



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

May 2023 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

While April was a month of painful anniversaries, as we remembered those lost in the Holocaust on Yom HaShoah (see article and photos in this newsletter), May is a month of joyous celebration, as we celebrate Shavuot (the receiving of the Torah), commemorate the establishment of the State of Israel 75 years ago, and dance on Broome Street for our annual Greek Jewish Festival.



Dedication of a Torah Scroll to Kehila Kedosha Janina by the Yohanan Family, 1951

This newsletter, our 170th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

We now reach over 10,000 households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at museum@kkjsm.org

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email 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.

Simchas

We celebrate the birth of the great-great granddaughter of Rabbi Jessoula Levy and Esther Cantos Levy, Simran Gupta-Laws, granddaughter of Daniel Weinberg, born 12/27/2022.



She said yes! Congratulations Dara and Jason on their engagement! Wishing them a lifetime of happiness, laughter and adventures. We're thrilled to welcome Dara to our family as our daughter and the Sand clan! It brings us joy to see how happy they make each other.

Passings

We extend our condolences to the family and friends of Moshe Shaul, born in Izmir in 1929 and attended Izmir Saint Joseph and Atatürk High Schools. He made aliya in 1949 and studied Sociology and Political Science at Hebrew university in Jerusalem. He was married and the father of two. He was involved in publishing in Ladino and was the editor of Aki Yerushalayim Magazine published quarterly for 39 years.



Moshe Shaul was born in the neighborhood called "La Montanya" (Mountain) in Izmir, where the Bet Israel Synagogue is located. He was active in the Neemanei Tsion youth organization and immigrated to Israel in 1949.

In 1954, during the first year of his university studies in Israel, an announcement posted on the university billboard caught his attention. Kol Israel (Voice of Israel) Radio was looking for someone who could be a Ladino presenter. At that time, the Editorial Manager was Yitshak Levi. In addition to broadcasting, Levi was researching Judeo Espanyol culture and folklore. He would go to the homes of the elderly and to the old age homes, and register the songs he heard from them. In the course of time, he managed to save over 400 songs, which we call "kantikas" or "romansas" from extinction.

When Yitshak Levi, a noted musician, passed away in 1977, the management of broadcasting in Ladino was given to Moshe Shaul. The radio had all the facilities to preserve a language; stories, narratives and songs could be recorded. Thus, Moshe Shaul was able to tour the nursing homes and register over 3,000 songs in a few years with the help of the radio staff. And with Spain's assistance, these songs were included in the catalog of Kol Israel. The radio program directed by Moshe Shaul won the first prize of Spain's EFE (Spanish News Agency) in 1980. (EFE is considered to be the world's third largest news agency). In 1985, he shared the Spanish National Radio's first prize with Radio Buenos Aires. In 1990, Aki Yerushalayim again won a special mention from Radio Buenos Aires. The award ceremony took place in Madrid, and Moshe Shaul received the award from the king.

In 2018, Moshe Shaul was honored with the title "Comandante de la Orden del Merito Civil Español", one of Spain's most prestigious awards. He was also appointed as a permanent member of Real Academia Española. Shaul was awarded by "La Autoridad Nacional del Ladino" the "Life Award" for his contributions to the Ladino language.

He published "Aki Yerushalayim" Magazine for 39 years. Moreover, his articles have been published on the websites of Şalom, El Amaneser Magazine and Itahdut Yotsei Turkiya. He was involved with La Autoridad Nacional del Ladino was founded in 1979 with the authorization of the then Minister of Culture Zvulun Hamer. Moshe Shaul was the deputy of former President Yitshak Navon, who was the president of the organization for many years. During the years that Moshe Shaul worked with Navon in this organization; he organized two international symposiums, one in Paris and the other in Salamanca, an exhibition of Ladino books, and he ensured the cataloging of the very old and decaying Ladino-language newspapers at the Ben Zvi Institute. He initiated Ladino courses still continuing at present, from Haifa to Beersheva.

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2023

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM
WISHES YOU A

HAPPY SHAVUOTH

מועדים לשמחה

Χρόνια Πολλά

JOIN US FOR SHAVUOTH HOLIDAY SERVICES AND CELEBRATE
OUR RECEIVING OF THE TORAH AS A COMMUNITY

FRI MAY 26 SHAHARITH 9:30AM

SAT MAY 27 SHAHARITH 9:30AM

“BEHOLD, I COME TO YOU IN A THICK CLOUD,
THAT THE PEOPLE MAY HEAR WHEN I SPEAK WITH YOU
AND BELIEVE YOU FOREVER.”

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME ST NYC
PLEASE RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG

Join us at Kehila Kedosha Janina for Shavuot Services, conducted in the Romaniote tradition of the Jews from Ioannina, Greece.

Friday May 26 - 1st Day Shahrith 9:30 AM

Saturday May 27 – 2nd Day Shahrith 9:30 AM

Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org

View our full holiday schedule [Here](#)

Greek Jewish Festival – Sunday May 21 from 12pm-6pm

Join the Greek Jewish Festival on Sunday May 21 as we celebrate the unique Romaniote and Sephardic heritage of the Jews of Greece! Experience a feast for the senses including authentic kosher Greek foods and homemade Greek pastries, traditional Greek dancing and live Greek and Sephardic music, an outdoor marketplace full of vendors, arts and educational activities for kids, Sephardic cooking demonstrations, and much more! Learn more at www.GreekJewishFestival.com and on our Facebook Event Page [Here](#)

Volunteers needed! If you can help volunteer on May 21 we would love to have your assistance! Please email Amarcus@kkjsm.org to sign up now.



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

PRESENTS THE
EIGHTH ANNUAL


ב"ה

**FREE
ADMISSION**

GREEK JEWISH FESTIVAL

**SUNDAY MAY 21, 2023
12PM-6PM**

280 BROOME ST BETWEEN ALLEN ST & ELDRIDGE ST
LOWER EAST SIDE NYC

DELICIOUS FOOD LIVE MUSIC KIDS ACTIVITIES

SYNAGOGUE TOURS DANCING VENDORS & GIFTS

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 LOWER EAST SIDE	 L.E.S.P.I.	 LOWER EAST SIDE HISTORY MONTH	 AJC New York	 Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network	 JIMENA	 SAVOR	 WOODWARD GALLERY	

GREEKJEWISHFESTIVAL.COM



4

Celebrate Israel Parade – June 4

Email Amarcus@kkjism.org to sign up to march in the parade with us!

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM
INVITES YOU TO JOIN US IN THE**

**CELEBRATE ISRAEL PARADE
SUNDAY JUNE 4TH**

JOIN THE GREEK JEWISH COMMUNITY AS WE MARCH TOGETHER WITH OUR OWN FLOAT IN THE CELEBRATE ISRAEL PARADE! FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER THE ROMANIOTE & SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY FROM GREECE, TURKEY, AND THE BALKANS WILL HAVE OUR OWN FLOAT IN THE PARADE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER COMMUNITY SYNAGOGUES. THE FLOAT WILL INCLUDE LIVE GREEK, ISRAELI, AND SEPHARDIC MUSIC TOO!

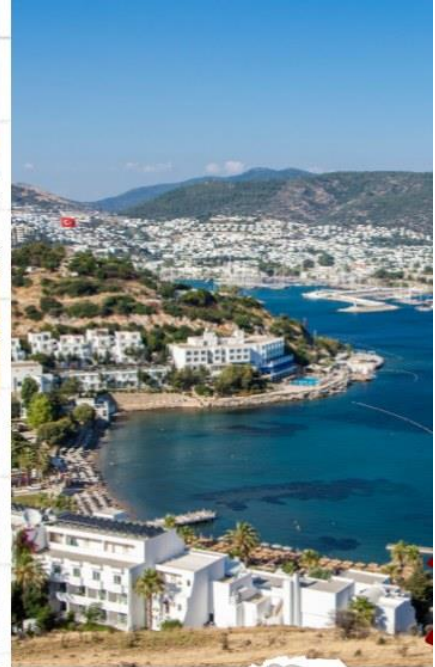
JOIN US ON MANHATTAN'S FIFTH AVENUE AS WE CELEBRATE THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

FOR MORE INFO AND TO SIGN UP TO MARCH WITH OUR COMMUNITY FLOAT, PLEASE EMAIL ANDREW MARCUS AT AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG



**Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network
Summer 2023 Tour of Jewish Turkey**

The Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network is excited to announce their special Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Turkey this Summer 2023! We will trace the roots of our families and visit the beautiful cities of Istanbul, Izmir, Edirne, Tekirdağ, Büyükada, Kuşadası, Ephesus, & Sardis. The tour will run from July 9-19, 2023. Spots are limited and the deadline to register and submit deposits is May 15. View the full itinerary at <https://bit.ly/YPTurkey2023> and contact Ethan@SephardicBrotherhood.com with any questions. Open to young Jews in their 20s and 30s. Sign up now while there are still spots left!



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS TOUR OF JEWISH TURKEY

July 9-19, 2023

**INCLUDES ISTANBUL, IZMIR, EDIRNE, TEKIRDAĞ,
BÜYÜKADA, KUŞADASI, EPHEBUS, & SARDIS**

**REDISCOVER YOUR HERITAGE AND CONNECT WITH OTHER YOUNG
SEPHARDIC JEWS ON THIS ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE**

View the full itinerary at bit.ly/YPTurkey2023

**To register and learn more email
Ethan@SephardicBrotherhood.com**



Upcoming Events of Interest

New York Sephardic Jewish Film Festival - May 7-11

View the Full Schedule and Reserve Tickets Here: <https://nysjff.eventive.org/schedule>



**NEW YORK SEPHARDIC JEWISH
FILM FESTIVAL**

25th Anniversary Edition, 7-11 May 2023



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Celebrate the Sephardic Culture on Film!



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Sephardi
Federation

Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On April 23rd, we commemorated Yom HaShoah at Kehila Kedosha Janina. This year marked the 80th anniversary of the deportations from Thessaloniki, Veroia, the Bulgarian Zones of Occupation in northeastern Greece and, the Bulgarian Zones of Occupation in North Macedonia (Monastir/Bitola and Skopje). In addition, as always, we remembered those lost from Ioannina, Preveza, Arta, Athens, Corfu, Hania, Chalkis, Kastoria, Larissa, Volos, Trikala, Patras, and other parts of Greece.



During our Yom HaShoah commemoration, we were treated to a preview of a film in progress by Caroline Kaye on the story of her family from Kavala and Drama and how they experienced the Holocaust in Bulgarian Zones of Operation in Northeastern Greece. To learn more about this important film project, visit <https://www.leftlanestraight.com/> or email us at museum@kkjms.org

Yom HaShoah Commemorations around Our World



Athens



Sarajevo



Greek Jewish community in Israel



Istanbul

News from Jewish Greece

Athens

Historical Holocaust Memorial in Tavros

An event that forges memory so as not to forget the traumatic past.

The Municipality of Moschato-Tavros, a municipality in the South Athens regional unit, organized on April 5 with great success the installation of the Historical Holocaust Memorial in the area of Rouf, in the train-theater train in Rouf. The aim of the event was to highlight the important historical event, since in this area, in early April 1944, the wagons carrying our Jewish compatriots to the mass extermination camps began.



The Mayor of Moschato-Tavros, Andreas Efthymiou, welcomed the attendees to the memorial service, stating that "with this event we pay tribute to the human condition, to human dignity, to man. The wagons, which today are a meeting place for free people and a place of culture, remind us of the innocent souls who perished in such a barbaric way. It was not Jews who were taken to the camps and crematoria. They were people, small children, babies, young people, men and women, old people.



People all over the world must enjoy the benefits of democracy, freedom of religion, freedom and self-determination. Those who have suffered persecution must be first in this fight. Especially today, when nationalism is dangerously flaring up, racism is spreading, the manipulation of the masses is achieved by all means, the European construction and world peace are threatened with collapse. we must all stand up and defend MAN."

The event was addressed by the actress, director and artistic director of the railway cultural multiplex "Train-Theater the train to Rouf", Mrs. Tatiana Lygari and the representative of the Jewish Community of Athens, Mr. Aris Emmanouil

The event was addressed by Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and MPs: Yannis Balafas, SYRIZA PS, Tonia Antoniou, PASOK-Movement for Change, Christos Katsotis, KKE. Nikos Papazoglou, politician of the "Greek Solution", and the Mayor of Nikaia-Rentis, George Ioakimidis, also greeted. Also, Yiannis Sgouros, former Regional Governor of Attica and head of the "Independent Self-Government of Attica", addressed the event, while Roxani Bey, member of the Political Council of PASOK-KINAL and Stella Valavani, Regional Councilor of Attica, were present.

Mr. Benjamin Batis, representative of the Jewish Community of Athens, Mr. Haris Athanasiadis, Professor of Public History at Panteion University, Mr. Kostas Therianos, educator-member of the Board of Directors of the "Glinos Foundation" and Mr. Marios Sousis, President of the Holocaust Descendants Association, referred to the historical memorial service with experiential references but also with highly structured analyses.

A special sensation was caused by the students of 1ST Tavros GEL who attended the event with the Director of the GEL Mrs. Persephone Gianellou and the Deputy Director Mr. Antonis Bakaloumis. Student Stefanos Botsis and student Despina Poula delivered an inspiring text while at the end, all students paid tribute with a white rose to the memory of our innocent fellow human beings who were murdered.

During the memorial service, musician-performer Anastasia Hadjipavlou performed songs from Mauthausen's Ballad and a Jewish psalm, while songwriter Panos Boussalis also performed songs from Mauthausen's Ballad. Particularly moving was the screening of a five-minute video about the Holocaust by the students of the Music School of Arta.

Ioannina

A tribute to Moses Elisaf by Dr. Léon Saltiel. Full article [here](#)

On Friday 17 February, 2023, a few hours before the start of Shabbat, the Greek Jewish world was shocked to learn of the death of Moses Elisaf, the Mayor of the city of Ioannina and President of its historic Jewish community. In Greece, from the Head of State to members of the government, parliamentarians, foreign ambassadors and the general public, they all expressed their grief at the news and large crowds attended the funeral. Everyone expressed their admiration for the man's achievements. Leon Saltiel, who interviewed him for K. a few months before his death, talks about the career and role played by this key figure of Greek Jewish identity and the void he leaves behind.



The death of Moise Elisaf at the age of 68 is a great loss for Greece and the Jewish world. He was a beloved mayor, a renowned physician, an intellectual and a Jewish leader. He was the first Jew to be elected mayor in Greece. By all accounts, committed to the good of society as a whole, he had all the qualities one expects of a great servant of a healthy and modern democracy. When K. magazine asked me to interview him, I sent him some questions in writing and he replied in August 2022. Later, in October, I went to his hometown of Ioannina, to speak at a conference – called “Combating Antisemitism, Holocaust Distortion and Denial on the Digital Battlefield” – organized by the municipality and the Greek delegation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), in which I have the honor of representing the Greek Jewish community. On this occasion, I saw how proud Moses Elisaf was to welcome a large group of delegates from all over Europe. He was a generous host, making a point of being a guide to his city himself. Regrettably, he was hospitalized soon after in December and gradually lost his battle with cancer.

The words I will quote from him here come from his last interview, which we did not have time to complete. I wish to faithfully render the meaning of his message as the traces of a testament to his achievements and his vision of Greek Judaism.

Elected as Mayor in 2019, Elisaf's ascension to the leadership of the municipality of Ioannina was, in his eyes, concrete proof that traditional antisemitic stereotypes and intolerance towards Jews had been put to rest in Greece. The fact that his fellow citizens chose to evaluate the mayoral candidates on the basis of objective criteria, without emphasizing their religious beliefs and origins, was for him a strong sign of this evolution. He was committed to fulfilling his duties as ‘First Citizen of the City’ to the best of his ability, focused on living up to the expectations of the voters.

Known for his continued involvement in Jewish communal life and his fight for Jewish representation in politics, he said he never felt he was looked down upon because of being Jewish: “I don't feel any difference in the way I am treated by the overwhelming majority of people. There are always, of course, malignant people, nostalgic fanatics of hate and intolerance, but they are a tiny minority and are completely isolated from my fellow citizens,” he replied.

No one can forget the election of a neo-Nazi group like the Golden Dawn to the Greek Parliament. About the antisemitism that still exists in Greek society, Mayor Elisaf confided in me that he felt “uncomfortable”, admitting that “stereotypes still resonate with many Greeks today. Stereotypical conspiratorial antisemitism, for example, is widespread in the country. Ideas are circulated but few acts are committed, he said. He could not imagine real violence occurring, especially because of its “incompatibility with Greek history and traditions” and “the strong condemnations issued by the official Orthodox Church” when antisemitism arises.

Moses Elisaf was not only the mayor of his city but also the president of its Jewish community – a community with a long history of Romaniote Judaism, of which Ioannina is the capital and which is perhaps the oldest Jewish community in the Diaspora, dating back to Alexander the Great. The Romaniotes are Greek-speaking Jews,

whose existence as a group predates the designations Ashkenazi or Sephardic. They form a unique community, with their particular architecture, with their particular customs and totally distinct from the other Jewish population in Greece. Their traditions are manifested in their own rituals, specific dietary habits, festivals not found elsewhere, and unique music and folk songs that Elisaf strove to preserve. As mayor and president of the community, his unique position was a source of honor and an additional challenge for him, because during his term of office he always tried to keep alive the Romaniote traditions, the heritage of all the inhabitants of Ioannina. We worked hard to safeguard the city's Jewish monuments, such as its imposing synagogue and cemetery.

While many Jewish community leaders in Greece are reluctant to run for office, Elisaf did not hesitate to become mayor. During his long career as a doctor and university teacher, he had always been an active citizen, participating in the political, social and cultural life of his city. He had previously served several terms as a member of the city council, president of the Cultural Centre of Ioannina (2011-2014) and, above all, vice-president of the Circle for Political and Social Issues of the city, an active group from civil society. He managed to put aside divisions, ideologies and petty interests, which earned him great recognition among the population. In his answers to my questions, he said he had to "serve his fellow man selflessly and with unrelenting love." Heir to a strong democratic culture, he considered it the duty of all citizens to participate in civic life in order to contribute, in their own way and according to their possibilities, to the common good.

Historically, the Jews of Greece formed several communities throughout the country. The Jewish population evolved and grew significantly after the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of 1492, when thousands of fleeing Jews found refuge in what is now Greece, notably in Thessaloniki, turning the city into a famous center of Jewish learning and achievement. Under the Ottoman Empire they lived in relative peace under the millet system, which granted them autonomy in their internal affairs and exemption from military service, provided they paid their taxes.

In the 19th century, as the Ottoman Empire retreated, the young Greek state acquired new territories that included Jewish citizens. These Jews enjoyed equal rights, but their population remained relatively small. The situation changed in 1912, when Thessaloniki – of which the 80,000 Jews then formed a majority – became part of Greece. In the inter-war period, the state's efforts to assimilate this population, the great fire of 1917 and the economic crisis of 1929 caused many Jews to leave the city. Only 50,000 Jews remained on the eve of World War II.

During World War II, approximately 85% of the Jewish population of Greece, which was then divided into 28 communities, was deported and perished in the Nazi death camps. 92% of the Jews of Ioannina were deported and murdered during the Holocaust, one of the highest percentages in Europe. With this disappearance, much of the city's rich Jewish culture evaporated. Today, the city is home to a small community of 40 people "fighting against time for survival," as Elisaf said. Keeping alive the memory and traditions of this community was a grueling job, he wrote to me. He always had in mind the goal of making the city aware and proud of its rich Jewish cultural tradition and the decisive role of the Jewish presence in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the city through the centuries. "We are happy that the history of the Shoah now becomes a heritage of all the inhabitants of the city and especially of the new generation."

Today, some 5,000 Jews live in Greece, divided into nine communities, mostly in Athens and Thessaloniki. They are very well integrated into the modern Greek state, have various professions and are very present in public life. Athens and Thessaloniki each have a Jewish primary school and a Jewish retirement home. In addition, there is a summer camp for all Jewish children in the country and many cultural, educational and social events with Jewish themes are organized every year. Greece has recently announced that it is developing – and will soon launch – a National Action Plan against antisemitism, in order to systematically tackle a long-standing and persistent concern of the Jewish community, which also undermines the rule of law and democratic institutions in the country. At the same time, the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens, the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki and the future Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki offer important educational activities throughout the year, while ensuring that Jewish traditions are documented and that the Holocaust is not forgotten.

His reply to my last question can be understood as a form of Jewish political testament. Regarding young Jews around Europe and who would be interested in being active in public life, he answered with unambiguous clarity. "My election has amply demonstrated that all citizens can run for any office, regardless of their religious or other convictions. And I want to use your question here to encourage our young co-religionists in Europe to participate in the political, social and cultural events of their countries, to be active citizens, to try to transmit the unique cultural characteristics of Jewish culture to the societies in which they live, without any attitude of either overreach or self-exclusion. Jewish communities need to see that society is open to them, and to set their sights on meaningful interaction with the multiple identities that make up today's Europe."

It is clear that with the passing of Moses Elisaf, Greece, Europe and the Jewish world are now orphaned. He was a beloved visionary, a bridge-builder, a Jewish activist — a man of many identities who symbolized the civic duty of citizens in today's unified Europe. His hard work to preserve the unique heritage and traditions of Romaniote Judaism must continue so that they can be passed onto future generations, beyond those of the ... 39 last Jews of Ioannina.

Leon Saltiel is a historian, specializing in the Holocaust in Thessaloniki. He is currently Director of Diplomacy, Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and to UNESCO, and Coordinator on countering antisemitism for the World Jewish Congress.

Thessaloniki

The following two articles are due to the work of Leon Saltiel, a scholar impassioned with spreading the story of the Holocaust in Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece, hoping to ensure that our story will be told and our victims remembered.

Dr Leon Saltiel: We need to fight stereotypes around Jews in Greece Full article [here](#)

Dr Leon Saltiel was born in Thessaloniki, Greece. He graduated with honors from the Department of International and European Studies at the University of Macedonia and continued his studies at the Department of International Relations at Georgetown University, where he was also a Fulbright Scholar.

He has over 15 years of experience in the fields of diplomacy and human rights, working in non-governmental organizations within the United Nations and other international organizations. He holds a PhD in Modern Greek history at the University of Macedonia, focusing on the Holocaust of the Jews of Thessaloniki.



Dr. Saltiel has also published articles in important academic journals and specializes in the persecution of Jews in Greece. His publications include *The Holocaust in Thessaloniki: Reactions to the Anti-Jewish Persecution, 1942–1943*, which won the 2021 Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research, and *'Do Not Forget Me': Three Jewish Mothers Write to their Sons from the Thessaloniki Ghetto*.

He is also a member of the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and of the Greek delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). He currently serves as Director of Diplomacy, Representative at UN Geneva and UNESCO, and Coordinator on Countering Antisemitism for the World Jewish Congress.

Dr Saltiel is a man who has devoted a significant part of his life to a sensitive issue, which may be about the period of the extermination of Jews in WWII, but it seems more relevant than ever, especially with the extreme right having such momentum within Greece, as well as worldwide.

He will be in Sydney, New South Wales this week to give a lecture commemorating the 80th anniversary of the deportation of Thessaloniki Jews.

The lecture is being organized by the Consulate General of Greece in Sydney, supported by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. It will be hosted by the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens, University of Sydney, at its premises on Thursday, April 20 from 6pm.

On Monday, April 24, Dr Saltiel will also be speaking on the subject of the Jews in Thessaloniki at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum. Ahead of his arrival in Australia, The Greek Herald spoke with Dr Saltiel about the purpose of his trip, but also about the Jews of the past and present.

In the interview, he delves into the evolution of the flourishing Jewish community in Thessaloniki for over two millennia. He also explains how his lectures will focus on important moments such as the creation of the Jewish community in ancient times, the impact of the Inquisition, its integration into the Greek State, the Holocaust and the current life of the Jews in Thessaloniki. Asked about the purpose of his trip to Australia, Dr Saltiel said: "I was invited by the Consul General of Greece in Sydney, Ioannis Mallikourtis, as there is a large Greek and Jewish community in the city."

"We will talk about the Holocaust, where thousands were exterminated by the Nazis in the death camps during World War II. We will speak in schools, with agencies and we will give interviews in the presence of journalists," he added. At a time when the extreme right has again come to the fore in Greece, with memories of the Golden Dawn party and its racist speech still fresh, we asked him if this specific issue is current and important.

"Someone could consider that it does not only concern the Jews. When the Nazis bloodied Europe, in addition to the six million Jews who were killed, millions of other people also lost their lives," Dr Saltiel said. "You quite rightly mention the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Golden Dawn, which is a direct threat to democracy. Anti-Semitism is a disease for society. We have to fight and fight for respect and mutual appreciation in diversity."

How many Jews of Thessaloniki were killed in World War II and how many are currently living in our country? Dr Saltiel replied that "about 50,000 Jews were killed in Thessaloniki, over 90 percent of the population in the city. At this moment, there are about 5,000 living in Greece in total. Most of them, around 3,500, are in Athens, another 1,500 in Thessaloniki and a few hundred in six other communities."



Are Jews in Greece facing racism today or not? Dr Saltiel was clear: "They are Greek citizens, who live normally like everyone else, with equality, freedom, they are constitutionally protected, they have the same rights and obligations as the rest."

"In everyday life there are manifestations of anti-Semitism, but mainly out of ignorance," he added. "For example, when I was a soldier, they asked me if I was Greek when hearing my last name. Also, there are still many conspiracy theories such as those about the Zionists. It's coffee shop talk, it's not violent. Of course, many efforts have been made in recent years with the help of many and the percentage of ignorance has decreased."

Finally, we asked him why people should attend his lectures in Australia. He replied that "people will learn the Jewish history in Greece and in the city of Thessaloniki from ancient times until today, but also the evolution of Greece as a nation state through this prism." "We will talk about nationalism, the need to fight hatred, the need for democracy," Dr Saltiel added. "We need to fight stereotypes. We want to get in touch with the Greeks of the diaspora and we look forward to meeting them in person, exchanging views and answering questions and concerns."

Rhodes

The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation (RJHF) is pleased to receive the ICARO Rodi pottery that belonged to our fellow Rhodesli and Holocaust Survivor, Miru Alcana of blessed memory. The historical item was donated by her friend, Jozef Bilman of Silver Lake. Learn more about Miru Alcana's story [here](#)



Stella Levi Received an Early Birthday Present with an Honor from the Republic of Italy (Stella will turn 100 on May 5th)

Stella was born on the island of Rhodes on May 5, 1923. She was deported with the Jews of Rhodes and Kos on July 23rd, 1944 and was among the few Jews from Rhodes who survived the concentration camps. Stella Levi was awarded last month with the insignia of the Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic - Italy's highest honor. Listen to Stella's speech [here](#): short and clear. She explains everything with the grace, dignity and humility that make her unique.



Kos

Kahal Shalom Synagogue Restoration

Updates on the restoration of the synagogue of Kos from architect Elias Messinas

Jewish history in the writing today in Kos in Greece: with great excitement we are happy to announce the restoration of the interior of Kahal Shalom Synagogue on the island of Kos in Greece! The synagogue built in 1935 was abandoned after the near total annihilation of the Jews of Kos (a community of about 120 Jews) in World War II. The synagogue was purchased by the municipality around 1984. The historic building was preserved and served as a cultural center for the local community. In recent years, with the increase in tourism from Israel, the need for a synagogue on the island has become evident. In the last year, the Municipality of Kos and the Central Board of Jewish Communities, decided to bring the synagogue back to its former use (mostly in the summer months) combined with a cultural center that will operate during most of the year.



The architect Dr. Elias Messinas, expert in the architecture, history and restoration of Greek synagogues was approached and given the very difficult task of returning the interior of the synagogue to its original state, with all the furniture required for prayer. Given that there was no evidence of the pre-WWII state of the synagogue, the design is based on historic examples in Italy (Kos was under Italian rule until 1943) and also on the reuse of older furniture in order to raise their sanctity and to comply with the principles of a circular economy.

The implementation was assigned to MANOS-TSIAOUSI in Serres, Greece, and the implementation was coordinated by Dimitris Geroukalis Director of Civil Company Ippokratis, who is responsible for the upkeep of the historic synagogue. The inauguration of the synagogue and the placing of the mezuzahs in the doors is planned in May.

Cyprus

A Poignant Commemoration of the EOKA Liberation Struggle at St. Nicholas in Flushing [Article here](#)

Flushing, NY – A poignant event commemorating the EOKA struggle against British colonial rule in Cyprus was held at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church's Sarantakos Hall in Flushing on April 1.

The Federation of Cypriot American Organizations (FCAO) in collaboration with the International Coordinating Committee Justice for Cyprus (PSEKA) and the Consulate General of the Republic of Cyprus in New York presented the event which featured songs, poetry, and essays commemorating the 68th anniversary of the start of the liberation struggle which lasted from 1955-1959.



Arianna Christou, member of the FCAO Board of Directors and NEPOMAK, the youth division of the Federation, served as emcee and gave the welcoming remarks, noting that "with feelings of national pride, we honor today the fighters of EOKA who with absolute faith in the idea of freedom participated in the great struggle against British colonial rule."



She then acknowledged the dignitaries present, including His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos- representing His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations Ambassador Evangelos Sekeris, Consul General of Cyprus in New York Michalis Firillas, Rev. Prototropresbyter Paul Palesty, Rona Marie Panteli, first secretary of the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the UN, FCAO President Kyriacos Papastylianou, Cyprus-U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Maria Pappas, St. Nicholas Parish Council President Peter Valasiadis, and William Spyropoulos Day School Principal Mary Tzallas.

His Grace Bishop Athenagoras and Fr. Palesty then presided over the Trisagion service in honor of the fallen heroes of EOKA. FCAO President Kyriacos Papastylianou in his remarks noted the heroism of the EOKA fighters which echoed the heroic feats of Hellenism from the past, such as the "molon labe" of Leonidas of Sparta quoted by Grigoris Afxentiou to the British who then burned him alive. He then acknowledged the presence of Andreas Karacostas, one of the EOKA fighters, who received a warm round of applause from the audience, adding that we owe a debt of gratitude to him and to all those heroes of the liberation struggle who fought, were imprisoned, tortured, during the course of the struggle.

"But sadly, the struggle for freedom for the Greek-Cypriot people was not vindicated," Papastylianou said, adding that instead, 14 years later the Turkish invasion took place "and 36 percent of Cyprus' territory is still occupied to this day. The struggle continues... we must never forget those who sacrificed their lives."

He then congratulated the children who participated in the program and their parents for passing down to their children the Greek language, faith, culture, history, and traditions, so that Hellenism is not lost in the United States.

Philip Christopher then thanked the St. Nicholas community and all those for attending, including the dignitaries and AHEPA, noting the presence of Nicholas Karacostas, Past Supreme President and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for AHEPA, and Savas Tsivicos. He also thanked the Artistic and Musical Director of the event and of the Pancyprian Association of America Phyto Stratis for all his efforts as well as the members of the Pancyprian Choir who were present, including President Ismini Michaels.

Christopher noted the celebrations of July 4th, March 25th, and April 1, 1955-1959, as "300 young men, willing to sacrifice their lives, fought against 30,000 British troops and due to the EOKA of April 1, 1955-1959, today, the Republic of Cyprus is independent, member of the European Union, member of the United Nations."

He continued: "Perhaps the sacrifice of Pallikarides, Demetriou, Karaolis, Matsis and Afxentiou did not give us the destiny that we wanted which was union with Greece, but it did give us independence and this is what we are celebrating today and we can never forget the sacrifice of those people, but what we usually remember is the determination the enthusiasm and the spirit, the spirit of 1776, the spirit of March 25, 1821, and the spirit of April 1, 1955-1959. We are fighting and we are continuing to fight, because 36 percent of the island of Cyprus is occupied by Turkish troops... it is our hope and we still have to hope after 48 years that what started on April 1, 1955 will not finish where the island is

divided and occupied... Cyprus today is still fighting for freedom and justice and we as American citizens... have an obligation to make sure that Cyprus becomes free and all the refugees return to their homes.”

Consul General of Cyprus Michalis Firillas noted that there is a bittersweet aspect to these days, celebrating March 25th, Greek Independence Day, and then April 1st and the tremendous struggle that was fought for freedom but Cyprus is still not entirely free. He added that such events must continue in honor of the heroes of EOKA as they inspire us to continue on, to have faith and be unified in the fight for freedom.

Ambassador Sekeris mentioned the invasion of Ukraine and reminding his colleagues at the UN that there is another longstanding issue, that of Cyprus. He also spoke in English, pointing out that the young martyrs of the EOKA struggle should be viewed as a paradigm to the young people present and an inspiration to all.

The impressive musical program followed with the gifted soloists Demetris Michael and Ariadne Anna under the direction of Phyto Stratis and the participation of the William Spyropoulos Greek American Day School Choir, directed by Areti Giovannou, and the students who recited poems and essays, Nicholas Polydorou, Maria Polydorou, Iacovos Polydorou, Markella Georgiou, Christiana Georgiou, and Eirini Kyprianou.

Stratis spoke briefly about the choice of the final song in the program before the National Anthems were sung, Tin Ellada Agapo, with lyrics from a poem by Pallikarides to his beloved, “it is not particularly a patriotic song, but it is a love song, and I wanted to highlight that these heroes, these fighters, who were called and are sometimes still called ‘terrorists’ when they were simply fighting for their homeland. Afxentiou with his sacrifice, choosing to stay inside and be burned alive showed who the real terrorists were and who were the heroes.”

“These people loved their homeland, their religion, their family, but above all they loved life,” Stratis said. “Evagoras Pallikarides was a young person, an excellent poet, and this is a small piece that shows the maturity of an 18-year-old.”

His Grace Bishop Athenagoras in his closing remarks noted that “the heroes will remain immortal in our minds, in our hearts, and in our memories.”

The event also included the screening of a video produced by the FCAO highlighting eyewitness accounts of the EOKA struggle, a photo exhibition organized with the support of the Cyprus Press and Information Office, and a reception which followed the program. Also among those present were Despina Axiotakis, Tasoula Manaridis, and many members of the community.

Turkey

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, Chief Rabbi of Athens, visits Rabbinate in Turkey

The Chief Rabbi of Athens Rav Gabriel Negrin paid a visit to Chief Rabbi Rav Isak Haleva in his office. During the meeting, our Bet-Din members Rav Izak Peres and Rav Naftali Haleva accompanied Chief Rabbi Nafi Haleva Izak Peres.



Exploring Turkey's Jewish Delights Full article in Hadassah Magazine [here](#)

Istanbul is a feast for the senses. Izmir enchants with its sparkling Aegean coastline and jewel-box synagogues. But just a few years ago, I'm unsure what my reaction would have been to an invitation to visit such illustrious Turkish cities. Without a doubt, I would have wanted to experience Istanbul—the fabled and literal spot where East meets West along the Bosphorus, the 25-mile-long channel that connects the Black and Marmara Seas. I would have wanted to explore ancient Constantinople's 21st-century manifestation, with its unparalleled sweep of towering minarets and domes surrounded by water, the whole scene turned golden by the sun.



The situation shifted again last year, when rapprochement between the nations culminated in the restoration of full diplomatic ties in August 2022. Turkey's motives for reconciliation, most observers agree, were a two-part political calculation. First, Turkey sought to burnish its image in Washington's political corridors and among influential Jewish groups that might lobby the United States government on its behalf. Normalizing relations with Israel might help accomplish that aim, the theory goes. At the same time, the country sought increased economic engagement with Israel and began to look to international tourism, which took a major hit during two years of Covid lockdowns, as a means to bolster its sluggish economy.

The Turkish republic's charm offensive may be one explanation for the Jewish media trip I joined last fall. The nation's newfound openness is welcome news for passport-holders eager to explore cosmopolitan Istanbul as well as Turkey's third-largest city, Izmir, home to the nation's second-largest Jewish community.

Whether you're exploring the European or Asian side of Istanbul—Turks refer to each as "the other side," or "karsi taraf," depending on where they are standing—the bustling crowds and splendor of Byzantine- and Ottoman-era architecture fronting the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn are magical. The city's urbane nature coupled with its millennia of recorded history means that Istanbul regularly appears atop lists of most-visited international metropolises. All those tourists translate to a cacophony of languages overheard when strolling the teeming streets of Istanbul, which, with 15.8 million residents, is Europe's largest city.

One language you're not likely to hear is Ladino. Istanbul's approximately 17,500 Jews, who are almost all Sephardi, for the most part grew up with parents or grandparents who spoke the language, also known as Judeo-Spanish. But although linguists estimate that 8,000 Ladino speakers remain in Turkey, few among the younger generations speak it.

"The language is in the category of other dying languages," confirmed Nisya Isman Allovi, the 43-year-old director and curator of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews in Istanbul. "I don't speak it, but I understand it. It is a nostalgic language for me, and of course I would like to hear more Ladino. But it just isn't a priority."

Allovi and other prominent Jews, however, are committed to preserving Ladino texts. As director of Turkey's largest Jewish museum, Allovi oversees a rich collection that includes 18th-century volumes of the *Me'am Lo'ez*, a commentary on the Torah written in Ladino. *Me'am Lo'ez* roughly translates to "The Tribe That Speaks a Foreign Language" and was an initiative first championed by Rabbi Yaakov Culi in Constantinople in 1730, when few Jews in the Ottoman Empire could read Hebrew.

Also housed at the museum are issues of the community paper *Salom*, which was published in Ladino from its founding in 1947 through 1984, when it switched to Turkish. Today, there are 6,000 subscribers to *El Amaneser* (the dawn), a monthly sister publication to *Salom* that is believed to be the only Ladino newspaper in the world.

Ladino's slow decline is the result of two forces, one from within and one from outside the Jewish community. With the arrival in Turkey of Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in the late 19th century, French became the preferred language of the Jewish cultural elite. After Turkey's independence in 1923, the patriotic fervor that the father of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, ignited, led to secularizing reforms including the "Citizen, Speak Turkish" campaign. As the 20th century progressed, fewer Jews felt comfortable speaking Ladino.



Further draining the country of Ladino-speakers, between 1948 and 1954, nearly 35,000 predominantly lower-class Jews made aliyah—40 percent of the population—largely for economic reasons. Today, fewer than 20,000 Jews live in Turkey, most of them well-educated, economically successful and somewhat insular.

Just as Ladino traveled with Sephardi Jews from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire, so, too, did the design of their houses of worship. Configured in what's called a central plan, most Turkish synagogues feature a tevah (bimah) in the middle of the sanctuary, facing the hechal (ark), with benches wrapping around the main floor and balcony seating for women. Close to 20 Sephardi synagogues bearing this layout are scattered throughout Istanbul, the majority on the European side.



Beyond Istanbul, similar synagogues can be found in, among other cities, Izmir, Ankara, Bursa and, in the south, Antakya, which suffered massive casualties after the devastating Kahramanmaraş earthquake in February that claimed more than 50,000 victims in Turkey and neighboring Syria.

Hop a short flight from Istanbul Airport or embark on a scenic five-hour road trip southwest to reach Izmir. During Greek, Roman and Ottoman rule, the area was known as Smyrna; its most impressive sight from antiquity is the Agora of Smyrna, originally erected in the fourth century BCE. Curved picturesquely around the bay of the Gulf of Izmir, the city today welcomes throngs of cruise passengers who disembark for day trips to the archaeological wonders of Ephesus, Pergamon and Sardis.

But fascinating Jewish history exists closer to port, in the city center. There, Izmir's labyrinthine First Jewish Quarter winds around a section of the Kemeralti bazaar crowded with fish peddlers, produce merchants and bakeries. It is the restoration and promotion of the quarter's sights that energize native son Nesim Bencoya. As the driving force behind the Izmir Jewish Heritage Project, Bencoya, the former director of the Haifa Cinematheque who returned to Izmir in 2010 after 40 years in Israel, helps to promote interest in Izmir's Jewish past.

Bencoya hustled our group of writers through atmospheric stone alleys and a series of exquisitely restored synagogues that mostly date from Izmir's Jewish golden age in the 17th century. The enthusiasm for his work was palpable as he passionately recounted colorful tales about the Jews who once walked these lanes, including the infamous Sabbatai Zevi, whose life story Bencoya shared:



Born in the city in 1626, as a teen, Sabbatai had been more interested in Jewish mysticism than Torah. In 1648, he declared himself the messiah, a move that prompted the rabbis to banish Sabbatai from the city. What followed were years of journeying through Ottoman lands including Salonika, Alexandria and Jerusalem, among other Jewish centers, where the charismatic Sabbatai attracted legions of followers taken by his notions of ascetic belief, fasts and focus on redemption.

In 1665, Sabbatai returned to Izmir en force. He and his disciples wrested control of the Portugal Synagogue and called both women and men to the Torah.

His movement, however, was short lived. In Constantinople in 1666, Sabbatai was arrested and sentenced to either conversion to Islam or death. He chose the former, and until his death in 1676, practiced some form of Judaism in secret.

Fascinating historical tales and synagogue treasures notwithstanding, Bencoya told me that the motivation for his tireless work derives from something far more crucial to the well-being of the city's Jews, who now number around 1,000.

"Antisemitism expresses itself in many forms," he said. "But the common reason for it is a lack of knowledge about Judaism, Jewish people and Jewish traditions. The Izmir Jewish Heritage Project, by exposing our culture to non-Jews, is filling this gap of ignorance with true knowledge."

One way that Bencoya is filling those gaps is through the five-year-old Izmir Sephardic Culture Festival, held annually during Hanukkah in the quarter's synagogues. The popular festival attracts close to 5,000 mostly non-Jewish attendees to a series of concerts, food tastings, art shows and Ladino performances.

"This language is rapidly disappearing, and not only the vocabulary, but a whole culture is in real danger," he told me. "Something had to be done."

So with his characteristic determination, Bencoya recruited two groups to perform in Ladino—one of which, *Salut de Smyrne*, features non-Jewish musicians who had never heard the language.

“Two years ago, I met a band specializing in ethnic music,” he said of *Salut de Smyrne*. “I asked if they would be interested in playing Ladino songs. Obviously, they did not know what I was talking about. But, after they listened to a few songs, they accepted my proposal. Not being Jewish, we worked on pronunciation, meaning of the lyrics and Sephardi culture.

“*Salut de Smyrne* today performs Ladino music everywhere and enriches its repertoire continuously,” Bencoya continued. “This is not exactly teaching Ladino as a language, but it is a good way to make Ladino relevant in the hope that Izmir Jews will be excited to follow this example, to be proud of their language and adopt it in various ways.”

After all, there are 530-plus years of remarkable heritage for the Jewish communities of Izmir and Istanbul to take pride in—and for keen travelers to engage with when they visit this captivating land.

If You Go

Start your planning at Turkey’s official tourism portal, *Go Turkiye*. For Jewish resources such as kosher food and services, consult the chief rabbinate’s office in Istanbul or Chabad.

Istanbul: What to See

While Jews no longer reside in the central Galata district—best known as the site of the 13th-century Galata Tower, whose 170-foot-high observation deck offers stunning 360-degree views of Istanbul—the largest synagogue in all of Turkey, *Neve Shalom*, remains there, open for Shabbat, holidays and special occasions.

Built by Jews who came to the area along the northwestern banks of the Golden Horn in the early and mid-20th century, *Neve Shalom* features a lofty sanctuary graced with over a dozen stained-glass windows. It also houses a towering wooden ark atop a red-carpeted stage; a women’s gallery encircling the space from above; and a massive brass chandelier featuring a Magen David within its diameter.

Despite the promise of peace in its name, *Neve Shalom* has witnessed three terror attacks, beginning with a devastating shooting spree on the Shabbat morning of September 6, 1986, when a pair of Arab assailants murdered 22 Jews.

That fateful morning is a glaringly violent footnote to a 530-year heritage that is celebrated in the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, located directly adjacent to *Neve Shalom*. Over several floors, the community’s origins are recounted through sophisticated multimedia displays as well as ritual artifacts such as Torah crowns, yads, menorahs and textiles from rabbinic robes to wedding costumes.

Two blocks west from Galata tower is the Italian Synagogue, so named for the Italian Jews who inaugurated the congregation in the 19th century. The sanctuary that greets contemporary visitors was rebuilt in the 1930s. Several blocks downhill from the tower is the Ashkenazi Synagogue, founded by Austrian Jews in 1900 and today the only site of Ashkenazi worship in Turkey.

The origins of Istanbul’s Jewish community lie in the Balat neighborhood, a maze of bohemian-chic side streets along the southeastern coast of the Golden Horn. It was here, in the 1430s, that Romaniote Jews hailing from Ottoman-controlled Ahry, Macedonia, founded the *Ahrida* Synagogue, the oldest still functioning Jewish site of worship in Turkey. While Sephardi Jews merged with, and ultimately subsumed, the Romaniote group after their arrival in the 1490s, the space retained its original name.

The synagogue was rebuilt in the 16th century after a severe fire and later underwent many bouts of restoration, most recently in 1992. The domed ceiling, painted a deep red with golden line segments, tops a white-columned sanctuary whose pride of place is a highly varnished wooden *tevah* shaped like the prow of a ship and said to symbolize both Noah’s Ark and the vessels that brought Jews from Spain to Turkey.

Around the corner, the *Yanbol* Synagogue owes its founding in the late 15th century to the arrival of Jews from Yanbol, Bulgaria. The small sanctuary that welcomes modern-day visitors dates to the 18th century, when the ceiling of intricate floral motifs in hues of green, blue and yellow was painted. Both the *Ahrida* and *Yanbol* synagogues are open primarily for tourists and on High Holidays and special occasions.

Istanbul's largest congregation today is the 100-year-old Bet Israel in Sisli, an affluent neighborhood whose Jewish population began to swell in the 1950s. An active congregation also exists in Ortakoy, at the Etz Hayyim Synagogue. Meanwhile, Bet Yaakov in Kuzguncuk is one of few extant synagogues on the Asian side of Istanbul, though its member families, originally from this area, largely live elsewhere.

Istanbul's historical peninsula, where the Golden Horn meets the Bosphorus just north of the Sea of Marmara, contains several must-see sights and indulgent experiences like the Cagaloglu Hamam.

No superlative does justice to the architectural significance and resplendence of the Hagia Sophia ("Holy Wisdom"), whose pendentive dome, erected in 537 during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian, capped what remained the largest basilica in Christendom for almost 1,000 years. Lavishly ornamented with marble and gold mosaics of Christian scenes such as the virgin and child—now largely obscured in keeping with the site's designation as a mosque—it is the sanctuary's soaring 180-foot height that most evokes spiritual grandeur. Also breathtaking is the neighboring Blue Mosque on Sultanahmet Square, completed in 1723 and renowned for its ceramic mosaics in tulip patterns, stained-glass windows, five primary domes and six minarets.

Built along the Bosphorus in 1453 by Mehmet the Conqueror, the nearby Topkapi Palace features a succession of four courtyards. Among the priceless jewels and weapons in the palace's treasury are the Spoonmaker's Diamond, the golden and emerald-studded Topkapi Dagger and the ceremonial armor of Sultan Mustafa III, who ruled in the 18th century. Of Jewish interest is a nondescript whitewashed building labeled "Room of the Chief Physician," where the sultan's doctors—who, for centuries, were Jews—lived and prepared their treatments.

To conjure up the grandeur of Byzantine Istanbul stroll through the preserved outline of the Hippodrome on Sultanahmet Square. First built in 203 AD by Emperor Septimius Severus and significantly renovated by Emperor Constantine in the 320s, a number of rulers beautified the race track by placing spectacular art, often seized from throughout the empire, along the Hippodrome's spina, or middle column. Still standing are two obelisks—the older, dating from 1490 BCE and made of pink granite, once stood at the Temple of Karnak in Luxor—and the serpent column, all that remains from a sacrificial tripod that Constantine ordered moved from the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

Squeezed into more than 60 covered alleys, the 4,000-plus shops in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar sell everything from handwoven rugs and Turkish cotton towels to knockoff designer goods, jewelry and cheap souvenirs. Built in the mid-15th century, the bazaar is thought to be the oldest and, according to local tourism officials, the most visited shopping mall in the world. Epicureans hungry for Turkish delight and other local treats will want to make a separate stop at the more manageable Spice Bazaar, about a 10-minute walk north in the direction of the Golden Horn.

Izmir: What to See

As monolithic as Sephardi Judaism has been in Turkey since Ottoman rule, the Jewish presence actually extends back to the late Roman era, if not earlier. Archaeologists have excavated the largest known synagogue from the ancient world at Sardis, an historically significant city since the Iron Age located in western Turkey, about an hour's drive from Izmir. The synagogue dates to the late third century C.E. and is noteworthy for its colonnaded forecourt and main hall that archaeologists believe could have accommodated almost 1,000 worshipers.

Izmir's First Jewish Quarter, which dates to the 16th century, surrounds Kemeralti market via a maze of alleyways whose main thoroughfare is Havra (synagogue) Street. Begin your tour of the quarter's jewel-box-like synagogues at the largest—Bikur Holim, located along the major artery of Ikicesmelik Street. (Visit the website of the Izmir Jewish Heritage Project to map out your tour.)

The synagogue was originally a large courtyard house, known as a cortijo, before it was gifted to the community in 1724 by Salomon de Ciaves, a Portuguese Dutch Jew. Today, Bikur Holim's impressive sanctuary features a raised central tevah encircled by marble columns and an elaborately painted ceiling with floral and geometric designs of reds, yellows and green.

Next, venture into the heart of the old quarter. A onetime home of the influential Palachi family, Bet Hillel is a tiny showcase devoted to Rabbi Hayim Palachi (1788-1869) and his son Rabbi Abraham Palachi (1809-1899). The classically ornamented Sephardi sanctuaries of Etz Hayim, Shalom, Algaze and Sinyora synagogues evoke the spiritual significance of Izmir's golden age, though some of their central plan designs have been altered.

In the mid-19th century, successful Jews looking to escape the crowded Kemeralti quarter decamped for the southern bay of Izmir, to what is now the Karatas neighborhood. Here, Jews built Bet Israel Synagogue, Izmir's largest and most ornate, in an Italian style notable for its towering mahogany columns rising up to the women's balcony, which also houses an exhibit on the history of Izmir's Jewish community.

A few blocks inland from Bet Israel stands an early 20th-century engineering feat with a Jewish pedigree: The Historical Elevator, or Asansor in Turkish. The lift's construction in 1907 was funded by Jewish businessman Nesim Levi to connect clifftop neighborhoods with Karatas's coastal streets. Ascend to the top to take in sweeping views of Izmir's bay. Down at sea level, explore Asansor Street, a charming alley lined with shops and cafes that was the childhood haunt of legendary Jewish singer and guitarist Dario Moreno, born David Arugete in 1921.

Don't leave Izmir without sampling two delicacies with Sephardi origins; boyoz, an iconic local pastry made with flour, sunflower oil and tahini, and subiya, a ubiquitous drink derived from melon seeds, water and sugar.

Bursa: What to See

An easy day trip from Istanbul, this onetime capital of the Ottoman Empire and stop on the Silk Route is best known today as the center of Turkey's thriving automotive production industry. The city's Jewish community, which numbers around 20 families, dates to the late 15th century, when Jews fleeing the Inquisition arrived in Bursa during the reign of Selim II. They erected their first house of worship—Gerus Synagogue—in the early 16th century. (Gerus translates to "cast out.")

After a restoration in 1992, the synagogue's few remaining members are joined by an Istanbul-based gabbai for Shabbat services in the petite main sanctuary, which features a central wooden tevah below a dome painted with floral motifs. The tevah is surrounded by white columns and ringed by crystal chandeliers and red velvet benches.

Gerus Synagogue's unofficial caretaker is Bursa-born Yosef Hazan, a Jewish businessman who splits his time between his hometown and Istanbul. According to the 50-year-old Hazan, 2,000 Jews lived here prior to the late 1940s, after which most made aliyah.

Israel

Reuven Bonfil, originally from the city of Karditsa in Greece, lit one of the six beacons this year at the Yom HaShoah ceremony in Yad Vashem. Learn more [here](#)

Reuven (Robert) Bonfil was born in 1937 in Karditsa, in the Thessaly region of Greece, the only son of David and Aptimia Allegra (Simcha).

In 1941, Italy occupied the region of Thessaly. Reuven fell ill and came with his parents to Athens under a false identity to undergo surgery. Athens was under German occupation. On the way back to Karditsa, at the train station in Domokus, the Bonfil family saw from the car window Jewish forced laborers under the guard of German soldiers. One of the Jewish workers asked for bread. Reuven's father threw him a loaf of bread from the window, but a German soldier beat the Jew to death with a rifle butt. A German officer got into the car and asked: "Who threw the bread?" Reuven was frozen with fear and his mother turned pale, but his father said in broken German: "No one threw bread from this wagon." The officer left the trailer.

At the end of 1943, the Germans arrived in Karditsa. Reuven and his mother hid in a coal warehouse under the house. Reuven's father was with the town's bishop, Ezekiel, whom he taught French. When German soldiers arrived at the bishop's house, the bishop took off the cross chain from his neck, hung it around his father's neck and presented him to the Germans as his son.

Reuven and his parents escaped in a donkey cart in torrential rain, crossed raging streams and reached the village of Defanospilina up on the mountain. When the Germans approached the village, communist underground people fled the family to the mountain village of Apidea.



In Epidia, the Greek Orthodox Golas family adopted Reuben and his parents, housed them in a room in their house and shared their bread with them. Reuben's father taught the children of the village arithmetic and his mother taught them to read and write in Greek.

German planes bombed Apidea and German troops approached the village. The couple Vasiliki and Kostas Golas led Reuben and his parents to the thicket of the forest up the mountain and hid them in the cabin. They stayed in a hut with a goat and survived on poverty, with the help of the Gulas family. They gathered berries under the snow and drank the goat's milk.

When the Germans retreated, Reuben and his parents returned to Karditza, where they discovered that members of his mother's family had been sent to Auschwitz and murdered.

Reuben married Chava, a Holocaust survivor from Germany, and immigrated with his family to Israel in 1968. Reuben is a professor of the history of the people of Israel at the Hebrew University.

Reuben and Eve have three children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

The Golas were recognized in 2018 posthumously as Righteous Among the Nations and their children received the badges in their name at a ceremony in Karditsa, with the participation of Reuben's extended family.

Haifa

Turkey's feathers ruffled by Haifa's newly unveiled Armenian Genocide Square Full article [here](#)

The northern city, where many ethnic Armenians live, is the first Israeli municipality to give such recognition to the World War I atrocities.

Turkey's ambassador to Israel has protested the naming of a square for the victims of the Armenian Genocide in Haifa, which last month became the first Israeli city to acknowledge the tragedy in this way.

The initiative "heavily carries the potential of deteriorating these bonds which the peoples and the Governments of Israel and Türkiye wish to improve," wrote Şakir Özkan Torunlar in a letter, obtained by The Times of Israel Tuesday, to Haifa Mayor Einat Kalisch-Rotem about the renaming, which took effect on March 20.



As the April 24 anniversary of the genocide approaches, Torunlar's protest is a reminder of the issue's sensitivity in the already-complicated relationship between Turkey, a powerful Muslim-majority nation, and Israel, where many feel an affinity to the Armenian experience because of the Holocaust.

Torunlar in his letter demanded the mayor reverse the decision to commemorate the genocide in the name of a square, and reiterated the official line of Turkey, stating that "such an act of genocide has never been committed in the history of the Turkish nation."

Located along Ben Gurion Avenue in Haifa, Israel's third-largest city and home to about half of the country's 15,000-odd non-Jewish ethnic Armenians, the inauguration of Armenian Genocide Square marks the second time that an Israeli local government has acknowledged the atrocities. Petah Tikva, near Tel Aviv, in 2020 unveiled a monument to the victims in what it later named the Charles Aznavour Park, commemorating the late French singer who was of Armenian descent.

The naming in Haifa highlighted the gap between widespread sympathy in Israel for the Armenian commemorative cause and the reluctance of successive Israeli governments seeking good ties with Turkey to officially recognize the killing of hundreds of thousands of Armenian civilians by Turkish troops during World War I.

Eliran Tal, the top spokesperson for the Haifa municipality, spoke of the naming as an example for the government to follow. "We can only hope now that the State of Israel acknowledges the genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire, which claimed the lives of 1.5 million Armenians," he wrote in a statement. Turkish diplomats, he added, "worked hard to pressure" the city to drop the plan.

In recent years, a new impediment has presented itself to recognition: Israel's deepening ties with Azerbaijan, an oil-rich nation with strong ties to Turkey, a border with Iran and a bloody territorial dispute with Armenia.

Such recognition could strain the already-fraught relationship between Israel and Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a devout nationalist Muslim who in the past has accused Israel of perpetrating a "genocide" against Palestinians, among other allegations against the Jewish state and people.

Turkey returned its ambassador to Israel last year, ending a four-year partial break in diplomatic relations following the slaying of Palestinians by Israeli troops in 2018 riots. It was the latest in a series of similar crises since Erdogan's rise to power in 2003.

Yerem Lapadjian, a leader of Haifa's community of about 6,000 Christian ethnic Armenians, shared the hope that Haifa's move would hasten a formal recognition of the genocide by Israel, which he said he considers his homeland in addition to Armenia. But his feelings about the square run deeper than geopolitics.

"When I walk past the Armenian Genocide Square, where I will also be commemorating the tragedy on the April 24 anniversary, I think of my late grandfather, a genocide survivor named Sarkis Lapadjian who died in Haifa in 1953," the grandson said.

As a teenager, his grandfather escaped his village after hearing rumors that the Turks were murdering all the men, Lapadjian recalled. "He fled to Egypt, but he returned to his village near Adana, Turkey to reconnect with his parents. They'd all been murdered, and he fled again, this time to Lebanon and finally Haifa. He's a holocaust survivor: A survivor of the Armenian holocaust."

Israel's refusal to acknowledge the Armenian genocide is particularly painful to Lapadjian, a 70-year-old car electrician. "It's inconceivable. The Armenian genocide, perpetrated when Turkey was an ally of Germany, served as a blueprint for the Holocaust. Had the world spoken out in 1915, perhaps the Jewish genocide would have been prevented. It's high time for Israel to speak out," he said.

Portugal

Lisbon's Hidden Jewish Cemetery Full article [here](#)

It was almost by accident that I came across the old Sephardic Jewish Cemetery of Lisbon's Estrela neighborhood. When I mentioned to a friend that I would be visiting the city's British Cemetery, he told me that he had heard that somewhere nearby there was also a Jewish one.

While walking, the following morning, through the tree-shaded grounds of the British Cemetery, I was fortunate in meeting Andrew Swinnerton, its administrator. He explained that the Jewish Cemetery directly adjoins the British Cemetery and pointed me towards a path leading to a high wall that separates the two burial grounds.

In 1497, King Manoel I of Portugal issued an edict demanding that Jews either convert to Christianity or leave the country. In the following years and decades, tens of thousands of Jews fled Portugal, including many of the so-called the "New Christians", or "conversos", whose lives were made intolerable, being subject to pogroms and the iron hand of the Holy Inquisition.



As a consequence of these expulsions, Sephardic Portuguese (and Spanish) Jewish communities were established across North Africa, southern Europe and further afield. Most of these exiles found new homes under the protection of the sultans and caliphs of the Ottoman Empire and of Morocco. Others fled north to Amsterdam, London, Hamburg and other trading centres, or across the Atlantic to Curaçao, New Amsterdam (Manhattan), Suriname, Pernambuco and elsewhere in the "New World".

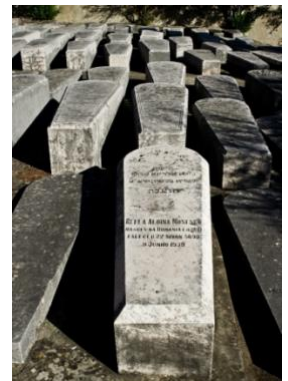


Some three hundred year after leaving Portugal, Jewish merchants started trickling back to their ancestral homeland. Although there were still strict restrictions placed on Jews in the country, as foreigners the new arrivals could count on at least some protection.

Thanks to the special relationship that existed between Britain and Portugal, Sephardim from London and especially Gibraltar (which since 1713 had been a British territory) became something of a significant presence in Lisbon. But well into the 19th century, Lisbon's Jewish community was in a delicate position. Catholicism was the sole religion permitted to Portuguese citizens and as such the Jews had no legal existence and the community was regarded as being a foreign colony.

Soon after the return of Jews to Lisbon, with the pre-expulsion Jewish cemeteries having long-since been destroyed, it became clear that a burial ground would be needed. Because many members of this new community were British subjects, a corner of the Protestant British Cemetery (or the "English Burial Ground", as it was called when created in 1721) was sectioned off for their use.

The Estrela Jewish cemetery's first grave was that of José Amzalaga, who died on 26 February 1804. For some sixty years this was Lisbon's only Jewish cemetery, the final resting place of British, Moroccan and other Sephardim, and increasingly their Portuguese-born co-religionists. The last burial took place in 1865, by which time no more space remained. A new Jewish cemetery was established in 1868, one that remains in use to this day.



Access to the Jewish Cemetery is restricted, its large metal doors almost always locked and at street level it is impossible to see over its high walls.

Approaching from the British Cemetery, however, I was able to open a flimsy cardboard door leading to the grounds of a vacant neighboring building, the former British Hospital. This, along with the Anglican parsonage, the Royal British Club and the Estrela Hall (the longtime home of Lisbon Players, an English-language theatre company), was once part of Lisbon's so-called "British Quarter". After well over three hundred years of British Crown ownership, the British government sold these buildings in 2018 to a real estate developer. Whereas the British Cemetery and St George's Anglican Church were not included in the sale, the Jewish Cemetery was – though fortunately this portion of the property will remain protected, under the care of Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa.

From the small rear courtyard of the former hospital, I was able to climb a few steps onto a fire escape, lean over a high wall and peer into the compact grounds of this normally hidden cemetery. The one hundred and fifty or so tombstones, with inscriptions all seemingly in Hebrew, are laid horizontally, in traditional Sephardic fashion. Soon only the occupants of the planned luxury condominiums will have this privileged view. Hopefully they will appreciate it.

Articles of Interest for Everyone

A Sephardic Family Odyssey From Constantinople to Queens Full article in NY Times [here](#)

Inspired by the 20th-century migrations of her grandmother, Elizabeth Graver's new novel, "Kantika," depicts lives filled with music, ritual and hardship across continents and cultures.

Of his refugee parents, the novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen once observed that they had "experienced the usual dilemma of anyone classified as an other. The other exists in contradiction, or perhaps in paradox, being either invisible or hyper-visible, but rarely just visible." The refugee, the immigrant, the outsider cannot merely be. She is either passed over or stands out like a sore thumb.

Elizabeth Graver's fifth novel, "Kantika," brings to life this duality through the story of an Ottoman Jewish family's emigration from early-20th-century Constantinople to Barcelona, Havana and eventually New York. The novel raises the literary profile of the Sephardim, which remains less conspicuous in America than that of the Ashkenazi, in that formidable line from Henry Roth to Philip Roth. Largely inspired by her maternal grandmother, Rebecca, Graver has reworked family interviews, photographs and stories recorded on microcassettes into stylized historical fiction spanning nearly half a century.



The author's grandmother Rebecca Cohen in Constantinople (now Istanbul), around 1920.

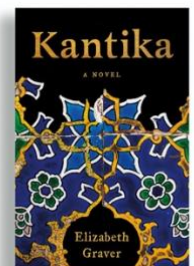
While "Kantika" inevitably relies on tropes of Jewish immigrant literature, from questions of what and where home is to idolization of America as a land relatively unhaunted by the ghosts of European antisemitism, Graver is equally interested in the resilience of women as filtered through the lens of music, motherhood and disability.

We are first introduced to the Cohens as cosmopolitan, affluent Turkish Jews whose lives in turn-of-the-century Constantinople seem buoyant, even picturesque. Alberto and Sultana live at the top of a hill in the ethnically mixed Fener neighborhood, tending to a garden bursting with roses, crocuses, tulips and hyacinths. Their daughter Rebecca fraternizes with the daughters of Greek diplomats and attends a French Catholic school; an Armenian maid lovingly serves their meals. Early on, Graver's narrator teasingly refers to the intra-Jewish cultural divide that marks the Sephardim as a more colorful branch of Judaism: "Later in life, Rebecca will encounter Jews for whom the Sabbath is a solemn, davening affair — no apricots in syrup or pomegranates with their bloody pearls, just gefilte fish trembling in slime."

Their multiethnic, multisectarian Ottoman world (arguably somewhat romanticized by Graver) soon collapses, replaced by a bureaucratic Turkish nationalism, even as Turkey remains home to the Cohens: their birthplace, the site of Alberto's garden, where his father is buried. Although the Ottoman Empire welcomed large numbers of Iberian Jewish exiles after 1492, some Ottoman Jews began to leave in the 20th century to avoid conscription into the army as well as to seek out better opportunities. After the Turkish government requisitions Alberto's textile factory, he too relocates the bankrupt family to Barcelona with the help of the Jewish Refugee Relief Committee.

Ambivalent about returning to the country that had expelled their ancestors 400 years earlier, the family must rely on invisibility as a form of protection in Spain. Alberto, the raki-drinking businessman with a penchant for the poet Judah Halevi, becomes a humble shammash, or groundskeeper, of a tiny, unmarked synagogue. Rebecca marries another Sephardic Jew and has two sons but is forced to conceal her Jewishness, posing as Marie Blanco Camayor, a literal blank slate with a Parisian pedigree, to get work as a seamstress. A filmmaker, who will later become a fascist, pesters the family to appear as specimens with "authentic Sephardic features" in his "little film to educate Spaniards about the national treasure of the half a million Spanish Jews abroad."

The cover of "Kantika" is designed to resemble four antique tiles painted blue, gold, white and green in a geometric floral pattern against a black background beneath the book's title, printed in gold.



In Graver's vision, migration is never simply a one-way street from the Old World to the Promised Land. Rather, her characters zig and zag, doubting, retracing and remembering the places that have shaped them. Alberto brings with him to Spain a suitcase of soil and bulbs from his Turkish garden, unable to let his literal roots go. Rebecca briefly returns to Turkey to look for her husband, an absentee father who is suffering cognitive issues from inhaling mustard gas, only to find him dead. Her sister emigrates to Cuba, hoping to get into America, and Rebecca herself stops in Cuba to marry her second husband, a more reliable partner with American citizenship, before finally landing in Queens.

Graver freely enters the consciousness of many if not all of her characters, channeling their superstitions, setbacks and successes. The novel focuses heavily on Rebecca, whose early naïveté blossoms into strong-willed determination. "I'm not a child, Papa. I belong to no one but myself," her younger self declares, but her older self knows that she belongs to the many who need her. Including the children from her second marriage, she is mother to six, a feat that does nothing to sap her strength. Well into middle age, she wants "more chatter, more cuddling, more laughter and especially — is it odd for a woman her age, a mother of six? — more play."

The amount of research that went into "Kantika" is plain to see: Botanical references to ruda, an herb also known as rue that Sephardic Jews have traditionally used as both medicine and a charm to ward off the evil eye, are sprinkled throughout. True to its title, which means "song" in Ladino (or Judeo-Spanish), Graver's novel is also steeped in music. Rebecca has at her fingertips a broad repertoire of Spanish, Hebrew and Ladino songs, as well as Turkish lullabies, which she sings to her children both to shield them and to transmit her cultural heritage. At times, this exuberant musicality risks going too far and sounding like a fairy tale, and the omniscient narration can sometimes be overwhelming, as when the novel later veers into a side quest about David, Rebecca's son, who is assigned to the U.S.S. Franklin during World War II.

Yet Graver's ability to tenderly and humorously inhabit the mind of Rebecca's disabled stepdaughter, Luna Levy, sets "Kantika" apart. Luna has cerebral palsy and Graver replaces the economic betterment motif of immigrant narratives with an account of Rebecca's persistent and successful resolve to teach Luna not to lower expectations for herself: "Newmother tortures her. For the past month, she has been taking her through a set of exercises for an hour a day, but with Nona" — her grandmother — "gone, the hour becomes two, then three." Rebecca's tough love, however, is genuine and Luna soon embraces her hyper-visibility, merrily greeting others in her father's shop in Queens: "Ahmlunalevy pleeezedtameeyoooo!"

That careful attention to individual speech underlines "Kantika"'s kaleidoscope of languages, accents and dialects. Graver weaves together snippets of Ladino, Turkish, French, Castilian, Catalan, Hebrew and English like one of Rebecca's hand-stitched dresses. Helpfully translated so as not to lose the reader, these fragments enrich Graver's fiction while also stressing one of its central questions: whether a language can stand in for home.

"Kantika" answers in the affirmative. Puzzled by the word aman in a Ladino song Rebecca sings, her husband, Sam, and daughter Suzanne hit the books: "At the public library the two of them discovered that it meant woe is me in Turkish and Greek, 'safety' in Arabic and something akin to 'believe' in Hebrew, but when they came home and told Rebecca, she rolled her eyes and said just let it be, it means aman, so they left it untranslated." Yet by the novel's end, a lightly tragic note surfaces. As their lives in the United States take off, Rebecca's American-born children can only muster "kitchen variety" Ladino. "Kantika" is thus also a gesture at preserving a language that, like Yiddish, is now endangered.

Queens is not exactly Fener, English is not Ladino, and Rebecca's thriving garden of snap peas and sunflowers cannot replace her lost parents. Far from being a Pollyannaish tale of New World success, "Kantika" is a meticulous endeavor to preserve the memories of a family, an elegy and a celebration both.

We always publish, with pleasure, the writings of our dear friend Alexander Billinis.

The Greek Sailor: On his broad shoulders Greece was built Full article by Alexander Billinis [here](#)

The story of Greek sailors is one of the oldest Greek narratives.

One of the first classics of literature chronicled the travels of one Odysseus. We have the far-flung Classical Greek colonies all across the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, the Triremes of Themistocles, and later the Greek-Fire breathing Dromons of the Byzantines. The Greek sailors who played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Greek merchant fleet in the 1700s and fought hard and successfully for Greece's freedom drew on a tradition that spread back millennia.



It is perhaps ironic that the most important islands in the Greek revolution and the commercial acme that took place in the fifty years prior had little or no maritime history. Hydra and Spetses were largely barren islands off the coast of the eastern Peloponnese, populated largely by refugees fleeing the constant struggles between Ottoman and Venetian, and the periodic attempts at throwing off the Ottoman yoke.

In the case of Hydra, population pressures pushed the islanders to the sea, as it had for Greeks since the dawn of history. I also believe strongly that the sea represented the opportunity for a freedom and personal agency unavailable on lands under the Ottoman foot. From a crude vessel in 1657, the Hydriots felled their trees and set every cove on the island to work with shipbuilding.

As retired Captain Dimitris Tsigkaris told me, "The sea is a university." Hydriots learned from other Aegean islanders, from the Venetians, and even from captivity. One of Hydra's premier shipbuilders had been taken by Barbary Pirates and put to work in shipyards in Algiers. Upon his release, he brought his skills home. Interacting with other sailors and captains in ports near and far expanded the Hydriots' and Spetsiotes' education. They could draw upon the nautical skills of an archipelago with four thousand years of navigation expertise, as well as the latest naval technology from Spain, Italy, or Britain.

Then of course, there is on-the-job training. For the Greek islander, this may have started at the age of seven. An eighteenth-century sailing ship required mental and physical agility and granular knowledge. It was not just the shoals and winds they needed to pilot, but also the dangers of pirates, of negotiating various national authorities, multiple languages, and a keen understanding of financial, and market forces. The great American Philhellene Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe marveled at the shipbuilding skills of the common sailor, who might be called upon to repair his vessel on some foreign beach.

It is hardly a wonder that the Hydriots set up their own nautical academy, the world's oldest, which remains running to the present day. They understood that their fortunes rested on human capital, and they made the necessary investments.

By 1820 Hydra, Spetses, and the even more diminutive Psara had built considerable fortunes based on their human capital. The shipping prowess dovetailed with an emerging merchant diaspora and guerilla captains growing in confidence. The ships carried more than just grain and merchandise—they carried messages of the Philike Etairia and plans for revolution.

When the time came, these sailors trained their cannon on the Turks, and their older ships were turned into floating bombs as fireships, recalling their Byzantine ancestors' deadly efficacy with Greek Fire. Far too many met an early grave that Greece might live.

Though Hydra, Spetses, and Psara never recovered from the losses of the Revolution, the Greek sailor lived on, manning ships from other islands. Though a portion of Greece was free, many of the same institutional failings of the Ottomans remained (and remain) so the quest for agency at sea remained. On the backs, quite

literally, of some of the finest sailors on the planet, the Greek Merchant fleet grew again, incorporating many of the merchant families and succeeding despite the many failings of the Greek state.

By 1939, the Greek Merchant Marine was the ninth largest in the world, creating a whole class of wealthy shipowners, and keeping thousands of Greeks, including my father's family, in middle class circumstances. Like other merchant mariners, the Greeks suffered a death rate in the slaughterhouse of the Atlantic well higher than that suffered by nearly every other branch fighting in the war, and by the end of the war a good seventy percent of tonnage was beneath the waves.

A British-American wartime mass production freighter, the Liberty Ship, came to the rescue of Allied fleets decimated by the U-Boat attacks. American industrial might—coupled with increasingly effective anti-submarine warfare, did the job too well and the end of the war found a glut of ships, prudently sold by the US government to Allied nationals. Nobody took more ships than the Greeks, and the "Blessed Liberty Ships" set the stage for the Greek-owned fleet to become the world's largest.

But once again, at the core of this shipping miracle, lay the Greek sailor. His resourcefulness and skill, from deckhand to captain to shipowner, made all this possible. He is a technocrat, with pride in his trade, and respected by Greek society. Shipping provided Greeks with an agency unavailable in Greece—without the pain of expatriation that so many Greeks eventually chose.

So much of Greece as we know it today—even the existence of the country—is owed to the Greek sailor. Honor is due.

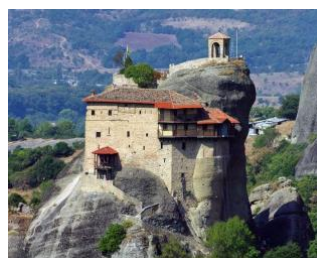
*Alexander Billinis is an instructor at Clemson University, in South Carolina, USA. He is a licensed attorney, with a former career in law, real estate management, and international banking. He has lived and worked in Greece, the UK, and Serbia, as well as shorter work or study assignments in Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, and Chile. A citizen of both the United States and Greece, he is married and the father of two teenage children.

Archaeological Sites in Greece

Greece is filled with archeological sites and, on the annual tours to Jewish Greece from the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry (this year from June 2-16), we try to visit as many of them as possible.



Ancient Agora



Meteora



Walls of Thessaloniki



The Parthenon on the Acropolis

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



In 1956, to mark the eighth Independence Day of the new State of Israel's independence, the late Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("The Rav") delivered a lecture in Yiddish to the Religious Zionists of America entitled "*Kol Dodi Dofek*" – "My Beloved Knocks", where he deals with the miracle and significance of the birth of the State of Israel. On the occasion of Israel's 75th birthday, recently celebrated on the 5th of Iyar (April 26th), and the 56th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem (Jerusalem Day) on the 28th of Iyar (May 19th), I would like to present a synopsis of this lecture.

The lecture's title comes from Chapter 5 of the Biblical "Song of Songs", with the narrative describing a "Beloved" knocking on the door of his "Lover", so he can enter her room and be with her. However, the Lover is tired, ready for bed, and does not want to open the door. The Beloved continues to knock and even plead to be let in, but to no avail. When the Lover finally does decide to open the door, it is too late: her Beloved has gone, and does not return.

Using classic allegorical interpretation of the "Song of Songs" and the "Beloved" and "Lover" symbolizing God's relationship with Israel, the Rav describes how Israel continuously missed opportunities to come closer to God at His request and initiative. All too often throughout history, Israel continued to transgress and ignore God's 'knocking' on the door, as it were. And more often than not, when Israel did finally respond, it was too late, and God had departed, often concealing His presence from us for unspecified lengths of time, causing us panic and despair as we then desperately sought Him out. And then, as the Rav so eloquently describes, in the aftermath of the horrors of the Holocaust and the destruction of an entire Jewish world, the "Beloved", meaning Almighty God, suddenly reappeared and came knocking once again, as He set in motion the miraculous founding of the State of Israel. Like the Biblical parable, world Jewry was once again faced with a choice: To heed the call of God and seize the opportunity to accept His love and join him in creating the new state, or hesitate and refuse his entry, so to speak, thereby missing again a golden opportunity to have Him in our midst.

The Rav then enumerated what he considered to be the six most significant of God's "knocks", each one demonstrating Divine Providence's direct involvement in the renewal of the sovereign Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel:

The first knock was heard in the political arena, when, despite the fierce antagonism between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., both recognized the legitimacy of a Jewish state, and a majority of nations voted in favor of its creation. This unprecedented political accomplishment was clear proof that Divine Providence was indeed rapping on the lectern of the U.N. Chairman!

The second knock resonated on the battlefield, as Israel's fledgling and small army defeated the combined Arab forces of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The miracle of the "many being delivered into the hands of the few" occurred right in front of our eyes! Like Pharaoh, God "hardened the hearts" of the Arabs, as they refused to accept the Partition Plan and chose to attack Israel in a war of annihilation. Not only were our enemies stopped and defeated, Israel actually gained more territory than the U.N. originally granted, including most of the Galilee, the Negev and part of Jerusalem. This is unequivocal proof of the hand of God in all its glory.

The third knock was on the door of theology. Christianity's most basic tenet considers Israel's rejection of Jesus as Messiah as being the root cause of the eternal abrogation of Judaism's original covenant with God, and Christianity as its replacement. The Church was the "new" Israel, a new testament (covenant) replaced the "old", and, inter alia, according to Church canon, the Jewish people must remain in perpetual exile as a downtrodden remnant and witness to the world of our rejection by God, never again regaining sovereignty in the Holy Land. On the theological level, then, the establishment of the new and sovereign State of Israel completely and absolutely refutes this most basic tenet of Christianity, as well as proving that no matter how long or fiercely Jews may suffer, God's original covenant with Judaism remains irreplaceable, irrevocable, and eternal.

The fourth knock struck the hearts of myriads of perplexed and assimilated Jews, especially youth, as they emerged from concentration and death camps and the dimension and extent of the destruction and death became known. This led to total chaos, massive confusion, loss of faith, and rampant assimilation and shedding of Jewish identity in post-war Europe. The birth of a sovereign and viable Jewish state caused many to realize that there was still hope and that their Judaism, Jewish identity, and history still had meaning and relevancy for their lives. The reality of being able to visit and live in the revived Jewish homeland helped significantly stem the tide of assimilation, as more and more survivors and youth made their way to Israel as their new Jewish home.

The fifth knock was especially strong: Jewish blood was no longer cheap nor *'hefker'* - free for the taking. Our enemies were suddenly faced with the realization that Jews would no longer be passive, defenseless, isolated, and easy prey for pogroms, pillage, forced migration, mass murder and annihilation. Jews would fight bravely, confidently, and victoriously, whether on their own land or when coming to the defense and rescue of Jews being persecuted anywhere in the world. With the founding of the State of Israel, even the most ferocious of our enemies had to think twice before harming Jews, because the State of Israel will not stand passively by when any Jew is in trouble.

The sixth knock was the opening of the gates of the Land of Israel to massive Jewish immigration to the Jewish homeland from all over the world. The miraculous absorption of myriads of Jews either secretly or openly brought to Israel between 1948-1956 was nothing short of miraculous, and unprecedented in human history. Despite the very real difficulties this massive absorption entailed for both the fledgling new state and especially the immigrants themselves, between 1948- 1956, Israel's population grew from some 800,000 souls to more than 1,800,000, the vast majority being immigrants. This could not have occurred without Divine intervention.

Thus, the Rav saw the founding of the State of Israel as a clear sign of God's reappearing to His people and his beckoning us to allow Him to show his love and commitment to His chosen people by making us part of His miracles. The Rav may have delivered the "Kol Dodi Dofek" lecture in 1956, but as we celebrate the state's 75th birthday, his prophetic words seem even more relevant today, with each "knock" being repeated and intensified as Israel continues to grow and thrive. It is therefore obvious that the "Lover" indeed responded to the "Beloved" in 1948, and it would be very prudent and wise that we make sure to never close the door again, as we ensure the eternity of the God-Israel relationship, the eternal future of the Jewish people, and the final redemption speedily in our days.



Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Humility of an Open Mind: Thoughts for Shavuoth
JewishIdeas.org

When I was a senior at Franklin High School in Seattle, my teacher for Language Arts was Mr. James Britain. Even after these many years, I remember him and his class quite vividly.

I invariably got A grades on all my papers. But once, Mr. Britain marked my paper with a D. I think I learned more from that D than from all my A papers. What was the paper about and what did I learn?

Mr. Britain often presented the class with challenging assignments. Once, he asked us to walk around the outside of the school building and to observe all its architectural details. Another assignment was to study a painting and analyze it as carefully as possible—its colors, perspective, lighting etc. His goal was to teach us to “see”, to focus in on detail, to look for the usual and the unusual.

One day, he played a recording of atonal electronic music for the class and asked us to write our impressions. I was outraged by this “music” and wrote a scathing essay condemning it. This was not music at all! It was a cacophony of senseless screeching, painful to the ear. Mr. Britain gave me a D on this paper. He wrote me a one line comment: “In order to learn, you must open your mind to new ideas.”

When I spoke to him afterward about my “unfair” grade, he calmly explained that I had entirely missed the point of the assignment. He indicated that I should have listened carefully, with an open mind; I should have tried to understand the intentions of the composer; I should have put aside my preconceived notions so as to experience the music on its terms—not on mine. Only after I had processed the experience with an open mind was I entitled to offer my judgments about it. Think carefully, don’t rant.

That was one of the most valuable lessons I’ve ever learned—and one of the most difficult to apply.

We all have fixed ideas on a great many topics. It is often painful to hear opinions that conflict with our sure understanding of life. New ideas, unusual approaches, unconventional artistic expressions—these are difficult to absorb. It is tempting—and usual—to shut off ideas that challenge our own views and tastes. It is very common for those who have different views to talk at each other, or to talk against each other; it is far less common for people actually to listen to each other, to try sincerely to understand the ideas and approaches of others. To open our minds to new ideas demands tremendous self-control and humility.

And this brings us to some thoughts about Shavuoth.

The festival of Shavuoth commemorates the Revelation at Mt. Sinai. The Torah and its commandments were revealed by the Almighty to the people of Israel on this special mountain.

In the early 17th century, Rehuël Jessurun wrote *Dialogo dos Montes*, a drama based on the rabbinic tradition that various mountains competed for the privilege of having the Torah revealed on them. (The drama was presented on Shavuoth, 1624, in the Bet Yaacob synagogue of Amsterdam.) Each mountain offered its claim to be the most worthy of this honor. Mount Sinai, though, was humble. It was a low and unimpressive mountain, hardly worthy of being chosen by God for the Divine revelation of the Torah. Because of its very humility, God chose Mount Sinai upon which to give the Israelites the Torah.

Much of human life resembles the Dialogue of the Mountains. People seek to assert their pre-eminence, to highlight their virtues, to claim the highest honors. Yet, it is the Mount Sinais of the world who reflect the quiet humility worthy of Divine blessing.

As we celebrate the Shavuoth festival commemorating the Revelation at Mount Sinai, it would be appropriate for us to recall the symbolic virtues of Mount Sinai—humility, awareness of limitations, openness to new and unique revelation.

“In order to learn, you must open your mind to new ideas.”

This does not mean that one must accept all new ideas, or that one should adopt every new opinion. Rather, it entails the ability to listen carefully, to analyze and process ideas, to think carefully and not to rant. Even ideas that we ultimately reject may contain kernels of truth that will sharpen and enhance our own understanding.

To open our minds to new and differing ideas is not only the way for all of us to grow intellectually and spiritually; it is the foundation of a responsible civil society.

Moadim leSimha.



**Parasha of the Week - Ahare Mot-Kedoshim
Loving Your Neighbor**

By Rabbi David Gingold-Altchek
Rabbi Emeritus of the Etz Chaim Synagogue in Indianapolis

The famous commandment of ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself: I am the Lord’ is foundational in Jewish theology and talmudic thought. R. Akiva was known to say that it was the ‘greatest generalization of the Torah’s ethic.’ As Rambam (Maimonides) pointed out, the proliferation of other faiths served one purpose to inform the world of the Torah’s ethics and the future redemption. Accordingly, western society has come to know this statement as the ‘Great Commandment’! Secular humanists too, have adopted this as the foundation of their atheistic ethical code of ‘just being a good purpose’. Yet the question must be asked, “is this statement done justice when quoted out of context,” as is so often done?

Accordingly, I would like to analyze the original text with a scrupulous eye. Let us review the context in which the verse was stated: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall give corrective guidance to your neighbor, lest you incur sin on his behalf. You shall not take vengeance or bear ill will against the children of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself; I am the Lord." When read in context, the first issue is the direction of interactional-social ethics. While being a dispositional loving person is nice, it is not realistic that everyone will have this dispositional trait at the core of their personality. That said, all people become upset with others (even the dispositional positive and loving) - whether family, friends, or members of the community at-large. Thus the Torah begins by instructing us with the desired way of dealing with our interpersonal dissatisfaction, i.e. "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall give corrective guidance to your neighbor..."

What however is meant by the continuation of this verse, i.e. "lest you incur sin on his behalf"? While many have taken this to be a compulsive commandment to correct, or criticize, other's mistakes; a more congruent approach would be, 'provide feedback to your neighbor so that you don't fall into the trap of holding the other in contempt and transgressing all of the following sins,' i.e. "... lest you incur sin on his behalf. You shall not take vengeance or bear ill will against the children of your own people."

So how is this all done? By remembering to, "love your neighbor as you love yourself...", meaning, in the same way that you do not bear ill will towards yourself, or become vengeful, for your own misgivings, don't do so to others. Moreover, when providing feedback or critique, not criticism; do so in the way you would want to receive it, i.e. "like yourself". Just like you wouldn't like to hear, "How could you do that, what do you lack conscience!", but instead want to hear, "I'm sure you are completely unaware of your misgiving, having no malintention... In fact, I too have faltered with this but you may have inadvertently done X." After all, is that not how we speak to ourselves in our own minds and hearts?!

Yet sometimes, unfortunately, our emotions forsake us. So how does one assure their steadfastness in this entire socially ethical construct? Well, by completing the oft unquoted ending of the great commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself: I am the Lord!" It is through our recognition, submission, and most importantly - our love of Hashem, and His image in others, that will constantly reinforce this true and eternal love! After all, if one fulfills the mitzvah of constructively guiding their friend through criticism - it says something about either: (1) the nature of their love for themselves or (2) their misunderstanding that the commandment of correcting and that of loving are two parts of the great whole. To learn more about this recognition of ourselves, and the divine, in others is see R' M. Cordevero's Tomer Devora (First Chapter) and Higyonei Uziel pt 1 (pp. 248).

Shabbat Shalom!

Recipe for Shavuot

Kezadas – Sephardic Rice and Cheese Pies

For Shavuot, wrote Linda Capeloto Sendowski, “since dairy food is traditionally served for the celebration meal, Nona always made these kezadas along with the usual desayuno or Sephardic breakfast and brunch pastries.” Sendowski finds it convenient to bake these open-faced pastries ahead. They freeze well and can be “easily reheated uncovered in a 150°C (300°F) oven to their oven-fresh state.”

Makes about 42 kezadas

Filling:

- 1 cup long-grain rice
- 1¾ cups water
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 225 gr. (8 ounces) feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup grated sharp cheddar or kash kaval cheese
- 2 extra large eggs



Dough:

- 4 1/3 cups all-purpose flour, unbleached if possible
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 cup ice water
- ¾ cup safflower oil or other vegetable oil
- Topping:
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

To make filling, place rice and water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook rice until it is steamed through and all the water is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir cheeses directly into rice in saucepan. Add eggs and mix until all is combined. Put rice filling in a container in the refrigerator to cool and stiffen while you prepare dough.

To make dough, combine flour and salt in a medium mixing bowl. Whisk cold water and oil together in a 2-cup measuring pitcher. Add liquid to flour, mix with your hands to a dough and gather dough together in a ball, making sure all of flour is incorporated.

Place rack in middle of oven and preheat oven to 205°C (400°F). Separate dough into 42 walnut-size balls. With your fingers, roll balls until smooth (smooth balls will roll out more easily and uniformly).

Line rimmed baking sheets with Silpat or parchment. On a wooden or stone surface, roll each ball into about a 7.5-cm (3-inch) circle using a wooden rolling pin. Take care not to roll over edges of rounds, or else the edges will be thin and the centers thick.

Place a mounded tablespoon of filling directly in center of each disc. Using your thumb and index finger, pinch six or more points around the kezada to form an open-faced kind of star. Place on lined baking sheets. For topping, beat egg and brush over tops of kezadas using a pastry brush. Sprinkle with a bit of Parmesan cheese.

Bake kezadas on middle rack of oven until golden and puffy, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on racks. Store in airtight containers in the refrigerator for up to two days, or in the freezer.

Bouena Sarfatty Garfinkle (1916-1997) – Author and Activist



Born into a Sephardic family in Salonika, Greece, Bouena Sarfatty Garfinkle was a poet, chronicler, and activist. When Nazis invaded Greece in 1941, Sarfatty Garfinkle began recording Ladino proverbs and composing poems that described everyday life in her Sephardic community under the Nazi regime.

Sarfatty Garfinkle eventually fled to Italy and joined the partisans there. She saved many children by smuggling them to Turkey and Palestine. In 1945, she returned to Greece on a stealth mission to establish an underground network helping Holocaust survivors settle in British-occupied Palestine. Learn more about Bouena's life [here](#)

Documenting the Diaspora in the US Full article [here](#)

A non-profit organization in New York is dedicated to telling the experience of Greeks and Cypriots who moved there discovers Paul Lambis

Since its inception, the Hellenic American Project (HAP) has been chronicling the existence of the Greek and Cypriot diaspora in the USA, from the first wave of mass migration in the early 1900s to the present. "The Hellenic American Project is a non-profit program that operates as a research facility, archive, Greek and Cypriot American library, art and event space," founder and director Nicholas Alexiou said. Although the program has been in existence for more than three decades, it was only officially established in 2012 with the goal of cultivating a seamless narrative that encompasses the Hellenic American experience through resources that are also available to the public.



"Our initiatives include conducting oral histories organized by generation and occupation, analyzing population data, curating and digitizing cultural artefacts and books, and organizing academic symposia and cultural events," Alexiou told the *Cyprus Mail*.

Alexiou was born in Volos, Greece in 1959 and emigrated to the United States in the 1980s to pursue graduate studies in sociology. His remarkable teaching performance at Queens College, City University of New York, exhibiting an appreciation for knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and a dedicated work ethic, earned him the President's Award for Teaching Excellence. "I have always had an interest in social and political theory, ethnic studies and research, and this led to the establishment of the first archive-library-museum for the Greek and Cypriot diaspora of New York," he said.



Nicholas Alexiou

"Although New York has the highest concentration of Greeks and Cypriots in the United States, there was no research, archival center, or museum, and the Hellenic American Project filled that void." "Our program has created a space for Greek American diasporic studies," he explained, "because after a century and a half of continuous presence in America, we know very little about the Greek and Cypriot contributions to American society, or even to their ancestral homelands."

Alexiou maintains that the history and literature of the Greek communities in America should be included in the educational curricula of all Greek American elementary and high schools. "I strongly believe that American-born Greeks and Cypriots must first understand their own cultural identity," he added.

According to Alexiou, the most recent US census found that about 1.5 million Americans are of Greek heritage, with nearly 100,000 residing in New York. "The Cypriot American community as a whole numbers around

55,000 people," he said. "An intriguing new finding suggests that Greeks born in America outnumber those born in mainland Greece."

HAP has many robust archives in its possession, including the archive of the Voice of America's Greek broadcasting service (1942-2014), a federal organization and one of the network's original language services that covered historic turning points in modern Greece, from the civil war in the late 1940s to the country's accession to the EU, as well as Greece's struggle to remain an integral part of it. "The Voice of America's historic broadcasts are an important resource for the study of US-Greece-Cyprus relations since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974," Alexiou added.

"The Hellenic American Project includes a fantastic art exhibition, which was shown at the Greek Consulate of Greece in New York and the Greek Embassy in Washington, DC." HAP has had several notable moments over the years that have drawn attention to the program as well as Alexiou and his team's efforts to preserve Greek and Cypriot cultural identity in America. In 2013, HAP was featured on NBC's Morning Show, drawing an estimated 15 million viewers. Although HAP has had many prominent visitors from Greece, including former Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in 2016, Alexiou is hopeful that Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides will also visit when he is next in the US. "Our paths crossed many years ago, when Christodoulides was studying at Queens College."

Like most organizations and initiatives of its kind, HAP depends on grants and donations to stay afloat. "At the moment, donations are going towards conducting oral histories, which includes videography, editing, interviews, and website maintenance." More substantial funding is required to curate and digitize archives, organize cultural events, symposia, art exhibitions, and research writing on specific topics," Alexiou explained. Although HAP is open to anyone who wishes to join its program, Alexiou insists that to meet the entry criteria, one must have a passion for research, show respect and remain free of bias. "The Hellenic American Project is an excellent resource for students and researchers interested in the Hellenic American experience, assisting those who qualify and utilize the archives and resources with scholarships, internships and credits." Among the many activities currently underway at HAP, Alexiou and his team are working on a special project to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus through interviews with Cypriot Americans, documenting their experiences and discussing the significant role of the Cyprus lobby since 1975. "The Hellenic American Project curates the archive of the late Lambros Papandoniou, White House correspondent for 30 years, which includes much of the Cyprus issue.

"With the support of Philip Christopher, President of the Pancyprian Association of America and Pseka (Justice for Cyprus), we hope to have a year-long exhibition open to the public, raising awareness of the invasion through photographic archives." To find out more about the Hellenic American Project, visit www.hapsoc.org

Looking for Our Help

As part of his Tikkun Olam project for his upcoming bar mitzvah, Oliver Etting, great-grandson of Rachel "Mary" Negrin Nelson of Ioannina, Greece, is raising funds for needed renovations to the synagogue in Ioannina, including replacing the windows. Oliver has set up a GoFundMe page with more information and a link to donate, as well as some research about the synagogue and his personal connection to it. The link is included below and all donations will go to Kehila Kedosha Janina to facilitate this process.



<https://www.gofundme.com/f/oliver-ettings-bar-mitzvah-tikkun-olam-project>

Poem written in 1952 by Louis Negrin, husband of Renee Matsil Negrin, first daughter of Amelia and Rabbi Behor Matsil. Presented to us by Amelia Sobel and printed with permission of Renee Matsil Motola, the granddaughter of Renee Matsil Negrin and Louis Negrin.

AN ODE TO A GRECIAN FAMILY

The Matsil Family Residence at one time was full
Till kid Cupid started using his pull
In '32 we were holding the nine
The count at the time numbered nine
Then Renee met Lou - I guess it was fate
She married him, and then there were eight
Till Jean and Dud said marriage'd be heaven
At which time we came down to seven
One male of the clan then took the step
And walked down the aisle with vigor and pep
When Ike and Sarah decided to mix
The magic number dwindled to six
Large house, soon after there was more room
As Manny decided to become a groom
So he married Essie - and man alive!
The inventory dropped to five
Matty and Ruthie evened the score
And made the count a small little four
The Jewdas liked us - tis plain to see
~~By the way~~ Julie + Jackie made it three
A dry spell followed for six long years
And to make Mom lose her tears
Morris and Anita said I do
And that left the Matsils only two
But not for long cause in the same year
Selma and Oscar became a pair
As they left for their honeymoon on the run
The Matsils were left with only one
The story for the moment ends right here
But look for marriage within the year.

These photos were found among the possessions of Rose Eskononts and sent to us by Laurie Serwetz (Rose's daughter). Please help us identify the people in the photos.



Picture of the Month

Thanks to Jerry Pardo, we have this priceless photo of Samuel Cohen (of Blessed Memory), Stella Mioni Cohen, of Blessed Memory, Roberta Hollander (granddaughter of Rabbi HaCohen) and Anna Mione Cohen.



We are very lucky to have Arlene Schulman as part of our community. A talented writer and documentary filmmaker, her humor may be biting at times, but her perspective is always on target.

My Cane Is Not A Decoration Full article by Arlene Schulman [here](#)

My late friend Edith Prentiss, a disability advocate, led by example when it came to fighting for accessibility. Now I use a cane, and I've learned to channel my inner Edith.

After decades of walking miles around New York City, a herniated disc tickled my sciatic nerve, creating searing pain in my back and leg. It promptly threw me into the category of a person with a disability last fall.

I thought of my friend, disability advocate Edith Prentiss, who died at 69 in 2021. She would have carefully selected a sturdy cane, sent me on to doctors and advised me of travel routes throughout our transit system.

Edith, one of about 90,000 wheelchair users in the city, advocated for more subway elevators, lobbied for wheelchair-accessible taxis and argued for accessible voting booths. She pushed restaurant owners to include proper ramps, tables and restrooms to accommodate wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

She fought for the almost million New Yorkers who are blind or have low vision, are deaf or hard of hearing, or live with cognitive, intellectual or developmental disabilities, and those suffering from a chronic or temporary illness or injury. No matter how large or small the fight, Edith was in your corner to take on any challengers.

A film — still in progress but on hold due to my documentary film studies at Columbia Journalism School — about her life is aptly titled "Edith Prentiss: Hell on Wheels." Edith was insulted.

Fearless About Confrontation

She fumed as a step, just one step, meant the difference between entering a building, crossing a street or attending an event. Even Edith's somewhat scattered gray hair bristled. The only hair salon that fit her wheelchair in our uptown neighborhood was a spacious barber shop where Major League baseball players have their hair cut and coiffed.

Edith was fearless about confrontation. "Excuse me! Excuse me!" she would call out, digging into a mountain of tote bags attached to her wheelchair for sheaves of notes and historical records waved at elected officials, heads of city agencies and CEOs. They groaned.

Most of the time, Edith, if she didn't win the fight, made the battles for people with disabilities most visible. But once she left meetings, she became invisible. I watched people carrying shopping bags, and wheeling suitcases shove past her into subway elevators. Women pushing strollers would cut her off.

Edith would board the A Train at the George Washington Bridge bus terminal with elevators to the platform and street. It was named after her in honor of her advocacy. Only 126 of New York City's 472 subway stations have elevators or ramps. And that's if they're working. Edith was late to meetings when her elevator was out of service or missed them entirely.

Once on the train, she would pull a paperback book from her tote bags, reading as New Yorkers jostled for space. Crumbs dropped from sloppy sandwiches and landed on her lap. Splashes of coffee dripped onto her shoulders. "Excuse me!" she yelled. "Oh, yeah. Sorry," people replied.

Edith rolled her eyes. Cranky participants dissected dangerous traffic patterns at a local community board meeting maybe a decade ago. Edith stopped the debate. "You're all just one car accident away from being like me," she warned almost gleefully, pointing to her wheelchair. Edith was right. You never know what to expect when you step off a curb. But, years later, it wasn't a car that rendered me invisible and walking with a cane. Instead, it was my living room couch.



Arlene on the A train

A Herniated Disc, A Bright Blue Walking Cane

The couch required lifting to slide a polka-dot rug under it. I picked up the couch with one hand and pushed the carpet under. No problem for a millennial with 25 years' worth of experience, although I neglected to bend my knees to absorb my weight. Bad move. Two days later, shooting pain in my leg — so painful I could barely stand — prevented me from walking. I wanted to chop my leg off. Instead, my orthopedist sent me on my way with instructions for a cocktail of Tylenol, Advil and muscle relaxers and orders for x-rays and an MRI.

My diagnosis was confirmed after being wheeled around the hospital, peering up at people, and shoving myself onto a table to be inserted into an MRI tube — herniated disc. A bright blue walking cane, one of the thousands pictured on Amazon, arrived the next day. Edith would have loved the flashlight attached to the handle. I imagine myself signaling her with our own personal Morse code. It wouldn't have mattered.

Channeling My Inner Edith

As they did with Edith, travelers shove past me to get onto elevators. They play Solitaire or listen to music, buried in cell phones, oblivious as I swing around subway poles practically perpendicular with pain. My gyrations are not a "showtime" performance.

I stab men in the foot with my cane so that they see me. They don't look up. Women are more often the ones who offer their seats. Then, waving my cane in the air as buses approach, I climb aboard to wedge myself between teenagers carrying sports equipment that hit my leg and business people who leap for open seats, briefcases and phones in hand.

Balancing on my cane as the bus swerves around corners would turn me into a four-eyed projectile. So, finally, I pessimistically told one bus driver, "I hope I get a seat." His reply was a dubious "Good luck with that." Enough already with the lack of courtesy. So I channeled my inner Edith.

When I boarded the M5 bus at 59th Street several months ago, not one person rose to usher me into their seat. Every seat, including one designated for people with disabilities, was occupied by a person on their phone.

I marched to the center of the bus. "Excuse me," I called out, my voice weary with pain and annoyance. "Would someone mind giving up their seat? I have a cane. It's NOT a decoration." A woman and her suitcase finally gave up her \$2.75 seat. It was such a relief to sit.

Other times I let my eyes flutter in agony or step on someone's foot and remark, "How terrible it is to have a cane." My sneakers sometimes stick to the floors of subway elevators coated in urine, and I hold my breath against the stench. On my way to and from the subway, I hop over puddles of dog pee and piles of poop, spraying Lysol on my shoes and cane to disinfect them when I return home.

How Do You Get People to Care?

Using a cane made me finally understand Edith's frustration. So how do you get people to care? Change is slow. The Metropolitan Transit Authority, which operates NYC's subways and buses, announced in June 2022 that elevators and ramps would be added to 95% of subway stations as part of a settlement agreement in two class-action lawsuits — by 2055.

But no matter how accessible New York City and other cities become, a person with a disability must often rely on strangers to get them through their journey, to give up a much-needed seat, to let them board an elevator, to open a door, to realize that maybe they can use a little extra space to get around.

Look up from cell phones to see who's struggling to stand. We can all do better. Now, here's my bus. My inner Edith is prepared to remind people that I have a cane. It's not a decoration.

*Arlene Schulman is a writer, photographer, and filmmaker living in Manhattan. She is the author of several books, including the critically acclaimed *The Prizefighters: An Intimate Look at Champions and Contenders* and *23rd Precinct: The Job*. Visit her at www.arlenesscratchpaper.com*

So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.

If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) made out to *Kehila Kedosha Janina*, to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy. **We need donations more than ever now. You can do this on line on our website: www.kkjsm.org accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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



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Kehila Kedosha Janina

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