

# **Introduction to the Jewish Sephardic World**

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# For Copies of These Slides



# Ladino “Ein Keloheinu”



# There Have Always Been Different Groups of Jews

- **Ancient**
  - **12 Tribes**
  - **Cohen (Priests) & Levites**
  - **Pharisees**
  - **Sadducees**
  - **Essenes**
  - **Zealots**
  - **Nazarenes (1<sup>st</sup> century Christians)**
- **Current Day**
  - **Ashkenazim & Sephardim**
  - **Movements (only Ashkenazic)**
    - **Orthodox (Ultra, Hasidic, Modern)**
    - **Conservative**
    - **Reform**
    - **Reconstructionist**
    - **Others – Renewal**
  - **Origin of the Movements**
    - **The Challenge of Modernity leads to Reform**
    - **Orthodox a response**
    - **Conservative emerges in the US**

# History of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewry

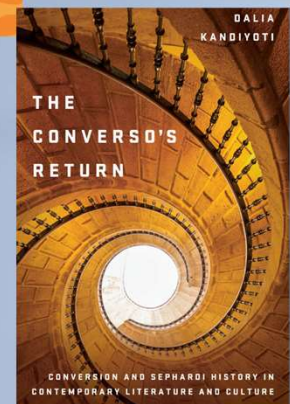
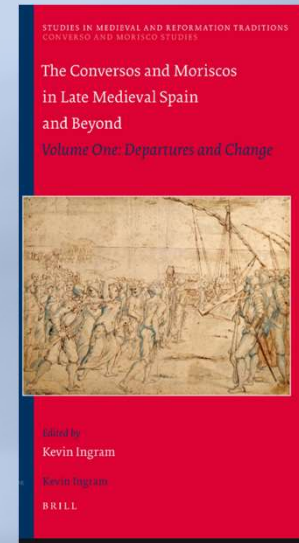
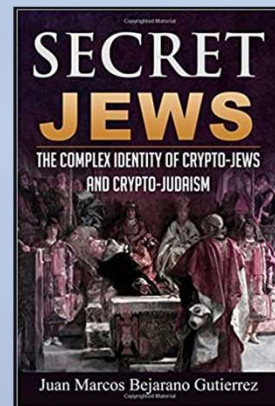
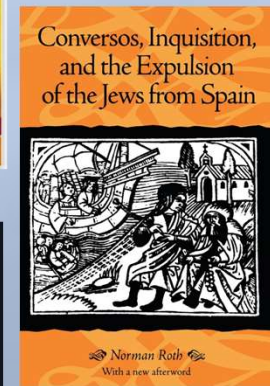
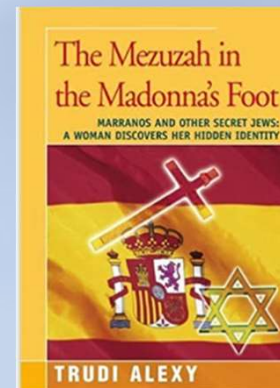
- **586 BCE: The Babylonians destroy the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple and take the Jewish leadership to Babylon**
- **50 years later, the Persian Empire conquers Babylon and allows the Jews to return**
- **Many Jews stay in Babylon – this is the first Diaspora**
- **Next few hundred years; Greek influence leads to Maccabee revolt (Hanukkah)**
- **Hasmoneans invite Rome in to settle dispute and Rome takes over**
- **Revolts against Rome (66 & 135 CE)**
- **Destruction of Temple and Roman persecution of Judaism**
- **Oral Law (*Mishna*) written down in 200 CE**
- **Rabbinic expansion and commentary on the *Mishna* is the *Gemara*. *Gemara* plus *Mishna* = *Talmud***
  - **Jerusalem Talmud in Holy Land compiled under oppression of Romans and Christians**
  - **Babylonian Talmud better edited and more complete.**
    - **Better structure attributed to higher exposure to Greek logic and thought.**
- **Holy Land is ruled (and oppressed) by Romans and Christians**
- **Babylon treats Jews far better allowing independent political and religious leadership.**

# History of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewry

- Jews of the Holy Land associated with Rome and Christians become the Ashkenazim.
- Jews of Babylon associated with the lands of Islam (founded in 7<sup>th</sup> century) become the Mizrachi/Sephardim and dominate Judaism for 1000 years.
  - For most of Jewish history, Sephardic Jews dominate Jewish law and culture
    - Most important legal code, the *Shulchan Aruch*, written by Joseph Caro (c 1500) had Sephardic rules. An addition, the *Mapa* (written by Rabbi Moshe Isserles), contains an Ashkenazic commentary.
    - Kabbalah developed in Sephardic world
- Major seat of Jewish culture in Spain (“the Golden Age”). Jews expelled in 1492
  - 1/3 die, 1/3 convert, 1/3 leave (most to Portugal where they are expelled 5 years later).
  - Inquisition lasts for 400 years. Marranos and Crypto Jews
  - Jews fleeing Spain welcomed into Ottoman Empire and other European nations.
- Initial Jewish settlers of America were all Sephardic. Ashkenazi wave is from late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Currently, Spain is offering citizenship to all Sephardic Jews (Feb. 2014).

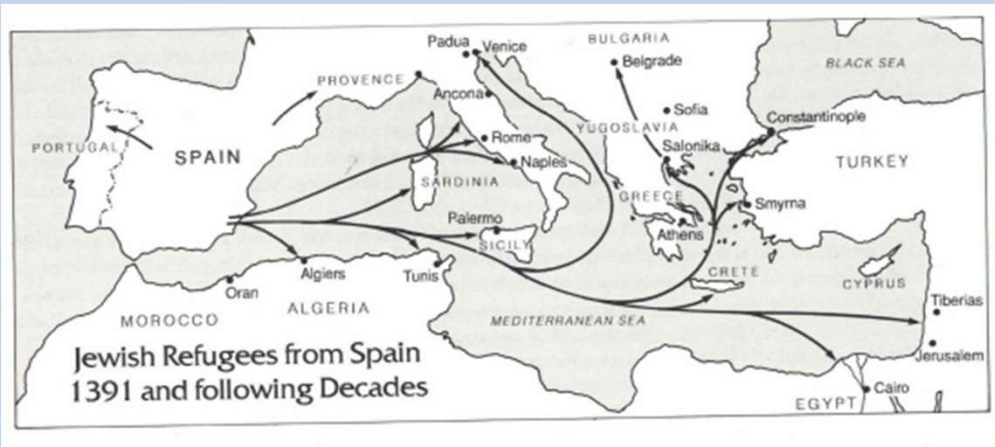
# The Marranos/Conversos

- **Forced Conversion in Spain dates back as far back as 1148**
  - In 14<sup>th</sup> century such Jews are called *Anusim* (Compelled Ones), *Nuevos Christianos* (New Christians), *Conversos* (converts) or *Marranos* (pigs).
  - Some conversions were sincere, many remained secret Jews
  - Riots and massacres begin
- **The Church begins the Inquisition to ferret out these secret Jews in 1480**
- **Suspected Jews' chimneys are watched – even their laundry watched for sabbath observance**
- **Inquisition lasts until early 19<sup>th</sup> century**
  - Estimated total death toll about 5,000
- **To this day, accounts of conversos discovering their Jewish heritage are fascinating.**
- **There is no shortage of books on the subject.**



# Highlights of Sephardic History

- **Pogroms and Expulsions**
  - **Golden Age in Spain ends in 1391 with massacres beginning in Seville.**
    - 1/3 of Jews die or flee, 1/3 convert to Christianity, 1/3 remain Jewish
  - **All Jews expelled in 1492 – choice is “convert, leave or die”**
  - **See maps for dates of subsequent expulsions**





# Traditional Sephardic Dress



Bride & Groom - Bukhara



Woman of Tangier in traditional dress - 1878



At a reception at the King's Palace  
(Sonia's mom is on right)

# Here Comes My Bride



Moroccan Girl – mid 20<sup>th</sup> C

# Broad Characterizations of the Ashkenazim and Sephardim

- **Ashkenazim**
  - **More oppressed over the centuries since there is a theological reason for the Church to keep Jews degraded**
  - **Leads to insularity – Both Jews and Christians forbid all but the necessary interactions**
    - **Ghettos**
    - **Genetic diseases**
  - **Separation from rest of the Jewish world leads to separate customs (discussed below) and more and more strict observance**
  - **Ashkenazic influence explodes as the influence of Western Europe explodes (the Renaissance) and Muslim/Arab influence declines**
  - ***Rashi* (as an example) is the great commentator on the Bible and Talmud. His commentary is detailed, line by line, even word by word.**
  - **Ashkenazi Rabbis develop technique of *Pilpul*, intensive and excruciatingly detailed exposition of arguments.**

# Highlights of Sephardic History

- Sephardim well accepted and even honored in Babylon and in medieval Islam
  - Jews are self-governing as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE
  - Schools at Sura, Nehardea and Pumbeditha lead to authoritative Babylonian Talmud (200-500CE)
  - Muslim laws protect “Peoples of the Book” (Jews and Christians) if they submit to Muslim rule
- Not ghettoized or separate.
- Jews interact greatly within the Muslim world in commerce, literature, philosophy and even theology.
  - Jews typically speak Arabic
  - Muslim development of Arabic grammar leads to development of Hebrew grammar
  - Muslim development of theology leads to development of Jewish theology
  - The concept of God’s omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence enters Judaism through Islam
- *Rambam (Maimonides)* as the classic Sephardic rabbi - both theologian and philosopher
  - Writes in Arabic and Hebrew
  - Commentary is integrative
  - A theologian and philosopher
- *Kabbalah* developed and expanded in the Sephardic world – *Zohar* (key text of *Kabbalah*) written in Spain
- Influence declines with decline of Islam
  - 600 years ago, half the world’s Jews were Sephardic
  - By the time of the Holocaust, less than 10%
  - Today, about one in six Jews are Sephardic for a total of 2.2 million.
  - In Israel, about 50% (1.4 million)

# Sephardic Synagogues

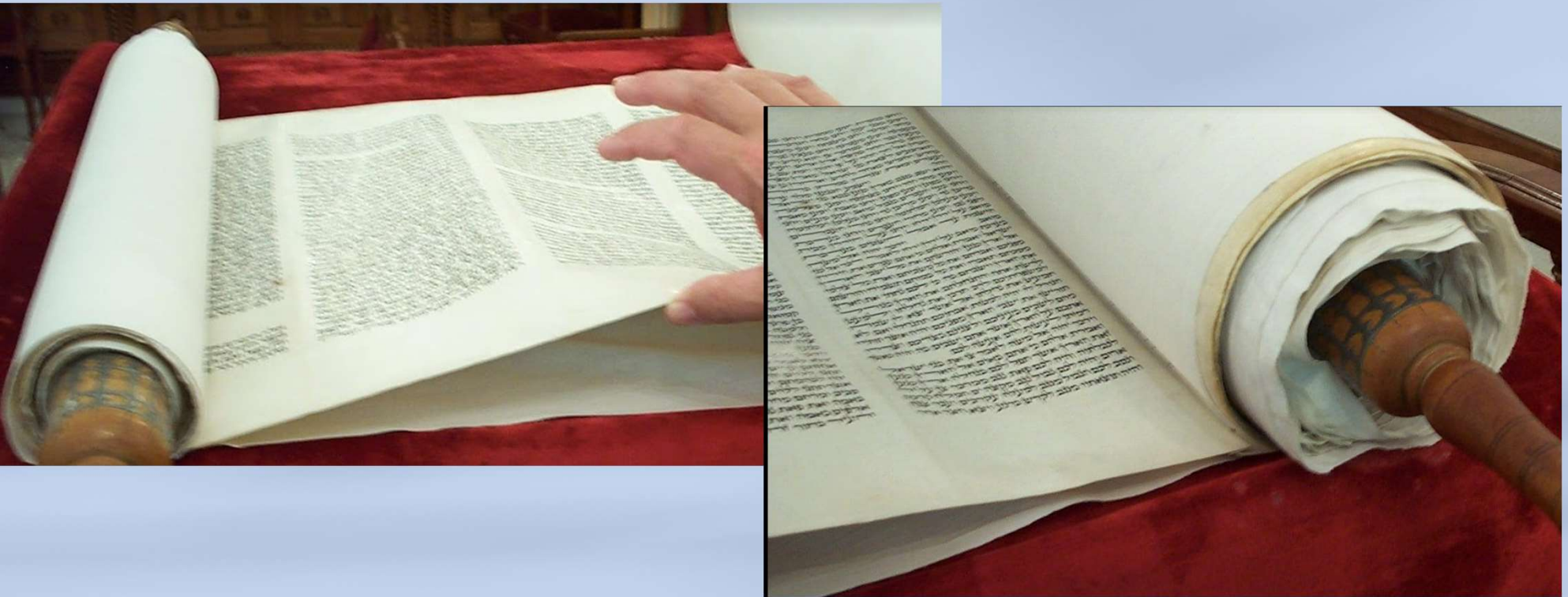


**Magen David Synagogue of Calcutta  
Built 1884**



**Synagogue in Casablanca  
Built by Sonia's Grandfather**

# Torah Scrolls of Morocco



All the Torah scrolls I saw in Morocco had what seemed to be a linen lining.

# On Sephardic Jewry

- **Definitions**

- **Technically. “Sephardic” only refers to Jews of Spanish origin (*Sefarad* means Spain in Hebrew; *Askenaz* means Germany). Ashkenazim are Jews whose traditions derive from Holy Land.**
- **But customs are similar among Jews of Muslim lands (often called *Mizrahi* [Eastern] Jews) so the term Sephardic is generally used to describe all of them. These are Jews whose traditions derive from Babylon.**

- **Distinctions and Differences**

- **Level of observance: Sephardic Jews (and their rabbis) are much more accepting of varying levels of observance. No movements in the Sephardic world.**
  - **The Talmudic concept of “*Dina malchuta dina*,” “the law of the land is the law” is a Sephardic one (it’s in the Babylonian Talmud but not in the Yerushalmi).**
  - **All Jews worship together but may vary widely in their levels of observance.**
- **Pronunciation of Hebrew**
  - ***Shabbat* (S) vs. *Shabbes* (A)**
  - ***Tallit* (S) vs. *Tallis* (A)**
  - ***Amen*: Ah-men (S) vs. O-mein (A)**
  - **Reform and Conservative movements adopt Sephardic pronunciation after the Six Day War as a symbol of unity with Israel.**

# On Sephardic Jewry

- **Pesach customs: *kiniyot* (including rice, corn, peanuts and beans) permitted to Sephardim**
- **Hanukkah foods: *Sufganiot* (jelly doughnuts) vs. *Latkes* (potato pancakes)**
- **Different method of tying *tzitzit***
- **Different prayer books**
- **Different method of wrapping *tefillin***
- **Different wedding customs**
  - **Bride does not circle groom in Sephardic wedding**
  - **Couple wrapped in tallit for Sephardic wedding**
  - **Ashkenazic Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz (960-1028) forbids polygamy. Polygamy still practiced in some Sephardic lands.**
- **Sephardic Jews commonly name their children after living grandparents.**
- **Different styles of Torah calligraphy and Torah cases (Sephardic Torah cases are often wooden or metal rather than cloth)**
- **Food and culture very different – this is why the idea of a “cultural Jew” is a misnomer.**



# Graves of the Saints/*Tzadikim* Revered



The tomb of Rabbi David Ben Barroukh in Taroudant. / Ph. DR



## 80 Shrine of Rabbi Abraham the Miracle Worker.

A 1989 photograph. The shrine of Rabbi Abraham in Azemour, Morocco, is still constantly visited by believers seeking miraculous cures.

Veneration of the tombs of saintly rabbis was always a feature of Jewish religious life in the Maghreb. An example occurred in the 1930s when a crippled youth from Manchester suddenly made a radical and medically inexplicable recovery after visiting the tomb of Ribbi Yahya in Mazagan, accompanied by a friend of the authors. He promptly changed his name to incorporate Yahya in it, thus acknowledging the source of his recovery.

# Graves of the Saints/*Tzadikim* Revered



# After Israel Statehood, Most Misrachi Jews Make Aliyah



## 149 Yemenite immigrants en-route for Israel

In operation 'Magic Carpet' in January 1950, the American Joint Distribution Committee chartered planes to fly the Yemenite Jews from refugee camps in Aden to Israel.

# The Hamsa and Dafina



The *Hamsa* – Protection against the Evil Eye  
Leads to special significance of the number 5



Moroccan *Dafina* – Sephardic answer to *Cholent*

# On Sephardic Jewry

- **Folk languages**
  - **Ladino – a mixture of medieval Spanish and Hebrew in the Sephardic world (see example of Ein K'Eloheinu – Non Komo Muestro Dio)**
  - **Yiddish – a mixture of German and local Eastern European languages and Hebrew among Ashkenazi Jews.**
- **Sephardic culture much more male centered than Ashkenazi – this is due to influence of Islamic culture**

# Some Notable Sephardic Jews

[Hank Azaria](#) (1964-) American actor and known for voicing many characters in the long-running animated series [The Simpsons](#)

[Benjamin N. Cardozo](#) (1870-1938), Supreme Court Justice

[Emmanuelle Chriqui](#) (1975-), Canadian actress

[Benjamin Disraeli](#) (1804-1881), Prime Minister of the [United Kingdom](#)

[Emma Lazarus](#) (1849-1887), U.S. poet, best remembered for her sonnet engraved on the [Statue of Liberty](#)

[Eugene Levy](#) (1946-) Canadian actor

[Paul Marciano](#) (1952-), co-founder of [Guess? Inc.](#)

[Amedeo Modigliani](#) (1884-1920), Italian painter

[Moses Montefiore](#) (1784-1885), British [financier](#) and banker, [activist](#), [philanthropist](#) and [Sheriff of London](#)

[Moses ben Nahman](#) (1194-1270), medieval Jewish scholar and rabbi

[Jerry Orbach](#) (1935-2004), actor best known for roles in [Dirty Dancing](#) and [Law & Order](#)

[Haym Salomon](#) (1740-1785), Polish-born American businessman who helped finance the [American Revolutionary War](#)

[Jerry Seinfeld](#) (1954-), American [stand-up comedian](#) known for playing titular character in TV series [Seinfeld](#)

[Peter Sellers](#) (1925-1980), British comedian and actor; Knight of the Realm (*Richard Henry Sellers*)

[Baruch Spinoza](#) (1632-1677), Dutch philosopher of Sephardic Portuguese origin

[Judah Touro](#) (1775-1854), American businessmen & philanthropist. [Touro College](#) & [Touro Synagogue](#) are named in his honor.

# For Further Reading

- **T. Alexy, *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot: Marranos and Other Secret Jews*, Simon and Shuster, 1993. A popular account of the author's investigation into her roots.**
- **E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History fo the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, UC Press, 2000. A scholarly history.**
- **L. Gubbay and A. Levy, *The Sephardim: Their Glorious Tradition from the Babylonian Exile to the Present Day*, Carnell Limited, 1992. An excellent coffee table book that emphasizes history on a nation by nation basis.**
- **B. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton University Press, 1984.**
- **N. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, Jewish Publication Society, 1979.**

# **Rabbi Lotker's Upcoming Classes**

## **Sponsored by the Federation**

**“Science and Religion: Conflicts Confusion and Clarity” [3 Sessions – Aug. 5, 12, &19 – 7PM]**

Join Rabbi Michael Lotker as he explores the intersection of the worlds of science and religion. We will touch on everything from Quantum Mechanics to Kabbalah and Revelation to Relativity and even Einstein to Rashi. Rabbi Lotker discusses how his religious faith is informed and strengthened by his scientific training and 30 year career as a physicist. He will discuss the evidence for God's existence, the truth of the Bible, the question of how a good and loving God can allow evil and tragedy in the world and the question of why be religious. You don't need to review your Calculus or Aramaic or even bring your slide rules. Just bring an open mind and lots of questions.

**A Taste of Judaism & Jewish Literacy – Late August -December:** After a broad three session “Taste of Judaism,” we will delve deeply into a wide array of Jewish topics. This class is for Jews who want to deepen their knowledge, people interested in conversion to Judaism, and anyone else just interested

**>>> Also – Office Hours Daily From 4-5PM**



# Meet With Rabbi Lotker Via www.lotker.com

## Rabbi Michael Lotker

- Home
- Rabbi Lotker
- Weddings
- Life Cycles & Funerals
- A Christian's Guide
- Classes
- Sermons
- Contact Rabbi Lotker

Welcome to Rabbi Michael Lotker's website. Here, you will find information about Rabbi Lotker, his services and his book, *A Christian's Guide to Judaism*.

On this site you will learn a bit about Rabbi Lotker, be able to contact him, learn about the services he offers, learn about his classes and talks, access class materials, hear some of his sermons, and learn about his book, *A Christian's Guide to Judaism*



### JOIN RABBI LOTKER ON-LINE FOR:

- Office Hours (Schmoozing) Weekdays  
4-5PM Pacific Time
- Classes in the Evening 7-8:30 PM

[>>CLICK HERE TO JOIN CONVERSATION<<](#)

[>>CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS ON CLASSES<<](#)

[Need to Connect With Rabbi Lotker - click here](#)



MICHAEL LOTKER

Rabbi Lotker opens a session at the US House of Representatives.  
[click image to see the blessing]

# An Amazing Story



**Two of Sonia's  
aunts.**

# "Cuando el Rey Nimrod",



**"Cuando el Rey Nimrod", (literally meaning "When King Nimrod"), also known as "Avraham Avinu" - "Abraham Our Father") is a Sephardic Jewish folk song in the Ladino language. It was probably composed in medieval Spain. Following the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 CE, it was carried to countries around the Mediterranean, it became popular with Sephardic communities in Greece, Turkey and Morocco and, consequently developed in slightly different forms in those countries. It tells a story of the birth of the biblical figure, Abraham, although the events described in it bear little relation to the events of Abraham's life, as they are related in the Torah.**