

The Havurah

Fortunately the most active members of our Havurah arrived shortly before Pesah or on the Eve. It was very much like a family drawing together as some arrived from Israel, others from England, some from Herakleion and those who could not come sent messages or even gifts. Annually our Shmorch Matsos were sent from Israel. Various tasks were assigned — cooking, setting the tables, arranging the texts to be read, translating some and greeting new guests. Our meal was vegetarian kosher and we used traditional Judaeo Greek or Sephardi recipes. Various pots and pans that we use for the Holidays were all suitably dipped in the mikveh including our old Salonika boumwello pan in which these traditional sweets are prepared.

Special thanks must go to: Gaby and Yali Cohen, Konstantine Fisher, Peter and Doris Naylor, Paola Nicotera, Danny and Brouria Peterzell, Giorgio and Papaty Papadopoulos, Amalia and Merav Reul, Angeliki Tsourounaki, Joseph, Natali and Leah Ventoura — and to the staff of the Konaki Restaurant and our many guests for making this a memorable evening. It was saddened only by the news that reached some of us on returning home of the tragedy at Natanya.

Plans are at present afoot for the first Bar Mitzvah to be celebrated at Etz Hayyim Synagogue since at least 1942 — perhaps even earlier. On checking the lists of victims only one child would have been of an age to celebrate his assuming the responsibilities of his maturity as a Jew. We have no way of ascertaining if in fact it occurred. On the 21st June (11th Tammuz) Eddi Moissis will become Bar Mitzvah surrounded by a great gathering of family and friends. His father, Minos Moise is a firm supporter of Etz Hayyim and the decision to come to Hania for the event will see over 150 people arriving from Athens and Larissa (where the family originates).

The officiating rabbi will be Rabbi Isaak Mizan of Athens.

Jottings

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Passover 5762/2002 at Etz Hayyim

Last year we had a somewhat open and experimental Passover as it was the first year that we were in a position to share the Festival in Hania. It was an 'open' Seder insofar as we did not restrict participation. There were inevitably some snags and also there was the arrival of some people — mostly tourists — whom we did not feel that we could turn away. On the basis of what we in the Havurah learned last year we decided that this year we would make the Seder more intimate and to restrict attendance to 60 persons. We also made a decision to conduct the Seder at the Konaki Restaurant (the site of Beth Shalom Synagogue destroyed in WW II).

One special problem that we encountered last year was the matter of a Haggadah. Needless to say the core had to be in Hebrew but at the same time we had a good number of non Jews whom we felt would understand little of what was going on — much less really share in the Festival with us. It was not long after Pesah last year that we began to think seriously about making our own Haggadah. The Summer passed with inevitable distractions and then on the 11th Sept., whatever we were thinking about changed drastically, and not long after was the eruption of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation into what was obviously going to lead to a war. Considering the message of the Haggadah and what Pesah is about we became more and more uncomfortable about the typical somewhat 'jolly' atmosphere that accompanies the recitation as a rule. Pesah is about the making of a nation out of a 'multitude'. It is about weakness, fear, trepidation and lack of will. It is about un-just rule, the

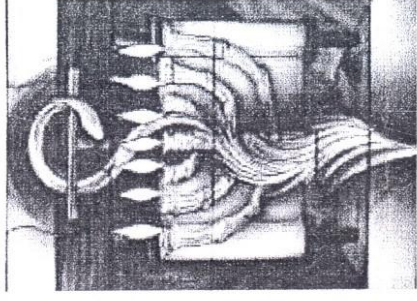
manipulation of the weak and vulnerable who have not the will or the strength to assert an identity or who have in fact lost it. It is chilling to imagine the great mass of people who stood on the edge of the great wilderness of Sinai and saw stretching before them only a vast emptiness. The Haggadah is about 'people making'. What evolved in the course of the next 40 years is recorded in many of our Feasts but what is at the core of all of them is that what formed us into a people again, as Israelites, was the constant remembrance of the core of the Covenant: that we be righteous and just and that we 'love the stranger' as we had also been strangers in a 'foreign land.'

In the face of such thoughts the problem of a suitable Haggadah became even more pernicious and in the end we opted for a middle course.

We chose the traditional Sephardic Haggadah (in the R. Marc Angel translation) and translated and transliterated all of the blessings into Greek. With this we also had a sheet prepared that outlined the Service. A small folio of the drawings and 'meditations' that we had hoped to include in our own Haggadah was also given to each participant.

Certain members of the Havurah were chosen to recite aloud the main dramatic moments in the service and each section was introduced by comments from the Parnas who stressed some of the thoughts mentioned about. He also led the blessings.

On looking back we still have much to learn but next year, hopefully, we will have our own Haggadah and also perhaps find a place more suitable to our needs.



EUROPEAN JEWISH DAY of CULTURE

Etz Hayyim 16th June

The Synagogue has been invited to participate in an active manner in the European Day of Jewish Culture to be held on the 16th June.

The primary goal of this project is to offer to the broader public the possibility to discover the historical heritage and traditions of Judaism.

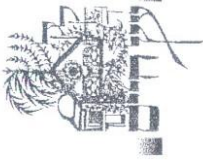
Quite apart from the being devoted to meeting the public, the organizers have the goal to promote and preserve the Jewish heritage, which is an integral part of the cultural European heritage.

The event has been planned and funded by the B'Nei Brith Europe, the European Council of Jewish Communities, the Red de Juderias de Espana and the Tourist Board of Lower Alsace.

At Etz Hayyim we will have an exhibit of facsimiles in colour of 30 important Jewish manuscripts and illuminations dating from the 13th cent. and representative of the depth of Jewish involvement in the arts, sciences and philosophical movements.

The mikveh will have a special exhibit concerning the role of women in Judaism, and the original artwork from our Haggadah illustrations and calligraphy.

During the day music taken from either the Sephardic or Askenazic traditions — into contemporary times will be played in the Synagogue (CDs) and a buffet will be set up with traditional Jewish sweets and drinks in the north courtyard.



Ecumenical Retreat

The Buddha in his first sermon given in the Deer Park at Sarnath to a group of fellow ascetics proclaimed the Middle Path between extremes. The essence of the sermon was very short and became known as the Four Noble Truths which are: there is suffering, there is a cause to suffering, there is a means of escaping suffering and there is the Eightfold Path to accomplish this. The Eightfold path is made up of directives – Right Views, Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection and Right Absorption (meaning to grasp the insubstantiality of life and the 'self'). It was from this Sermon that something that we all share in common became apparent and also became the starting point for our Retreat. Torah is a Path, Jesus said of himself that he was the 'Way' or Path, Muhammad proclaimed that the Qur'an was a 'straight Path' ... all of us on these Paths essentially are in agreement as to the need for a Path and also the signposts that mark it. Posed perhaps in other language, dressed in other verbal garments and accoutrements the values proclaimed by the Buddha, are essentially the same – mercy, love, benevolence, righteousness and justice, compassion and being attentive to the needs of both the sentient as well as non-sentient world. All of these values arise from intense and non egotistic awareness. How we are rooted in them is essentially what determine how we serve God. The manner in which the Mystery of God may be approached formally in prayer and liturgical service is something else altogether and is perhaps more culturally and historically determined that we feel comfortable to admit at times. What we wanted to stay away from was syncretism of any sort. There are serious points of differences between the three children of Abraham and they cannot be skipped over. However, we also wished to insure that there was much food for thought and we avoided religious sentimentalism in which differences were either ignored or treated as irrelevancies. Essentially we wished to insure that there was no attempt to formulate a 'comparative' approach to the three religions and their messages. Each has its own legitimacy with its own integrated system of symbols, myths, images and eschatologies that have proven in the course of centuries to have been the means of access to the inner life – and hence – to our true natures.

It is recorded that towards the end of his life (he lived to be over 80) the Buddha gave another sermon at Vulture Peak. Gathered there were thousands of his monks, nuns and lay followers all eagerly awaiting his teaching. It is said that in the crowd was one of his early disciples as well, a monk called Kashyapa and when the Buddha had taken his seat, and adjusted his saffron robe a great hush fell over the gathering, all waiting to hear his teaching. The Buddha reached down and picked up a flower and held it high with his fingers and looked out over the silent and probably breathless crowd. Out of the enormous crowd of eager people only Kashyapa broke into a smile and the Buddha then spoke into what was probably a slightly stupefied silence. What he said initially – three phrases – are clothed in Buddhist Sanskrit and Pali terminology: 'I have the All Pervading Eye of the True Dharma (Reality), the Secret Heart of Incomparable Nirvana (the extinction of the illusion of a self that is separate from Reality), and the True Aspect of Formless Form (the only true 'self' is that which has no form and can assume all forms). He ended by saying 'It does not rely on letters and is transmitted outside the scriptures. I now pass it on to Mahakashyapa.'

Six theologians could sit and debate for hours on the comparative worth of doctrines, dogmas and practice without ever reaching an agreement. In fact history has indicated on innumerable occasions that such debates, either formal or even informal, end up in serious and contradictory dysfunctional behavior patterns such as witch hunts, burnings at the stake, ostracism, and excommunication.

Imagine the Holy Office, the Shas leadership in Israel or the Taliban mullahs sitting down together as fellow-seekers on the Path. How far would they lead us essentially? Would we even find what they had to say relevant any longer? But if it happened that the Baal Shem Tov, Moses Cordovero, al-Chazali and Meister Eckhart and perhaps even Zen Master Dogen were to sit together such a smile might well flicker over their faces even prior to being introduced. Their paths may well have been quite different but they are all companions on the greater Path that leads to true knowing of our selves, our place in nature and our search for the Hidden God. The understanding of Mahakashyapa was

expressed in a smile. What was hidden in his smile? What is hidden in the smile of the Baal Shem Tov? Moses Cordovero, al-Chazali, Meister Eckhart, and Dogen?

Fr. Burrell chose as his examples of the three traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam three quite disparate individuals – Etzi Hillelsum, St Teresa of Avila and Jalal ad-Din Rumi.

All three of these travelers were fired by love in quite different forms and all three found God in their search. What is so extraordinary is that the three of them – a 20th cent. Jew, a 16th cent. Christian and a 13th cent. Muslim all speak of love as it enflamed their lives and enriched our world with a single message. It was this message that Fr. Burrell concentrated on in the course of the evening meetings at Etz Hayyim.

Etzi Hillelsum was born in 1914 in Holland of a Jewish family from Russia. She grew up in a completely secularized atmosphere and studied Law and Russian Literature. At a certain point in her life she studied under a man with whom she fell deeply in love, a love that evolved for both of them into a heroic giving of themselves to others in the final months of the Holocaust. Hillelsum left behind both a Journal as well as letters that were written from Westerbork internment camp prior to her being sent to Auschwitz where she died in 1943.

St. Teresa of Avila was born into a quite wealthy Jewish converso family in Avila in the early 16th cent. Her family apparently took their conversion seriously and at an early age Teresa entered the Carmelite order of nuns and in her middle years was responsible for its revitalization. She was an inveterate traveler going from one Carmelite house to another in order to accomplish the reform but she also was the spiritual director to her sisters as well as a close friend of San Juan de la Cruz the poet and mystic. Her greatest work was the 'Interior Castle' which maps out and delves deeply into the path of love that leads to union with God.

Jalal ad Din Rumi was born early in the 13th cent. in Konya, Turkey. His father had taken up a post there in the university not long after fleeing the Mongol invasions that ravaged sections of Afghanistan and Persia. Rumi was brought up as an intellectual, and at a very early age was given an appointment at the university, married and had before him a life that was destined to be

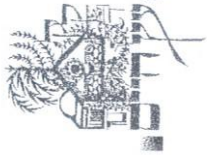
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secure and comfortable. Into this secure and predictable life a dervish named Shams ad Din suddenly disrupted everything. Rumi left his family, his post in the university and left Konya to live with Shams ad Din who became his teacher and who initiated him into the inner life of seeking God through love. Rumi's traumatic transformation led to his ultimate realization of union with the One. From his teachings that are recorded in numerous poems and in the Masnavi (which has been called the Turkish Qur'an), was derived ultimately the order of Whirling Dervishes. At his death thousands of Muslims, Jews and Christians flocked to Konya to pay their respects to the Master or Mevlana.

This first retreat at Etz Hayyim lasted from the 30th December until the 5th of January. Each night we would gather in the synagogue and a written text of the evening's topic was given to each person. It was in turn read and commented on by Fr. Burrell and then time was taken to sit in silence and after that to ask questions and discuss. As some of the participants were not conversant in English translation was given by one of the members of our havurah, Paola Nicotera. The text of this small booklet is a record of the evening talks as they were given by Fr. Burrell and edited in this form by Sister Elena Malitz CSC who was also present for the retreat.

I must mention in closing one very moving incident that occurred in the middle of the retreat when one of our participants, Sister Marie Emma, announced that she had suddenly been posted to Tirana in Albania and was to leave on the following morning. Of French origin she took final vows in the Missionaries of Charity (The Sisters of Mother Teresa) and for some time, along with her superior and other nuns in Hania, often visited Etz Hayyim and participated in many holidays such as Pesah, Hanukah, Shavuoth and Purim. We were all quite numbed by the fact that she had so suddenly to leave and at the end of one evening's session, in the spirit of the retreat, we all prayed a blessing on her for God speed in Hebrew, Arabic and Greek. After a moment pause at the end of the blessing she turned to all of us and very beautifully sang the 'Shema Israel' and then left in silence.

Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis



Abandoned Synagogue -for Bruria

*A Star of David on a rusty grate,
A Hebrew inscription over a gate;
The only signs that mark the place
-This cul-de-sac's dark secret.*

*"Blessed are all who enter here"
You translate, but the gate's chained;
Infernal gates with a lying*

*Inscription
Their destination never reached.*

*Suspicious, avaricious for a tip,
A wizened old lady
Like a beetle from decay
Scuttles up with the key,*

*Admits us to another type of tip
Where chickens scrabble amidst rubble,
Goats bleat from the dark
sanctuary,
Shit piled thick on marbled floors.*

*We clamber over rubbish, fallen
doors,
Through dirty trees whose grimed
leaves
Clamour for the half-light
Into a cave-chamber with mould-
reek;*

*"A mikveh!" you explain: benches
Where women, after bathing, rested;
Step to a choked pool, so ancient-
seeming
Though only fifty years have passed.*

*Biblical scholar, ambiguous
unbeliever,
You interpret inscriptions, explain lost
functions,
Restoring name and meaning to
what is plundered.*

Anonymous,

But as we stand in this meeting-

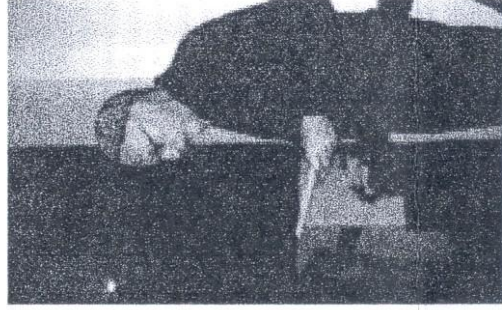
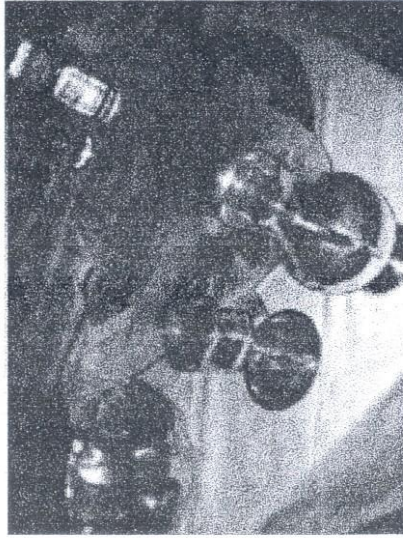
by Cliff Cook

*place
At drizzling day's end
I see your face wearied
By what is not toned for.*

*Such unquiet stillness
My flesh crawls;
Crime imprinted on walls
Like grime on your black clothes.*

Cliff Cook, Hamia

Passover 5762/2002 at Etz Hayyim



TZEDAKA

TO ETZ HAYYIM SYNAGOGUE

Tzedakah is a very important part of Jewish observance and we felt warmly remembered this year through the assistance and support - moral and financial - that we received. Being the year that it is, a year of violence and sadness, this support was deeply appreciated. The Synagogue and our presence is the sole remainder of some 2400 years of Jewish life on this great island and at times one does feel as though an island within an island.

This year especially, we felt the financial 'crunch' as tourism dropped dramatically and following that incidents dictated other priorities. We wish to thank all of you for your continued support of the important work in process at Etz Hayyim.

Noteworthy assistance was recieved from: The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the Sisters of B'Noth Brith in Athens, Mrs. L. Beraha, Lloyd and Margit Cotsen, Joseph and Deirdre Honick, Robert Lifton, and Carol Rosofsky, Dr. Murray Pepper and Vickie Reynolds, Prof. Joseph and Natali Ventoura (Herakleion), Joseph Ventoura (Athens).

Nikos Stavroulakis
Havurath Etz Hayyim



Tu B'Shvat

Tu B'Shvat at

Eitz Hayyim Synagogue Hania.

This is the second year that we have celebrated the festival and we plan to elaborate on it and our experience and to allow it to speak to those who participate in this night with us.

In accordance with a traditional practice amongst some Hassidim we will illuminate the synagogue, the two gardens and the exterior of the Kal with many candles. The grave of R. Hillel Ashkenazi who was a noted hassid, tzaddik and kabbalist of the early 18th century will, as usual, have been white washed and its surface covered with candles. A long table will be set in the center of the synagogue and it will be covered with special fruits, berries, nuts and confections made from them as well as wine. Traditionally two or four cups of wine are consumed during this seder beginning with white and ending with red. Wine has a complex symbolism in Judaism and we will dwell on that during this evening – it symbolizes the inner teachings of the Torah as love, as it says in the Song of Songs 'Drink to drunkenness, O lovers (5:1). Wine also symbolizes the Shechinah or God's presence in all of Reality. Rabbi Mendel Schneersohn once remarked 'when wine goes in the secret comes out.' (Sichot in English, vol.19, p.165). In some ways we are all called upon to be intoxicated by the beauty and joy of this world and wine is in many cases our access to it.

At the beginning will be read a special intention derived from the teachings of R. Avraam Yakov of Sadigir who is recorded as saying, 'when I make this blessing may I become a channel for divine vitality. May a blessing for renewed divine energy flow through me and go out to all inanimate creations and to all of the creatures of the world – plants, animals, and human beings.'

Central to our celebration will be the silent consumption of five fruits that are associated with Eretz Israel – olives, dates, grapes, figs and pome-

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granates – with a special blessing. Following this will be the consumption of a fruit from Israel itself. By derivation our oranges in Crete are Jaffas hence we will use them. It is our custom to precede this by a short teaching about how to approach this holy act of eating the orange which essentially is the way we should proceed to eat all of our food. First to look at it, handle it if possible, smell it and feel its texture in our hands. We should also think of the many persons whose labour has gone into bringing this food to us and we should bless their labour of which we peeled carefully and with thought and attention – its segments taken apart and then consumed thoughtfully and with full awareness of the mystery of the transformation of life.

After this various nuts are eaten along with fruits – especially nuts that have shells and pits and wine is consumed. A selection of special texts will be read while these fruits are consumed. A section from the Torah will be studied at the end of this part of the seder. This year it is perhaps especially relevant that we chose the text that forbids one to cut down the tress of one's enemy even during war.

Since in Hania we do not consume bread at this seder we do not have Grace after the meal but end it with a prayer for fruit trees after smelling an apple and making the blessing: 'Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives a good fragrance to fruits' and this will be followed by this prayer:

"May it be Your will, O Lord our God, and God of our ancestors, that by virtue of eating the fruits, which we have eaten and made blessings over, and by meditating on their mystical and spiritual meanings, may the fruit trees be filled with the strength of Your abundant grace, to grow and to flourish from beginning to the end of the year, for goodness and for blessing, for good life and for peace for us and for all of creation."

Monthly concerts

We continue to have monthly concerts that are organized by Hugh Bryan. They take place on the first Wednesday of the month. We have had very good attendance at these CD concerts and have also, fortunately, been able to alleviate the hardness of our benches in the synagogue by acquiring cushions for everyone! Refreshments are served in the north courtyard after the concerts.

Poetry reading

This month we will begin to have poetry readings in the synagogue.

The first of these has been organized by two members of our Havurah – Mrs. Elizabeth Outram and Mrs. Natali Ventoura and Cliff Cook.



Publication Notice "Passover Folio"

The Havurath Etz Hayyim published for Pesah an interesting folio of drawings by N. Stavroulakis with a text that was written to accompany them as a commentary on Passover issues.

The publication can be obtained through the Synagogue.

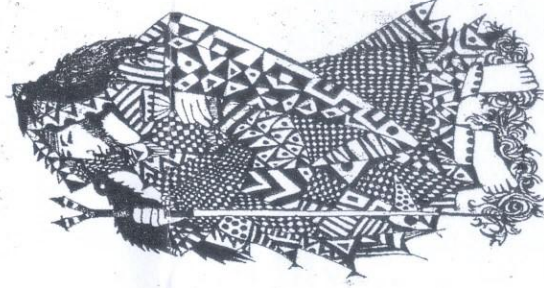
(Two of the drawings have been included here as illustrations).

Cost - \$10.00 plus postage.

All proceeds go to the Synagogue.



Miriam, one of the great prophets of Israel



Eliahu - Elijah or Eliahu ha-Tishbi

WEB SITE and DATA BASE

In the future the web site will be changed more frequently and in addition we are preparing a data base. The latter will evolve as material and time dictate. At the moment we are concentrating on specific subjects such as: a) Bibliography on Cretan Jewry, b) Articles on Cretan-Judaean history, c) Photographs, d) Membership lists, e) Recent events, e) Related material from other Jewish centers in Greece, f) Family trees and lineages of Cretan Jews as well as names and addresses of persons who come from families originating in Crete.

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