



Jottings

Etz Hayyim Synagogue
P.O. Box 251
73100 Hania, Crete, Greece
Tel. +30 28210 86286
E-mail: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org
Web site: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org

Editorial Before the rededication of the Synagogue in 1999, Passover was only celebrated haphazardly by perhaps individual Jews who came to Hania and felt obliged to celebrate the festival. At that time, the Jewish quarter in Hania was definitely deserted and its confines and definition had become blurred in people's memory. It was only in 2000 that we organized a Seder that was performed in memory of the lost community. We had considerable difficulty in finding a Haggadah as the majority of participants in these early Seders were not specifically religiously inclined but on the other hand we wished to link ourselves to a then broken tradition of the recitation of the Haggadah at Pessah. We very early attempted to use the Sephardi Haggadah by Rabbi Mark Angel from New York, however this did not entirely suit our purposes. And it was only in the course of experiment and significance that we eventually felt the need to create our own Haggadah, which nonetheless fits into a tradition of Haggadoth that were not only written in Hania up until the 15th century but also illuminated. Last year we brought out our own Haggadah, which in some respects is a composite as the illustrations were done by Nikos Stavroulakis and the text evolved in the course of the last few years of re-editing and correcting. While not entirely adequate, considering the antiquity of this

community and the Cretan Jews, in some sense it is an ongoing creative communal activity. We find that current events, which decry an enormous insecurity, have to be reflected in the text for there to be a conversation about the serious nature of this festival. Too often a communal Seder can be dissolved by the levity of the evening. In this spirit we should particularly bring to mind the many migrant, homeless people who are just now searching for a home of their own. So, in keeping with the real root of the festival, we ask you to share in the sense of insecurity of this festival itself. It is too often that we as Jews look back through our successes and blessings to a period when these were not known. At the moment we stand with our ancestors in the desert of our lives; with nothing before us but the hope and aspirations of our values. It is in this spirit that I wish to all of you the blessings of a creative Pessah that you will share with us during this festival.

Nikos Stavroulakis

Yom Kippur at Etz Hayyim

One of the highlights of our first holiday to Crete in 2011 was a visit to the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Chania. We had no idea what to expect as all we knew was what we had read in the tourist brochures. However, as soon as we entered through the ancient doorway, adorned with Hebrew lettering above, into a charming little courtyard, we realized that we were in for a very pleasant surprise.

Walking through the courtyard we passed into the actual sanctuary, and lo and behold there before us was a small synagogue lovingly restored to its glory of bygone days. Richly embroidered cushions covered the wooden benches on all sides; there was an ornate ark at one end and opposite it a raised reader's platform. Just outside the sanctuary was a *mikve* (ritual bath) and in the rear courtyard a small cemetery containing the graves of former rabbis of the community.

We were then told the horrific story of the destruction and slaughter of the entire Jewish community of Crete by the Nazis towards the end of the Second World War, and the recent rebuilding of the syna- ... continued on page 3.

Also in this issue:

Festivals and Liturgical Life	2
Yom Kippur at Etz Hayyim (cont.).....	3
Yati Ochi – Why Not?.....	4
Book Presentation / Poetry Reading.....	5
News in Brief.....	6
Gedenkdienst at Etz Hayyim.....	7
General Information / Upcoming Events.....	8



Festivals and Liturgical Life at Etz Hayyim

We had a great number of people who participated in Rosh Hashanah celebrations in fall and a somewhat lesser number who participated in the celebration of Yom Kippur. We were very fortunate to have the continued presence of Lior Asher for Rosh Hashanah and of Gershon Coren for Yom Kippur.

The day after Yom Kippur, we began to erect the Sukkah and decorated it the following days, so that during Sukkoth many friends and visitors could commemorate the festival by eating in the Sukkah. On Erev Sukkoth, Nikos Stavroulakis led Arvith prayers and the blessings were made over the Lulaf and Etrog that had been sent from Athens.

Tu B'Shevat we celebrated by a talk by Stavroulakis on the character of the holiday and particularly its 21st century significance of an ecological feast of potentially some importance. As every year, we shared the traditional dish of Ashure and an assortment of appropriate seasonal fruits.

For Purim, about 25 participants were present when we read the text of the Megilat Esther according to custom.

The spirit of the holiday was taken up in that Roger Yayon and other members of the Havurah, who were in attendance, read the Megilat Esther from various sources in French, Hebrew, Greek and English and we all participated in clapping and stamping our feet at the mention of Haman's name in the course of the reading. We had an overlap of the commitment of *Gedenkdienst* as not only did our current volunteer, Nino Gamsjäger, perform excellently, but last-year's volunteer, Moritz Plattner, joined us for the celebration of Purim.

From the very first time after the rededication of the synagogue in 2000, Ahouva Amar and her two daughters, who have now grown to maturity, have not only participated in the celebration of Purim but also provided sweets. This year, she brought various traditional sweets that are associated with the body-parts of Haman and these were displayed on a table in the Synagogue proper.

This year, for the upcoming festival of Pessah, we will have our traditional Etz Hayyim Seder and fortunately we have our own Haggadah for the Seder. N.S.



Dish of Ashure, traditionally served at Tu B'Shevat



Sukkah in the Etz Hayyim courtyard

Rosh Hashanah 2015/5776

They came from near (Crete, Athens, Ioannina, Volos) and far (Austria, England, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Israel, Turkey, and the U.S.A.), Jew and non-Jew, first-time visitors, returning visitors, faithful "regulars." The Synagogue was filled beyond capacity; extra chairs had to be brought in from the restaurant across the cul-de-sac. Admittedly, the holiday is not about numbers, in the sense of HOW MANY people participate in the rituals. Still, it was deeply gratifying to see the Synagogue abuzz.

It was reminiscent of the crowds at the Rededication in 1999, at the special Shabbat Services after the fires of 2010 and on other recent and not-so-recent occasions, including the annual Memorial Service in June 2015. It conjured up an image seen in a photo dating back to the Ottoman period when Chania was in its heyday of cultural diversity: throngs of people milling in the street whom photo caption identifies as Jews, Muslims and Christian-Orthodox Greeks. Was this what it was like at



High Holiday services at Etz Hayyim prior to 1944? This year's High Holiday services were led by Director Nikos Stavroulakis assisted by Lior Asher from Israel, who has come to pray and assist at Etz Hayyim for six years. The piercing notes of the Shofar (thank you, Lior) called us back to our innermost selves. A communal meal followed at Ela Restaurant on Odos Kondylakis. The nearly eighty participants filled three long tables. Many, if not most of the dishes served were based on recipes from Nikos Stavroulakis' *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*.

Natalie Ventura



Yom Kippur at Etz Hayyim... continued from page 1.

gogue by Nicholas Stavroulakis who had also founded the Jewish Museum in Athens.

At the end of the tour I prayed *mincha* (the afternoon service), and during a conversation with the tour guide I mentioned that if they ever needed somebody to conduct the high holy days services, I would be honoured to do so.

After returning home to Israel, we indeed received a schedule of the times of services on Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur, but I realised that the very abbreviated times of service were not quite what I was used to so I did not pursue the idea any further. On subsequent holidays in Crete we would always revisit the synagogue and then in August 2015, we met Anja the administrative director of Etz Hayyim. During our conversation with her, she mentioned that over the past couple of years, a young man from Tel Aviv had come over to conduct the services. This year, however, he could only come for Rosh Hashanna. Once again I was shown the time table for Yom Kippur and to my delight it showed that this year, they were indeed planning to have a full roster of services for the day. "I am your man," I said to Anja. After some lengthy soul-searching and a meeting with Nicholas Stavroulakis, because at that time Anja was unable to guarantee a minyan (a quorum of male Jewish attendees), I decided to come back and conduct all the services on Yom Kippur.

At 6:15 pm we entered the synagogue to get ready for the Kol Nidrei service that was scheduled to start at 6:30 pm. There were a few people milling around, and I put on my *tallit* (prayer shawl) in preparation for the service. A



few women came forward to light the candles as is customary before Shabbat and other festivals and then I began the famous chant of Kol Nidrei. During the entire service my back was to the congregation, so I had no idea how many people had actually turned up. You can imagine my absolute delight when turning round at the end of the service, I saw the entire sanctuary was full - standing room only. I thanked everybody for coming, and announced that services would resume the following morning at 9:00 am with afternoon and evening services starting at 5:30pm.

With trepidation I came back in the morning but once again the faithful had returned, and we had a very good turnout all day. There were several memorable incidents during the morning services. During the reading of the *Torah* a young woman asked to be called up to read the blessings. She was so overcome with emotion that not only she but many of the congregation had tears in their eyes. I myself could not stop my tears when reading the special memorial prayer for victims of the Holocaust. I'm sure many people were thinking of the community of Crete which 73 years ago prayed in the very place we were praying now and were then shipped off to their deaths. With the final Neilah service once again the synagogue was full and during the singing of Hatikva following the blowing of the shofar, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. We have never experienced a Yom Kippur as meaningful as this one at Etz Hayyim. There was a strong feeling of community despite everyone being strangers and we want to extend our gratitude to the entire community for helping us feel this way.

Gershon Coren



Yati Oxi - Why not?

Many moons ago I had the privilege to meet the British artist John Craxton at an art exhibition in London in the 1980s. He told me he lived in a beautiful Venetian Ottoman city called Chania in Crete, the island of light, winds and myths. I listen carefully when people recommend an enchanting place in the world, research it and then decide, after studying photographs, if it will be added to my destination list. Thus I saw a photograph of the Venetian harbour and the oldest lighthouse in the world. "I'll go there one day" I promised myself since I had been a Philhellenic since the early 70s loving the people, the language and being interested in the Hellenic Diaspora.

That day came in August 2006. [...] I stayed at Lena's pension in an old Turkish house in Topanas, the Old Town. Most important I discovered the ancient synagogue with its unconventional interfaith community. I am a non-religious curious Jew but something drew me to this intimate atmospheric place of worship with a resident grey cat. The Friday evening service gave me a sense of my lost heritage even though I was not Sephardic. The founder and leader was Nikos Stavroulakis and I was to keep in touch with him on and off over the coming years receiving a Jewish New Year card designed by him every year since 2006. He had resurrected the synagogue twelve years earlier by raising international funds. This revered scholar and historian, half Cretan and half Jewish Turkish had also set up the Jewish museums in Athens and Salonica, I decided this was to be my synagogue and made arrangements to become a benefactor in my Will on my return back to England. I had thought my destiny was to be Salonica "The Jerusalem of the Balkans and City of Refugees", a city with a fascinating history but through a series of mishaps last September, instead of following my calling to Salonica, I rented a studio again in Topanas to improve my basic Greek and to spend Jewish New Year in the synagogue. [...] I have met interesting individuals, not only in Chania and Rethymno but international returning visitors and residents even with links to Israel. The foreign residents

are all here with a past life and a new beginning. The city draws us like a magnet. The life to come is unknown but all I know is that when I see the clear blue skies, the sea, the Venetian and Ottoman architecture surrounding me, the brightness of the day and the warmth of the sun, I feel excited and happy. When I open the front door I have no idea how the day will turn out. I certainly do not feel this back in England. Why not choose to live in a beautiful magical place with a friendly community? Chania is like a big incestuous international village with a synagogue where I feel I am part of the community. [...]

Why was I drawn to the Friday night services at the synagogue? The ambience reminded me of my teenage years back in Liverpool, when I was part of the middle class Jewish community and forced by my parents to go to their beautiful Victorian architecturally renowned Princes Road synagogue where my father was its treasurer. It was known for its wonderful choir and acoustics and even admired by the famous British composer Andrew Lloyd-Webber. The singing in Hebrew was so familiar to me on those Friday nights in the synagogue, stirring past nostalgic memories. [...] Since leaving Liverpool at the age of nineteen all those decades ago, I have always been an outsider traveling the world like the "Wandering Jew" living mainly in Paris and London where there have been no village-like communities. Here in Chania at last I feel a sense of belonging. Carpe Diem!

Jilliana Ranicar-Breese



News from the Etz Hayyim Havurah — We would also love to hear from you.

Our sincere thanks to the local and international members of the Etz Hayyim Havurah who contributed the above texts. We would also love to hear from you. Please contact the synagogue if you would like to contribute an article, share information or ideas.

The next *Jottings* will be published for the High Holidays 5777. Please send contributions by September 1, 2016.



Leaves in the Wind. Memoir of a Sephardi Family — Book Presentation

In November 2015, Joseph (Dozis) Ventura presented his family memoir *Leaves in the Wind*. After a welcome by the Director of the Synagogue, Nicholas Stavroulakis, the host of the evening, Nikos I. Hourdakis, introduced the author and his work. The main presentation of the evening was given by historian Kostis Mamalakis, who characterized the book as follows: “The book *Leaves in the Wind* is a doorway into time. Once we step through that door, Joseph – Dozis Ventura is our guide to the past and introduces us to his family. His family is not stationary, it moves through time, moves from place to place, migrates, lives abroad, repatriates, struggles to survive and spread roots, struggles against war. [...] Joseph – Dozis Ventura establishes that this particular journey to the past will contain [...] the struggle for survival of a Jewish family through time – or, to be more precise – through the turbulence of dramatic events such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, World War I, the Balkan Wars of independence, World War II, the Greek Civil War, and along with all this, ethnic cleansings, expulsions, migrations of populations. [...] It would be interesting to ask why Isosif – Dozis Ventura has decided to break his silence. Why is it necessary for us to break our silence? What’s certain is that to break our silence, we have to have come to terms with our past, and when we speak about our past, we help the next generation to come to terms with its own biographical path. What would we be without our memory?”

Some of these questions were addressed by the author

in his presentation, which also included a series of family photographs illustrating the dozens of names of family members whose stories and fates are described in the book. This was followed by the reading by historian/philologist Nikos Gigourtakis of selected chapters of the book. The reading was accompanied by Sephardi songs exquisitely performed by Elizabeth Verouli. The evening concluded with a series of questions by the audience to the presenters.

A video documenting the book presentation is available online; please contact the Synagogue office for access to the video.

Joseph (Dozis) Ventura is a long-term friend and supporter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue; he is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim which operates the Synagogue. We thank him very much indeed for donating the entire proceeds of the evening to Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

Φύλλα του Ανέμου. Χρονικό μιας Σεφαραδίτικης Οικογένειας
του Ντόζη Βεντούρα Ομάδας Καθηγητές Φυσικής του Πανεπιστημίου Κρήτης

Κυριακή 1 Νοεμβρίου 16 μ.μ. | Συναγωγή Ετζ Χαγίμ

Παρουσίαση του βιβλίου - **Κωστής Μαμαλάκης**, ιστορικός
Διάγραμμα αποσκευασμάτων - **Νίκος Γιγούρτακης**, φιλόλογος, ιστορικός
Συντονιστής - **Νίκος Ι. Χουρδάκης**, δημοσιογράφος, ψυχολόγος
Μουσικά διαλλείματα - **Ελισάβετ Βερούλη**, μουσικός

Υπό την αιγίδα της συναγωγής Ετζ Χαγίμ: Ν. Σταυρούλας, Διευθυντής

**Leaves in the Wind.
Memoir of a Sephardi Family**
By Dozis Ventura Professor Emeritus of Physics at the University of Crete

Sunday, 1 November 2015 16 pm | Etz Hayyim Synagogue

Book Presentation - **Kostas Mamalakis**, historian
Reading - **Nikos Gigourtakis**, historian/philologist
Host - **Nikos I. Hourdakis**, journalist/psychologist
Guitar and voice music - **Elizabeth Verouli**, musician

Under the aegis of Etz Hayyim Synagogue: N. Stavroulakis, Director

Πρόεδρος Συνεδρίου: Νικόλαος Κονδύλης, Χανιά
Τηλ./Τελ.: +30 28210-66260 (Email: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org)

Είσοδος: ελεύθερη (βιωτέες είναι ευπρόσδεκτες)
Admission: free (donations are welcome)

Paul Celan — Poet of the Shoa. His Life and Poetry

In December 2015, Etz Hayyim and the Association of Haniote Philologists invited the general public to an evening about the life and work of Paul Celan, one of the most prominent post-World War II poets in Europe, who was born into a German-speaking Jewish family in the Bukovina (today Ukraine).

The evening was prepared and presented by Giorgos Kartakis, a Haniote philologist, published poet and eminent translator of Paul Celan’s poetry into Greek. During his presentation, Giorgos Kartakis read several of his original translations of Celan’s poems, including the *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue). There were about 45 people in the audience, many of them Haniotes who had never been to Etz Hayyim before.





Etz Hayyim News in Brief

Visit by Israel Ambassador — We were honored by a visit by the new Ambassador of Israel to Greece, Irit Ben-Aba. We were especially impressed by her sensitivity to our situation and the fact that she had done considerable research on our community and our customs and the recent history of the synagogue. We were especially interested in her commitment to the moral and religious support for our community in Hania in the context of the non-Jewish population and municipality in Hania. The visit went beyond normal custom as the director and synagogue staff were hosted for a dinner at the Galini Restaurant.

N.S.

An application (app) for iPhone about Etz Hayyim Synagogue is currently being developed by Ready Labs Inc. in Athens. The funding for the technical implementation and translation into Hebrew was provided by the Canadian Embassy in Athens under the then-Ambassador Robert Peck, whom we would like to particularly thank for his support. The content for the app was prepared by the Etz Hayyim staff and provides an overview about Cretan Jewish history, the history and a virtual tour of Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

In February, **renovation works began** in the interior of the synagogue to repair damage caused by humidity in the historic walls. The interior walls were cleaned of old paint and peeling plaster and will remain like this throughout the summer to allow them to dry. At the beginning of autumn, after the High Holidays, pending the results of another inspection, the walls will be replastered where necessary and water-vapor permeable ("breathable") paint will be applied.

The Etz Hayyim Library catalogue will shortly be in-

cluded in the online catalogue of the Library of the University of Crete in Rethymon. This will make our holdings of more than 4000 volumes available to more prospective users. We would like to thank Manolis Koukourakis (Director, Central Library University of Crete, Rethymno) and his colleague Eleni Koveou for their indispensable help in facilitating this cooperation.



Jennifer Stein Memorial Library, major Ezrath Nashim

2016 marks the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the reconstruction of Etz Hayyim Synagogue. On this occasion, the **exhibition „The Reconstruction of Etz Hayyim Synagogue – 20 Years on“** is currently being prepared. The opening is planned for mid-June 2016.

Two new souvenirs are now available from Etz Hayyim against donation: mugs with Etz Hayyim designs by Nikos Stavroulakis and hand-made kippoth, the latter inspired by crochet skills Mrs. Plattner, mother of our previous *Gedenkdienster* Moritz Plattner. Many thanks!

In July 2016, **three Bar Mitzvahs** are scheduled to take place at Etz Hayyim.



Renovation works, Etz Hayyim interior, February 2016





2015 at Etz Hayyim in Numbers

In 2015, Etz Hayyim Synagogue welcomed **23,409** visitors. There were about **1,000** participants for the Kabbalat Shabbat services throughout the year. About **800** pupils from Cretan and Greek schools as well as students from two universities in the USA visited Etz Hayyim. On 2 October 2015, we welcomed **576** visitors, the highest number of visitors per day. A record number of **121** participants

celebrated the Erev Rosh Hashanah service at Etz Hayyim. For the Hashkabah (Memorial Service) and the Pessah Seder there were about **65** participants each. With the addition of Ashure and Alberto in spring 2015, the synagogue has now **four** cats. We hosted **two** concerts, **two** book presentations, **one** poetry reading and **one** exhibition. **One** Bat Mitzvah and **one** wedding were celebrated.

Gedenkdienst at Etz Hayyim

During the fairly quiet winter in Hania, there was a lot of time to think about which projects could be outlined and implemented during the upcoming season. Several events took place and some projects pertaining to memorial culture were started and gave me the chance to contribute several of my own ideas:

Since the winter we have worked on an exhibition which will commemorate the time when Nikos started to restore the Synagogue 20 years ago. Talking with him extensively about the exhibition, while going over photographs and sketches from the time of the renovation, and working with him closely has contributed a lot to my understanding of Etz Hayyim and its history.

In February I was approached by a historian working for the memorial site at the former Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria who asked if I could help with research based on Greek records to provide biographical information of victims from Crete who perished at Mauthausen during World War II. During research I did with Konstantin Fischer on this topic we learned about a Cretan man, born in Hania, who also died in Mauthausen and happened to be Jewish. I hope that it will be possible to do further research on his personal story and background.

In 2015, Etz Hayyim was the location for two concerts and since I have made friends in Hania whose music would probably fit quite well into the Synagogue, I would like to organise a few concerts in the coming months because it would be a pity to not take advantage of the great acoustics inside the Synagogue. Furthermore, as most postcards, which are available at the moment, still depict the Synagogue around the year 2000, I would like to start a new postcard collection, including not only the interior of the Synagogue and the holiday festivities, but also our four gorgeous cats.

Over Christmas I was back in Vienna not only to see my family but also to participate in the annual seminar during which the next *Gedenkdiener*s for the coming year are selected. Coincidentally, the name of the *Gedenkdiener* who will come to Hania in August this year is Daniel – just like the youngest son of Etz Hayyim's caretaker Beznik. (Incidentally, the Synagogue is almost a kind of kindergarten for little four-year old Daniel as he visits us several times a day, helps set up the Synagogue for visitors in the morning, waters the plants in the garden, loves eating Matzah with Tzatziki etc.) Another *Gedenkdiener* with the same name as that of a son of Etz Hayyim's caretaker Beznik almost continues a tradition ... as my name (Nino) is identical with that of Beznik's oldest son. Which means next year *Gedenkdienst* will have to look for an Alvin to complete the series.

On a more serious note, after more than six months at Etz Hayyim, I can fully appreciate that Etz Hayyim has the potential for many projects and a host of innovative ideas in terms of a space for artists, historical studies and educational work. Partly this is becoming reality, mainly due to the effort of Anja who is – besides the *Gedenkdiener* – the only full-time employee at Etz Hayyim. But without additional personnel who could help with day-to-day work and the necessary funds, it is difficult to realize all these projects and use the full potential of a place that is of such historical and cultural value as Etz Hayyim.

Nino Gamsjäger

From previous *Gedenkdiener* Moritz Plattner

After returning to Vienna, I followed my original plan and started studying Political Science. Since it is not a too demanding subject at the university of Vienna, I was able to simultaneously get my degree as a skiing teacher, and for



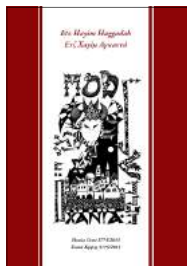
the whole month of February I stayed in my grandmother's village, Schlading, teaching children how to ski. Back to Vienna, I returned to my studies and moved into my own flat.

At the end of March I visited Crete, toured around the island and attended the services for Purim at Etz Hayyim. It was very nice to meet the community again and experience the atmosphere of the Synagogue.

In these past few months since my return, my life has changed quite a bit and I feel that I have to ask myself what I want to do in the future, but I am positive that the values and ideas that I got from my time at Etz Hayyim will help me greatly in finding an answer to these questions.

Still available: *The Etz Hayyim Haggadah*

66 pages + cover | cover four-colour | inside b/w | glued bound | bilingual Greek-English | 16 drawings by Nikos Stavroulakis | price: € 15



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Date for Hashkabah (Memorial Service) 2016

The Hashkabah (Memorial Service) will take place on **14 June 2016**. A public ceremony with representatives of the municipality of Hania and the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KISE) will be held at the monument for the Cretan Jewish victims of the Shoa. Following this, there will be a Hashkabah service at Etz Hayyim Synagogue led by Rabbi Gabriel Negrin of Athens.

Calendar for High Holidays 5777/2016

Erev Rosh Hashana, 2 October, 7 pm
Rosh Hashana Morning Service, 3 October, 10 am

Yom Kippur

Kol Nidre, 11 October, 6:30 pm
Yom Kippur Service, 12 October, 9 am
Neilah, 12 October, 6:30 pm

Erev Sukkot, 16 October, 6:30 pm
(Sukkah will be up until 23 October)



Bank Information for Donations

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SWIFT/BIC: PIRBGRAA
Bank: Piraeus Bank (1635), Agia Marina, Hania

We very much appreciate your continued support of our work at Etz Hayyim Synagogue. Donation receipts provided.

Weekly Services at Etz Hayyim

Kabbalat Shabbat Service are held every Friday; service starts at sunset.

Candle lighting times are posted on our website:
<http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/newsandevents>
(click on the relevant dates in the calendar).

Other Holy Days will be announced on our website, per

Synagogue Opening Hours

May to October the synagogue is open to visitors **Monday to Thursday 10 am to 6 pm, Friday 10 to 3 pm**; and again 30 minutes before Kabbalat Shabbat service.

Contact us and stay in touch

Phone: 0030-28210-86286

Email: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org

Web: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org

Facebook: Synagogue Etz Hayyim



Jottings

Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

Director of Etz Hayyim Synagogue
Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis

Co-editors of Jottings
Nino Gamsjäger, Anja Zuckmantel