

Tudo se ilumina para
aquele que busca a luz.
BEN-ROSH

HALAPID

All is illuminated for
one who seeks the light
ARTURO CARLOS
BARROS BASTO

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MY PERSONAL JOUR- NEY

by Sonya A. Loya

Being raised Catholic, didn't seem to *make* me Catholic. Some how, I never felt as if I fit in to what seemed to be the religion of my ancestors. I can remember praying with my Granny three times a day when we were around one another. At her house, she had a little altar facing the east with candles on it, and she used to put a scarf on when she prayed. I never really understood these rituals.

Growing up, I can remember questioning God. I use to tell him, with my little finger pointed to the sky, *I want to see you, if you are really there, I know you are not in those statues.* If break one, of which every one in our family had several, I knew I would be in trouble. How could God be in those some what scary things any way, was my thinking? I can remember clearly waking up around three in the morning, at different times, and going outside to swing on my swing set, looking up at the full moon, with rippled clouds surrounding it. I would ask God so many questions, for I knew there was some thing more than statues to talk to.

LINKING THE SABBATEAN SPRING FESTIVAL WITH THE HEBREW TEKUFOTH

by Gad Nassi

This article concerns the commonly shared ideology of those Sephardim who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula as well as those who were forced to undergo conversion and remained there or immigrated to other countries. The messianic hope for religious and national restoration was for them a commonly held one that would bring an end to the agony of expulsion or conversion that they had suffered.

The exiled Sephardim had struggled for centuries to preserve their identity while the converts also struggled over the conflict between their alienation from Judaism and their loyalty towards it. Since the free expression of Jewish identity was a social and commonly held taboo, this conflict endured for generations.

The messianic hope created a similar phenomenon that arose in the East among the Sabbatean believers, who have been living secret lives for the past three-and-one-half centuries, and the subject is still taboo and the object of many offensive allegations.

The effects of this struggle on the souls of these forced converts and Sabbatean believers are complex and controversial. But it is clear to me that this struggle became the source and basis for enrichment and creativity in the personal, emotional, social and cultural sense. The Miami conference of SCJS, at which I first presented this material, has been a meaningful one for me and, to some extent, constitutes the closing of a circle among the various communities of Sephardi Jewry that was disbanded and became dispersed

Conference 2005

15th Annual Conference Attracts International, Local Speakers, Conferees to Miami Beach

by Dolores Sloan
Editor, *HaLapid*

Residents of South Florida who read the August 6 Tropical Life Section of the Miami *Herald* came across the following paragraph in a story titled "Secret Jews' of the Spanish Inquisition."

"There are bound to be thousands of people who are descended from the secret Jews of Spain and Portugal," said Abraham Lavender, a sociology professor at Florida International University and president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, which will hold its annual conference Sunday through Tuesday in Miami Beach."

Earlier, the story referred to scholars indicating that "South Florida, with its large Hispanic population will prove fertile ground for rabbis seeking to recover scattered remnants of the anusim." SCJS members chose Miami for this year's annual conference because of growing interest in the subject there by persons of Latin background, by researchers studying the history of the anusim, and by local individuals wanting to learn more about it

The story, by the *Herald's* Alexandra Alter, did indeed attract several persons from the region to conference sessions at the Marseilles Hotel in Miami Beach and to pre-conference events at Temple Beth Tov-Ahavat Shalom. SCJS's mission describes the Society as a group whose members, from all religious or spiritual persuasions, seek information and research about crypto-Judaism, as scholars, members of the interested public and those who suspect their families' roots may connect them to the Se-

phardic Jews who inhabited the Iberian Peninsula for 1,500 years before their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and their forced conversion to Catholicism in Portugal in 1497.

In the past five years, however, conferees arriving in conference cities before official opening events have been hosted by a local synagogue whose members include persons from crypto-Jewish backgrounds and/or a tradition of support for those who do. This year, visitors were welcomed at Temple Beth Tov, located on *Calle Ocho*, Eighth Street, in Miami's Little Havana, on Friday and Saturday, August 5-6, by Rabbi Manuel Armon, Temple President Roberto Gonzalez, and SCJS President Laverde, also a member of the congregation.

Armon and Gonzalez, the latter joined by his wife and daughter, spoke several days later during the conference on how the declining membership of Ashkenazy Jews of European origins has been bolstered by 20 Latino families over the past few years (see page).

The Society's 15th annual conference began officially two days later on Sunday evening, August 7, with a dinner and the keynote address by Seth Kunitz, Dean of Arts and Humanities, University of Durham, United Kingdom. Speaking on "Why Do

Academics and Non-Academics Have a Problem with Crypto-Judaism," Dr. Kunitz

Business meeting

Board meeting



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
Abraham Lavender PhD
A Day to Remember
the Sephardic Expulsion

The annual conference held in Miami Beach, Florida, on August 7-9, the first conference on the east coast, was a success. Although regrettably many of the west coast members were unable to travel the long distance, a number of east coast members and international members from "across the Atlantic" attended their first conference. With over a million Hispanics in Miami-Dade County, valuable contacts and visibility were realized. The *Miami Herald* published nearly a full-page article the day before the conference began, discussing the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies and Temple Beth Tov, the mixed Ashkenazi-Hispanic synagogue in West Miami. The article was informative, objective, and positive, unlike some of the uninformed and inaccurate comments previously made in various publications. Anyone who wants a copy may email me at abelavender@aol.com.

Positive sparks were lit, and the word about crypto Jews will spread. Most of the meetings will continue to be on the west coast or in the Southwest because of the strong membership there, and we look forward to a rewarding conference next year in El Paso, TX. Perhaps in a few years we will be able to meet in Rhode Island, another "hot" spot on the east coast. By the way, although Seymour Lieberman's nephew was out of town and unable to attend the conference and accept his uncle's award, I have now presented it to him.

Looking to the future, there is increasing informal discussion that a special memorial day should be established to recognize the suffering that all Sephardim, including the crypto Jews, underwent with the expulsion from Spain at the end of July 1492. Orders had been issued as early as 1482 for partial expulsion of Jews from some cities and towns in Andalusia, and in 1484 Jews had been expelled from the entire dioceses of Cordoba, Seville, and Cadiz. Other areas had partial expulsions. But most conversos had not sincerely converted. Partly as a result of frustration felt by Inquisitors because of their failure to force sincere conversions, on March 31, 1492, the final Edict of Expulsion was signed in Granada, which had just been conquered from the Moslems. By late April, the Edict was promulgated to Castile and Aragon where many of Spain's Jews then lived.

By July 31, 1492, all Jews had to convert to Catholicism, go into exile, or suffer severe punishment including death in many cases. For those leav-

FROM THE EDITOR

ing, Howard M. Sachar noted that "the final stages of departure were unalleviated misery. Refugees choked the highways. At seaports, they were cursed, stoned, often beaten and robbed. Local merchants cheated them. Ship captains squeezed them dry" (*Farewell Espana*, 1972, p. 72). On August 2 and 3, the last openly practicing Jews left Spain. On August 2, a few conversos or secret Jews were with Christopher Columbus as he prepared to leave Spain on his first voyage to the Americas. Later, in his log, thinking of the Jewish exiles, Columbus would refer to the "fleet of misery and woe." Ironically, August 2 was Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the year for Jews, marked by a fast commemorating the destruction of the first and second temples. Some sources suggest that Columbus delayed his departure one day because he did not want to leave on Tisha B'Av, perhaps because of a secret Jewish identity on his part or perhaps because the seaports were so congested with escaping Jews. As David Gitlitz notes, the "harshness of the Expulsion itself" and the fears of the rigors of the journey influenced some Jews to remain in Spain (*Secrecy and Deceit*, 1966, p. 38).

Largely because of the relatively small number of openly-practicing Jews from Spain who settled in the Americas, and specifically in the United States, little attention has been paid to the suffering undergone by the Sephardim in Spain. The second issue being discussed is which day should be recognized as a day of mourning for the Sephardic world's greatest catastrophe. The feeling by some is that it should be separate from Tisha B'Av which already commemorates tremendous suffering for all Jews, and that perhaps we should choose the date of the edict, March 31.

throughout the world. This was a process that began more than five hundred years ago and is still continuing.

Sabbatean Messianism was the largest and most momentous messianic movement in Jewish history subsequent to the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt. This movement, which swept across the world from England to Persia, from Netherlands to Morocco and from Germany to Yemen, is well documented and known, and is also the topic of many publications. Therefore, I do not intend to expound upon it. I will refer to it by describing a personal reminiscence of my childhood and say a few words *in connection* with the subject of my paper.

It happened during the late 1940s when I was a child. On a particular night, it was decided that we, the children, should organize a festive reunion in the cellar of the building in which we lived. I know it was spring for the simple reason that the she-goat of our neighbor had given birth and its milk was to be distributed during the reunion; possibly also because the weather in Istanbul was warm enough to afford a reunion in the humid and dark cellar.

After having drunk goat milk and entertained ourselves with the traditional Turkish-shadow play, known as "aoivat and KaragOz," the time came to go home. At this precise moment the organizer of the reunion, the oldest among us, addressed the Sabbatean children: "You are not allowed to go home until the adults finish their meeting, are you?" The children agreed without saying a word, expressing themselves only by nodding.

In spite of its ambiguous and unexpected character, I had the intuition that a certain truth lay beyond this question and that it ought to be tacitly respected.¹

Born and educated in Istanbul, I became aware early about a mysterious people who appeared to be Turks with Jewish affinities. Their elders spoke Spanish at home and sometimes exchanged a few words in this language with my parents. I heard rumors that the approach of Jewish holy days made these "other Turks" tense and they were secretly celebrating them with their own customs. Besides these sporadic manifestations, they never talked about their Jewish ties, and mutual discretion made the subject a never-revealed taboo.

It is probably this experience that later influenced the very personal dimension of my future interest in understanding the nature of this phenomenon.

The apostasy of Sabbetai Sevi in 1666 produced deep consternation among the people who saw in him the expected Messiah. Instead of admitting that their redeemer was an imposter, many of them looked for an explanation of what had happened. They maintained that the apostasy was in reality the fulfillment of a mission to lift up the holy sparks which was dispersed even among the gentiles, a task which only the Messiah himself could perform to bring redemption. So the foundation of a new sect with its own ideology, its own commandments, its own liturgy and its own organization, was laid, and by creating its own legacy, it would survive for more than three centuries.

In fact, the Sabbatean community which flourished in Salonica is the only heretical sect in the history of crypto-Jewry with so well-established precepts and institutions. The Ma'minim—believers in Hebrew—they they called themselves were voluntary converts, a mass phenomenon without a precedent in Jewish history. They were considered as Muslims publicly, Ten Commandments were replaced with a new religious order based on eighteen precepts, *las Incomendensas*, as they called it in Judeo-Spanish.

The definition of adultery in *las Incomendensas*, suggesting prudence rather than a prohibition, is ambiguous. It is in this context that a peculiar feast, the Sabbatean Spring Festival, was incorporated into the Sabbatean liturgy. Based on its origins and its mode of celebration, this feast, usually known as the Lamb

Festival, remains the most puzzling and eccentric holiday of Sabbatean lore.

The feast begins at midnight between the 21st and the 22nd day of the month of Adar, at the supposed occurrence of the spring equinox. According to the Sabbatean tradition, the spring equinox represents the beginning of the New Year and the creation of the world. Only married couples were permitted to participate in the ceremony, where the meat of the lamb was eaten for the first time in the year. It was required that at least two married couples or a paired number of married couples participate in the ceremony. Women wore jewels and their best clothes and served at the banquet. At a certain moment, lights were extinguished and the couples would apparently make love after exchanging partners.

My paper discusses the eventual relationship of this festival with the Jewish belief of *Tekufoth* (seasons).

Throughout history, most pagan religions and cultures considered time as cyclical. The condition and fate of mankind were therefore explained through events occurring at specific times. Certain days or time periods of sacred significance were celebrated by usually including a particular ritual of sacrifices and meals that, at times, bordered or led to licentious behavior. Among these, festivals celebrating the creation process and the renewal of nature are of particular interest. They have been celebrated in recorded history for more than five millennia. In ancient Mesopotamia, Sumerians and Babylonians celebrated the renewal of nature indicated by spring rains, as well as by the returning of the rains in autumn. Food sacrifices were dedicated to fertility deities, after which the participants marked their feasting by ritual ceremonies.

In Babylon, the Creation epic was read at this occasion to remind the celebrants that order arose out of chaos by means of a struggle between the god of heaven and the goddess of the deep. Later, a sheep was beheaded, its body being thrown into the river, and its head taken into the wilderness. This ritual symbolized the freeing of the community from the powers of chaos. After the populace engaged in carnival-like activities, a banquet was held to celebrate the renewal of nature, man and society.² Beliefs and rituals connected with seasonal renewals, and associated with an encounter of a chaotic and sexual nature between deities, have also existed in a variety of cultures. They are almost a universal phenomenon, which is embedded in the symbolic spiritual legacy and collective memory of the Euro-Asian peoples and has played a major role in determining their mystical and religious inclinations and beliefs.

Superstitious beliefs connected with the periods of the equinoxes and the solstices have also appeared in Jewish folklore. However, even if the original myth was forgotten, its remnants were preserved in the belief that waters were contaminated by noxious blood, whereby it was prohibited to drink water at the time of the *Tekufoth*. Jews believed that a venomous drop of blood falling from heaven, at the period of the summer solstice, poisoned the waters in streams and rivers. They then refrained from drinking water in this period.

The Ritual of Abudarham, written c. 1341, bears the following information: "*During seasonal changes it is prohibited to drink the waters of the rivers, for a drop a blood falling from the clouds in the sky would swell the body of anyone who drinks from*". A Jewish mystical belief is that Lilith's³ menses are the source of these drops. Still another legend is that the constellations Scorpio and Leo, or Cancer and Libra engage in a bitter struggle at these four critical moments, and their blood stains the waters.⁴

The Hebrew word *Tekufa*—in plural *Tekufoth*—literally meaning "period" or "season," also, equinox or solstice, referring to the annual seasonal changes. The four *Tekufoth* are the month of

Nissan (April) at the spring equinox; the month of *Tammuz* (July) at the summer solstice; the month of *Tishri* (September/October) at the autumnal equinox and the month of *Teveth* (December) at the winter solstice.

The *Midrash of Psalms* reports:

There are four seasons in a year. From the season of Nissan to the season of Tammuz the days borrow from the nights [i.e. the sun lights for a longer time], and from Tammuz to Tishri the days pay back to the nights; from Tishri to Teveth days borrow from the nights but from Teveth to Nissan the days pay back to the nights: which means that the season of Nissan and of Tishri owe nothing to anyone.⁵

An old legend, which made its first literary appearance in the twelfth century liturgical book *Mahzor Vitry*, connects this belief with the following biblical events: God turned the waters of Egypt to blood in the spring equinox, and from then on at the time of the equinox drops of blood are deposited on the waters; the same occurs at the summer solstice, when Moses smote the rock and blood flowed from it; at the autumnal equinox; when Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, blood appeared on his knife; and at the winter solstice, when Jephtah sacrificed his daughter in the fulfillment of his vow to God, her blood mixed with the waters.⁶ According to one theory, the very first *Tekufah*—the spring equinox—in the Jewish calendar took place on Adar 22 at the beginning of Wednesday, the fourth day of the Jewish week, i.e. Tuesday evening at 6 p.m. in the first year of the world's creation.⁷ A book published in Amsterdam in 1636 contains informative and depictive material on the *Tekufoth*.⁸ Moreover, according to another publication, beliefs concerning the *Tekufoth* were probably still extant amongst European Jewry at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ The enlightened religious authorities saw the beliefs in *Tekufoth* as a remnant of paganism, denounced them and tried to suppress them. However, these efforts did not prove to be successful,^{9, 10, 11} and, as a matter of fact, the belief regarding the noxious effect of drinking water drawn at nighttime during the *Tekufoth* persisted among simple Jewish folk until recently.

Another peculiar fact in connection with the *Sabbatean Lamb Festival* is that it is celebrated during the same season as *Nevruz*, which is a millenarian, well-established and very popular pagan festival in Turkey, celebrated essentially by mystical heterodoxies and also having analogical aspects with the former. *Nevruz* means "New Year" in Persian. This festival and its variations are widespread among peoples inhabiting the rural areas of the former Ottoman Empire as well as among those ethnically and culturally related to them living elsewhere.

The beginning of the New Year in *Nevruz* is also linked with many biblical themes of deliverance: creation of the world by God, when the duration of night is equal to day; the formation out of mud of the first man, Adam; the return of Adam and Eve to Paradise by God, after He forgave them; Noah, after leaving his ark, set foot on land; Joseph was saved from the pit; Moses divided the Red Sea to save his people; Jonah was delivered to land by the whale; the stars which were in Aries when God created the Universe were ordered by Him to return to their own zodiac signs.¹²

On the other hand, a folk pattern reported by Galante, which existed among the Jews of Izmir, the native city of Sabbetai Sevi, also remembered by people who lived in its vicinity, is of interest. This is the belief and popular custom concerning the spring equinox known as *la Dulse*.

According to Galante, people believed that angels who guard the waters in the world are removed at a precise moment during the spring equinox. It was also believed that the devil poisons them during this interval, known as *la Dulse*, when waters are without guardians. People should therefore take the necessary

precautions in order not to be harmed by drinking water during the night at this moment.¹³

La Dulse means, "jam" in Judeo-Spanish. Used as an adjective, *dulse* means "sweet." Since the first half of the sixteenth century, *Nevruz* has been traditionally celebrated with great pomp in Manisa, a neighboring town of Izmir where a notable Jewish community existed, by distributing a sweet paste, known as *Mesir Paste* (of Manisa), *Mesir* means, "feast" in Turkish.¹⁴ The use of the term *la dulse*, indicating the perilous moment at *Tekufoth* during the spring equinox, is unique to the Jews of Izmir and to its neighboring Jewish communities — and the sole apparent reason for using it is because of this sweet paste.

There is no doubt that the renewal of nature represented by the Sabbatean Spring Festival also implied themes associated with the creation of man and the world, as well as the reappearance of the Messiah, according to one belief, as the original Adam. The extinguishing of lights and the concomitant sexual orgy is a simulacrum of the darkness, the eschatological, messianic and creational chaos and the free expression of instinctual needs followed by rebirth, as it is conceived in mystical philosophies.

According to rumors, during the secret rites observed by Alevi populations in Turkey, which are accompanied by music and drinking, the candles would go out at a certain point and the entire ceremony would turn into an orgy. This festivity is popularly known in Turkish as *mum sonde alemi*, meaning "festivity of extinguishing candles." Rumors about this custom spread in Turkey and are even extant today.

After his conversion, Sabbetai Sevi met and became friendly with a leader of the Ottoman mystical *Bektashi* order by the name of Mehmet Niyazi. He was a guest at his house of worship and participated in *Bektashi* rituals in Istanbul and perhaps in Edirne as well. It is also known that in the earliest annals of Sabbateanism, the movement adopted the liturgy of *dervishes* in the Turkish language transliterated into Hebrew characters.

In conclusion, let us note briefly that Sabbateans shared many common of the spiritual and behavioral characteristics of various Ottoman mystical groups. The Sabbateans probably found in the tolerant and even receptive attitude of Ottoman public opinion towards mystical heterodoxies, a legitimate foundation for their tenets.

The analogy between their syncretistic, antinomian and secretive mystical lore also seems to have played a cardinal role in establishing a rapprochement and a close relationship between them.^(is)

It is probably this similarity between Sabbatean lore and Ottoman mysticism that determined — among many other historical, sociological, folkloric, religious mystical factors — the choice, the timing and the mode of celebration of the *Sabbatean Lamb Festival*, shaping its peculiar and even unique heretical nature .i6)

1. Extract from Gad Nassi, "Exploring the Pagan, Jewish and Ottoman Roots of the *Sabbatean Lamb Festival*", *Turkish-Jewish Encounters*, ed. Mehmet Tiltltncti (Haarlem, 2001), pp. 241-260.

2. Fredericksen Linwood, "Feast and Festival", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 7, 1973, pp. 197-202.

10. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition, A Study in Folk Religion*, (New York: Behrman House, 1937), pp. 257-9.

11. Avigdor Aptowitzer, "Isur Shtiath Mayim beSha'ath haTekufah" [Prohibition against Drinking Water during the Period of Seasonal Change] in *HaTzofeh* (Budapest, 1912), II, pp. 122-6; Levi Ginzberg, "Arba Tekufoth" [Four Seasons] in

HaTzofeh (Budapest, 1913), III, pp. 184-6.

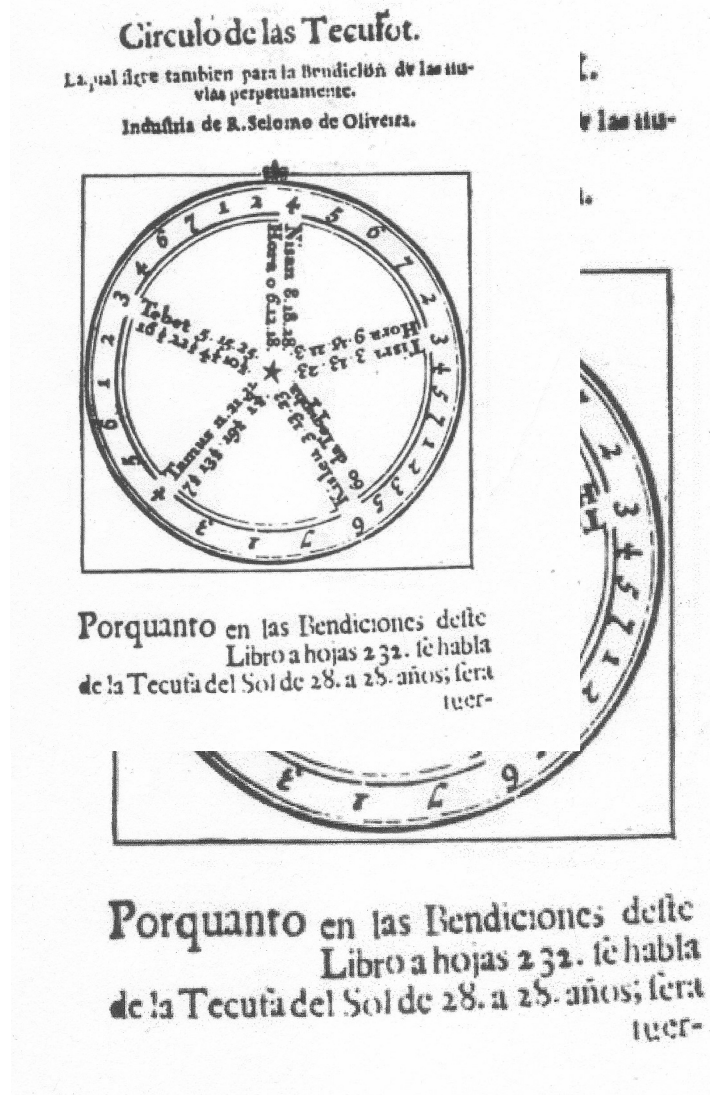
12. M. Abdulhalik cay, *Türk Ergenekon Bayramı, Nevruz* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünün Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1988), pp. 22-3.

10. Avram Galante, *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, (Istanbul: Isis, 1986), VIII, 211-2.

11. Originally given out for its medicinal value, the distribution of the Mesir Paste later became a well-rooted tradition. The Mesir Celebration began to be held in around 1539 and since then, *every year* on *March 21st*, the day of the *Nevruz* festival, the people gather in front of the Sultan Mosque to catch the Mesir Paste wrapped in paper as it is tossed out to them.

12. Gad Nassi, "Shabbetaism and the Ottoman Mystical Tradition" in *500 Years in our Heritage, 1492-1992, First International Congress on Turkish Jewry* organized by MORIT, Beth Hatefuso. Tel-Aviv, October 1989. Turkish version of the same paper, "Sabetaycihk ve Osmanlı Mistik Gelenei", *Tarih ve Toplum*, XVI, 75, (Istanbul, March 1990) pp. 143-145.

13. A detailed description of these factors and their comprehensive analysis, may be found in Gad Nassi, "Exploring the Pagan, Jewish and Ottoman Roots of the Sabbatean Lamb Festival", *Turkish-Jewish Encounters*, ed. Mehmet TUtilnell (Haarlem, 2001), pp. 241-260. This investigation elaborates for the first time the links between the Sabbatean *Lamb Festival* and the belief of *Tekufoth*.



Jewish calendar representing the Equinoxes and Solstices, known as *Tekufoth*. From the book "Seder Berakhot – Orden de las Bendiciones y las Ocasiones en que se Devan Dizir", printed in Hebrew with Portuguese to teach Judaism to Conversos. Edited by Isaac de Mattatias Aboab. Translated by Binyanin Senior. Printed in the printing house Albert Magnus, Amsterdam 1686(7). Author's collection.

My brother and I spoke a language of our own; no one could understand him for his first five years. After a few doctor's visits, my parents were told not to teach us both Spanish and English; they believed that was confusing my brother and thus he couldn't speak either. Only I could speak with him and understand what he wanted. I use to talk with my angel in this language. When I first read the Zohar, I read that the angel Gabriel speaks all 70 languages to a cluster of dust and then hands it to Ha Shem to breathe his *ruach* into it. Thus, it becomes a living soul. The Zohar further says that, by the time the child is out of the womb, it no longer remembers all the languages or the Torah. If so, I thought, maybe we need to remember, so we could find our way back to who we really are.

My life has been very difficult; with every turn in the journey there seem to be up hill battles and down hill tumblers. At the age of eighteen, I had been on my own for a year, having quit high school, where I had fallen through every crack possible. No one seemed to care that I did. I had learning disabilities, that were not detected at that time, and was told all my life I was not teachable. There were also home-related problems that kept my mind day dreaming about other things besides school, thought to be more important. However, I was given a gift that would carry me in life: my talent and natural skills to work and create with my hands.

I started working at the very young age of twelve, waiting tables, then working for a neighbor at thirteen stringing jewelry for his store. Everything I made sold; creating was never difficult, it seem to come as natural as breathing to me. Growing up, I learned leather skills, welding, beading; I knew how to crochet at a very young age, I started using a potter's wheel in the third grade. Shortly after turning eighteen, I met my future husband, while I was hitchhiking in Arizona. He ended up taking me all the way home to New Mexico and asking my father if he could take me to Dallas with him. My father, knowing me, made a deal with him: "Before you hit her, send her home COD."

Shortly after moving to the Dallas area, I had an awakening at 3 am; it was another spiritual encounter. I was told not to follow man or the religion of man, to follow him. I was told I would never be forsaken, nor forgotten. I began for the first time in my life to teach my self to read with the Bible. After that experience, I was changed. I made the mistake of calling my parents and telling them I gave up Catholicism for Lent: not a pretty picture.

Three months later, I knew I had to be water immersed, so I drove in my car looking for a church to baptize me fully in water, not knowing any thing about *mikvah*. I found a little Pentecostal church on a back road that didn't require me to join, all that was asked of me was to wear a dress. So I went and made me a simple white skirt and blouse and was water immersed. I would do so any time I

could, even though I was told once I was baptized I didn't need to do it any more. For me it seemed to be needed to cleanse my soul.

I waded my way thru the Christian maze, never feeling like I fit or belonged. I still had my encounters around three in the morning, always having the Old Testament speak to me the loudest. I always felt like some thing was missing, some thing wasn't right. After that encounter at eighteen, I started having dreams of living in Israel; they would reoccur, many times. I had the strangest connection to Jewish people that I didn't seem to have with just any one. All my friends called me the Jew magnet. My ex-husband always told me that if we divorced, I would remarry a Jewish man. After being married for sixteen years and having a beautiful daughter, Rachel Hosanna, he decided he no longer wanted to be married and told me to go home.

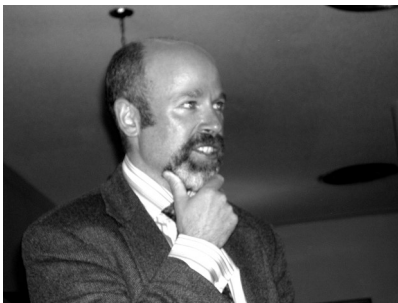
Two weeks later I was in New Mexico, a single parent and moving back home to start all over again with nothing but my two hands, a bit of glass and some tools. After a few car accidents, I was told I was 80% disabled. Soon, I was living at home once again. My father told me to take a month off and think about what I wanted to do and they would help me. I told my parents I didn't need a month to think about it. I wanted to do my art full-time and venture into business for my self.

Starting in 350 square feet in December, 1996, I began to work twelve to sixteen hour days, seven days a week, for 3 years. I was still having my three a.m. encounters, being shown things in the Torah, more and more clearly. The dreams about living in Israel were more and more frequent, as well. Within a few months of living back home, I stopped eating pork; I couldn't stand it any longer. The thought of it grossed me out. Within one year of being back I was no longer observing Easter or Christmas. Living with my parents, where those practices were still being done, was difficult.

In '99, I was invited to a Jewish conference. I was amazed to see other Hispanics there. I wondered if they were checking this out too, that they knew who they were. By the end of the conference I was told I might be of the crypto-Jewish or *marrano* background. At that conference I met my soon-to-be mentor from Israel, who seemed to know more about my history than I did. He asked me if I would consider selling his Judaica in my glass shop. Within five years of doing business in that small space, I was able to move into 2,500 square feet. Again, I stepped out, believing that Ha Shem was with me. There were 1,000 square feet next to the gallery that remained empty for a year until I started Bat-Tzion Hebrew Learning Center, with a Judaica shop in full scale.

At that time, I met my fiancé, who was also the only one practicing Judaism in his family. We wanted to cre-

Seth Kunin â?" Rabbi, Scholar, Saint



Several years ago Professor Seth Kunin and I attended a national conference of messianic congregations, where I had been invited to lecture on the history of crypto-Judaism in New Mexico. As we passed by the numerous displays of talitot, kippot and prayer books, Seth whispered to me, â?oAs a rabbi, Iâ?Tm appalled, but as an anthropologist, I find all this absolutely fas-

cinating!â?

Seth Kunin brings the training and orientation of both fields to his research into the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism in the US Southwest. He is the author of several papers and articles on the topic, and is currently preparing a book-length manuscript on the ethnography of crypto-Jews in New Mexico, to be published by Columbia University Press [not yet].

Born in New York City, he was exposed early in life to the life of an anthropologist, traveling around Mexico as a child with his mother, Professor Carolyn Kunin. Sethâ?Ts twin brother, SCJS member David Kunin, also became a rabbi, and currently holds a pulpit at Congregation Beth Shalom in Edmonton, British Columbia.

He earned his B.A. at Columbia University, M.A. at The Jewish Theological Seminary, and his Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge. He was ordained as a Conservative Rabbi at Leo Baeck College in London.

Sethâ?Ts initial research interests lay in structural analyses of Biblical texts, with particular attention to women and the book of Genesis. In the mid-1990s, he became aware of a growing body of literature dealing with crypto-Judaism, and decided to explore the topic. â?oYou might say that my move from Biblical analysis to crypto-Judaism started as a theoretical move,â? he explained, â?owondering how Israelite/Rabbinic cultural structures would be found in three modern communities -- crypto-Jews, Ethiopian Jews and Hasidic Jews. After beginning the project I became so fascinated and intrigued by crypto-Judaism that it took over my research agenda -- and has been an extraordinary experience both in research and personal terms.â?

Receiving generous grants from the universities where he taught, as well as from the British Academy, the Carnegie Trust, and the Estate of Eva Feld, Seth has spent the past ten summers conducting anthropological field work in New Mexico. He was the first anthropologist to apply a sophisticated theoretical construct to the study of crypto-Jewish society in New Mexico. It was not his purpose to either deny or demonstrate the historical validity of the community, but rather to examine the dynamic nature of the

group comprising those who assert a converso heritage at the turn of the twenty-first century. But despite this expressed intention, his analysis appeared to confirm the presence of customs, practices and belief structures among New Mexico Hispanos consistent with a historical evolution of these traditions from earlier generations. Seth also recognized influences on crypto-Jewish culture from other sources, i.e. Protestantism, Catholicism, Ashkenazi Judaism, and general Anglo-American culture.

Seth has been a mainstay of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies since he presented his first paper to the organization in Albuquerque in 1995. Since then he has participated regularly in our conferences, and has served on the program committee for the past nine years, and as chair in 2003.

He is leaving his position as Director of Research of the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), having accepted the prestigious post of Dean Arts and Humanities at the University of Durham (UK).

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which can be read by young readers all by themselves. It is the story of Jacobo who visits his *abuelita* (grandmother) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The book includes a glossary of Spanish and Hebrew words used in the text and it ends with a recipe for Jacobo's favorite *Sopa*. Abuelita makes unleavened tortillas at Easter time, lights two candles on Friday night, lights a candelabrum near Christmas time and has other traditions which Jacobo's Catholic friends don't follow. Soon a Jewish family moves in next door. They have a son Jacobo's age. The boys become friends and soon Jacobo recognizes many of his abuelita's practices in the Jewish home. Questioning

his grandmother eventually brings out the truth of their Jewish heritage.

As with any good children's book, *Abuelita's Secret Matzahs* is amply filled with fine illustrations. In this case the drawings are by SCJS member, Diana Bryer of New Mexico who has shown her artwork at several of our conferences. Her drawings are simple and face each page of text making it easier for very young readers to understand the story.

The acknowledgments following the title page include gratitude to our own Dr. Stanley Hordes, SCJS Board Member, for his reading of the manuscript and expert advice.

If you have children or young teen-agers in your family, think of *Abuelita's Secret Matzahs* as an appropriate, as well as delightful and informative gift for birthdays or holidays.

Book Review

Abuelita's Secret Matzahs

Written by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

Illustrations by Diana Bryer

The pages of *HaLapid* have presented reviews of many books dealing with the history and culture of crypto Jews, some of them quite scholarly, others written in a more popular style, some fiction and some histories. But, until now, the books have been directed towards an adult readership. What a pleasure to find a book written for children.

In researching the culture of crypto Jews in New Mexico and elsewhere, certain themes come up over and over again:

1. Children were not told of their Jewish heritage until reaching their early teen years.
2. Sometimes only one child in a family is chosen to carry on the knowledge.
3. Hispanic families have certain practices that differ from that of their Hispanic neighbors.
4. Parents or grandparents are, at first, reluctant to explain their peculiar practices.

All of these themes are included in *Abuelita's Secret Matzahs* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. A book written on a level that children can understand and

JEANNE



ate a safe place for others like ourselves, who were having the same difficulties we were, "not fitting in." We believed that Judaism was the answer. The messianic arena was not fulfilling for us, nor did we find it much different than Christianity, other than the feasts, wearing *talits*, and keeping Shabbat. We needed and wanted more, but didn't know how to find it. Thus, Bat-Tzion Hebrew Learning Center, Inc. was born. Damon spoke 11 languages and Hebrew was his favorite.

Three months later, he died from cancer. It was most difficult, left alone to journey the road in darkness. I lost seven people in my life in seven months, and my only child was now leaving for college. The morning she left, my little dog of eleven years, who had been with me night and day from the moment of her birth, was run over and killed. However, a year after Damon's death, I had this strong feeling that I was to continue with Bat-Tzion; how I didn't know.

On January 5, 2004, I asked my parents for their blessing. I knew it would affect them when I went public with the learning center. Not only did I get my blessing, but my dad finally admitted that he had known he was Jewish since the age of six. Needless to say, my mother and I were shocked. But shock wasn't the only emotion going through my being. There were anger, joy, confusion and relief, all at the same time. When I asked why hadn't he said anything all the times that I had told them I thought we might be Jewish, he shrugged his shoulders and said "I was raised Catholic," and left the room. Later I found out why. The persecution of Jews had lasted in New Mexico, up until the early 1900's.

I held several conferences at the Learning Center, with the help of my volunteer, Carl Johnson. At these, Bill Radcliffe, one of my mentors, and his friend Ed Madison brought the Torah scroll up the mountain to Ruidoso and assisted us in doing Shabbat services in Hebrew, English, and Spanish. We didn't have the big picture or understanding about what we were doing, but more and more crypto Jews started coming. With hindsight, I see that we were preparing these people for their transition from Christianity to Judaism, the true faith of their forefathers. I held my first Sephardic Anousim conference in August, 2004, with very little advertising, and people showed up from all over: Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas. Some thing was happening.

During Rosh Hashana, I was allowed to parade the Torah. This was followed by a dream of flying to Israel. The following week, I received a call from a gentleman I did not know, who owned a travel company in Israel, asking me to take a fam tour. I was in Israel that next month; it was my first trip and an amazing part of my journey to Judaism. I can't in words explain how at home I felt, how

for the first time in my life I felt like I was where I belong.

In January of this year, I met Rabbi Leon, of Temple in El Paso. He came in March to speak to the anusim studying at Bat-Tzion. Now, several of us are in the process of our returns or conversions. During our beginning conversations Rabbi Leon asked me if I knew what Beresheta meant. When I told I thought it meant soul mate, he said yes, in marriage, although it also means destiny in life. He told me he had been asking Ha Shem if it was his destiny that he work with me. Then he asked what I thought. My response was that, although I may not know much, I *do* know that I will let him lead me in my path, for it's my desire to serve him. A few days later, I learned that his email address uses his initials, which are the same as mine. We also have the same Torah portion, Exodus 33:12, daughters named Rachel and other similar things connecting us. Although the road is difficult, the journey is worth being on when it leads to your destiny. I hope to complete my return some time soon, thanks to Rabbi Leon, who is now assisting so many on the road back home. Isaiah 58:6-14 is what I have lived my life by for 15 years now, it seems to be what my life is all about.

In February, 2005, I called Bennett Greenspan from Family Tree DNA, in Houston, inviting him to speak at my second annual Sefardic conference in El Paso. He said he would put it on his calendar, then asked if my dad and brother would be willing to take the DNA test. They agreed. When the test came back with our genes pointing to Ashkenazi Levites, it confirmed what I had felt for so long.

I also asked Stan Hordes to help me research my last name. I received the results of the DNA tests and the research on my name the very same day. It is found among Moroccan Jews, and was a prominent Jewish quarter, Loya, in the province of Navarra Spain, in the middle ages. Two days later, a dear friend gave me a book that is out of print, *The Glass Makers*, about the Jewish skill with glass for 3,000 years. Samuel Kurinsky's research of eight years helped confirm that glass making is in my very genetics. All my life I have been attracted to glass. My life search came together in a few day's after twenty-seven years of seeking; after years of condescending remarks from others, comments by Christian pastors directing people to "the Mexican lady who thinks she's a Jew", to working with others seeking their roots. Isn't the promise that, if you seek, you shall find? I hope to encourage others to continue their search. It will be worth the work to find the treasure. In this lifetime, I hope to restore to my family what was taken from us by force. Being able to share part of my personal journey at the Sephardic Anousim Conference, in August, in El Paso, was a first public experience for me. This is the first of the many conferences I have coordinated where I asked my self to be a speaker! I hope it will encourage others to search out the truth for themselves.

1 In 2004, I asked a mentor, Danny Ben-Gigi, to help me

with my Hebrew name. It was time. After a few weeks of researching, he found both of my names, written in Hebrew, have the tetragramaton. The message he got in response to prayer is "This woman loves the Torah, and she lives on the mountain." Thus Sinia became my Hebrew name, the female version of Sinai. Only one letter was changed.

ANOUSIM CONFERENCE MEETS IN EL PASO

By Arthur Benveniste

Just two weeks after SCJS held its annual conference in Miami Beach, a similar conference convened in El Paso, TX, August 19-21. Titled "The Sephardic Anousim Conference," it was hosted by local Congregation B'nai Zion.

El Paso is a city with a strong crypto-Jewish presence and Rabbi Stephen A. Leon of Congregation B'nai Zion has a long history of working with *anousim*, assisting them in their return to Judaism. Rabbi Leon delivered the keynote address after Friday evening candle lighting and a Shabbat dinner. His topic: "The Crypto-Jews of the Southwest; How and Why They Are Returning to Judaism." It is a topic with which he is well acquainted.

Las Cruces, NM Writer Denise Chavez spoke about her family's *anousim* history the following afternoon. Later in the day, Sonya Loya, in her presentation, "My Personal Journey," told how she discovered her Jewish heritage and about her return to Judaism. Her inspiring story can be found beginning on page one of this issue. We came to know Sonya and Rabbi Leon at our conference in Miami Beach, which they attended, and we look forward to working with them in future SCJS events. Sonya is now Director of the Bat-Tziyon Hebrew Learning Center in Ruidoso, NM.

On Saturday evening Seudah Shlesheet and several others, who have returned to Judaism or are in the process of doing so, took part in a panel discussion. This was followed by *Havdalah* and a musical program featuring Cantor Marc Philippe and New Mexico singer and composer Consuelo Luz.

On Sunday morning, Bennett Greenspan of Family Tree DNA presented a paper entitled "The Anousim and DNA Testing Today." Greenspan has spoken on the topic at previous SCJS conferences.

SCJS will hold its annual conference in El Paso in August of 2006, with Sonya and Rabbi Leon are serving as local conference chairs, announces Gloria Trujillo, Society Vice President/Meetings and Conferences. We look forward to seeing them there, accompanied by friends and members of Congregation B'nai Zion, as well as those researching their crypto-Jewish history.

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