family had kept it going in a number of locations around the city.

Today, athletic footwear is what many people wear and they are rarely repaired. When they wear out, they are trashed. Today, Nike, the big footwear company, is building out a 16,000 square-foot product innovation center in the Star Metal Offices building on the West Side of Atlanta to sell even more of their popular shoes.

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**Gershon Harris**  
**Hatzor Haglilit, Israel**



This month's bulletin will be sent out while Israel is still at war with the arch-terrorist group Hamas, whose entire reason for being is to destroy Israel and murder Jews.

November's bulletin also corresponds with weekly Torah portions dealing with the life and deeds of *'Avraham Avinu'* – our father Avraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Though seemingly unrelated and coincidental, a deep, religious, and intrinsic connection can be made between the conduct and heroism of Israel's military and civilian population, as well as the response and rallying cry of virtually the entire Jewish world in coming to Israel's aid during these trying times.

Avraham is considered the father of the Jewish nation – embodied in his name: *'av hamon goyim'* – the father of many nations, and the main reason for G-d's choosing Avraham for this role lies in his unbridled commitment to *'hesed* and *'mishpat* – lovingkindness and justice, which were part and parcel of his personality. As such, Avraham was constantly reaching out, helping others, and refused to stand idly by when others were in trouble. He did not hesitate to speak out, no matter what the risk, if he perceived an injustice or potential injustice being committed, so eloquently and definitively proven when he confronts G-d Himself upon the latter informing him that Sodom and Gomorrah must be destroyed due to their unbridled and unforgivable level of corruption and sin against their fellow man. Avraham knew very well that there was virtually no chance of finding any redeeming quality of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet in his sense of mercy and justice, he feels he must challenge G-d and at least make the effort to change G-d's mind. In a famous



dialogue described in detail in the Torah, G-d ultimately agrees, at Avraham's insistence, that if even as few as ten righteous individuals can be found in the entire population of this major urban center and its environs, G-d will not execute his decree. And throughout the Biblical text itself, and further embellished in Midrashic literature, Avraham's many acts of both spiritual and material help and kindness Avraham are described.

These special traits of Avraham's personality became the spiritual-genetic legacy of his descendants, and specifically the Jewish people. Not only were Avraham's personality traits and deeds incorporated into formal Jewish law, they are considered as so basic to the Jewish personality that the Talmud (Tractate Yevamot, page 79A), opines that one should question the lineage of any Jew who does not demonstrate the basic human and humane qualities of Avraham Avinu!

As such, it is no coincidence nor surprise that Jews of every type, level religious observance, background, and in every era, have always been leaders and initiators of social and charitable causes for both their fellow Jews and the world at large. Jewish charity, kindness, and campaigns for social justice, political equality and so much more, are legendary, with the term *'tikkun olam'* – repairing the world – becoming the rallying cry and in certain ways, Judaism itself, for so many individuals and groups who display no other religious or cultural Jewish rituals or observance of any kind or level. Throughout history, Avraham's legacy has been demonstrated in the countless self-help organizations and associations that proliferated in the Jewish world, as well as spontaneous acts of unbridled kindness and in providing for Jews in trouble and suffering hardship in all forms, whether in the form of well-established charitable organizations, or never-ending spontaneous local, regional and even country-wide campaigns to raise funds or volunteer to help individual Jews and entire communities all over the world in times of stress, even under the harshest and hopeless conditions of persecution and atrocities during the Holocaust, both inside ghettos and even the death camps themselves. And let us not forget how quick Jews and the State of Israel immediately respond to natural and other disasters the world over, whether in countries that support Israel or are considered its fiercest adversaries.

This legacy is being demonstrated to a degree no one could, nor wanted, to imagine today, as Israel continues to fight against the pure and unadulterated evil of Hamas and its allies. The response of the Israeli civilian population in helping each other and our soldiers is staggering in both quantity and quality, and goes way beyond the welcome, vital and heartening campaigns to donate food, clothing, supplies and equipment to both the IDF and the civilians so horribly affected by indescribable atrocities of Hamas. Many civilian security teams, having secured their own kibbutz or community after the attacks, literally ran to others, often at the cost of their lives, to help them defend themselves. And thousands of Israelis living abroad, even for decades, did everything they could, and at their expense, to fly back to Israel to serve in the reserves and join the fighting, and yes, pay with their lives, in many cases. And of course, the response of private individuals, foundations, congregations, schools and other Jewish, and yes, even non-Jewish groups around the world in raising funds and shipping thousands of tons of vital equipment and supplies to Israel, is more than heartening: it is a real and tangible manifestation and proof of our legacy as sons and daughters of Abraham Avinu through the ages, no matter where we may live, or how affiliated or unaffiliated we may be with Jewish life or institutions. The much-quoted Talmudic phrase (Tractate Shavuot, page 39A), "כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה" [All of Israel are responsible for one another] has never been truer than now. In times of trouble, sorrow, disaster and threat, Jews put all differences aside, and our spiritual-genetic legacy as descendants of Avraham Avinu takes over. Would it be that this true brotherhood and unity be maintained in times of peace and prosperity as well!



**Rabbi Marc D. Angel**  
**Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Vayera**  
[JewishIdeas.org](http://JewishIdeas.org)

G-d informs Abraham that the people of Sodom are so wicked that He has decided to destroy them. Abraham protests: "Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous people within the city, will You sweep away and not forgive the place for the fifty righteous that are in it?" (Bereishith 18:23-24). The conversation continues until G-d finally agrees with Abraham to save the city if only ten righteous people are found within.

This episode is often cited as an example of how a religious person has the right to challenge G-d's decisions. Abraham certainly must have realized that if G-d planned to destroy Sodom, He had good reason to do so. Yet, Abraham courageously challenged G-d, demanding mercy for the city if even ten righteous people could be found there. G-d acceded. Victory for Abraham, right?

Wrong.

The city—as G-d knew full well—did not have ten righteous people within. G-d destroyed the city with fire and brimstone. Only Lot and his daughters managed to escape alive.

What were Abraham's assumptions when he negotiated with G-d? Why didn't he just ask G-d to spare the righteous of the city and let the wicked perish? Why did he think that ten righteous people in the city would justify G-d's sparing the entire city? The general explanation offered is that Abraham believed that a "minyan" of good people had the power to impact on the rest of the community. They would set a good example, they would teach, they would turn the masses into a moral and upright society.

Abraham was courageous in confronting G-d. But he was also naïve. He thought that a wicked society should be spared if only ten good people still lived among them. But G-d had already viewed the entire city and deemed it hopelessly wicked. Even if there were ten such individuals, G-d knew that they were powerless to change the overall wickedness of the whole society.

What were Abraham's thoughts after the destruction of Sodom? The Torah is silent on this. Abraham had negotiated with G-d in the hope of saving the city...but the city was destroyed. Abraham had gained nothing from his bargaining with G-d. Did Abraham learn anything from this episode?

Maybe he learned to be less naïve. Originally, he did not want to believe that a few righteous people were unable to change society for the good. He wanted to believe in the ultimate goodness within humanity. If we only speak nicely to the wicked people they will turn to righteousness. If we only give bad people a chance, they will come to their senses and become moral and just.

G-d taught him otherwise. The people of Sodom were absolutely corrupt, lacking elementary decency. Their society fostered and perpetuated evil. A few good people among them couldn't change them; but they would corrupt the few good people. Abraham learned that some wicked people are incorrigible. They are so steeped in evil, hatred and lies that they are beyond redemption.

But there is a twist to this story. Although G-d apparently wanted Abraham to be less naïve, He also appreciated Abraham's naïve belief in the possible salvation of even very wicked people. G-d wanted to temper Abraham's naivety but not eliminate it. After all, if Abraham was to teach monotheism and righteousness to the world, he had to maintain a belief that he could succeed in reaching everyone...or at least almost everyone.

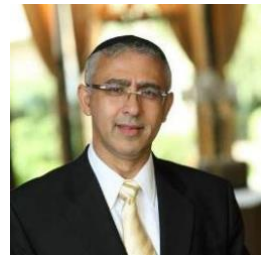
The lesson: there are evil people in the world whose wickedness is so deep that they cannot be redeemed. Don't be a naïve believer in the goodness of all humans and in their capacity to change for the better. But don't completely give up your naivety. Keep trying, keep negotiating, keep challenging G-d and humanity.

Because once you lose that naivety, the fire within you dies...along with hope for the ultimate redemption of humanity.

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## **Why Is It Important to Read Tehilim and Understand What You Are Reading? Psalm 120: The Enemies of Israel, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow**

By Rabbi Yosef Bitton



Psalm 120

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת אֱלֹהֵי בְצִרְתָּהּ לִי קִרְאתִי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי:  
ה' הֲצִילָהּ בְּפִשִׁי מִשִּׁפְתֵי שֶׁקֶר מִלְּשׁוֹן רַמְיָה:  
מִהֲיִתֵּן לָךְ וּמִהֲיִסִּיף לְךָ לִשׁוֹן רַמְיָה:  
חֲצִי גִבּוֹר שְׂנוּגִים לֵעָם גַּחְלֵי רִתְּמִים:  
אֹיְהֵ-לִי כִי־גִרְתִּי מִשֶּׁרֶף שִׁכְנֹתַי עִם־אֱהֵלֵי קֶדֶר:  
רַבַּת שִׁכְנֵה־לָּהּ בְּפִשִׁי לֵעָם שׁוֹנֵא שְׁלוֹם:  
אֲנִי־שְׁלוֹם וְכִי אֲדַבֵּר הִמָּה לְמַלְחָמָה:

1. Song of Maalot. I cry out to G-d out of my anguish, knowing that He will answer me.
- 2 HaShem, free me from the lips of lies, from the tongue of liars.
- 3 What [peace] could be achieved [with this enemy]? What [other lies] will people with lying tongues have to add [to deceive]?
- 4 [Their promises of peace] are like the poisonous arrows of their warriors, or the embers of broom [that do not seem burning] that simulate [peace]
- 5 Woe to me that I have to live among the inhabitants of Meshech [=towns of the Levant, like Turkey], and that I have to reside next to the people of Quedar [the Ismailis, or Arabs]!
- 6 I have already spent a lot of time alongside these people [and I have learned] that they do not want peace [and only think about destroying me].
- 7 I want peace, [and I seek peace]! But when I talk to them about peace, my enemies think about [how to destroy me with] war

This is an extraordinary Psalm, because despite having been written 3,000 years ago, it is impossible not to identify with it today.

1 I cry out to G-d out of my anguish, knowing that He will answer me. 2. HaShem, free me from the lips of lies, from the tongue of liars.  
King David begins by begging G-d to save him from these unusual enemies. Unlike other occasions in which the rival is characterized by his military power that endangers David's life (see for example, Tehilim 144) in this Psalm the threat does not come from the battlefield: this enemy is dangerous because he betrays and lies, and shows himself as seeking peace, but it is not possible to trust his promises of non-aggression



3 What [peace] will be achieved [with this enemy]? What [other lies] will people with lying tongues have to add [to deceive]?

4 [His promises of peace] are [as deceptive] as the poisonous arrows of his warriors; or like the broom-tree ashes[that do not seem burning] with which they simulate [peace]

His deadly arrows not only damage the wounded body part because they are poisoned: the words of this enemy are poisoned with hatred and death, not with peace and coexistence. In times of peace, the enemy's strategy is compared to the embers of the "broom-tree" (in the Hebrew original "rotem"): the burning ashes of this wild bush look gray, dull, and innocuous, like ashes. But when you think that this ash is cold and harmless, you touch it, and then you get burnt. The enemies of King David appear peaceful and harmless, like the ashes of the broom tree, but that is only appearances and empty promises. When you approach him with your outstretched hand, thinking that his hatred is off, you get burnt!

5 Woe to me that I have to live among the inhabitants of Meshekh [=peoples of the Levant, like Turkey], and that I have to reside next to the peoples of Kedar [the Ishmaelites and Arabs]!

David expresses the anguish of living surrounded by treacherous people. And he finally reveals the identity of these unusual rivals without word or honor. They are Israel's own neighbors: Meshekh, to the north—in the Levant or what today would be Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey—and Kedar to the south—Egypt and Gaza. A little context will help us better understand this Psalm. By the time of King David and his son Shelomo, the kingdom of Israel flourished and had reached its economic peak. King David had also made peace with other peoples, such as the Phoenicians, with whom he established trade treaties that benefitted both. The entire region, the Middle East at that time, benefitted greatly from Israel's prosperity and stability. It was a "win/win" situation, as they say today, where everyone could prosper. But for Meshekh and Kedar the "prosperity and stability" of Israel was unbearable. They could not bear that Israel triumphed and was at peace! Although it may seem totally crazy, for the leaders of these people, it was more important to destroy Israel than to benefit from the prosperity that Israel generously shared with the entire region.

6 I already spent too much time alongside these people who hate peace [and only think of destroying me]. 7 I want peace,[and I seek peace]. But while I talk to you about peace, my enemies [behind my back] think about [how to destroy me with] war.

David now knows them. He lived with them for a long time. These people, in reality, do not seek peace. Its main objective is the destruction of Israel. For Israel's enemies, a peace treaty is not an objective in itself: it is only a means for Israel—naively trusting in hollow promises—to lower its guard, weaken itself, and expose itself more easily to attacks from its neighbors. But after he got burnt repeatedly with broom-tree ashes, David overcame his naivety. And he expressed his new discovery with pain: the Ishmaelites, the ancient Arab people, who are supposedly "our cousins" — have been infected by the existential hatred that Amaleq has for the Jews?

David's enemies are like a wild, hungry tiger, approaching him with just one goal in mind: eating King David! Let's imagine how dangerous, naive, and suicidal it would be to extend a hand of peace to the tiger and —with a big smile— offer to take the tiger to dinner at the best restaurant. Nothing is more dangerous than imagining that the tiger would "understand my language," thinking that the tiger would shake my hand and we would go together to enjoy a great meal in peace.

The tiger does NOT understand my language. And his appetite for me can't wait. His sense of smell and his instincts control him. And when I extend my hand to him, I will become his dinner.

Originally Written in 2021

## **Sephardic Torah - A Trailblazing Havruta: Rabbanit Farha Sassoon and Rav Yitzhak Nissim**

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila Featured in The Jewish Journal



For most of Jewish history, the havruta system – where two people partner for serious Torah study – was limited to men. In the early 20th century, two prominent Iraqi personalities – one female and one male – broke the glass ceiling. Farha Flora Sasson was a prominent businesswoman who loved to study Torah, Talmud and Halakha. Her havruta via correspondence was Yitzhak Nissim, a young Torah scholar who later became Israel’s second Sephardic Chief Rabbi (1955-1973).

Farha Sassoon was humble and modest, and wished to keep her havruta correspondence with Rav Nissim private. He respectfully disagreed, and he wanted to publish their Torah discussions in his new book of halakhic responsa. He felt that publishing their exchanges – with her name – would set a groundbreaking example for women to engage in serious Torah study:

“I’ve been thinking about this a lot, and I don’t understand why Her Honor does not want her name written in the halakhic book I will be publishing? I firmly believe that it is incumbent on the Hakhamim of this generation to strengthen and encourage women who voluntarily take upon the study of the Oral Law. In fact, I pray that G-d will inspire the hearts of many women to study Torah, and that the light of their Torah will be a positive influence on their surroundings, especially on the children in their home, for to our great sorrow, our levels of Torah and reverence for G-d have terribly deteriorated. I therefore think it is preferable that we should mention your name in my published book. If Her Honor is not agreeable to this, I will cancel that thought, for the greatest display of respect is honoring a person’s will. Having said that, I do think that for the sake of future generations, it is preferable that your name should be mentioned in print.”

Thankfully he convinced her. Rav Nissim’s book – Yayin Hatov – was published in 1946, and for the very first time, here was a halakhic work that included three lengthy responsa reflecting a havruta exchange between a man and a woman. In these responsa, Rav Nissim addressed Farha as “Rabbanit” – a title which could either mean “rabbi’s wife” or “female rabbi.” She was neither, so his addressing her as “Rabbanit” was out of his deep respect for her rabbinic knowledge and passion for Torah study.

Quietly, without any fanfare, Rav Yitzhak Nissim and Rabbanit Farha Sassoon helped pave the way for serious Torah study for women. That’s an achievement worthy of celebration, especially on Simhat Torah.

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

## 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 we can to express that support. Many of us have family 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 anti-Semitic 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.

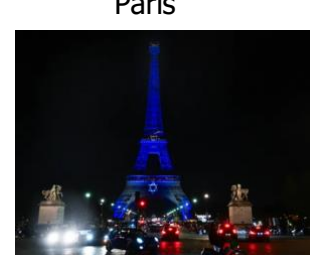
While we cannot serve on the front lines in Israel, we all have a role to play to help the Jewish people in this battle against evil:

- **Donate** to organizations to aid those in need in Israel. There are so many worthy causes, including the [Friends of the IDF](#), [Magen David Adom](#), [Zaka](#), and many more.
- **Reach Out** - If you have any friends or family members in Israel, see how they're doing. Send them a WhatsApp, write them an email, FaceTime them, or give them a call. Ask them if there's anything you can do to help.
- **Advocate & Support Publicly** - Show up at rallies in support of Israel. Contact your elected officials to tell them where you stand. Educate your friends and colleagues about the truth of what Israel is fighting against. Find resources from Stand with Us [Here](#).
- **Pray** - Most importantly, we must always keep Israel in our prayers, and ask Hashem to help protect us in this difficult time. We pray for the safety and success of the IDF, we pray for the safe return of all the hostages, we pray for the recovery of all those who are wounded, and we pray for peace in Israel. [Click Here to Download Special Prayers for Israel](#)

אֵלָא שְׁבַכְל דִּוְר וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עֲלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.  
"In each generation, they stand against us to destroy us,  
but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand."

Rallies in New York and across the world:

There were many more that we could not include.



Paris



Geneva

Berlin



**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](http://www.kkjsm.org) accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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



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280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002  
Website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)  
Email: [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)**

**Your donations enable us to continue our work. You can send donations via mail directly to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002, or you can donate via our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org).**