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& DNA

KolHakehila Community Voices

Witnessing their coming home

by Shoshana Tita

On a cold winter night a couple of years ago, I was invited to speak at the inauguration of Spain's first department of Judaic studies. A young taxi driver took me on that 200-mile drive, a journey that ended up marking the beginning of his homecoming to Judaism.

All that Ignacio knew was that he descended from the *anusim*, Jews forced to convert to Catholicism 500 years ago. But he had so many questions to ask me during that long drive to Leida that I knew that it was ultimately for him that I had traveled so far.

Ignacio's story is the same as those of numerous other *anusim* whose souls are crying out to rediscover their roots. So many of those crypto *Judios*, or secret Jews, are longing after five or six generations to find ways to return to their Jewish roots.

Spain and Portugal have a history of fervent Catholicism, but according to a recent genetic study reported in the *American Journal of Human Genetic*, almost a third of the population of the Iberian Peninsula now turns out to have a non-Christian genetic heritage. About 20 percent show Sephardic Jewish ancestry. The forced conversions to Christianity in the 15th and 16th centuries left genetic signatures. That genetic study based on an analysis of Y chromosomes indicates that there was a high level of conversions among Jews.

My friend, Malka Gonzalez Bayo, has just published a fascinating book titled *The Surnames of the Spanish Jews*. Jews undergoing conversions often took surnames from locations or professions to preserve the memory of their origins. In Mallorca, there is an entire group called Chuetas, which means pig in Catalan; its members married only from that group so as not to assimilate.

During World War II, Adolf Hitler sent his emissaries to Mallorca to secure the list of names of those Chuetas. The bishop turned down the request, saying that he would have to turn in himself in that case.

Upon arriving in Spain, I decided to invite as many *anusim* as I could find for Shabbat dinners. It was then that Malka first spoke of the "mutilated memory."

Each one of my guests had a painful story to tell of how he or she felt rejected by both Catholics and Jews alike. Each one had a different tale of a grandmother lighting Friday night candles or separating meat and milk. Some of their families had biblical texts passed on from generation to generation. Above all, what they all had in common are memories and stories from their forefathers that awaken their Jewish soul.

Ironically, during Israel's most recent military operation in Gaza, these

anusim were at the forefront of pro-Israel demonstrations while Spanish Jews have kept a low profile.

This awakening of the descendants of Jews 500 years later has led many to formal conversions. The fractured collective and individual memory is being restored. So many of those disparagingly called *marranos*, or pigs, by the Spanish are looking to reconnect to their heritage. We see that prophecy of the hunger to return to Judaism manifest itself in those *anusim* who are reclaiming their stolen past.

We are taught that all Jewish souls were present on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Torah. For the numerous *anusim* returning to their forefather's religion, the souls are finding a rebirth.

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However, it is also prophesied that the good guys will defeat the minions of evil, and the children of the Gods will live to rebuild Valhalla.

How silly it is to **wade** through a morass of contradictory words in search of a god. My God has no need for written words. Whenever I am on the right path, I **feel His presence**. He smooths the way ahead for me and puts the wind at my back. He bends the trees which wave to me in greeting, while His ravens circle above. My God **speaks** in these ways to me, because I am an Aryan. Black men's gods speak to them in different ways, as do those of Asians. Their gods demand fear. My God demands bravery. I stand before my God. I do not kneel or kow-tow, for my God despises slaves, cowards and weaklings. That is why I receive no message from your Afro-Asiatic deity and that is why your 'paradise' is alien and disgusting to me.

Even the jew-book 'quotes' Yahweh as commanding "Thou shalt have no other gods but me!" Please look up the passage in which Yahweh has a brawl with Dagon, the half-man, half-fish god. If I remember correctly, Yahweh cheats, just as David cheated when he fought Goliath. Using a sling & stone against a swordsmen is as vile as using a pistol. Spare me your jewish god! After reading the jew-book, I feel in need of a hot shower, with plenty of soap.

I prophesy that your intellectual journey is not over. A person who is sedated with opiates wakens eventually and opens his eyes. As one who is still alive, I predict that you can also come to. I welcome you in advance, as a fellow member of The Universe. ORION!

Rabbi's remarks about Holocaust upset Israelis

By Jack Katzenell **7 AUG 00**
The Associated Press **USA TODAY**

JERUSALEM — A prominent rabbi who heads Israel's third biggest political party sparked an uproar in Israel on Sunday for saying that 6 million Jews perished in the Holocaust because they were reincarnations of sinners.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, spiritual leader of the Shas party, also declared that Prime Minister Ehud Barak has "no sense" because he is trying to make peace with the Palestinians, whom Yosef called "snakes."

Yosef was speaking in his weekly Saturday night sermon, which is broadcast over the party's radio stations and is beamed overseas.

He said that the 6 million Holocaust victims "were reincarnations of the souls of sinners, people who transgressed and did all sorts of things that should not be done. They had been reincarnated in order to atone."

All sectors of Jerusalem condemned his remarks.

"His words are liable to harm the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust and are liable to hurt the feelings of their families and the feelings of the entire nation," Barak said.

Helen Kaminsky, whose relatives were buried alive at Babi Yar in Ukraine, where Nazis killed about 100,000 people during World War II, demanded an apology and said she wanted to spit in Yosef's face.

"This senile guy and lowlife, he should step down," Kaminsky, 61, said sobbing. "How could he say such a thing? You don't imagine how many people have been hurt today. They should silence him."

Legislator Yosef Lapid, a Holocaust survivor who heads the secularist Shinui party, said Rabbi Yosef "is in effect confirming what Hitler said, that the Jews are sinners."

Israel's two main radio stations and Holocaust organizations said they were inundated with phone calls and fax messages, most of them criticizing Yosef's statement.

Officials from the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum labeled his remarks "miserable" and said they "seriously harm the



By Menahem Kahana, Agence France-Presse

Ignites furor: Rabbi Ovadia Yosef also called Palestinians "snakes."

memory of the victims."

"It's hard to understand where Rabbi Yosef gets the courage to explain the intentions and ways of the supreme authority," they said.

Shas Chairman Eli Ishai said criticism of the rabbi is unjustified. "Rabbi Ovadia weeps for every Jew who is killed ... but nobody, not even a saint, has not sinned. Everyone dies in a state of sin."

Reincarnation is not a concept central to Jewish thinking, although it appears in the Zohar, the book that is the basis for Jewish mysticism, or cabala.

Yosef, who ordered Shas to quit Barak's coalition as the prime minister left for the recent Camp David summit with the Palestinians, described Arabs as "snakes" interested in murdering Jews, and he said Barak has "no sense."

"What kind of peace is this?" Yosef said. "Will you put them beside us? You are bringing snakes beside us. ... Will we make peace with a snake?"

The Palestinian Information Ministry dismissed Yosef's statements about the Palestinians as "silly" and "fascist." The ministry, which is headed by the senior Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo, called on the Israeli government "to condemn such foolishness."

Shas was opposed to the concessions that Barak offered at Camp David, particularly his proposals to extend limited sovereignty to Palestinians in parts of Jerusalem.