

HAMERKAZ

FALL 2006 EDITION

PRESENTS A PUBLICATION OF THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER

INSIDE...

SEC HAS A WISH

REACHING OUT TO
UNDERPRIVILEGED
CHILDREN

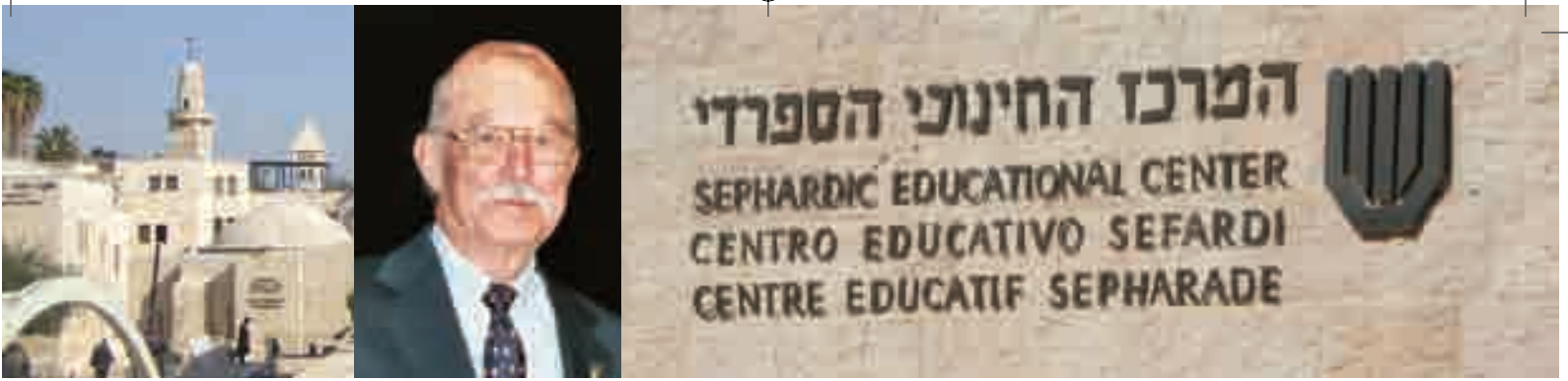
BIRTHRIGHT TRIP MEMORIES

9TH LA SEPHARDIC JEWISH
FILM FESTIVAL



A CENTER FOR ALL JEWS





Celebrating the SEC

By Dr. Jose A. Nessim
Founder

Dear Friends,

In 1979 I established the SEC because there was a great need to create an educational center for the 1.3 million Sephardim living in the Diaspora. Since then, our Center in Jerusalem has received and educated thousands of young people and adults from every continent in the Diaspora. Over the past 30 years, we have made tremendous progress. We have much to be proud of.

It was extremely important to me that the Center be situated in our spiritual capital, the holy city of Jerusalem. Thank G-d, we were able to purchase three historical buildings just steps from the Kotel, which served as the hub of Sephardic life for centuries. We subsequently renovated these buildings to serve as dormitories and study facilities for our participants. The Center is active all year round with a variety of programs.

This past year, we have accomplished many things. Most recently, our branch in Argentina hosted an amazing convention in Miami. Rabbi Baruch Garzon from Spain and Rabbi Abraham Tobal of Mexico led many interesting sessions. I salute Dr. Salvador Sarfatti, a dedicated and successful leader for Latin America, for organizing this wonderful event.

We have taken many young Jews for their first visit to Israel with our Taglit-Israel Birthright Trip. I urge you to tell all your friends and relatives to take advantage of this unique gift – after all, its free! We love and support Israel.

Mexico is the country that has most utilized our Center in Jerusalem, followed by the U.S.A. Our hope and prayer is that every community in the Diaspora will arrange a visit to our Center by contacting our World Headquarters in Los Angeles.

For our movement to be effective we must receive your financial support. Ashkenazi organizations in Israel are blessed by donations in the millions of dollars yearly. Miracles will happen if you help the SEC financially. One such miracle that can happen when our donors make it possible is for 100 of our young adults to come to Jerusalem for one year to study to be leaders.

We urge every community where Sephardim live to join with us to make the SEC stronger and more vibrant. We also encourage you to join the many ranks of friends of the SEC. Please become a member by sending us your names and addresses. We need you, your children and your friends support morally and financially. We welcome your input. Please feel free to email me your ideas and suggestions.

We are and will remain traditional Jews as we have always been, Moderation, tolerance, and tradition has always been the characteristic of Sephardic Judaism. We wish to perpetuate this tradition, always staying afar from the extremes which are so common today.

Dear friends, it is up to us. G-d will bless you if we advance His work on earth.

With blessings for a Happy, Health, and Prosperous New Year,

**THE SEC IS A MOVEMENT
THAT IS OPEN FOR ALL JEWS.**

SEC Mission

The **SEC** is dedicated to ensuring Jewish identity and continuity by transmitting our rich Sephardic legacy to all Diaspora Jews, especially our youth.

Focusing on the timeless values of unity, compassion, sensitivity, tolerance and moderation embodied by Sephardic Judaism, we promote strength of family & community, pride of heritage & customs, increased knowledge of Torah & practice of Mitzvot, growth in spirituality, a traditional approach to Halacha, engagement with the modern world & society, and a meaningful connection to Israel, our People & Homeland.

OUR ASPIRATIONS

We are deeply committed to:

Cultivating leadership, both lay and rabbinic, so that our Diaspora communities become more vibrant.

Ensuring that every young Jewish man and woman has the opportunity to visit Israel.

Generating awareness among all Jewish youth, and ultimately future generations, of the beauty of Sephardic Judaism.

Fostering a return of our youth to their spiritual roots and heritage through stimulating programs and events in the Diaspora and Israel.

Creating innovative programs so our young people can meet and forge lifelong bonds of friendship.

Fully utilizing our historic spiritual and educational campus in the heart of Jerusalem's Old City which serves as a beacon illuminating and enhancing our programs.

Maintaining our independence from any particular organized religious movement or political entity, while seeking to partner with other Jewish organizations to spread the model of Sephardic Judaism.

Abiding by Halacha as determined by our contemporary Sephardic sages.

Serving, supporting and enhancing the individual and collective needs of all Jewish communities and institutions so they will grow qualitatively and quantitatively.

Donations & Grants

Estate of Gino HaCoen

Dr. Jose and Freda Nessim

Mr. and Mrs. Moise Emquies

Martin Elias

Saul Levi

Jewish Federation of Winnepeg

Ron and Paulette Nessim

Maurice Marciano Foundation

Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel

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Sarita Fields

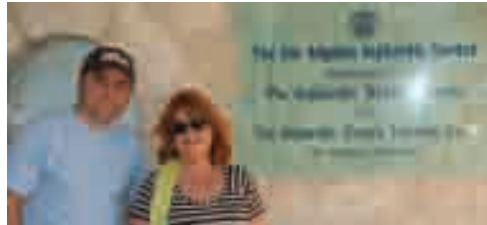
Kenneth Fils

SEC Wish List

The SEC depends on the generosity of our friends and supporters to help us provide quality programs and projects in the U.S. and abroad. Every gift helps! Here are just a few of the ways you can direct your contribution.

SEC General Support: Your gift supports the development of educational and social programs for young adults hosted by SEC in cities around the country.

The SEC in Israel. Improvements are needed to upgrade our historic campus in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem. Our projects include:



Neil Sheff and Sarita Fields visit the SEC Courtyard and dedication by the first Sephardic synagogues of L.A. Has your synagogue made a dedication at the SEC? Join us today.

1

Spanish Courtyard Beatification Project: THE SEC's historic building known as the Old Metivta has one of the last remaining enclosed courtyards in the Old City. It is our vision to make this into a destination for all visitors to the Old City by designing a visitor's center, including replicating the original well in the center of the courtyard. **\$25,000**

2

Sephardic Historical Exhibit: One of the rooms in the Old Metivta will become a historical exhibit about the Sephardic Journey and Experience. **\$10,000**

3

Improvements to the Dormitory: Our dormitory, known as the Sephardic House, is in need of upgrades: These include new bunk beds, mattresses, and linens. Out total budget for this project is **\$90,000.**

200 New mattresses	\$125 each
200 New bunk beds	\$300 each
New linens, including towels, sheets, and pillows	\$100 per set

4

Naming Opportunities: There are many naming opportunities available, including classrooms, dormitory rooms, a multimedia center and more. Please call Larry Azose at (310) 441-9361 or lila@secjerusalem.org for more information.

5

Legacy Bequests: You can secure our future with the stroke of a pen! Include the SEC in your planned giving and estate planning. Please contact the SEC Office for materials on the SEC.

Giving to the only Sephardic organization of its kind in the world: Priceless!!!!

CALLING ALL ALUMNI! The SEC is updating our database and needs your current contact information. Please visit our website and logon to the SEC Alumni section and enter in your current contact information.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! We need volunteers to update our mailing lists, help with mailings, and office organization projects. Please contact Sandra at 310.441.9361 or sbeliltilti@secjerusalem.org for more information.

SEC ISRAEL

SEC Jerusalem Projects 2008

Book on Sephardic Communities

We are in the final stages of completing our book on "Sephardic Communities in Israel: Their Aliyot and Contribution". We have chapters on 12 communities. We have received the first part of a \$5000 grant from the World Sephardi Federation to help complete the book. We hope to go to press in the next four months, and we are inviting dedication opportunities from donors to complete the publication.



Sephardic History Wall at the SEC Courtyard

Jerusalem Tours

The SEC has expanded its tours and activities in the Old City to include:

ROOF TOP TOUR

THE SYNAGOGUES OF THE OLD CITY

THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY OF THE OLD CITY

MOUNT ZION AND THE TOMB OF KING DAVID

HERODIAN QUARTER

TREASURE HUNT AROUND THE OLD CITY*

Some of these activities include street theater.

We have produced a brochure which has been distributed to various hotels and organizations. For information on joining one of these tours on your next visit contact:

rabbib@secjerusalem.org

**The Treasure Hunt was voted as one of the top ten activities to do in Jerusalem by the Jerusalem Post.*

High School Program

Planning has already begun for our Israel high school program. This program seeks to bring high school students from all over the country to the SEC for one and two day fun and educational experiences in Jerusalem's Old City. Some of the activities will include tours in and around the Old City, some as well as seminars addressing issues that concern today's youth. Israel's Ministry of Education is very eager to participate in this program. Michal Dehan, the national supervisor for the Ministry of Education visited the SEC recently and was very enthusiastic to report back to her colleagues. She will be bringing a group of principals to the SEC to preview and springboard the program. Rabbi Benarroch is now working with the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, Canada to secure funding for programs for children from Kiryat Shemona, their sister city.



Members of the SEC Board in Jerusalem met this past July to discuss the Center's progress. From left to right: Former Minister of Justice and Counsel to SEC, Moshe Nissim; Rabbi Yosef Benarroch, Ed. Director; Eli Nissim, Past President of the Open University of Israel; Dr. Jose and Freda Nessim; Neil Sheff, Esq.; Janet Levy-Pahima, Esq.; Ray Malle; Sarita Hasson Fields; Ron Nessim, Esq.; Amnon Ben-Amram, CPA.

Shoah in Sephardic Communities

Urim Publishers is now distributing the Shoah book published by the SEC throughout North America. They have begun with a trial run of 200 books. Steimatsky's and Yad Vashem carry it in Israel and have sold out.

We are also well under way with our Holocaust Curriculum project. Rabbi Morrey Schartz of the Hebrew University's Melton Institute has begun the project. The Claims Conference has granted us half of the funding totaling \$13,500. We hope to complete the project by the end of the 2008 year to provide Jewish schools throughout North America with this important and little known side of history.

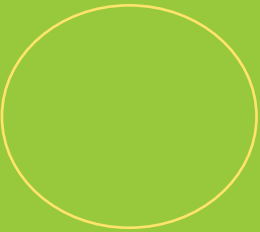


Lindsay Goldblatt (far left) with her cousins

My Experience in Israel

By Lindsay Goldblatt

I had the privilege of touring Israel this summer with the SEC through the Taglit-Birthright group. Forty other young adults, including five of my cousins and I experienced everything from the Dead Sea, climbing Mt. Masada, riding Donkey's and Camels, seeing waterfalls and visiting the Western Wall. Being able to share this experience with my family made it that much more memorable and special. For me the most influential part of the trip was the time we spent at the SEC in Jerusalem. The historical SEC buildings are located in the heart of Jerusalem, just walking distance from the some of the most historical places in the world. We had the great privilege of being escorted around a beautiful, ancient city by an amazingly insightful man, Rabbi Benarroch. When those in our group were asked what some of the best times were during their stay in Israel, some said the time spent with the Rabbi was amazing. We agreed that he was so easy to talk to and offered us a world of knowledge. Rabbi Benarroch was full of great stories and enthusiasm. Having him as our personal Jerusalem Tour Guide made the experience extra special. The Rabbi took us to places such as ancient Synagogues located next door to the SEC and my favorite place, the Western Wall. We got to experience the Wall on Shabbat which was such an incredible site to see. The SEC was very hospitable during our stay and if I am lucky enough to find myself back in Israel, I will be sure to stay at the SEC and visit with Rabbi Benarroch and his amazing wife. Since we have returned home, most of our group members gather on Friday nights to celebrate Shabbat and frequently communicate with each other as well as our fun and wonderful group leader, Sandy. Experiencing Israel together has given all of us a special bond.



Birthright

SEC led 2 very successful Birthright Israel trips this summer. In July we had a group of 41 students from the New York area and another group of 41 students from the Los Angeles area. Overall the trips were a great success educationally as well as socially. Participant evaluations were extremely positive. Winter trip Birthright registration is now open by visiting our website and we hope to fill three busses. The ten day trip includes visits to Tel Aviv, Caesarea, Safed, Tiberias, the Golan Heights, the Dead Sea and Masada, Ashkelon, and Jerusalem. A highlight is spending Shabbat at the SEC in Jerusalem, together with seminars given by Rabbi Benarroch on Jewish identity and Israel advocacy, a five day program with Israeli soldiers, and much more.



SEC ISRAEL



SEC Reaches Out to Underprivileged Children

With the generous donation of Moise and Carol Ann Emquies of Los Angeles, this past spring the SEC together with Israel's Ministry of Education, brought underprivileged Israeli children to the Old City on a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program. The program included 150 children from the community of Sderot and another 50 children from the city of Ashdod. Besides the educational component, the program gave a brief respite to the children of Sderot from daily rocket attacks from Gaza. The two day program included room and board at the SEC, a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony at the Western Wall, Tefillin workshop for boys and Bat Mitzvah workshop for girls focusing on "A woman's life in Jerusalem before 1948", tour of the City of David, festive dinner at the SEC, and a treasure hunt around the Old City. Students also received personalized T-shirts, new prayer books, and a Bar/Bat Mitzvah certificate. The program was a great success and showed the important role the SEC has in helping underprivileged children in Israel.

On September 22-23 we hosted 130 kids from the community of Kiryat Shemona for a similar two day program at the center. This program was made possible by a \$12,000 grant from the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg Canada. In addition 30 members of the Winnipeg Jewish Federation were in Israel during this time for a mission. They visited the Center and participated in a program with the children from Kiryat Shemona. Members of UIA Israel were also present and we hope this will be an opportunity to have the SEC added as a destination by other Federation missions to Israel. All in all by the end of the 2008 year we will have brought over 1,000 high school children from around Israel on educational overnight trips to our center in Jerusalem.



SEC LOS ANGELES

Friends Reception of SEC-LA

Hosted bt Luxe Summit Hotel



L to R: Luxe Summit Hotelier Efrem Harkham (center), with Rabbi Moises Benzaquen and Jeannine Sefton.

L to R: Morrie Angel, Clement Cohen, Larry Azose, Larry Clumuck, President of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, Spiritual Leader of Sephardic Temple



L to R: Ester Avrahamy, Rachel Sheff, Rica Emquies and Sharon Halevy Gomperts.

SEC Executive Cte.: L to R: Ron Nessim; Steve Nessim; Sarita Hasson Fields; Dr. Jose Nessim, Founder; Rabbi Yosef Benarroch, Ed. Director, SEC.



Members of SEC Advisory Committee:

L to R: Larry Azose, Ron Nessim, Georgette Gelbard, Morrie Angel, Yosi Avrahamy, Ray Mallel, Moussa Shaaya, Joe Samuels, Jeannine Sefton, Rabbi Jay Levy, Dr. Jose Nessim.



Eli Attie



Daniel Bouskila

9th Annual Los Angeles

Sephardic

Jewish Film Festival

Roll out the red carpet for our world class L.A. Sephardic Jewish Film Festival which kicks off Sunday, November 9th, 2008 with a spectacular Opening Night Gala at Paramount Studios in Hollywood. With a buffet dinner catered by Pat's, a silent auction with great items for the entire family, a wonderful feature film and a dessert reception, you won't want to miss it. The Festival will continue from November 11th-16th 2008 at the Majestic Crest Theater in Westwood.

We are proud to be honoring two outstanding recipients at the Opening Night Gala. Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, spiritual leader of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel will receive the Maimonides Leadership Award for his many years of unconditional support and guidance to the SEC and his love for Israel. The Cinema Sepharad Award will be presented to Eli Attie, Emmy-Award winning producer whose many credits include: *The West Wing*; *America: A Tribute to Heroes*; *House*; and *Studio 60*.

The festival continues with a superb line-up of films which highlight the Sephardic experience, from Morocco, Israel, South America, Rhodes, Egypt, Iraq and more.

The Student Film Competition "My Sephardic Experience" is a new addition to our film festival. This film competition will involve young adults in recognizing and learning about the Sephardic heritage, culture and history. Prizes will be awarded to first place in Middle School and High School categories.

The Sephardic Educational Center, headquartered in Jerusalem, takes pride in educating Jewish youth worldwide, perpetuating their heritage and culture. For information see www.sephardicfilmfestival.com or contact our Festival Coordinator, Denah Angel. (310) 601-6302 denahangel@gmail.com

SEC LOS ANGELES

Three Mothers



Sephardic Jewish Film FESTIVAL

Opening Night - Sunday, November 9, 2008
PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

Program subject to change)

Three Mothers (feature)

Israel 2006, 106 minutes; French, Arabic, Hebrew with English Subtitles

Inspired by the true story of Rose, Flora and Yasmin Hakim, triplets born in 1942 in Alexandria, Egypt, the film takes us through political turmoil which forces the family, like many Sephardim of the Middle East, to leave and eventually settle in Israel. Today, in Israel, they live together in an apartment without men and without children, but with family secrets they have kept...until now. Starring Israel's acclaimed first lady of the screen, Gila Almagor.



Majestic Crest Theater, Westwood **TUESDAY, NOV 11**
7:30 P.M.

Nuba of Gold and Light

Morocco 2007, 80 minutes; French, Arabic, Spanish w/ English Subtitles

The story of Arab-Andalusian music beginning with the Andalusian Caliphs in medieval Spain and flourishing in Morocco under the name of el Ala. A musical tapestry weaved from a magical period of Jewish and Arabic coexistence.

Souvenirs

Israel 2006, 75 minutes; Hebrew w/ English Subtitles

A charming, funny and touching father/son journey, Sleiman Cohen, an 82 year old Yemenite Jew, recalls the untold story of his proud service as a member of the Jewish Brigade of British Mandate Palestine, as he travels with his filmmaker son to retrace this historical chapter of the last days of the war.

NOVEMBER 9-16

Majestic Crest Theater, Westwood

THURSDAY, NOV 13
7:30 P.M.

Kapparot (short)

Israel 2006, 8 minutes; Hebrew w/ English Subtitles
U.S. Premier

Tradition and modernity meet head on in this short about the traditional Sephardic custom performed the eve of Yom Kippur, from the The Ma'ale School of Television Film and the Arts in Jerusalem

The Island of Roses: Tragedy in Paradise"

Italy, 2007, 56 minutes; Italian w/English Subtitles
Los Angeles Premier

Rebecca goes to Rhodes (Greece), known as the "Island of Roses", with her mother to unravel the story of their family, the German occupation, eventual deportation, and struggle to survive, all woven together in this poignant story told through her grandfather's war diaries and letters, personal testimonies and guided tour of the Jewish Quarter, "La Juderia", with family friend and survivor, Stella Levi.

Majestic Crest Theater, Westwood

SUNDAY, NOV 16
2 P.M.

Meir Basri

USA, 2006, 19 minutes; English- West Coast Premier

This short documentary made by filmmaker-attorney and recipient of the Sephardic Legacy Award at L.A. Sephardic Jewish Film Festival '06, Carole Basri, about the life of her uncle Meir Basri, a statesman, writer, leader of the Jewish community in Baghdad, a renown Arabic poet and sadly a torture victim of Saddam Hussein.

Ladino-500 Year Young

Israel 2006, 52 minutes; Hebrew, Spanish, Ladino w/ English Subtitles - Los Angeles Premier

Yasmin Levy, an electrifying 29-year-old Israeli singer, is following in the footsteps of her father, Yitzhak Levy, a revered singer who dedicated his life to recording and documenting the musical culture of Ladino, the ancient language of the Jews of Spain, to immortalize and disseminate the musical legacy that he helped preserve.



Dancing Alfonso

The Longing-The Forgotten Jews of South America

USA, 2007, 75 minutes; English, Spanish w/ English Subtitles

Connecting with ancestors; reclaiming faith; against all odds. A small group of South Americans long to affirm their faith. Their ancestors — Spanish Jews — were forced to convert during the Spanish Inquisition. Isolated in Catholic countries, rejected by local Jewish communities, they battle to become Jews regardless of the consequences.

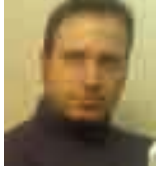
Dancing Alfonso

Israel 2007, 50 minutes; Hebrew/Spanish w/ English Subtitles

Alfonso is the lead dancer in a flamenco group, which rehearses in a Tel Aviv suburb. The average age of the group members is over 75. "Dancing Alfonso" provides a novel and unfamiliar portrait of the inner world of older people, and with a fresh look at our endless, but ever hopeful, search for someone to love.

SEC LATIN AMERICA

SEC-Latin America Convention '08 in Miami



Congratulations to the Sephardic Educational Center for hosting a very successful 14th annual Latin American Convention from August 15th to 18th, 2008. This year's convention brought together Jews from all over the world including Israel, Spain, Canada, Latin American countries with many from Argentina, as well as cities throughout the United States from New York to Los Angeles.

The organization of the event was first class and was held at the beautiful Ramada Beach Resort Spa Hotel in North Miami Beach, Florida. Guests enjoyed Meeting/Banquet facilities for lectures and discussion, relaxing by the pool and a Restaurant for Sabbath and all Kosher meals. Numerous activities, city tours including a visit to the holocaust museum, Jewish lectures and entertainment were all coordinated by SEC Canada's Avi Bendayan who did an excellent job with the weekends itinerary.

Keynote speakers for the weekend were General Director Rabbi Benito Baruj Garzón from Spain, Rabbi Yosef Bitton from New York and Rabbi Abraham Tobal from Mexico. The weekend was primarily organized in honor of Dr. José A. Nessim and a fabulous banquet was held in his honor. The many guests celebrated that evening and showed the founder of the Sephardic Educational Center their gratefulness for all his work.

The experience of meeting Jewish people from different countries was truly unforgettable and will only continue to grow the Sephardic Educational Center worldwide for many years to come.

Derek Melamed
Montreal

SEC Mexico



Dr. Nessim with Friends from SEC-Mexico



L to R: León Halac (Argentina), Dr. José A. Nessim (L.A), Dr. Salvador Sarfatti (Argentina), Ray Mallel (L.A), Marcos Maleh (Argentina), Elías Jassan (Argentina)

Joint

Buenos Aires, June 2008

Mr. Salvador Sarfatti,
President, Sephardic Educational Center-Latin America

The Jewish community as a whole has been making major efforts to alleviate the difficult situation affecting the thousands of Jews who live below the poverty line.

This has been possible thanks to the substantial efforts made by Jewish institutions from all over the country, and the funding contributed by the American Jewish communities through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

As we have been announcing since the onset of the Argentine economic crisis, international funds committed to different programs will phase out. Thus, measures to increase the contribution of local institutions must be put in place to continue assisting the poorest sectors of our community.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has defined a policy to gradually and lineally reduce its contribution by 20% a year until December 2009. For that reason, local organizations will have to absorb the reduction. In the case of SEC, the sum to be contributed for food and housing programs in 2009 amounts to \$6600 USD.

We remain at your disposal for any clarification you might require with our warmest Shalom.

Yours Sincerely,
Fabián Triskier M.D
Lic. Alejandro Kladniew
Social Programs Director
Regional Vice Director
JDC Latin America



A Time to Forgive

RABBI YOSEF BENARROCH
SEC - Jerusalem

The High Holiday season begins with the inception of the month of Elul. Forty days before the festival of Rosh Hashanah we begin with our preparations. What makes the month of Elul so special?

The “Tur” in his compendium of Jewish law (OH 581) explains that it was on the first day of Elul, that Moses ascended the mountain to receive the second “Tablets of the Law” (Luhot Haberit). Forty days earlier on the 17th day of the month of Tamuz Moses descended the mountain with the first “Tablets”. He was filled with excitement as he approached the nation readying himself to give them G-d’s law. But everything came shattering down when instead of finding an awe inspired nation waiting impatiently for the “Tablets” he found them dancing in a frenzy around the “Golden Calf”. It was the ultimate moment of betrayal. Forty days later on the first day of Elul, Moses once again ascended the mountain to receive the second “Tablets of the Law”. He would remain atop the mountain for another forty days descending on “Yom Kippur” and giving the nation the new “Tablets”.

It is intriguing to imagine what was going on between Moses and G-d during those last forty days from the first day of Elul to Yom Kippur. What could Moses say to G-d after such betrayal? Our Rabbis explain that he was steeped in prayer, relentlessly asking G-d to forgive the Jewish people. G-d’s wrath was great but Moses persevered, and finally at the end of the forty days on Yom Kippur Moses prevailed. G-d forgave the Jewish nation and agreed to begin anew.

The month of Elul begins a new page in the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. It is a

time of love and compassion. It is a time of renewed trust. It teaches us that we can rebuild our relationships even after they have been seriously challenged. It teaches us that there is a time to mend even when the pain runs deep. It teaches us that even after betrayal there can be love and reconciliation. It teaches us to never lose hope.

Our Rabbis in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 10b) explain that on the first day of “Tishrei” on “Rosh Hashanah”, Joseph the forsaken son of Jacob, was freed from the Egyptian prison. He had been betrayed by his brothers. Thrown into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions, sold to Egyptian slavery, imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Who would have blamed him had he later taken revenge against his brothers? Yet he chose to forgive, he chose to let go of the past and forge a new relationship of love and trust with his brothers. When he emerged from that pit on Rosh Hashanah he resolved to put the past behind and find the inner strength and courage to forgive and start anew. Joseph becomes the model of what we must strive for during the month of Elul.

Dear friend’s there is too much hatred and jealousy in our world. It is easy to live in anger and hang on to the slightest injustices against us. Elul and the High Holidays teach us that we must learn to forgive. The month of Elul, which ushers in the High Holiday season, teaches us that even when our relationships are seriously challenged we can rebuild them with trust, compassion, and love.

Wishing you all a Shana Tova Tizku Leshanim Rabot

SEC Receives Gift from Estate of Gabriel Cohen and Miru Alcana



Miru Alcana - A Sephardic Heroine

By Mati Franco

To discover who Miru was I needed to speak with the people who were there with her in Rhodes, in Auschwitz, in Dachau. Her sisters as she called them who had witnessed her extraordinary feats of courage, strength and generosity. My two cousins, Diana Golden and Felicie Caldes, the Galante sisters, filled me in on important parts of the story. "She saved our lives many times over, without her we never would have survived".

All the Jewish inhabitants of Rhodes had basically the same story to tell about how the Nazis took over after Mussolini's fall. Rhodes was a Greek island that had been administered and ruled by Italy since 1912. Miru Alcana was born there in 1916 in the bosom of the Spanish speaking Sephardic community that had lived on Rhodes for many hundreds of years.

In July of 1944 notices were posted on the island ordering the Jewish men to appear the next day, armed with their papers ready to be sent to work for the Germans. Once all the men were gathered up they informed the women and children that they must come with their belongings, money, jewels etc. Everything of any value was immediately taken from them and they were herded like beasts onto small boats that took them to Piraeus, the Port of Athens. After three additional days in the camp of Haidari, where they were given neither food nor drink, they were loaded onto box cars for a three week trek to some unknown destination. Needless to say many weak and elderly people died on the way. Their bodies were summarily disposed of. How any of them arrived in Auschwitz with the strength to stand is a mystery.

The infamous selection process began immediately. The mothers and children, the weak, sickly and elderly were selected for the gas chambers and crematoriums. The others were separated between the men and women and sent to various work locations. Miru, along with Felicie and Diana, were sent to an underground factory near Dachau.

Their mothers, younger siblings, nephews and nieces were dragged along to their immediate death.

In the crowd of deportees, during a moment of temporary confusion, Miru managed to pull several young girls out of the 'death' group and bring them along to her 'work' group thus saving them as well. It was here that Miru began showing the signs of her astonishing character traits that would not only allow her to survive but to continuously help others to survive as well.

In the factory she used her few idle minutes to run around helping others with their work, knowing that if they lagged behind they would be shot. The extra soup she received for doing a good job went to feed them as well.

The autumn crept into winter and the snows began. These girls from the Mediterranean weren't hardened for the cold. They had inadequate clothing, were made to sleep on hard, bare bunks with one flimsy cover and were worked like beasts of burden. They started dying one after the other. Cholera and typhus were rampant. Miru stole slivers of precious soap which she hid in the hem of her dress to wash the girls properly and

(continued on following page)



Gabriel Joseph (Gino) Cohen

Gabriel Joseph (Gino) Cohen was born on July 15, 1915 in Libya. He grew up in Tunisia and moved to Paris, France. He was a tailor by profession and eventually immigrated to Canada and then to the United States, where he settled in Los Angeles. He was a very religious and observant man and loved his Sephardic heritage. He believed that he should do everything to financially help Israel, to the extent of denying himself all luxuries.

He was briefly married to Miru Alcana but even after their divorce, they continued a life long caring friendship until her death.

When his health deteriorated to the extent that he was no longer able to take care for himself, he moved to a nursing home in Israel and died shortly thereafter.

He left all of his and Miru's estate to Jewish organizations in Israel- SEC, Jewish National Fund and the Hadassah Hospital of Jerusalem. His wish was that the donations would be in his and Miru Alcana's name.

(Miru continued)

attempt to keep them from infections. Anything she could do she would do for them. If all they had was dirty water, then she used the dirty water to wash them and their pitiful garments. Survival was all that mattered. There are women around the world today who will tell you that Miru saved their lives.

Surely the most traumatic incident for her personally was witnessing one of her brothers being shot to death after she managed to slip a chunk of bread to him through the barbed wire fence separating the men from the women in the first camp. This would haunt her forever. But still she wouldn't break. As long as there were people who needed her help, she held on.

Of the over 1700 Jews deported from Rhodes, only 150 survived. Miru eventually sailed for New York. From New York she quickly chose to continue on to Los Angeles. In the last decade of her life neither glaucoma, nor hip replacements, nor chronic emphysema could stop her. She almost never missed

the Shabbat service at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel. But the losses she had sustained and the agonizing pain of her war experiences could never be forgotten. Miru was wounded deep down in her soul and we can only admire her all the more for putting that pain aside and continuing to come to the aid of others for the rest of her days. In the hearts of those of us who loved and admired her and, indeed, in the eyes of the world she will always remain a true Hero of the Holocaust. Miru Alcana died May 6, 2004 in Los Angeles.

Editor's Note: I had the great honor and pleasure to know Miru from my childhood through adulthood. She would share Pesach and Sukkot holidays with us at our home and my children knew that she was a real live Heroine. We loved Miru very much and she loved us all, whether in Ladino, French, English or Italian. She was a unique individual that will always remain in our hearts.

SEC Songbook- One of a Kind

The SEC had completed a 20 year project of the most unique and complete Jewish Songbook, with Hebrew, English Translation and Transliteration of every song, Kiddush, Birkat Hamazon and related blessings. It includes sections of Israeli songs, Sephardic songs, Hassidic songs, and even Ladino songs. It is a must for every home and can be purchased for Bar and Bat Mitzva's or weddings. In order to publish this for sale and distribution, we are soliciting donors to dedicate the book in honor or memory of a loved one. The suggested donation is \$40,000 for sole dedication rights.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT THE
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Reflections on the Judeo-Spanish Tradition

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel



(Rabbi Angel is Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals—www.jewishideas.org—that fosters an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Rabbi Emeritus of the historic Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, he has

authored and edited 26 books. Among his recent books are “Foundations of Sephardic Spirituality: The Inner Life of Jews of the Ottoman Empire”, Jewish Lights, 2006; and “The Search Committee” [a novel], Urim Publications, 2008.)

I can still hear the voices of my grandparents, parents and elder relatives speaking and singing in Judeo-Spanish. Although they have passed away years ago, I still feel their presence especially on Shabbat and holidays and at family celebrations.

I grew up in Seattle among Jews who had come from Turkey and the Island of Rhodes and whose mother-tongue was Judeo-Spanish. It did not occur to me to ask: why were people from Turkey and Rhodes speaking a Hispanic language? Why did they carry themselves with such self-respect and pride, even though many of them were simple laborers with modest formal education? What was the link between my relatives and medieval Sephardic Jewry in the Iberian Peninsula? What was the nature of the Judeo-Spanish civilization of the past centuries that produced the worldview and practices that imbued the lives of the elders of my family?

As I grew older, it began to dawn on me that my generation is the last to have lived among people who spoke Judeo-Spanish as their mother tongue, and whose lives were thoroughly shaped by Judeo-Spanish civilization. The language and many of the cultural characteristics are coming to the end of their historical lives. The new generations no longer speak Judeo-Spanish as their native language, and do not live in a communal context that is conducive to maintaining the language and traditions.

And yet, the voices of our elders stay with us and want to be heard. They—and their ancestors going back 500 years and more—were part of a vital, thriving and powerful Sephardic civilization that spanned the Ottoman Empire and stretched into Europe and the New World. This civilization produced great sages, poets, writers, journalists,

dramatists, intellectuals; it fostered a lively, optimistic folk culture. Judeo-Spanish civilization is a treasure not just for members of our group, but for the entire Jewish people. But so little scholarly attention has been given to Jews of the Judeo-Spanish tradition, to trying to understand who they were, what they felt and believed.

It is not possible to bring Judeo-Spanish civilization back to life. Yes, there is a resurgence of interest in Ladino folk songs; there are Ladino chat rooms on the internet; there is more scholarly attention being given to the language and literature of the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, none of these things can restore the old civilization as a natural, living communal organism.

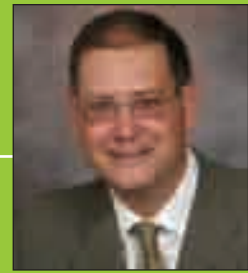
If I still hear the voices of my ancestors, the echo of those voices will diminish with each passing generation—as children and grandchildren will not have had the direct experience and interaction with these ancestors. But their story is not over; it is only transitioning into a new phase.

Judeo-Spanish civilization has fostered significant ideas and values. Our task is to study that civilization as deeply as we can, and to draw out and transmit that which is meaningful to us and future generations. Some of the lasting teachings relate to personal pride and self-respect; humor; a natural, healthy view of religion and our relationship with God; optimism; aesthetics and proper comportment; love of life.

In my book, “Foundations of Sephardic Spirituality: The Inner Life of Jews of the Ottoman Empire”, I present a study of Judeo-Spanish civilization—providing historical context, but focusing on the inner life of our people—the ideas, values and traditions that shaped generations of Sephardic Jews—and that can still help shape future generations of our people. I call my book “a nostalgic history”, since it is written not as a scholarly outsider, but as one who is himself a product of the Judeo-Spanish tradition.

My grandfather, Marco Romey, used to say—based on a kabbalistic teaching—that each person was put on earth to accomplish a unique mission. I think this is true not just for individuals, but for civilizations. The Judeo-Spanish era thrived for five centuries and has now entered its historical sunset. Yet, its mission is far from over. As we study and ponder the manifold aspects of Judeo-Spanish civilization, we will find that it has much to teach us—and much to give to future generations. The voices of our ancestors are not silenced, and will not be silenced.

The Executive Director TO OUR SEC FAMILY



Like so many of you, I am proud and extremely passionate about our Sephardic heritage. I am often asked why we emphasize being Sephardic. After all, in today's challenging world, shouldn't we be more focused on our mutual heritage and overall Jewish identity, celebrating what we share in common, as opposed to the differences that distinguish us? Are we in fact, being elitist?

There is something inherent in the unique qualities embodied by Sephardic Judaism, or what Rabbi Marc Angel calls "Sephardism", that provide a means to achieve a balance in life. The values of tolerance, moderation, respect for our fellow man, engagement with the society around us, to name just a few, while still anchored by the tenets, traditions and practices of our Faith provide the ideal balance. The great sage Maimonides termed this the Golden Path. Sephardic values are core Jewish values, beyond the cultural and ethnic elements such as language, customs, liturgy, music and cuisine. This is something that we must convey to our children as well as share with the entire Jewish world. The SEC Mission reflects this concept.

What is important is not who your grandparents were, it is who your grandchildren will be. That is what was behind Dr. Jose Nessim's bold vision almost thirty years ago to found the SEC. Independent studies indicate that the only way to ensure our children's Jewish identity is through education. Education takes many forms- home, community, formal and informal. Under the rubric of education, the SEC promotes and sponsors exciting young adult programs and activities, as well as programs and projects which are academic and cultural. Each of these programs helps fulfill our mission.

We have a tremendous asset in our historic SEC campus in Jerusalem. The Center is the only one of its kind to be situated within the walls of the Old City. The very air resonates with history and vibrant Jewish life. It is the perfect setting for Jews to experience and learn Judaism. Our Educational Director, Rabbi Yosef Benarroch, brings much experience and a warm, charming personality to our programs.

Over the past several months, the SEC Executive Committee has been actively working to chart our future. We have engaged in critical strategic planning, identifying the challenges which face us as an organization. We have instituted many best practices in non profit management. We have begun laying a solid foundation for growth by identifying programs and educational projects we wish to pursue. There is still much to do.

That's where your involvement is vital. As we launch our ambitious programs for the coming year, we invite you to join us. You and your family will benefit by participating in SEC programs and events, both locally and in Israel. Of course, your financial support is central to our success. Working together, we can greatly enhance the lives of our youth and our communities.

In Ethics of our Fathers, 1:14, Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"

If we, the heirs to this extraordinary legacy, cannot transmit our values to our children, who will do it? If we keep it to ourselves, others will be unable to appreciate its beauty. And finally, the time for action is now. We cannot delay. Collectively, we possess the skills, talents and resources necessary to accomplish our goals.

Your comments and ideas are most welcome and appreciated. Please feel free to contact me directly at 310.441.9631 ext 207 or by email at lla@secjerusalem.org

I wish you and your families a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year,

Larry Azose



MATURING GRACEFULLY

By Neil J. Sheff

I finally got back to Israel this summer after 16 years. There were streets with new names, there were new highways, the galleries were more sophisticated, the restaurants were superb, archeological "digs" that I remembered were now multi-media tourist sites, trailer settlements had become modern cities, there was a new Russian-accented Hebrew added to the many accents that I remembered, and there were malls just like home, but with Kosher Food Courts! At 60, Israel has started to mature beautifully in many ways; and in many ways she is still like an adolescent with growing pains, an ugly pimple that breaks out here and there but eventually smoothes away, still having to protect itself against bullies in the neighborhood, and at times rebellious against G-d. But I fell in love again with Israel.

After having been an SEC participant, counselor and guide for 7 consecutive summers in the 80's I worried that the Israel I would come back to in 2008 would be foreign to me. I was scared I would lose my way, not find the familiar landmarks and hangouts I knew so well and passed each day when I lived in Jerusalem those many summers ago. Well things had changed but my spiritual compass seemed to automatically adjust to those changes and once again, I felt like I was back home. Instead of leading the large SEC groups of young adults from the US, Mexico, Canada, Spain, England, etc. like I used to, I now had a smaller and less patient group to lead- my 3 children- with my "co-counselor" wife, Rachel. After all, we were the "SEC family" and thanks to the SEC where Rachel and I met, we had this group to lead.

We arrived at the SEC in Jerusalem, like a family going back to their father's birthplace. It was a very special feeling, telling my children that one day they would be spending their summer there. We walked to the Kotel on Friday night and breathed the special air that surrounds the holiest spot on earth. We then gathered for Shabbat dinner at the Center just a few steps away with our SEC Family and the inspiration behind it all, Dr. Jose Nessim. It was 28 years since my first Shabbat at the Center with Doc. While we had lots of memories to share about the past, our thoughts were toward the future. With a new Executive Director, Larry

Azose, who understands the mission and need of a Sephardic movement, an enthused, committed and growing Executive Committee and the continuing motivating spirit of our founder, mentor and dreamer, Dr. Nessim, the SEC also approaches maturity where we have spent the past year working on our structure, our mission, our goals, and our professionalism.

The SEC, like Israel, is growing up. Next year, we will celebrate our 30th anniversary. You have watched us grow these past years. Some of you have helped raise us; some have just admired the progress; some have been oblivious to the minor miracle. We move into our next phase of maturity with confidence and hope for the future of Sephardic Judaism knowing our philosophy can make a difference in the Jewish world.

May we be able to join together this new year to work for the benefit of our People and may it be with happiness, selflessness and for the sake of our children.

Tizku Le'shanim Rabot
Neil J. Sheff - Editor

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