

THE SEPHARDIC BROTHER

איל אירמאנאדו ספרדי *EL ERMANADO SEFARADI*

FALL 2022

SEPHARDIC ROSH ASHANA

TORAH THOUGHTS AND
RECIPES FOR A
SEPHARDIC NEW
YEAR SEDER

THE HISTORY OF THE FEZ

UNDERSTANDING
THE BACKGROUND
OF THIS UNIQUE
SEPHARDIC SYMBOL

SUMMER RECAP

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE
SEPHARDIC ADVENTURE
CAMP, SEPHARDIC
BIRTHRIGHT TRIP, AND
TOUR OF GREECE



The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood Foundation
La Ermandad Sefaradi

"THE QUARTERLY
MAGAZINE OF OUR
SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY"

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Ke Sus Almas Repozen en Gan Eden May Their Souls Rest in the Garden of Eden

Recent Passings (6/2022 – 8/2022)

Victor Pinhas
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HIGH HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Good Jews, Good People?

There are many people in our society that we revere as important members of the community. As we approach the High Holidays, we must reflect on our individual actions and deeds during this past year. One of the deeds we can evaluate is what has been done to strengthen our Sephardic community. We have been blessed to count among us those who contributed their time, money, and effort to our organization and the betterment of the Sephardic community at large. So many of you deserve our respect and admiration and can truly be worthy of the title of Benadam (a good person, what our Ashkenazi brethren call a mensch).

As a young man of 18, I was working part time slinging hotdogs and hamburgers in a fast food store in downtown Brooklyn. Unfortunately, I had the misfortune of interacting with a person who posed as a Benadam and was perceived by the community as a Benadam.

One day, the owner of the hot dog store dropped by, which was unusual since he rarely visited. He was an absentee owner and only came by when there was a problem. The owner was having trouble getting anyone to work during that upcoming Roshana and Kippur. He was Jewish and also uno de los maestros (one of ours – Sephardic) He would be going to the synagogue, praying and fasting on Kippur, and receiving many honors throughout the holiday.

However, he tried to get me to work on the days of Roshana and Kippur! He said in Ladino, “es un pekado ke no lavores, puedes ganar un poko paras!” (It’s a pity not to work that day. You can make some money!) But I refused. It was obvious to me then that rituals alone do not make a good Jew or a good person.

That day he tried to urge a fellow Jew to do wrong. It showed me that he was not deserving of respect or admiration. I learned that good deeds and Mivnot allow one to be called a Benadam. There must be no inclination to do anything wrong or evil or urging others to do so. It is comparable to the serpent tempting Eve to take a bite of the apple.

We are fortunate that each one of us who have supported our organization can proudly wear the title of Benadam.

Unlike my experience with the owner, my experience with all of you has been positive and your support genuine.

The Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America has had an exemplary year. Our membership has grown by leaps and bounds. Our programming has expanded, especially our digital courses. Our outreach to other Sephardic communities now extends both nationally and internationally. Our communications, both weekly with *La Boz Sefaradi* and quarterly with our newly redesigned magazine, *El Ermanado – The Brother*, has received outstanding reviews from our membership.

We distributed 20 academic scholarships to our highest achieving student community members, and helped many of los maestros with financial assistance through our Henry J. Perahia Funds for the Needy. And, of course, we continue to give our traditional burial benefits and funeral assistance to our full members.

Lastly, our National Sephardic Community Gala held at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in NYC honoring three extraordinarily worthy Sephardic individuals in December 2021 was an enormous success – not only financially but an evening filled with warmth, camaraderie, music, and dancing.

Our Executive Committee and Central Council members extend a special thank you to our staff as our year comes to a close: our Managing Director, Ethan Marcus for his outstanding creativity and perseverance; and our Office Manager, Mariya Yadgarova and Bookkeeper Miriam Rabieva.

My wife, Ellen, and I wish all of you a healthy Roshana as the New Year approaches. And on el dia de Kippur, may you be sealed in the book of life. ■

*Tizku LeShanim Rabot
and Anyada Buena i
Dulse!*

Irving Barocas
President



**Want to write a story for the
SEPHARDIC BROTHER?**

Email us at
info@sephardicbrotherhood.com
with your ideas!

The Kids Are Alright: a Sephardic Perspective on 'Akedat Yitsha

By JACOB CHEREKIN

This Rosh Ashana, we'll once again read the story of the Binding of Isaac, one of the most impactful stories in all of Tanakh (Hebrew Bible). Like each year before, we relive the staggering suspense of a father being asked to do the unthinkable, sacrifice his son at God's command.

While many in the modern age struggle to understand such an act, Bronze Age Canaan and Mesopotamia, the main setting of Abraham's lifetime, had many instances of human sacrifice, including that of children.¹ This practice would later continue through the Iron Age by the Phoenicians in Lebanon, as well as Carthaginian colonies across the Mediterranean.²

During this time, it was normal, if not common, to offer up one's children to local deities as a commodity akin to goats or cows. In some contexts, the children of noble people were sacrificed as an honor for their families' high status.³

When commenting on the first verse of this Perasha: "after these things, God tested Abraham," two great Torah scholars tell us something interesting: Don Yitshak Abravanel, a 15th century Sephardic Torah scholar and political statesman in Spain, and Rabbi Yitshak Arama,⁴ another 15th century Spanish Rabbi who was forced into exile in the 1492 Expulsion. They both remind us that since God knows our minds and is aware of all secrets, there was no real need for Abraham to prove his convictions.

But that begs the question: Why would

God need to ask Abraham to go through this episode at all? Why could the Creator simply just tell him not to refrain from human sacrifice in the first place?

Using this cultural context, the Italian-born Kabbalist and Biblical commentator Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh notes that the exact purpose of this divine imperative was to eradicate the association of child sacrifice with the worship of the one true God.⁵ This revolutionary message of this story required a powerful mode of instruction that would allow Abraham to truly internalize the truth.

Through giving the command to sacrifice Isaac, forcing Abraham to develop the proper intention to perform this command, and revealing at the final moment that Isaac must not be harmed, God imprinted on Abraham's soul the true meaning of the episode: the opposition of the divine will to human sacrifice.⁶

By withdrawing this instruction as the knife was raised, when Abraham had made the conscious decision to sacrifice his son, God rewarded this act of devotion with the insight that human sacrifice is anathema to what his descendants should practice.

As noted by Rabbi David Kahmi, another great Sephardic sage, the account of the Binding of Isaac was first passed down orally from Isaac to Jacob before being written down during the revelation of the Torah. This chain of transmission helped keep the story alive, influencing the spiritual and moral fiber of future generations.⁷

The example set by Abraham was critical to guiding the generation of the Exodus that received commandments against child sacrifice⁸ as well as

Prophets who decried latter generations in the land of Israel that backslid into these awful practices.^{9,10}

Despite the periodic failings of a few, the Jewish nation has continued to stand strong against human sacrifice and idolatry, standing for the inherent value of human life, the most beautiful gift granted by the transcendent, ineffable God. ■

Anyada buena i dulce!

Jacob Chereskin lives with his family in Washington D.C. In his spare time, he reads about Jewish history and spirituality, with a particular interest in the scholars of pre-Expulsion Spain and the Ottoman Empire. His Sephardic roots come from the communities of Çorlu and Anakra in Turkey, and he is a proud member of the Sephardic Brotherhood.



¹ "Thirteenth Century B.C. Temple of Human Sacrifice at Amman." J.B. Hennessey, *Studia Phoenicia*, vol. 3, Phoenicia and Its Neighbours (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1985); "Radical 'royals'? Burial practices at Ba ur Höyük and the emergence of early states in Mesopotamia," Brenna Hassett and Haluk Sa lamtimur, *Antiquity*, Volume 92, Issue 363, June 2018, pp. 640-654

² "Burials, Symbols, and Mortuary Practices in Phoenician Tombs." In *Across Frontiers: Etruscans, Greeks, Phoenicians and Cypriots: Studies in Honour of David Ridgway and Francesca Romana Serra Ridgway*, edited by E. Herring, I. Lemos, E. Lo Schiavo, L. Vagnetti, R. Whitehouse, and J. Wilkins, pp. 37-47, London: Accordia Research Institute

³ Hassett and Sa lamtimur

⁴ Abravanel 'al haTorah, Bereshit 22:1; A edat Yitshak Bereshit 22:1

⁵ Em leMi ra, Bereshit 22:1

⁶ Em leMi ra, Bereshit 22:1

⁷ Radaq 'Al haTorah, Bereshit 22:1

⁸ הַעֲבִיר לְמַלְאָךְ וְלֹא תַחַל אֶת-שֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה - וַיִּקְרָא יי"ח מִזְרַעְךָ לֹא-תִתֵּן

⁹ לְכַל-גְּלוּלֵיכֶם עַד-הַיּוֹם וְאֲנִי אֶדְרֹשׁ לָכֶם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי-אַנְי נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי כִּשְׂאֵת מִתְנַתֵּלְכֶם בְּהַעֲבִיר בְּנֵיכֶם בְּאֵשׁ אֲתֶם נִטְמָאִים הַיְ-וָה אִם-אֶדְרֹשׁ לָכֶם - יִחַזְקֵאל כֹּהֵן

¹⁰ 'בעל: אֲשֶׁר לֹא-צִוִּיתִי וְלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי, וְלֹא עֲלֵתָה עִלְ-לִבִּי. לִכֹּן הִנֵּה-יָמִים בָּנוּ אֶת-בְּמוֹת הַבַּעַל, לְשַׁרְף אֶת-בְּנֵיהֶם בְּאֵשׁ-עֹלֹת זֹתֶפֶת, וַיֵּא בְּ-הַגֵּם-כִּי, אִם-גִּיָּא הַהֲרָגָה - יִרְמִיחוּ יָדָם: וְיֵא-יְהוָה-וְיֵא, וְלֹא-יִקְרָא לְמִקְוֹם הַזֶּה עוֹד

ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

The Synagogues of Greece: an exhibition, new books and an archive

By ELIAS V. MESSINAS, PhD, MSc

The origins of the Jewish heritage of Greece are lost in antiquity. According to the ancient historian Strabo, there were organized Jewish communities in most major Greek cities. These communities had functioning synagogues, as archaeological findings indicate.

The oldest-known Greek synagogue, dating from the first century BCE, was unearthed in Delos, although its Jewish origins have been disputed. Magnificent synagogue mosaic floors dating from the fourth century CE have been discovered on the islands of Aegina and lately in Chios. The Metroon, at the foot of the Hephaesteion (Theseion) in the Agora of Athens, has also been suggested by the American School of Classical Studies, to be a synagogue from the beginning of the fifth century CE.

Upon the outbreak of World War

II, there were 27 Jewish communities and a small concentration of Jewish congregations in several more cities, numbering over 70,000 Jews in Greece, including Romaniotes, Sephardim, and Ashkenazim. These diverse communities prayed in more than 100 synagogues, originating from antiquity, Medieval Spain, Italy, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and North Africa.

In WWII, the Nazis and the Bulgarians in Thrace and parts of Macedonia arrested, deported, and annihilated 87% of the Jews of Greece. The synagogues

were demolished, destroyed, pillaged or converted to other uses. Jewish cemeteries and institutions were also destroyed. In Thessaloniki (Salonika), the Nazis allowed the pillaging of the ancient cemetery for construction throughout the city. The extension of the Aristotle University was later built on the site.

Upon Liberation, we know of 38 synagogues surviving in 25 cities in Greece. Most of them were either ruined or abandoned, or had been converted into homes, warehouses, and stables, before being returned to the Jewish people. In many cases, lacking a Jewish community, meant that these synagogues were sold and then torn down during the modern reconstruction of cities. Only a few synagogues were saved, like on the island of Kos, thanks to the intervention of the local authorities.

Today, 15 synagogues stand in 12 cities throughout Greece. Two synagogues in Athens (Beit Shalom and the Etz Hayyim - Yanniotiki), and three in Thessaloniki (Monastirioton, Yad LeZikaron, and Yoshua Salem at the Shaul Modiano Retirement Home). One synagogue also stands in each of these cities: Corfu (Scuola Greca), Chalkis, Chania (Etz HaHayim), Ioannina (Kahal Kadosh Yashan), Kos (Kahal Shalom), Larissa (Etz HaHayim), Rhodes (Kahal Kadosh Shalom), Trikala (Yavanim), Volos, and Veroia. The former Jewish community center in Kavala that served as a prayer hall, was demolished circa 2020.

The survey and study of the synagogues of Greece was initiated by the author in 1993. Upon graduating from the Yale School of Architecture and after practicing in architectural offices in New York, he undertook the project not only as a young Jewish architect looking for a meaningful start in his career, but also to fulfill the need to document what survived the Holocaust, making this material available for exhibitions and further study. The survey project started in Chalkis, the city where the author's grandmother Eftihia Negrin (nee Forni) was born and raised, before moving to Ioannina with her husband Elias Negrin. The survey of the synagogue in Chalkis was made possible thanks to a seed contribution by the

late Minos Mordochai, board member of the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens, and reimbursement of photographic costs by the World Monuments Fund, thanks to Samuel Gruber, Director of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments. The survey project, which encompassed all cities with standing synagogues, also included visits to cities without synagogues and Jewish communities, where local non-Jews kept the narrative alive.

In 1998, Kol haKEHILA, the newsletter of the Jewish monuments of Greece (kolhakehila.org), was created by the author, as a resource for research and information on the synagogues of Greece and genealogy of the Jews of Greece. The site has been accessible online since 2001.

Upon completion of the restoration of Monastirioton and Yad LeZikaron synagogues in Thessaloniki and the Yavanim synagogue in Trikala, the author, together with Yvette Nahmia-Messinas, undertook a campaign for the preservation of the mosaic of the ancient synagogue in Aegina. The exhibition, which was curated by the author at the Archaeological Museum of Aegina, where the mosaic is located today, presented for the first time to the general public, the importance of the Romaniote heritage of the Jewish community of Aegina, and the human history between the German Archaeologist Franz Gabriel Welter and American Jewish Archaeologist Belle Mazur who studied and published it. Thanks to a donation by Samuel-Makis Matsas, a protective roof will be erected over the mosaic. In addition, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture will restore the mosaic. In 2022 the author was also called to undertake the restoration of the interior of the Shalom synagogue in Kos, to function once again as a synagogue.

This year, as interest in the Jewish heritage of Greece and the synagogues of Greece is increasing, the author published two new books on the subject.

The book *The Synagogues of Greece: A Study of Synagogues in Macedonia and Thrace: With Architectural Drawings of all Synagogues of Greece* is the second edition of the book published

in 2011 in The Sephardi and Greek Holocaust Library by the series editor Steven Bowman. The new edition (2022) is an updated, corrected, and enlarged republication of the first printing, covering the continuing research and architectural restorations of nearly three decades by the author. It includes the first-ever full scale in-situ survey and the architectural drawings of the synagogues of Greece, drafted by the author since 1993, some of which have since been demolished. The book traces the history of nearly 100 synagogues in Jewish quarters, most of which no longer exist. The book is currently available online at Amazon.

The second book, *The Synagogue* ('Η Συναγωγή', Infognomon Editions, 2022) is the new novel by the author, bringing to the front, the human story behind the research. The texts are based on many years of research on the synagogues themselves, on published and unpublished archival documents, in Greece, Israel and elsewhere, and on interviews from the time of the survey to the present day. For example, in one chapter, the author, serving his army duty in Northern Greece, visited Didimoticho searching for the ruins of the demolished synagogue, by asking the locals to direct him. The story reveals heroes who still keep the Jewish narrative alive. The book is published in Greek, but a Hebrew translation and publication in Israel is currently under review.

This year, the author has also created a digitized collection of his rich archive of the Synagogues of Greece to enrich and serve archives, libraries and institutions. The digital archive of the synagogues of Greece, includes more than 1500 images and 200 architectural drawings, adding to existing collections and enabling comparative study, research, exhibition and publication. Details may be provided upon request. ■

Elias V. Messinas is a practicing architect, graduate of the Yale School of Architecture, Bezalel Academy, and the National Technical University of Athens. He initiated the survey and study of the synagogue of Greece in 1993, preserving in detail architectural records of synagogues since demolished. Since 2016 he has been the chief architect and coordinator of restoration projects of synagogues throughout Greece.

