



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

January 2025 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This year Hanukkah overlaps with the secular New Year. It is no coincidence that Hanukkah is celebrated when we have the shortest days of the year. As we enter the new secular year, may the Hanukkah candles inspire us to bring more light into the world to make it a better year ahead, may the hostages return to their families, and may there only be peace in Israel.



Historic oil Hanukkah menorah from Corfu

This newsletter, our 189th 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 thousands of households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at info@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 info@kkjsm.org

Simchas

We celebrate the recent wedding of Rachel Serwertz and Mathew Esmaelzada back in August, 2024, and anticipate the upcoming birth of their first child. Rose Eskononts will become a great-grandmother!



In December, our beloved Rae Yamali turned 102!

And in January, Annette Binder will turn 97!

Passings

We are sad to share the news of the passing of Terry Lafazan at the end of 2024. The graveside funeral will be held on Thursday, January 2, 2025 at 1pm at Beth David Cemetery 300 Elmont Rd Elmont, NY 11003. Shiva will be observed at the Lafazan Residence 2212 Brigham St. Brooklyn, NY 11229 on Thurs 3-8 & Friday 1-5

On November 22, 2024 we lost a special person in our community, Melvin Matsil. Mel was the only offspring of the eldest child of Isaak Matsil and Sarah Judah Matsil.



Rabbi Matsil with his wife Amelia, Amelia's father, and their oldest children: Isaak, Renee (with a classic "moutra" expression).

We mourn the passing of Zanet Nachmia, the last Holocaust survivor from the city of Ioannina, who died shortly before her 100th birthday in December. Zanet was born in Ioannina in 1925, one of the six children of Haim Nachmias, who ran a taverna, and his wife Revekka (née Mordechai), and grew up within the walled Kastro, opposite the synagogue. She attended primary school at the Alliance Israélite Universelle until the fifth grade, when she left to help her mother with the chores of their large household.



"We were saddened to learn of the unexpected loss of the late Zanet Nachmia from Ioannina, the last survivor of Auschwitz in the city, and grandmother of our director, Zanet Battinou," the Jewish Museum of Greece said. Read the full obituary of Zanet below in this Newsletter.

We were deeply saddened by the passing of Walter Pappas, the husband of Pearl Colchamiro. A moving Memorial tribute took place on October 27th. Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, read her moving tribute to Walter:



As an honorary Colchamiro, I am honored to be asked to contribute to this memorial. The Colchamiro's were part of our community from the beginning. Jessoula and Rachel had 11 children (7 daughters and 4 sons). Like many in Greece, and here on the Lower East Side, they were involved in all aspects of the textile industry. Acquiring a sewing machine made you an entrepreneur, but it is questionable whether the Colchamiro's back in Greece even had the funds to purchase a sewing machine. Rather they were involved in the buying and selling of fabric, buttons and thread. Family legend gives insight into the derivation of their surname (Kalhamira) the opening prayer from the separation of the leavened and the unleavened, starting Pesach, where Jessoula was as meticulous in picking out his fabric as he would be in separating the leavened from the unleavened.

The actual surname was Matathias, but Elias, the patriarch of this branch of the family was the only one who came over with the surname of Matathias.

One major impetus for emigration was economic, more specifically the need to provide dowries for 7 daughters. At the family reunion in 2003, 156 members of the Colchamiro family gathered in the sanctuary of Kehila Kedosha Janina. As I looked down on the crowd, my eyes filled with tears. From the humble beginnings of this family, we now had doctors, attorneys, architects, professors and a predominance of professionals. Not only among the men, but also among the women, something that would have been unheard of had they remained in Greece. The seed was there and was given the opportunity to grow here in the United States, And, then, of course, most of you never would have been here, the devastation of the Holocaust decimating the small Jewish community of Ioannina.

Walter, in whose memory we are gathered here, had the soul of a Colchamiro, a true Renaissance man, who loved learning, traveling, but most of all family. Jesse Colchamiro, who would have loved to be here, summed up the essence of what it meant to be a Colchamiro, when after visiting a sick relative, said "that's what we Colchamiro's do." Your gathering here in memory and in honor of Walter, is what Colchamiro's do, and I cannot help but feel that Walter is looking down on all of you now and silently whispering "thank you."

Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina & Past Events

In December we were happy to welcome many people to tour our museum. Some came to KKJ for the first time to reconnect with their Romaniote roots, while others read about us as a must-see museum and landmark. One person was on a mission to visit every museum in NYC, and we were his penultimate stop before completing his journey. Regardless of how they find out about us, visitors always walk away as new friends of our community.



The Cabili family from Boston, with others who have Greek and Italian heritage



Cypriot visitors



The Levy family with Vitoulis, Matza, Alderoty and other family roots from Greece & Turkey



Not only do our visitors find it enriching to come to KKJ, but our tour guides also find it rewarding to connect with such interesting people and share our beautiful heritage. We are always looking for more volunteers to help with museum tours and events. If you would like to serve as a volunteer docent, please email Amarcus@kkjism.org



KKJ President Marvin Marcus leading a tour group

Thank you to everyone who joined us on December 14 for our special Hanukkah & Hellenism Shabbat class led by Theo Canter. We welcomed more than 50 people and Theo gave an insightful overview of Rabbinic reactions to Hellenism, the symbiotic exchange between our cultures, and the ongoing tension between preserving Jewish practices and staying true to the Torah while engaging with our wider world. We look forward to hosting more exciting Shabbat lunch classes in 2025!

Theo has been quite busy reaching out to new and longstanding community members. He even represented KKJ at an international Hanukkah celebration hosted by our friends at the Tribeca synagogue. The event featured Jewish Hanukkah foods and traditions from countries all over the world, and Theo proudly shared our Greek Jewish traditions and encouraged people to come visit us at KKJ.



On December 19 KKJ hosted an online class in partnership with the Sephardic Brotherhood of America about the process to apply for Greek citizenship. Led by a Greek lawyer, the class outlined the steps if you, a parent, or a grandparent were Greek citizens. You can watch a recording of the class here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/2DWbBSerTcs>



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

What an incredible Hanukkah party! Thank you to everyone who joined us last Thursday and made it such an amazing evening. More than 100 young community members came together to celebrate with nonstop music, dancing, delicious homemade prasa keftedes and bimuelos/loukoumades, special guest performers, Hanukkah candle lighting, and beautiful energy. Special thanks to Avram Pengas for always bringing uplifting music, and to the Restis family for help making this event possible. It was definitely the best Hanukkah party in NYC. Wishing everyone a Hanukkah Sameah!



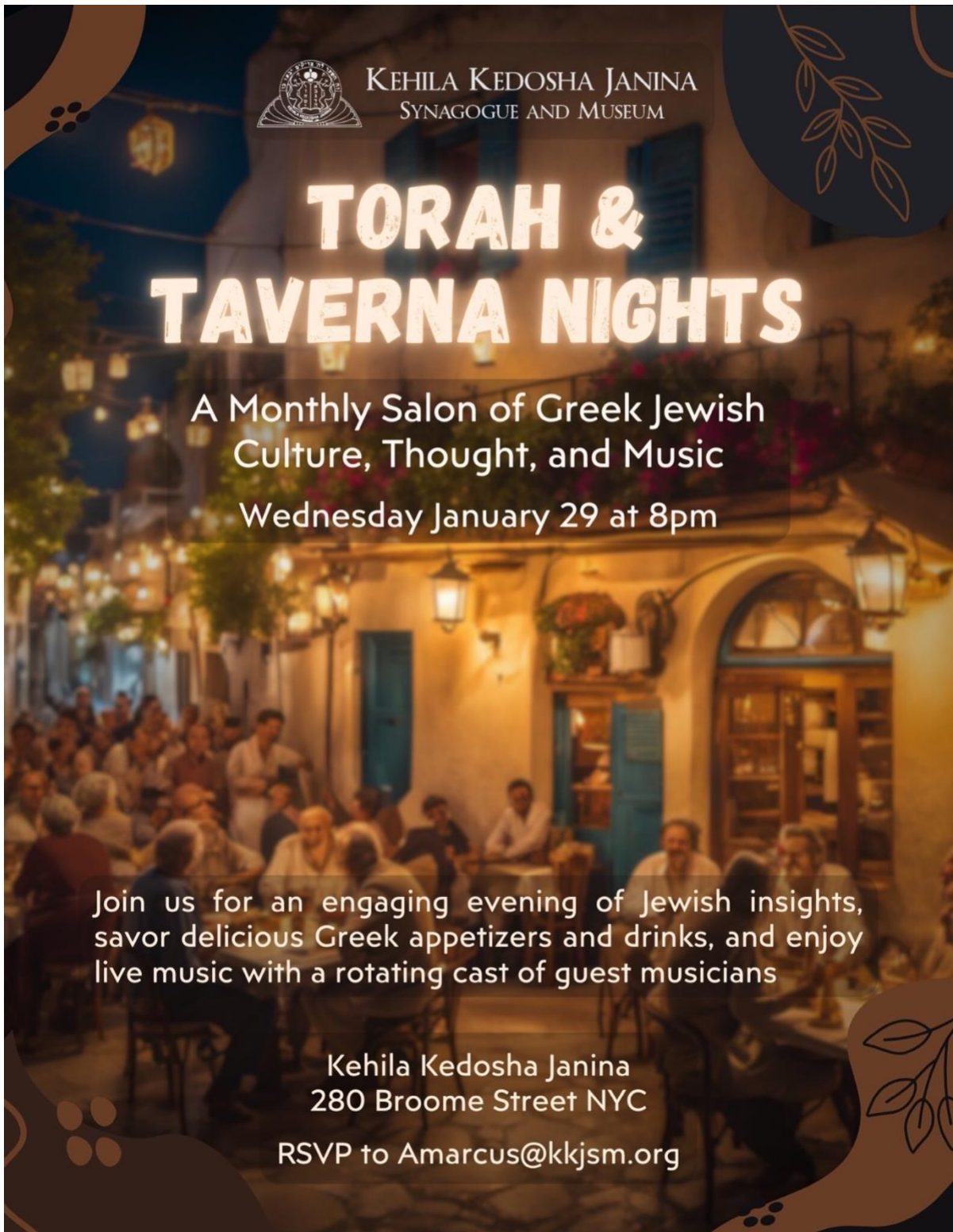
Thank you to everyone who joined our Young Professionals Shabbat dinner last month. It was a very special evening with Kabbalat Shabbat services, a delicious Greek Sephardic dinner, lively songs in Hebrew and Ladino, and uplifting energy throughout the night. We had a guest speaker from Israel join us and he shared his experience helping wounded soldiers and civilians recover mentally and physically over the past year, and how we all have the power of resilience in each of us. We also heard moving words from Theo Canter on the perasha and how each of us go "up and down" the ladder of life as Yaakov saw the angels in his vision of the ladder to heaven. Special thanks to our guest hazzanim Avi Garson and Aaron Levy for leading beautiful prayers. Looking forward to seeing everyone again soon!




Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Torah & Taverna Nights – January 29 at 8pm

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org



 **KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA**
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

TORAH & TAVERNA NIGHTS

A Monthly Salon of Greek Jewish
Culture, Thought, and Music
Wednesday January 29 at 8pm

Join us for an engaging evening of Jewish insights,
savor delicious Greek appetizers and drinks, and enjoy
live music with a rotating cast of guest musicians

Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

Join us on Wednesday January 29 at 8pm for the launch of our new monthly evening program Torah & Taverna Nights! Each month will feature guest Jewish educators and musicians and offer an engaging evening of insights, live music, delicious appetizers, and more. The inaugural evening will feature a world-renowned Israeli guest – stay tuned for more details soon! Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

Romaniote American Oral History Project

Contact Theo@kkjism.org to learn more and share your stories



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

ROMANIOTE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

A community-sourced archive for
preservation, research, and inspiration



What does it mean to be a Romaniote Jew
in the US in the 21st Century?

After more than 100 years in America,
Kehila Kedosha Janina is excited to launch
this new research project to document our
community today, exploring questions of
identity, culture, preservation, & adaptation.

We want to hear from you! Submit
testimonies, family stories, recipes,
photographs, traditions, songs, memories,
& more.



Contact Theo Canter at Theo@kkjism.org
to learn more and contribute your voice as we
write the next chapter of our community's story

Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Classes

Email Theo@kkjism.org to learn more



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Tutoring

FREE

Learn How To...



Read Torah & Haftara

Read Torah & Haftara in Hebrew, chanted in the centuries-old Greek Romaniote rite



Give a Derasha

Prepare a speech analyzing the weekly Torah portion



Lead Tefillah

Recite the prayers for Shabbat with our beautiful ancient melodies

Classes taught by KKJ Community Engagement Fellow Theo Canter

Email Theo@kkjism.org to learn more and sign up

**Message from Theo Canter
KKJ Community Engagement Fellow**



Shalom uVeraha dear friends and community,

It has been another beautiful and busy month of prayers, reflection, learning, and celebration at KKJ. Yes, the weather these days is cold, the daylight shorter, and the news often disconcerting. This darkest time of the year is when we find we ourselves most seeking spirituality, warmth, and light.

The Jewish people — Yehudim — take our name from “Hodayah,” gratitude. In that spirit, I want to express my deep *hakarath ha-tov* (recognition of the good) for all of our successes of the recent season and beyond. It makes all the difference how people, young and old, are showing up to our Kehila, engaging in a great variety of ways. Electric power may keep the lights on in the synagogue, but it is the power of each individual’s soul that keeps our community alive.

At our Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner this past month, where I was pleased to see many familiar and new faces, I discussed the story of Yaakov’s dream, where the angels move both up and down the ladder to heaven. Like the angels, each one of us is constantly on that journey. People come to our Kehila for a great variety of reasons — not only for a religious experience but to honor the traditions of our ancestors, for a sense of community, and even to enjoy our delicious Mediterranean Kiddush lunch. In that same *perasha*, we have the story of Yaakov wrestling with an angel, who changes his name to Israel — meaning the one who wrestles with God. In that spirit, we are actively called to wrestle with our own spirituality and identity, to never take it for granted.

Another highlight of the last month was the “Hannukah and Hellenism” class I led, which examined how the Rabbis of the Talmud and beyond engaged with Greek language, literature, and ideas. A central part of the lesson was Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed*. In it, Maimonides goes so far as to say that Aristotle ‘achieved the pinnacle of wisdom, almost akin to the Biblical Prophets.’ But, Aristotle falls short in thinking that contemplation is the highest virtue — we must appreciate the beauty of God’s creation through action.

In that spirit, as we celebrate Hannukah, let us be a light to the nations — by adding the candle of holiness to our wider society, built on both Greek and Jewish values. As our ancestors rededicated the Temple, let us rededicate ourselves to prayer, Torah, and *mitzvot*.

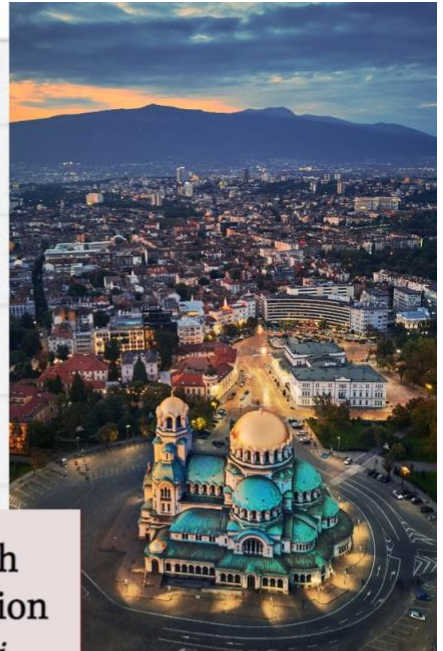
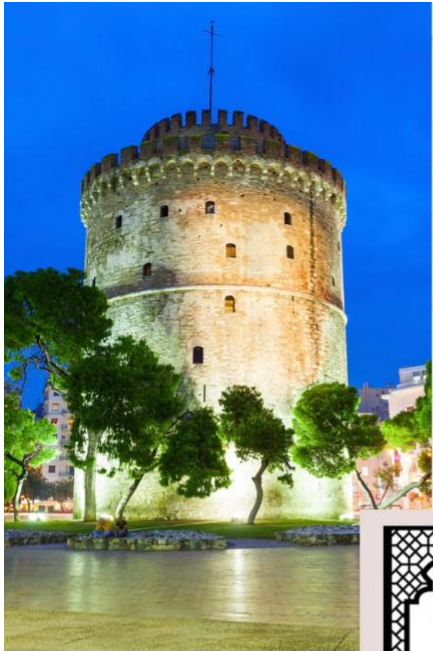
Additionally, looking to the New Year, much like how we eat the pomegranate on Rosh Hashana for a year full of blessings, it is a widespread tradition in Greece on New Years’ Eve to smash a pomegranate on the doorstep. Tu BiShvat is just around the corner, where we begin to look forward to the spring and the returning sun, with hopes for a fruitful harvest from the field and from the heart!

May the coming year be as sweet as loukoumades/bimuelos and as full of blessings as a pomegranate.

Hanukkah Sameah and Happy New Year,
Theo

Tour of Jewish Greece & the Balkans – Summer 2025
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

The Sephardic Brotherhood will be leading a special tour in 2025 that will visit 3 countries and 8 cities with Romaniote and Sephardic heritage. The tour will feature walking tours of the Jewish neighborhoods, a special Sephardic Shabbat experience in Salonika, visiting the historic Jewish Cemetery of Monastir, a day trip to the Romaniote community of Ioannina, touring the Acropolis of Athens, and the gorgeous beaches on the island of Corfu. Learn more and register at <https://www.sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece>.



The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood Foundation
La Ermandad Sefaradi

TOUR OF JEWISH GREECE & THE BALKANS

June 22 - July 3, 2025

**INCLUDES SOFIA, PLOVDIV, SKOPJE, MONASTIR (BITOLA),
THESSALONIKI (SALONIKA), IOANNINA, CORFU, & ATHENS**

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

**To register and learn more go to
[sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece](https://www.sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece)**



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network
Tour of Jewish Italy – July 2025

The Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network is excited to announce their Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Italy! They will trace the roots of our communities and visit the beautiful cities of Florence, Rome, Naples, Livorno, Pisa, Pompeii, & Capri. The tour runs July 6-16, 2025. Spots are limited and the deadline to register & submit deposits is January 15. Open to Jewish young adults in their 20s and 30s. Make sure to sign up now for this once-in-a-lifetime experience while there are still spots left! View the full itinerary here: <https://bit.ly/YPItaly2025> and email info@GreekJewishYPN.org to learn more & sign up.



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS TOUR OF JEWISH ITALY

July 6-16, 2025

**INCLUDES FLORENCE, ROME, NAPLES, LIVORNO,
PISA, POMPEII, & CAPRI**

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

View the full itinerary at bit.ly/YPItaly2025

**To register and learn more email
info@GreekJewishYPN.org**



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network – Cooking Class

Open to young adults in their 20s and 30s

RSVP to info@GreekJewishYPN.org



Greek Jewish & Sephardic
Young Professionals Network

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

GREEK JEWISH COOKING CLASS



★ BAKLAVA ★

★ BOUREKAS ★

★ GREEK SALAD ★

JOIN US AS WE LEARN HOW TO COOK HOMEMADE
BOUREKAS, BAKLAVA, AND GREEK SALAD
IN THIS INTERACTIVE DELICIOUS EVENT

JANUARY 12, 2025

3:00 PM

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME ST NYC

TICKET

\$18

Open to Young Adults in their 20's and 30's
RSVP to info@GreekJewishYPN.org

News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina

Last Holocaust Survivor from Ioannina, Greece Passes Away at 99 Full article [Here](#)

Zanet Nachmia, the last Holocaust survivor from the city of Ioannina, Greece died shortly before her 100th birthday the Jewish Museum of Greece announced in December.



Nachmia was born in Ioannina in 1925, one of the six children of Haim Nachmias, who ran a taverna, and his wife Revekka (née Mordechai), and grew up within the walled Kastro, opposite the synagogue. She attended primary school at the Alliance Israélite Universelle until the fifth grade, when she left to help her mother with the chores of their large household.

On March 25, 1944, the entire Jewish community of Ioannina, including Nachmia and her family, was rounded up and deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Of the 1,960 people deported, 1,850 were murdered in the camps. Nachmia also passed through other camps, including Mauthausen and Gelsenau, and was a forced laborer in a factory in Breslau (now Wroclaw).

Only she and her older brother Michael survived out of their entire family. After her liberation from the camps in 1945, she returned to Ioannina and married fellow Auschwitz survivor Israel Tsitos and they began to rebuild their life. Nachmia, who is survived by her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, remained in Ioannina for the rest of her life.

"We were saddened to learn of the unexpected loss of the late Zanet Nachmia from Ioannina, the last survivor of Auschwitz in the city, and grandmother of our director, Zanet Battinou," the Jewish Museum of Greece said. Nachmia "supported the work of the museum through the donation of family photographs as well as by depositing her personal testimony in our oral history archive," it added.

Jews of Ioannina perish in the Holocaust

Zanet Battinou recently related the tragic story of the Jews of Ioannina. "When the Axis Powers gained control of Greece," she said, "Ioannina came under Italian administration, and that situation was relatively benign for the community as they were left in peace." However, in July of 1943 a German division arrived and took charge of the city, she explained—which was the death knell for many residents of the historic community.

On March 25, 1944, Battinou stated, trucks arrived in Ioannina which were meant to transport the Jewish residents of the city—whose ancestors had lived there for nearly two thousand years—to their doom. "1,870 Jews were loaded onto the trucks and taken through Trikala to Larissa and from there crammed onto trains and taken to Auschwitz," Battinou states. Ninety-two percent of the Jews of Ioannina were never to see their homes again. At the end of the war, she said, the Jewish community "numbered only 181 souls. And even many of those left for the United States or Israel. Still, however, "they never lost touch with their hometown, maintaining their sense of belonging and community spirit that common roots produce."

German Consul Visits Ioannina Synagogue

On the occasion of the Moses Elisaf memorial lecture on religion and philosophy, the Jewish Community of Ioannina received the Consul General of Germany Monika Frank. She visited the Kahal Kadosh Yashan Synagogue and laid a wreath at the Holocaust monument, as well as the cemetery, on the tomb of Moses Elisaf and the last survivor Zanet Nachmia.



Thessaloniki

Jewish Community of Thessaloniki honored the head of its Historical Archive, Aliki Arouh

"This award is very important to me and I would like to dedicate it to all those who have a name, have a history and allow me every day, through the traces of our precious archive, to enter their lives literally." Holding in her hands the honorary plaque she had just received from the hands of the President of the Central Jewish Council of Greece and the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, David Saltiel, the head of the Historical Archive of the IKTH, Aliki Arouh, had a heartfelt "thank you" as a "gift" not only for the Council that honored her, recognizing her valuable work in the Archive, but also all those who filled the hall of the Community Center of IKTH early last Thursday afternoon.



Renowned historians, academics of the largest universities in the country, researchers, members of the Community, many relatives and friends – some even travelled from far away for this purpose – were all there to share their own unique story with the head of the Historical Archive of IKTH, who, despite the complex nature of her work and the difficulties involved in managing such important archives, It manages to recognize the value of every detail, every document, every image, reminding us that memory is the most powerful tool to understand our history and find our place in it.

All those who spoke about her work – people from Greece and abroad – referred to the strong connection she feels with the individuals and families reconnected through the Archive, but also her relentless efforts to preserve the history of the Jewish community through it, not only to bring justice to the ancestors of its members. but also to preserve the memory of those who perished. They remembered some personal moments – some emotionally charged and others with a touch of humor – and everyone agreed that the value of Alice Arouh's work is truly priceless.

Without hiding her emotion for the honor bestowed upon her by the ICT, she referred to her first contact with the Archive in 2009, when, after a health adventure, the president of the ICT invited her to work there. "I went down to the file that was full of cockroaches, boxes, bags, discarded all [...] Slowly, with both hands and an Ajax, I began to dust off – literally and figuratively. Very quickly I realized that through the files the whole history of the Community was revived in front of me", she said and remembered how difficult this daily "dive" in history was for her. "I felt in the early days – before I suffered this "insensitivity" that should distinguish you, when you read very unpleasant things, such as members of our Community literally asking us for trousers, a costume after the Holocaust, a blanket because they slept on the floor of the Monastiriotes synagogue – that you must have a strong stomach [...] Then I just kept going. And everything I did magically led me to the next step", recounted Mrs. Arouh, revealing the emotions that overwhelmed her every time she read documents and saw pictures brought to life in her imagination again the old, mighty Jewish community of Thessaloniki. "That's how I want you to keep it. I want you to remember that all these people, whose traces are in our archive, have a name and a history. Let's keep their memory alive through our work. I, as an archivist, promise you that this award gives me the courage and strength to do even more", he said, receiving loud applause from the large audience.

He confessed that "... I never feel alone, even though I am practically the only employee in the Archive, because every day when I bow my head and catch my eye on a document, suddenly all our ancestors, all the names, all the people who passed through our community, its history, come alive."

In closing, she said she was blessed to be doing a job she loves and thanked once again those who talked about her and gave her a piece of them, as she characteristically said.

Earlier, opening the event, the president of KISE and ICT, David Saltiel, spoke about Aliki Arouh's dedication and the systematic way in which she has worked and continues to work for the organization of the archive of the Jewish Community. "Aliki's work at the Historical Archive is not just a job, like any other. It has a peculiarity. The archive is a living object of the community, which the more you process it, the more you discover facts and

information that none of us knew about," he noted. He referred both to the "effective system of cataloguing and managing the available material he has developed, making it accessible to all interested parties" and to the fact that he "took care of the verification of the Holocaust victims database", a "life's work of the president of the Community Assembly and survivor of Auschwitz, Heinz Kounio. But also in the "systems with the data developed as part of its work, which allow the finding and analysis of data accurately and efficiently".

He also made special mention of the "friendly and supportive environment" that Mrs. Arouh has created for the visitors of the Archive, which "increase more every year", as well as her active participation and presence in events of international bodies, noting that with this action she contributes significantly to the promotion of the Historical Archive of the Historical Archive of the Archive of IKTH and makes it a center of reference. study and research of the history of the Jews of Thessaloniki at an international level.

The following spoke in detail about Aliki Arouh's work and personality: Anna Maria Droumbouki, Maria Kavala, Vasilis Ritzaleos, Rika Benveniste, Eva Saoulidou Sevi, Dimitris Goulis, Mariangela Chatzistamatiou, Eleftheria Xyla, Yiota Gatsou, Leon Nar, Aegli Brouskou, Areti Makri, Valia Kravva, Stratos Dordanas, George Antoniou. Videos screened at the event were also sent by Andreas Bouroutis, Leon Saltiel, Devin Naar, Rachel Handayo, Jason Chandrinou, while Filippou Carabbott intervened via Zoom.



One of the most touching moments of the evening was the recorded surprise message of her son, Leo, but also her mother's "thank you" to all those who were "present" at the event. "You are all a part of Aliki. Thank you," said Katy Arouh, while Leo talked about his "beloved mom" and her journey through the archive. With emotion and pride, he looked back and remembered -among other things- his mother "coming home after work in the office and looking after her children: me and then again the Jewish heritage that she acquired with endless zoom calls, phone calls, conversations with other people and researchers who over the years collaborated and embraced her work." The event was coordinated by Marianna Kyritsi, who also read the written greetings of the Jewish Communities of Larissa and Volos and the director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Zanet Battino.

Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki New Photo Exhibit: The Assael Collection - Snapshot of Conquerors 1941-1944

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki present the exhibition "Snapshots of occupiers 1941-1944. The Assael Collection" at the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, 11 Agios Minas. The exhibition, with the aim of highlighting the history of the occupation period in the city of Thessaloniki through unpublished historical documents and, specifically, through photographs of German soldiers during the period of the Occupation, illuminates unseen aspects of Local History.



Visitors will have the opportunity to tour Occupied Thessaloniki and get to know unknown aspects of the past through rare photographic material. The evidence of the exhibition comes from the extremely rich archive of the collector and researcher Andreas Assael. Assael's personal archive is different from other collections of possession photographs. The exhibition presents the entire private albums and photo sets of the German conquerors of Thessaloniki. The owners of the albums are not anonymous soldiers, but soldiers who served the Nazi regime, who introduce themselves through the commemorative photographs. Having their official and personal documents in his possession, Assael contributed to highlighting the faces hidden behind the photographic lens. As eyewitnesses to the multifaceted barbarity against the Christian population and especially the Thessalonian Jews, the conquerors immortalized conflicting events, such as the great famine in Thessaloniki and the events of Black Saturday in Liberty Square.

The Assael family is one of the Jewish families that hid with all its members together and were saved inside the occupied Thessaloniki. The story of Freddy, who on Black Saturday was brutally beaten by the Greek Christian dosilog Laskaris Papanaoum, unfolds through the images, and above all, through the narration of his son, Andreas Assael. If we could summarize the specificity of Andreas Assael's collection in one word, it would be the concept of "return".

Return as the collection "returned" to the descendant of one of the protagonists of this dark memory for the city and through him to the place and the wider community of the city, which it concerns, illuminating painful issues through micro-history and recommending a rare testimony with the in which we explore the intergenerational trauma and the traumatic memory of the German Occupation.

The opening of the exhibition will take place on Wednesday, December 11 at 18:00 at the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. The exhibition will last until the end of August 2025 and will be framed by the scientific evening that will take place at the MOMus Museum of Photography on 12/12/2024 at 18:00. There will be educational tours for schools. The exhibition was realized with the financial support of the Hellenic-German Fund for the Future and with the support of MOMus Museum of Photography.

Trikala

Celebration of Hanukkah in Trikala with members of the Jewish Community of Athens

The Jewish Community of Trikala had the pleasure and the honor to welcome members of the Jewish Community of Athens on December 27, 2024, as part of their Hanukkah festivities. This visit was a moving opportunity to strengthen the ties between the two communities and revive traditions. The visitors had previously visited the "Mill of the Elves" and toured the sights of the city.



During the visit, the Kabbalat Shabbat service was held at the Trikala Synagogue, with the participation of members and friends of the Community. In an atmosphere of elation and spirituality, the ceremony of lighting the second candle for Hanukkah, a symbol of light, hope and renewal, took place.

The presence of the members of the Athens Community was particularly moving, highlighting the importance of cooperation and unity between the Jewish communities of our country. The event ended with an exchange of wishes and souvenir gifts, strengthening the feeling of brotherhood and solidarity.

The Jewish Community of Trikala warmly thanks the members of the Jewish Community of Athens for their visit to our city and wishes everyone a Hag Hanukkah Sameach (Happy Hanukkah) with health, love and light.

Chalcis

Hanukkah celebrations in Chalcis



Athens

How Greek Jews Celebrate Chanukah: Spoiler Alert, It's Different There [Article Here](#)

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin's family has been in Greece for a very long time – since the 4th century BCE, to be exact. Negrin, who has been the rabbi of Athens since he was 26-years-old, explains that the Jewish community of Greece is called "Romaniote." "I can trace our family background [directly] to the 11th century." The Romaniote have their own unique traditions and speak their own Hebrew-Greek language, known as Yevanic or Judeo-Greco, and is the Greek equivalent to Yiddish and Ladino. "Among the Judeo-Greco speakers we don't have a name for it, it's just our language."

The Romaniote are not considered Sephardic, although the Athenian community is half-Sephardic. "We have our ancient history and then after the destruction of the Temple...most of our traditions are based on the Jerusalem Talmud and not the Babylonian Talmud. We have a lot of traditions that come directly from the Temple. Every day, we count the years since the destruction of the Temple in our morning prayers." Their Ketubbahs are in Hebrew and not in Aramaic; they also include this count. Their minhagim developed during the Byzantine Empire which reflected in them having different liturgical music.

Negrin was 19-years-old when he first met an Ashkenazi Jew, and that was when he first learned the extent of the conflict between Greeks and Jews as in the story of Chanukah. "The conflict was between the Hellenistic Empire of the Assyrians and the Jews...even in ancient times, Greeks were not related to Antiochus. That's why he was called Ehiphanus. The one who wants to show himself. This is similar the Epimanis – a crazy person." That doesn't mean he was Greek, as that the Assyrian Empire even had different borders. "No one gives any Greek identity to Cleopatra [either]...Even in our prayer books, when we add the prayer of Chanukah *al hanissim*, it doesn't say the Greek Empire but it says 'the cruel Syrian Empire.'" While this was an effort to be politically correct in Greece, historically speaking it may be more accurate.

Greek Jewish communities have a longstanding significance to Jewish history. "The Jewish community in Crete used to send goats for the Temple [for use as sacrifices]. In fact, recently archeologists in Greece unearthed ancient purchase orders from Israel ordering animals to be brought to the Temple for sacrifice. The Jewish community in Corfu, to the North, created high-quality ethrogim." In fact, archaeologists have found evidence of Greek animal sales with Israel. "Several years ago [they] found a ceramic plate that was actually an order from the Temple to Greek Jews, an order for goats and other goods from Greece to Israel." Other ancient communities in places like Olympia were strategically placed to further the cause of the Jewish community. There was a trade agreement in place to exchange goods between Greece and Israel during second Temple times. "Many lamps were found with menorahs on them from ancient times, but it is not a custom to light [the menorah] outside the home today." Greeks are raised with Greek philosophy as an important part of their education. "I knew about Philo before I knew about Rambam..."

Kashrut has an interesting history in Greece. "We have the strong opposition of south French rabbis about the kosher wine of Greece and Crete because it was carried by Muslims...It was an economic debate based on a halachic issue." There has been production of kosher products in Israel from ancient times to today.

"Greek Jews were always a solid and important part of Greek society throughout history. We never had pogroms at the level of Russia. If you see a painting of medieval Europe, you can always see who is a Jew." Stereotypical looks defined paintings of Jews in this area, but in Byzantine paintings, Jews and non-Jews look the same. "The only way you can see that they are Jews is because it is written at the top of the painting." The Greek revolution affected the relationship, though now things are more stable.

In the Holocaust, Greece lost 87% of its population. The percentage was more than 99% in Crete. "Today we are only 5,500 Jews all over Greece. Most of us are centered in Athens, the capital city. We are 3,500 Jews today." Most are traditional Jews and there isn't such a big need for kosher food but most eat strictly kosher in their houses. There are several main supermarkets that carry products that are sourceable with a list, although

there are only a handful of strictly observant families. "We have kosher shechita in Athens and butcher stores. We have several products and specific factories that produce from yogurt and cheese to bread and pastries." To find out more, visit the Jewish Community of Athens [here](#).

Athens Hanukkah Bazaar

The Athens Jewish Community held their annual Hanukkah Bazaar on December 15th at the Jewish School. In an atmosphere full of joy and creativity, they celebrated the Hanukkah Bazaar together. Students, parents, friends and relatives shared moments of celebration with theater performances for our students, art workshops, face painting, trampoline and games, hand omemade treats from the parents of our School and wonderful gifts at our School counter. Well done to the children of the Elementary school who baked cookies with their teachers, Ms. Zoe Makri and Ms. Nectaria Andronas, to support the purchase of a defibrillator!

They were delighted with the joyful announcements from the families of our Community, who honored us by "cutting the ribbon", while the children enjoyed unique activities. They warmly thank everyone who contributed to the success of our celebration. The Director Mr. Giorgos Canello, the Teaching & Administrative Staff, the School Committee, donors, parents and of course all of you who honored us with your presence. Special thanks to Erricos Mosse, who voluntarily took over the music editing of the Bazaar, lifted the mood and created a unique atmosphere. With your love, you make the Hanukkah Bazaar a celebration for the whole Community! Hag Chanukah Sameach!



Volos

Volos: Jewish History and Memory Full article by Roland Baumann [Here](#) (in French)

The Jewish community of Volos, one of the oldest in Greece, bears witness to a unique history during the Shoah, marked by the destruction of the Jews of Salonika, nicknamed the "Jerusalem of the Balkans".

A city in Magnesia, in ancient Thessaly, at the bottom of the Pagasetic Gulf, Volos lies at the foot of Mount Pelion, the mountain of the Centaurs. It is from here that, according to mythology, the expedition of Jason and the Argonauts are said to have taken to the sea. The region has many archaeological sites, dating back to the Neolithic period. In 294 BC, the king of Macedonia founded Demetrias there. A prosperous Roman city since the end of the 2nd century BC, then episcopal seat under the Emperor Constantine, Demetrias was deserted in the 6th century, when the Byzantines built a stronghold nearby, the "castle", on the site of the old town of Volos (Palia Volos).



The Jewish presence in Magnesia dates back more than two millennia. According to a Romaniote tradition, the first Jews settled there after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Sources mention a community established as early as the 1st century. Tombstones dated between 325 and 641, and discovered in Nea Anchialos, south of Volos, bear witness to a continuous presence. The Romaniotes, Greek-speaking

Jews, constitute a community well integrated into the local cultural fabric of the Byzantine Empire. In the 12th century, Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler from Navarre, described a prosperous Jewish community near Almyros. Under the Ottoman Empire, the castle of Volos served as an administrative and economic center. The Jews actively participated in the grain trade of Thessaly, as well as in that of silk and cotton produced in the Christian villages of Pelion. Concentrated around the castle, they enjoyed a certain religious and cultural autonomy. Diplomatic documents from the 16th century attest to the existence of a synagogue and a ritual bath within the castle grounds.

After 1830, a new city, with a commercial vocation, developed to the east of the castle of Volos. Greek independence, then the integration of Thessaly into Greece in 1881, accelerated urban development. The port of Volos became a major commercial crossroads between the Balkans, Asia Minor and Western Europe. The arrival of the railway (in 1886) reinforced this growth, as did the modernization of the port. Jews played a major role in this economic development, becoming involved in the flourishing textile and tobacco industries. Jewish families, such as the Mourtzoukos and the Levis, ran large textile factories, while the Saportas dominated the tobacco trade. The Varouch bank financed many projects that accelerated local industrialization. In 1865, the Alliance Israélite Universelle opened a school in Volos. A synagogue was built in 1870 in the centre of the Jewish quarter of the new city, at the intersection of Xenophon, Platon and Moses streets. Moshe Pessah (1869-1955), who became Chief Rabbi of Volos in 1892, established a rabbinical school there in 1894. The community was distinguished by the vitality and dynamism of its cultural, social and political associations. In 1928, the community had 1,071 members out of a total population of 50,000 inhabitants in Volos.



The rescue of 75% of the Jews of Volos

During the Italo-Greek War of 1940, 71 Jews from Volos were mobilized and sent to the front. The Italian army occupied the city from 1941 to 1943. After the Italian capitulation, the Germans took control of Volos. On September 30, 1943, Major Kurt Rikert demanded from Rabbi Pesach a list of the Jews and of their property. The German consul Helmut Scheffel, although representing the Nazi regime, discreetly warned the local authorities of the impending deportations, urging the Jews to act quickly. Rabbi Pessah, in collaboration with the EAM-ELAS resistance, then encouraged the Jews to flee to the villages of Pelion and neighboring rural areas. Archbishop Joachim Alexopoulos, Metropolitan of Dimitriados, used his influence to have the villagers welcome the refugees and to hide Jewish families in monasteries and churches. Within days, some 700 Jews from Volos took refuge in the mountain villages, where they survived, protected by the ELAS partisans and the locals. 130 Jews, mostly elderly or sick, who remained in Volos were arrested during a roundup in March 1944 and deported to Auschwitz; only nine survived. The rescue of 75% of the Jews of Volos is a testament to exemplary solidarity between Jews and non-Jews in the face of Nazi oppression.

A gathering place for Jews before their deportation, the "Yellow Warehouse", built in 1926 in the city centre to store tobacco, was used by the Germans and their Greek collaborators as a detention, torture and execution centre. Many resistance fighters, Christian and Jewish, suffered horror there before being deported or put to death. Listed as a historical monument in 1993, this place of remembrance is now in danger. Renovation work, begun in 2019, was interrupted due to lack of funding, leaving the building exposed to the elements and threatening its collapse. The University of Thessaly wants to create a centre for technological innovation there, drawing criticism from resistance associations who are advocating for it to be turned into a museum dedicated to the national Resistance.

Greece, barely liberated, became the scene of new conflicts, pitting British troops against EAM-ELAS resistance fighters in Athens in December 1944 (Dekemvriáná), and followed by a white terror that, across the country, struck the EAM-ELAS partisans, all suspected of communism. These convulsions led to a civil war that devastated Greece until 1949, and ended with the defeat of the partisans. Many young Jews, who had entered the ranks of the resistance, were suspects for the royalist regime restored by the British, and which recycled many former Nazi collaborators, while fierce repression fell on the former resistance fighters. This new tragedy

incited most of the survivors of the Shoah to exile. In 1948, the Jewish community still had 645 members, but emigration to Israel and the United States quickly reduced this number.

Now numbering fewer than a hundred residents, the Jewish community of Volos remains active, holding regular religious services and cultural events. A Holocaust memorial, inaugurated in 1998 on Riga Fereou Square, near the town hall, commemorates the Jews of Volos murdered during the Holocaust. In 2023, a temporary exhibition organized by the Volos Municipal Museum highlighted the history of the city's Jewish community. It is worth noting that the museum's permanent collection fully integrates Jewish history with local history, illustrating both a model of integration and exemplary solidarity, in order to inspire young visitors, especially the many school groups to whom this institution is particularly aimed.

Student Video Competition on the Holocaust and Collective Memory of Greeks

For the 11th year, the General Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education, Religions and Sports and the Jewish Museum of Greece are organizing a student competition - an educational program for Holocaust Remembrance. For the school year 2024-2025, the student competition for creating a short film (video) has the theme "The Holocaust in the collective memory of the Greeks" and will be held, for the first time, simultaneously in Cyprus, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of Cyprus, based on the 27/02/2024 Memorandum between the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and of Sports (General Secretariat of Religions) of the Hellenic Republic, the Church of Greece, the Central Jewish Council of Greece, the Jewish Museum of Greece, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus and the Church of Cyprus.

Lyceum students of the following Secondary Education Departments can participate in the competition until January 30, 2025:

- A, B, C, D of Athens, Anat. Attica, Western Attica, Piraeus
- Rev. Thessaloniki, West Thessaloniki
- Ioannina
- Corfu
- Zakynthos
- Kefalonia
- Evia
- Messinia
- Kozani
- Dodecanese (for the High Schools of the First Dodecanese - Rhodes)



The winners will participate in a special educational program of the Jewish Museum of Greece, which includes, among other things, an educational visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland.

The thematic field of the competition is the Holocaust of the Jews in the Second World War with special reference to Greek Jewry. The students, through their projects, are invited to express their thoughts and feelings on the subject, as well as to reflect on its importance and relevance in modern life.

The students who will participate in the competition will become familiar with scientific and historical research and will become researchers of the past themselves through the retrieval and study of primary and secondary historical sources. In addition, the competition is an occasion for students to engage with the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust in Europe, Greece and Cyprus, but at the same time with the history of their local society.

Source: website [Ministry of Education 29.11.2024](#)

Cyprus

Israelis are increasingly heading to Cyprus — and not just for vacation or to get married

“Every day, new families are arriving here, but they feel sad about it,” a local rabbi said. “They always tell me it’s temporary.”

Larnaca, Cyprus — Galia Sopher and her two young daughters had spent the night of Oct. 6, 2023, camping in the fields near their home in Kibbutz Mefalsim on the Gaza border when, at 6:30 the next morning, air-raid sirens woke them and rockets began raining down from the sky.



Sopher tried calling her husband, Amitai, at home, but he had already run into the shelter where there was no phone signal. The three made it back and joined him there, terrified because, although they had long since gotten used to sirens, they realized that this time was different.

“We started hearing machine guns and understood there were terrorists inside the kibbutz,” recalled the 36-year-old kindergarten teacher, who grew up in Mexico and spent the past 16 years of her life in Israel.

“We tried to get our girls to stay quiet, and waited for hours. We didn’t know if terrorists were hiding in the bushes,” said Sopher. “Finally, at around 3 a.m., we got a message that we could leave the kibbutz. While driving to our friend’s house in central Israel, we saw bodies all around us. I told our girls to cover their eyes so they wouldn’t see.” She added sadly: “I don’t know how we got so lucky and why others didn’t.”

Despite her longtime Zionism, Galia — a former spokeswoman for the Israel Defense Forces — said remaining in Israel became too difficult emotionally in the wake of the horrors she and her family lived through. So four months ago, they relocated to nearby Cyprus, joining an exodus that’s quickly turning this Greek-speaking island into a sort of second Jewish promised land.

“Unfortunately, they keep coming,” said Rabbi Arie Raskin, who founded Chabad-Lubavitch of Cyprus 22 years ago. He estimates that 3,500 Israeli families, totaling around 15,000 people, now call the Republic of Cyprus home. That’s up from 2,000 families before the Oct. 7 attack.

“Every day, new families are arriving here, but they feel sad about it,” he said. “They always tell me it’s temporary.”

The flow of Israelis into Cyprus didn’t start with the war.

“In the beginning, people moved here because of the stress of living in Israel,” said Raskin, citing as one example protests over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s proposed judicial reforms in the year before the war began.

“People couldn’t take it anymore. Whoever could pick himself up and work online just left,” he said. “And not only Cyprus but also Greece, Romania, any country in which they felt safe. Obviously, Cyprus — because of its proximity to Israel — makes it much more attractive.”

But proximity is not the only advantage. As a member of the European Union, Cyprus has a stable currency and liberal tax laws. The cost of living is dramatically lower than in Israel, and violent crime is virtually unheard of. More importantly, Israelis are warmly welcomed here — so much so that signs in the duty-free shops at Larnaca International Airport beckon travelers in English, Greek and Hebrew.

Last year, according to official figures, about 411,000 Israelis visited Cyprus, making them the island’s No. 2 source of tourism (about 10.7% of the total) after the United Kingdom, which has a 33.9% share of the pie.

Tel Aviv tech executive Amnon Keiny, 56, recently spent a long weekend in Cyprus with his wife, 54-year-old therapist Dafna Dariel. The couple came here because Keiny had been planning a Zoom call with a key U.S. client but didn’t want to risk staying in Israel and having his call interrupted by air-raid sirens.

“We needed somewhere nearby and were looking for the hotel with the best internet, so we ended up flying here this morning,” Keiny said over dinner at the 175-room Lordos Beach Hotel. “We left home at 5 a.m., and at 6:20, as we were buying coffee at the airport, the sirens started.”

Cyprus, in fact, has long been a popular wedding destination for Israelis who are unable or unwilling to marry under the auspices of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which recognizes only ceremonies performed according to Orthodox Jewish law. The need for an easy offshore wedding has declined somewhat since Israel's Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that online marriage ceremonies are valid in Israel.

Still, the Israelis keep coming. Nicolas Kirkillari manages the Lordos Beach, located 20 minutes' drive north of Larnaca's airport. The hotel used to cater to Russians, but since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the number of Russians visiting Cyprus has dropped from 800,000 a year to nearly zero due to EU sanctions and difficulty getting visas.

"The only solution for us was to find a new market to replace what was 20% of our tourism," Kirkillari said. "This was a strategic decision, and we were already on the map for Israelis."

Cyprus is even more on the map now that Turkish Airlines has stopped flying to Tel Aviv, and Israeli Jews don't feel safe in once-popular Turkish destinations such as Antalya, Bodrum and Cappadocia.

That's because Turkey's government under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has taken an aggressive stance against Israel, cutting off trade and threatening to invade as a show of support for Hamas. In one notable example of the impact, hair transplant clinics have opened up in Nicosia, catering specifically to Israeli men who in years past might have traveled to Turkey for such operations.

The warm attitude toward Israel in Cyprus is also a change from the not-too-distant past.

"I remember the old days, when there used to be a communist president, Demetris Christofias," Raskin told JTA, referring to the country's leader from 2008 to 2013 who is also the only communist head of state in European Union history. "I came to visit him once, before Hanukkah, to bring him a menorah, and he started giving me a whole speech about Israelis killing Palestinians. But the current president [Nikos Christodoulides] stands with Israel in every possible way." Raskin said that right after the Oct. 7 attack, a few protesters gathered along Larnaca's popular boardwalk, shouting "Free Palestine" and passing out baklava.

"Right away, I called the police chief, the minister of justice and the mayor of Larnaca, and they told me they weren't going to allow this again," said the rabbi, adding that he believes that the vast majority of the island's Greek-speaking population sympathizes with Israel and the predicament it faces.

More recently, pro-Palestinian protesters staged a rally in Nicosia, which attracted a small crowd. But the country has not seen the major anti-Israel protests that have convulsed other places.

The fact that 36% of the island has been under Turkish military control since 1974 may explain any sympathy toward Israel. In fact, the 112-mile-long occupation line snakes from northwestern Cyprus all the way to Famagusta and cuts right through downtown Nicosia, which has the sad distinction of outlasting Jerusalem, Belfast, Beirut and Berlin as the world's last divided capital.

At Nicosia's Ledra Palace Hotel, barbed wire and a United Nations buffer zone separate free Cyprus from the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus — an entity recognized by only one country: Turkey. Heavily armed guards at the checkpoint verify the passports of all who cross into the TRNC, even though Cyprus views the crossing not as a border but an abomination.

"The Cypriot people are living this trauma since 1974. What Hamas did to us on Oct. 7 is like what the Turks did to them," said a retired Israeli who recently moved to Limassol with his wife but declined to give his name for fear of retribution. "And now they're afraid — not only here but even in Greece — that the Turks will use this situation to start World War III."

At Limassol's sprawling new City of Dreams Mediterranean — one of Europe's biggest casinos, with 100 roulette tables and 1,000 slot machines — Hebrew is the dominant language, spoken by masses of Israeli tourists. Limassol is the island's second-largest city, complete with shipping port and world-class marina, and is also home to its leading Israeli expat community.

If all goes as planned, it'll also soon be home to a \$75 million Jewish mega-school funded by the Yael Foundation, a Jerusalem-based charity established by philanthropists Yael and Uri Poliavich.

The institution will focus on "skills of the future," according to Rabbi Yehoshua Smukler, the foundation's head of major educational projects.

"The Jews are predominantly business executives with good lives here. That's why they stay," said Smukler, a Canadian-born educator who spent 28 years in Australia and now commutes between Israel and Cyprus. "Most are quite comfortable, and can afford and value quality education. However, to date there hasn't been any top-quality Jewish international schools, so we are creating one."

The ambitious project, set to open in September 2027, plans to accommodate 1,360 students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and another 290 in pre-school. In addition to the basics, the new school will feature music, dance and drama classes, as well as a regulation-size soccer field and a state-of-the-art computer lab.

"Currently, there are only two kinds of schools here in Cyprus: public schools in Greek, and international schools, which are mostly in English. So 99% of all Jewish kids on the island attend international schools and pay private school fees, because very few speak Greek, and that's not a priority for them," said Smukler, adding that tuition will cost roughly \$10,000 per year.

Raskin, 47, has been in Cyprus for the past 22 years. He and his wife, Shaindl, have eight children and a granddaughter. Since opening Chabad's Cyprus headquarters in Larnaca, he's since expanded to Orthodox synagogues in Agia Napa, Limassol, Nicosia and Paphos as well.

Sopher moved to Cyprus in July with her husband, a software developer, and daughters Emily and Gaya. Through a friend, she quickly found a job at Chabad taking care of children. The move had come after a weeklong trip to Cyprus in May, made just to check things out.

Now she sees her future, and that of her children, on this Mediterranean island. "Most of the Israelis living in Cyprus don't want to go back. Their lives are here now," she said. "You're out of the craziness, but close enough that you can go there and return the same day."

Bridging Histories: New WJC exhibition celebrates Sephardi history, heritage and contributions

"Sephardi Heritage is Jewish Heritage," says Rabbi Isaac Choua, of Lebanese origins, who oversees the exhibition, promoted as part of Sephardi Heritage Month.

A new exhibition hosted by the World Jewish Congress celebrates historical Sephardi heritage and contribution to society, leaving the viewers intrigued to research more about the history of Jews in the Middle East.



Born to parents from Lebanon who emigrated in 1977, Rabbi Isaac Choua now serves as Global Interfaith Lead for the WJC Jewish Diplomatic Corps and liaison for Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa. Choua, who oversees the exhibition, spoke to The Jerusalem Post on the occasion of Sephardi Heritage Month and the Israel-sanctioned Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran marked on November 30.

A Multilingual Childhood

Choua's personal history reflects the complex tapestry of the Sephardi Jewish experience. "Growing up in Brooklyn, I was surrounded by Sephardic Jews from Syria, Lebanon, Damascus, Aleppo, and Egypt," Choua reminisced. "We spoke Hebrew, Arabic, and English, with sprinklings of Spanish and French." According to Choua, this multilingual background was his first hint of a broader Jewish narrative, often overlooked by mainstream Jewish historical accounts.

During his early school years, Choua recalled a pivotal moment of cultural awareness. "In second grade, someone asked me whether I was Ashkenazi or Sephardi," he said. "That's when I first realized I was somehow different."

Choua highlighted a critical gap in how Jewish history is typically presented. "In school, I experienced a predominantly Ashkenazi-focused narrative with subtle anti-Sephardic undertones at the time," he said. "The Jewish historical education was heavily skewed towards one perspective, overlooking the rich experiences of Jews from Arab lands."

Still on the issue of the historical account, Choua mentioned that pogroms in Arab countries like Libya rarely received the same historical recognition as events like Kristallnacht in Germany. "Institutions like Yad Vashem only recently began acknowledging Jewish experiences in places like Tunisia," he reminded. "When we discuss Jewish history, we must truly mean Jewish history – acknowledging everyone's legacy and pain."

Celebrate contribution – not only persecution

Through his post in the World Jewish Congress, Choua maintains connections with Jewish communities across the Middle East, including Egypt, Bahrain, UAE, Tunisia, and Morocco, navigating the nuanced terrain of Jewish-Arab relationships with remarkable insight.

Now a current exhibition led by WJC and promoted by Choua himself, originally planned for launch in Morocco before the October 7th massacre, aims to educate Jews about their comprehensive history. "Jews were always an integral part of the Middle Eastern fabric," Choua explained, stressing that when Jewish youth don't understand Jewish identity and history, it translates into fractured narratives.

For Choua, it is important to stress not only instances of persecution of Jews but also emphasize the Jewish population's contribution to culture in the Middle East. He stressed that the exhibition does not deal with the heart-rending deportation and exile of Jews of the Middle East but rather sets a goal to provoke the viewers into being intrigued and researching the tragic destiny that befell these millennia-old vibrant Jewish



communities on their own. Such is the case of Laila Murad, a successful Jewish-Egyptian whose story is supposed to prompt viewers into discovering how Nasser once denounced her as a Zionist and how this cost her career.

For this reason, the exhibition focuses on showcasing remarkable Jewish individuals from different countries across the Middle East, including musicians, diplomats, ministers, athletes, artists, and thinkers. "Sephardi Jews are not just about food," he emphasized with a smile. "We're highlighting how Jews were pioneers in so many areas of life, like being the first to bring cinema to North Africa." When asked whether people were interested in researching these stories and their own heritage, Choua sighed. "People are interested," he said carefully, "but unfortunately, there's little genuine earnestness in truly understanding the Jewish experience in the Middle East."



Choua critically examined contemporary litmus tests of Jewish identity. "Especially in the Sephardic world, Zionism meant something different," he explained. The Zionism of figures like Alkalai, Bibas, Moyal, and Lazarus was more nuanced than the canonized version of Zionism which most people know." According to Choua, interactions are now primarily viewed through the lens of Israel, with little genuine attempt to understand the broader Jewish experience. He added that both pro-Zionist and anti-Zionist political agendas attempt to explore these experiences for their own benefit instead of attempting to learn about them in a sincere manner.

Jews of Arab Lands

When asked about his views regarding the issue of Sephardi Jewish identity in Israel versus the US, Choua answered: "Even in Israel, where half the Jewish population is of Sephardi origin, only a few pages were dedicated to Sephardic history," he explained. "Tragically, even Sephardic Jews themselves often don't know their own rich historical narrative."

In this context, Choua commended the Bitton Committee, set up in 2016 under then Education Minister Naftali Bennett, for beginning to address these historical gaps in Israeli educational curricula. "There's still much work to be done," Choua emphasized. A core mission of the exhibition, as per Choua himself, is transforming how Jewish identity is perceived. "For many Jews," he said, "Jewish identity has become synonymous with experienced antisemitism – a narrative of victimhood rather than pride."

For him, the exhibition represents a bridge to celebrating Jewish identity. "It's not about others telling our story," Choua passionately declared, "but us telling our own story. It's a new way of connecting with Jewish identity and heritage." Choua referenced historical institutions like Tiferet Israel in Lebanon, which advocated for maintaining Middle Eastern roots while embracing external knowledge. "Our scholars were educated and worked real jobs. To be considered wise, one needs to have a genuine profession. They supported women's education and higher learning."

Choua continued: "What's missing today is an all-encompassing Jewish identity, like that of our sages. This isn't just Sephardic heritage – this is Jewish heritage. It's an opportunity to connect with roots that belong to all of us." Choua's vision extends beyond the exhibition. Referring to an action group for the promotion of Sephardic heritage inside the WJC, Choua envisioned: "I hope this group won't exist in five years because by then we will have become an essential part of the process of understanding and celebrating our complete Jewish story."

For Choua, the exhibition represents more than a historical display; it's a powerful statement about diversity, complexity, and the rich, multifaceted nature of Jewish identity – a narrative that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. A passionate plea to recognize that Jewish history is not monolithic but a vibrant, interconnected tapestry of experiences waiting to be fully understood and celebrated.

The exhibit's website can be found at: <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/legacy-of-jews-in-MENA>

Duwell Bakes to Preserve Sephardic Traditions [Full article Here](#)

Approaching 90, Sarah Duwell bakes Sephardic treats as a connection to family and synagogue.

Sarah Duwell puts almost nine decades of skill and love into baking Sephardic delicacies, especially significant this time of year because of the annual food-laden Chanukah Bazaar at Congregation Or VeShalom (OVS) where these goodies are sold.

She said, "It's so special for me to bake each week at the synagogue as a connection with the generations of my family and longtime friends. Even now, at 89, every time I roll out the dough and put it into the oven to bake, it reminds me of all the years that my family baked here together at this wonderful synagogue."



Sephardic cuisine, which includes a wide variety of baked goods, is a way to preserve cultural identity, and pass down family recipes and memories "la dor va dor." She continued, "An absolute favorite in any Sephardic household are burekas. I remember baking with my sisters, mother, and grandmother, and the amazing aroma that followed. I continued this tradition with my daughters and granddaughters."

Throughout the year, every Tuesday, congregants ages 2-92 of OVS, one of the few remaining Sephardic Jewish synagogues in the Southeast, meet for hours to bake traditional delicacies like biscochos – traditional ring-shaped tea cookies; and burekas – savory pastries, filled with various fillings such as potato, cheese or spinach and eggplant.

Duwell expertly kneads the dough to make burekas by pinching into half-moon shapes and watching for a golden-brown color in just minutes. The 30-ish other weekly volunteers are all similarly rolling and pinching the dough for burekas and adding a savory filling, or twisting the biscocho dough into circles before dipping the cookies into cinnamon sugar and baking to the exact point only experience can discern. The volunteer bakers take orders and sell baked goods year-round to families who cherish these connections to their Sephardic families who originally came from Spain, Portugal, Greece, or Turkey.

Duwell (nee Notrica) was born and raised in Atlanta, attended Grady High School and Georgia State University. She met husband, Dan, in 1955 at a Jewish young adults' singles program at The Temple. She smiles, "He was an Ashkenazi Jew, which was considered an intermarriage back then." They were married 53 years, had three children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Duwell hails from a long line of Sephardic heritage. Her father, Judah, was born in the Greek Isle of Rhodes. He came to the U.S. in 1912 and was an OVS founding member. "Back then, my father would go door to door collecting the 15-cent synagogue dues from each family," says Duwell. Judah returned to Rhodes in 1920, which is where he met his wife, Matilda. They married in Israel in 1921, and then returned to the U.S. Back in Atlanta, Judah and Matilda had four children with Sarah being the youngest.

Over the years, Duwell's family has always shared the love of baking. From her late sister, Betty, and Betty's son, Bob, to Bob's son, Scott; from Sarah's granddaughter, Sarah Meyer, to her great-granddaughter, Bailey Mae, to Sarah's late daughter, Marlene, and her daughter, Judy; to Sarah's son-in-law, Les, and sister-in-law, Rochelle. They all bake as a vital part of their cultural tradition. Duwell concluded, "Our synagogue is not like most temples; it's very tied to its roots. We bake together for the love of the synagogue and our community."



Every Tuesday, Or VeShalom volunteers gather to pinch, fill and bake to golden brown.

The original location of Congregation Or VeShalom was in Virginia Highlands. In 1970, they outgrew the building and moved to their current location in Brookhaven. With this new space came an extended kitchen and the ability to bake together unlike before where members would bake in their own home kitchens. When the demand for burekas rose, OVS started baking and selling homemade baked goods year-round.

A family who bakes together stays together. OVS hosted its 48th Annual Chanukah Bazaar and Food Festival on Dec. 8 where hundreds came to shop and eat homemade Mediterranean cuisine including those flavorful burekas and biscochos. Festival highlights included gifts and jewelry from local vendors, raffle gift baskets, and a Kids Zone.

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



While the Hasmonean High Priest Mattathias and his sons were true heroes that saved the Jewish people from spiritual destruction and the miracles of Hanukkah, subsequent generations of the Hasmonean dynasty became corrupt, power hungry and murderous, leading to the Roman conquest of the Holy Land, the destruction of the Second Temple, and 2,000 years of exile and dispersion of the Jewish people.

How did this happen? How could the descendants of Mattathias and his heroic sons fall to the same depths of corruption, tyrannic behavior and cruelty Israel had suffered under Antiochus only one generation before? A profound answer is suggested by the renowned 13th century Spanish sage, Rabbi Moshe Ben Nahman – Nahmanides - better known as the Ramban.

In his Biblical commentary on the stories of our forefathers, the Ramban develops a thesis known as “the deeds of the fathers are a sign to their descendants”. The basic premise is that everything that happened, or was done, by our forefathers constituted an omen for future generations and their experiences.

In the context of this thesis, the Ramban sees the Hasmonean corruption as being the result of the Hasmoneans violating a sacred rule of Jewish leadership established by our forefather Jacob in his blessing to his son Judah (Genesis 49:10): “**The rod/scepter of leadership may not turn away from [the tribe of] Judah**”, meaning that the Jewish monarchy and political leadership must come exclusively from the tribe of Judah, the ancestor of the Davidic line. The religious and spiritual leadership was the prescribed and exclusive role of the tribe of Levy and the Cohanim (Priests), which include the Hasmonean families. Therefore, as Cohanim, they were bound by this “separation of powers”, so to speak, and this distinction between political and spiritual leadership was considered sacrosanct and largely honored throughout Biblical times. However, the post-Maccabean Hasmonean Cohanim, wielding considerable power as the religious leaders of the people, decided to break this rule, and forcibly usurped the monarchy and political leadership as well.

The Ramban, saw this usurpation as a cardinal sin and violation of this sacred tradition, as well as a foreboding sign of the later corruption and internecine baseless hatred among Jews that led to the Roman destruction of the Second Temple and the exile of the Jewish nation. As the Ramban states in his commentary on Genesis 49:10): *“In my opinion, the kings from other tribes, who ruled over Israel after King David, went against the wish of their father Jacob by diverting the inheritance of Judah to another tribe... **This was also the reason for the punishment of Hasmoneans who reigned as the monarchs during the Second Temple ...It is also possible that in addition to the Hasmoneans having sinned for assuming royalty when there were not from the tribe of Judah, they sinned by taking the monarchy even as priests, since it was not their right to rule, but only perform the service of God as priests.**”*

Thus, the Ramban points out two severe violations by the Hasmoneans that would be a sign and omen for the future: First, they usurped the monarchy from the line of Judah and David, for which they had no right. And second, as priests, they were not meant to rule as monarchs, but only perform the service of God. These flagrant and severe violations by the Hasmoneans were a sign for their descendants of the dire fate Israel was to suffer under Roman rule.

The Ramban’s idea and message resonate even today. Judaism does not believe in coincidences, and our Prophets made it crystal clear that there are consequences for Israel’s actions that will resonate in the future. Jewish history also clearly bears out the Ramban’s idea, but unfortunately, we never seem to heed the Ramban’s words nor learn from our past experiences that might prevent future calamities. But there is another side to the coin: Just as bad

deeds and sins may forbode later tragedies, good deeds and proper spiritual and ethical conduct can foresee a brighter future. The more we internalize and understand this concept of our own deeds constituting a sign for our children and future generations and act accordingly, the sooner we will merit the final redemption.



Rabbi Marc D. Angel
Resolving an Identity Crisis: Thoughts for Parashat Vayigash
JewishIdeas.org

"And Joseph said to his brothers: I am Joseph. Does my father still live?"

In re-uniting with his brothers, Joseph asked if his father was still alive. Yet, the brothers had already told him that Jacob was alive. Indeed, the rest of Joseph's words make clear that he knew Jacob was alive. So what is the significance of his question "does my father still live?" We need to understand Joseph's dilemma.

We gain insight into Joseph's inner life by the names he gave to his sons. He named his first-born Menasheh "for God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." Joseph was proclaiming himself an Egyptian. He was a ruler in Egypt, he had an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife; he wanted to forget his father's house. Yet, he named his second son Ephraim, "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." He described Egypt as a land of his affliction--he still wasn't at peace in Egypt in spite of his efforts to be a full Egyptian. Who was Joseph? Was he a fully assimilated Egyptian, or was he still tied to his ancestral home? Joseph had a serious identity crisis.

Joseph concealed this inner struggle until he actually was faced with his brothers, who had come to Egypt to buy food. Now Joseph was forced to decide who he was. Should he be an Egyptian and reject his brothers, or should he be an Israelite and identify with them. This uncertainty might explain his cruel treatment of his brothers. He strove to remain an Egyptian, to avoid re-connecting with his brothers. Yet, he could not succeed. At last, he broke down crying: I am Joseph. Does my father still live?

The question about his father was rhetorical, since he already knew Jacob was alive. The question can be understood as Joseph speaking to himself: I thought I could assimilate and become a full, true Egyptian. I tried very hard to forget my father's home, my connection with my people. But I cannot keep up the charade any longer. Does my father still live within me, do my ties to my people continue to bind me to them, is this connection so powerful as to be able to draw me back to my roots?

When Joseph finally realizes that his father is still alive within himself and that he cannot break away from his family and traditions, he is able to reconcile with his brothers. Joseph, the archetypal "assimilated Jew", returns to the fold. He regains his true identity. I am Joseph your brother. I reclaim the ideas and ideals of my father's home.

The Joseph story foreshadows so many other stories of assimilated Jews who have found their ways back home. They had left their families and traditions, trying to adopt an entirely new identity. Yet, something happens in their lives, triggering a return to Judaism and the Jewish people. They are often perplexed by this return. They ask in amazement: "does my father still live?" And they answer: yes, the Jewish teachings and traditions and peoplehood still live within me. I will not run away any longer. I finally know who I am, and have made peace with myself, my family and my God.

Sephardic Torah from the Holy Land - Music Soothes the Soul by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

I learn so much from Rabbi Uziel about halakha and philosophy – and now - how to “chill and relax” in these stressful times.

These are stressful times here in Israel. War on two fronts, soldiers killed almost daily, 101 hostages still in Gaza, nonstop sirens and barrages of rockets, thousands still displaced from their homes, deep political divisions, no tourism, economic uncertainty. Trauma, PTSD and depression are widespread. Despite all resilient efforts for the semblance of a normal life – and Israelis are the best at that in the world – the circumstances make it challenging to just “chill and relax.”

Our first two days back here from our recent trip to Los Angeles included two visits to our bomb shelter, and the news of over ten soldiers and civilians killed. I found my stress levels particularly high, and as usual, I turned to my books to find an escape. I was preparing a lecture on various halakhic perspectives on hostage deals, and I opened volume 7 of Rabbi Haim David's *Aseh Lekha Rav* responsa. Rabbi Halevy was one of the outstanding Sephardic rabbis, scholars and leaders of the 20th century. His rabbi and mentor was Chief Rabbi Benzion Uziel, and prior to Rabbi Uziel's passing in 1953, Rabbi Halevy served as his special assistant. Leafing through volume 7, where Rabbi Halevy's lengthy position paper on hostage deals is found, I chanced upon something that has nothing to do with war or hostages. It's a position paper about music.

From the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, halakha prohibited listening to music. This relates to the fact that the Temple service was rooted in a symphony of musical instruments, and now that the Temple was destroyed, it is no longer appropriate to listen to music.

Rabbi Halevy explains why this is no longer enforced, ruling that it's 100% permitted to listen to music. He encourages doing so as a means of relaxation. To illustrate his point, he brings a real life example:

“I saw with my own eyes how my master and teacher, Chief Rabbi Benzion Uziel would come home from a long day of work, sit in his armchair and relax by listening to music. Rabbi Uziel shared with me how calming, soothing and relaxing music is for him, and how one hour of music uplifts and strengthens him.”



Thinking about the tumultuous times Rabbi Uziel lived through in Israel – the years of the Holocaust, the War of Independence (6,500 soldiers killed – 1% of the population in the Yishuv), and the internal challenges of a small new state – I can only imagine what was on his mind as he came home to his armchair, gramophone and radio.

I learn so much from Rabbi Uziel about halakha and philosophy – and now – how to “chill and relax” in these stressful times. I only wish Rabbi Halevy told us what kind of music Rabbi Uziel listened to. I'll leave that to our musical imagination.

Shabbat Shalom

Monastir Music Project

Led by Zack Youcha and the Jewish Music Research Centre
at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem



Our dear friend and community member Zack Youcha has launched a new project to document music from the Sephardic community of Monastir (present day Bitola in North Macedonia).

"I am delighted to introduce the newly published Monastirli music archive at the Jewish Music Research Centre. We decided to make this an ongoing project, to be published in increments. This first round is a set of ten songs from the Joe Elias collection, as well as two biographies. There are many more recordings to come, as well as more historical context, music transcriptions, photos, articles, etc. It's a very exciting start to what I hope will be a tool for Monastirlis to learn their heritage music; and for others to learn about it."

Listen to the first set of songs and learn more here: <https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/en/playlist/23926>

If you have family recordings of music, please contact Zack about free digitalization and audio restoration. Email Zack Youcha at zackyoucha@gmail.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. **You can do this online on our website: www.kkjsm.org accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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



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