

HISTORY OF SEPHARAD



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The object of every reference of mankind to history, to its own history, lies in its capacity to go beyond the phantoms of the past and into all the positive messages of progress, which represent by themselves a step forward for humanity.

1492 represents a gigantic step in the history of mankind due to the discovery of the New World. It is also the date of an event that will deeply and forever mark the destiny of Spain, since at that date it took the decision of expelling its Jews, which, as John Elliott said, weakened the foundations of Spanish Monarchy at the very beginning of its imperial journey.

Quoting the great Jewish German lyric poetress Else LASKER-SCHULER, "For Jews, the day of the great exodus the world was filled of grief, as if God was dead."

In fact, for Jewish Spaniards SEFARAD was not a country of exile but rather a homeland. A touching paragraph of Cervantes's Quijote, in which an expelled moor expresses his insatiable feeling of desire and nostalgia for Spain, perfectly reflects the Jewish drama:

"Wherever we go, our heart cries for Spain because after all we were born there and we have made of it our natural homeland... Until today I had never understood nor felt the true meaning of the expression: Homeland's love is sweet."

As José Amador de los Ríos, member of the Royal Academy of History, wrote in his masterpiece "History of the Jews of Spain and Portugal:

"It is very difficult to open a book of history of the Iberian Peninsula without finding in the civil, political, religious, scientific or literary fields a memorable name or event relative to the contribution of the Hebrew Nation for the past 2.000 years."

It is in the cultural sphere where the expatriated Jew has left a deep emptiness that has never really been filled. By expelling the Jews, Spain rejected what the greatest Spanish historian, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, called "the mental capacity of the Hispano-Jewish people as well as its predisposition and special talents for entente". Angel Ganivet, tormented spirit and brilliant critic of the Spanish society, justified the lack of interest of Spaniards for the applied sciences at the beginning of the century as a consequence of his country's rejection of "the Semitic race". "In general", he concluded, "we can consider a historic law that whenever the Indo-European race enters in contact with the Semitic race, a vigorous renaissance takes place." It is precisely this renaissance which was mined by the expulsion.

This expulsion represents for us one of the most tragic chapters in our History, and for centuries SEFARAD will remain in our collective memory as the land of Inquisition,

of persecution and of the waves of massacres that shook the entire Peninsula from 1391 and that culminated with the Expulsion Decree of March 31, 1492.

Although we were also expelled by almost every other European country, only very rarely not to say ever, did these expulsions leave in our collective spirit an impact and a memory as deep as the ones created by the commotion of 1492.

This can only be explained by the special intensity of the traditions and legacies that Sephardic Jews carried with them in their journey throughout the Mediterranean, Holland and the New World.

What were the components of this legacy to Mankind ?

The Golden Age of Judaism took place in Spain, coincided with, and was made possible thanks to the splendor of the Caliphate of Moslem Cordova.

Jewish culture was already well rooted in Spain at the beginning of the X Century and counted with the participation of a number of precursors of etymologists and poets such as DUNASH BEN LABRAT, MENAHEM BEN-SARUK and ISAAC IBN CHICATILLA.

The highlights of Jewish culture date from the XI and XII Centuries with works of the tormented poet and philosopher Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, with the masterful author of the

Selihot Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (known as Hasala, writer of the Selihot), with the wandering erudite Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, with the poet of Zion and author of the Cuzari Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, and with the morals philosopher Bahya Ibn Paguda, whose Hovot Halevavot ("Duties of Hearts") had a profound influence in all the subsequent Jewish pious literature. As many other Jewish writers of his generation, Ibn Paguda was largely inspired by non-Jewish sources and adopted ideas from Moslem mysticism and from Arabic neo-platonism. But the thinker of Spanish Judaism, the most prestigious among those that were born and worked in this particular cross-roads of cultures and traditions was, without any doubt, the Cordovan colossus, Rabinic authority, codifier, philosopher and royal doctor, Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (Maimonide). He was the most distinguished character of Judaism in the post-talmudic era and one of the greatest of all times. His influence on the future of Judaism is simply incalculable. His comments on the Mishnah (Mishneh Tora) and his Responsa made of him one of the most important Halakhists. As a philosopher, he was the first to give a solid aristotelian base to medieval Jewish Philosophy.

His "Guide of the Perplexed" is probably the most important philosophic work written by a Jew. As a doctor, he excelled in this art and was an extremely original scientific innovator. Maimonide was the jewel of the crown of Sephardic Judaism under Moslem domination.

The great intellectual Jewish personalities of Spain were also the best synthetisers of the principal scientific systems and traditions. Only by remembering that the Mediterranean civilization of the XII Century was divided between the Greek tradition in the East, the Arabic culture in Spain and the Latin heritage in Europe, can we really appreciate the decisive role played by the Jews of Spain in the unification and synthesis of these great traditions of human civilization.

Already at the beginning of the XII Century, the Christian Toledo was the center of the famous School of Translators, where Rabbi Yehuda Ben Moshe, Shmuel Halevi Abulafia, Rabbi Sag of Toledo and many other Jewish specialists participated in the translation from Arabic to Latin of the great scientific and philosophic works known at the time. The School of Toledo was going to become the birthplace of the Castilian language and many Jews were among its founders.

They were fervent admirers of the newly born roman languages as scientific and social articulation vehicles as well as substitutes for Latin, which they hated for being the Common Language of Christianity.

The Jews of Christian Spain even used the Bible in Castilian language. Thanks to their efforts as first hispanizers of Latin Spain, they became major contributors to the

configuration of the emerging Spanish nationality. We called SEFARAD a Spain that was not even born yet.

The School of Translators of Toledo is an outstanding example of this Golden Age, a fortunate period in which the faithful researchers of monotheistic religions, children in fact of the same God, worked in harmony to provide the world, in a unique and truly exceptional case, with some more light and some more hope in a frame of tolerance.

The origins of Castilian literature are closely linked to the literary works of converted Jews. The influence in the Castilian lyric poetry of the Moral Proverbs of Don Santob has been considered of crucial importance. There are also studies which affirm that the fundamental theme of Spanish literature - "The Tragic Sense of Life of Miguel de Unamuno"- has its real origin in the book of Santob. Also one cannot forget that "La Celestina", the most impressive Spanish literary work after Don Quijote, is unquestionably the oeuvre of a converted Jew, Fernando de Rojas.

However, it is the Astronomy which was going to be, clearly and definitively, the Jewish science in Spain; to the extent that the famous journey of Columbus to the New World in 1492 would have been simply unconceivable without the work previously performed by Jewish astronomers. Yehuda Ben-Moshe Cohen and Isaac Ben Sid created the Alphonsine Tables

on which Galilei would lately base some of his theories. Among all, it is the Crescas family from Mallorca which distinguished itself. It was a family of astronomers and cartographers who elaborated in 1375 the famous "Mapamundi", first world map that included the discoveries made by Marco Polo. Abraham Zacuto, a Jewish Professor of Astronomy at the University of Salamanca, was the advisor of the Catholic Kings that voted favourably for the expedition of Columbus, with whom he maintained a close relationship before his adventure of 1492. Regarding Columbus himself, several prestigious authors such as Salvador de Madariaga and Cecil Roth, proved that the known facts of his life only make sense if he was born in a family of Spanish Jews established in Genoa. His Judaism is palpable in the book of the Prophets, which he wrote. The Spanish nature was going to open unthinkable paths to human civilization, and the Jews of Spain were very largely represented in this impressive venture. Personalities such as the writer Fernando de Rojas and the navigator Columbus are symbols and examples of the considerable spiritual wealth that Spain owes to its Jews, both in the literary and the navigation fields.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the most precious contribution of Sephardic Judaism - from Spain and the whole Mediterranean Diaspora - to Judaic life and to its vision of History, to Divinity and to Destiny, was Jewish mysticism.



Two of its main pillars were Spanish Jews: Rabbi Moshe de Leon, author of the Zohar - probably the most venerated book among some important segments of Spanish Jews -, and Rabbi Isaac Lurie, founder of the Cabalistic School of Safed. Jewish mysticism began in Spain, as a reaction to both philosophic tendencies in Jewish studies and to liberal inclinations among upper class Jews. The sufferings of the exile and the catastrophe of the expulsion itself were presented in an apocalyptic vision of History, of Jewish existence and of the very concept of Salvation.

The collapse of Jewish life in Spain and the subsequent appearance of a worldwide Sephardic Diaspora were undoubtedly linked to the appearance of religious fanaticism in Christian Spain. One of the ways in which the growing spirit of intolerance that led to the expulsion was expressed, were the religious disputes. In the XII Century, these disputes took a new turn which changed their meaning.

Until then, the Augustinian idea that the very existence of a humiliated Jewish Synagogue was a vindictive proof of Christianity, had been dominant. Later, the intention clearly became to convert the Jews, and every mean was licit in this new phase of Judaeo-Christian relationships that culminated with the expulsion of those who wanted to keep their faith intact. This Sephardic Diaspora was not exclusively composed by bankers and major merchants; rather

its backbone was formed by middle and lower classes, by craftsmen, skillful workers and professionals. A member of Venice's Townhall warned his colleagues against the expulsion of the Jews as follows:

"What a pernicious act was to expell the Jews ! Don't you know that you might suffer the consequences for a long period ? Who gave the Turks their strength, and where could they have found the skillful craftsmen to manufacture the cannons, bows, projectiles, swords and shields that allowed them to measure themselves against other powerful nations, if it were not among the Jews expelled by the Kings of Spain?"

By observing the flow of expelled Sephardic Jews entering his Ottoman empire, Bejazet II exclaimed:

"And you call this man, the King of Spain, a politically wise King, he who impoverishes his kingdom to enrich ours? I receive the Jews with open arms."

This is precisely the reason why now that Spain commemorates the trauma of the separation and the expulsion, the Turkish Government will celebrate the Fifth Centenary of the admission of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

Without underestimating the economic consequences of the expulsion, the educated Spaniards were more conscient of the cultural and scientific desolation resulting from the removal of the Jews. At a passionated debate on the Jewish question that took place in the Spanish Parliament in 1869, the great liberal leader Emilio Castelar turned to the audience and

talked about the "Great European Thoughts that shine today worldwide and that could have shined here if our Jews had not been expelled." He was referring to the example of Spinoza "whose parents were Spaniards", but whose glory Spain could not share because of its intolerance. It was also the case, he said, of another distinguished Jew of Spanish origin, Disraeli. "By depriving us of the Jewish presence", he concluded, "you deprived us of an infinity of names that would have made the glory of Spain".

But it is evident that the expulsion did not completely deprive Spain of Jewish presence; although it is possible that it solved the Jewish question, it created the converted question.

At the dawn of the eviction, some departments of the greatest importance in the Administration were in the hands of distinguished converted such as Luis de Santangel, whose influence on the Catholic Kings was decisive in rendering possible Columbus's voyage (he was the first person to whom Columbus wrote about the impressions on his journey). Another one was Gabriel Sanchez, treasurer of the Kingdom of Aragon, whose descendants were going to marry over the next centuries with members of the most important families of Spain's aristocracy. Converted Jews were also present in the cultural life of the country thanks to names such as the writer Fernando de Rojas, the great humanist Luis Vives, the

founders of Spanish Mysticism, Juan de la Cruz and Juan De Avila and the most extraordinary woman of Spanish history, Santa Teresa de Avila. Diego Lainez, second general in the Jesuitic Order, was also of Jewish origin. It was also the case of the philosophers Leon Hebreo, Alfonso de Zamora, Alonso de Madrigal, of the cartographer Nicolas Oliver and of the doctors Villalobos and Cristobal Acosta, to mention just some of them. It is therefore not surprising that the excellent Spanish historian Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz remarked that "Included the King, no one in Spain can affirm with certitude not to have a Jew among his ancestors and this is particularly true as we approach the highest social hierarchies." It is therefore doubtful that the eviction made Spain less Jewish. In addition, there was the problem of the "marranos", Jews converted to Christianity who nevertheless maintained their beliefs and Judaic practices. Professor Yerushalmi from Columbia University presented in a brilliant study the life and works of one distinguished marrano, Isaac Cardoso. Born in Portugal in 1604 in the bosom of a converted family, he was raised in Spain and became doctor of the King Philip IV. Brilliant and respected Spanish intellectual, he was friend of the most outstanding literary personalities of his time such as Calderon, Quevedo and Lope de Vega - in whose memory he later wrote a touching elegy - while leading a secret Jewish life. In 1648, at the summit of his glory, he abandoned the enchantment of Sefarad to lead a full and

open Jewish life in the ghetto of Venice, where he wrote one of the most passionate and eloquent apologies of Judaism, "The Excellencies of the Hebrews". The particular odyssey of Cardoso was also that of several generations of marranos who lived in antagonistic civilizations trying, painfully but very often in an intensely creative manner, to remain faithful to their religious roots.

It is more the preservation of the Sephardic cultural heritage several centuries after the eviction than the unquestionable participation of Spanish Jews in the Mediterranean economic vitality what still astonishes both erudites and seculars. The conservation of the Hispano-Jewish language or "ladino" as the common language of Spanish Jews would have been unconceivable without the deep feelings that the Sephardim maintained towards Spain and without the necessity of maintaining important elements of a common and definitive Sephardic identity.

The Ladino is a pre-Cervantine and pre-Columbine Spanish, the language that the conquerors brought to the New World being exactly the same than the one the Sephardim Jews took with them in exile. It was a reminiscence of Spain and its landscapes, of the flavor of their lives before the catastrophe of the eviction and the dispersion. From Tangier to Salonica, from Curaçao to Monastir and from Alepo to the

ghettos of Spanish Africa, the Hispano-Jewish dialect was practically a common language of the Sephardic community, the language of a nostalgic desire and of the daily communication, but also an expression of a self-defense reaction against assimilation and the integration into other cultures.

The most typical literary creation of Sephardic Judaism was, without any doubt, the "Romancero" or popular romance. Ramon Menendez Pidal who was an expert in this field, categorically stated that in the context of the romanceros the Hispano-Jewish tradition is the most important:

"It is not strange that among all types of romances, the Jewish version improves or completes the versions gathered during the XVI Century when the romance was at its summit." Sephardim Jews perpetuated and even perfected the Hispano-Jewish romancero after being expelled from their beloved Spain, moved by their love to the customs and traditions of their ancestors. The difference between the Christian and the Hispano-Jewish romance is very clear: the first one praises the virtues of cavalry, love and religion. On the other hand, exiled Jews rejected in their version of romance the unpleasant aspects of their lives in Spain. Their romance was the purest expression of their nostalgia for the landscapes they were forced to abandon, a colorful reminder of the daily Jewish life in Sefarad, the evocation of tales and moral

lessons and of the lamentations and elegies pronounced in honor of the dead - they were called bitter chants in Spanish -.

The romancero was the most genuine reflection of the collective personality of Spanish Judaism after the eviction; it was a popular, literary and even religious way of expression, constantly linked to the memory and to the experience of their life in Spain.

Jews left Spain as an exiled community lacking of any economic means, the only real treasure they took with them to their new diaspora consisted in an extraordinary baggage of romances, nostalgic reminders of the lost homeland. Several centuries after the eviction, Sephardim romances were still heard in the Jewish quarters of Salonica, Larissa, Sophia, Bucarest, Sarajevo, Belgrad, Smyrne, Jerusalem, Hebron, Damascus, Alepo, Cairo, Tangier and Alexandria.

In 1634, when the Spanish traveller Domingo de Toral arrived in the city of Alepo, he was surprised to discover hundreds of Jewish houses in which the XVI and XVII Centuries poems of writers such as Lope de Vega and Gongora were as popular as the romances of the XIV and XV Centuries. This fact, as well as many other, testifies that the Sephardim communities continued to be under the influence of Spanish literary creativity well after their expulsion, that they maintained their cultural cohesion through education (Salonica alone had

10.000 students in two Spanish community schools) and that they kept a permanent and fertile contact with the new literary currents in Spain.

Sephardim Jews often adapted the romancero tradition to their spiritual and collective needs and thus preserved this extraordinary literary genre. For example, the poet Israel Nagara wrote his religious hymns to Safed at the end of the XVI Century (Zmirot Israel) in the same style than the Spanish songs, some of which were romances. Even Shabtai Zvi, the false Messiah that shook entire Jewish communities in the Sephardic context, used to mix Spanish profane images with his religious chants to create a considerable effect on his audience. It was evident at the end of the XVII Century that the Jews had enriched the original romances, rending them almost unrecognizable through linguistic innovations and through the introduction of new themes impregnated with the exotic flavor of the new Sephardic diaspora.

This freedom and creative flexibility are indisputable signs of the unbelievable cohesion and of the vitality of the Sephardic popular culture. This vitality was always based on a feeling of singularity, even of superiority towards other non-Sephardim Jews. Among the Jews only the Sephardim grant such big importance to the notion of ethnic purity and they continue to take pride in being "pure Sephardim", an expression that we might even call elitist.



An example of the above is the letter sent by the Sephardic writer Isaac Pinto to the antisemitic French philosopher Voltaire in response to virulent antisemitic comments made by the latter:

"You must make a distinction between the Ashkenazes and the other Jews - Spanish and Portuguese - who have never been mixed to the vulgar class of the other Jacob's sons... Our divorce with our brothers is such that if a Portuguese Jew of the Netherlands or England marries an Ashkenaze woman he will lose all his prerogatives, he will no longer be a member of his synagogue, he will be left aside of the core of the nation".

Jews abandoned a very Judaic Spain but left being very Spanish. And that is the reason why they consider themselves the aristocracy of the Jewish nation. The great Jewish historian Graetz expressed this fact as follows:

"Wherever they went... they took with them the Spanish language, the Spanish dignity and distinction, to Africa, Syria, Palestine, Italy and Flanders. They preserved and cultivated the Spanish manners with so much love that even today their descendants conserve them with great vigour. Far from being absorbed by the majoritary Jewish population of the countries that accepted them with hospitality, the Sephardim, as a privileged race, looked at them with disdain and sometimes even tried to impose their laws. This was due to the fact that Spanish and Portuguese Jews used with purity the languages of their countries of origin (who thanks to the discoveries and conquests were used worldwide). Also they had played a role in literature and therefore, even when they talked with Christians, they could do it on an equal basis, with courage and without fear of servility".

Many innovators and important studies have talked about the great common past of Jews and Spaniards. However, today the challenge is not strictly scientific, despite the evident

existence of a crucial academic dimension. We must challenge our societies to develop the capacity of learning lessons from the past, in order to establish the true meaning of the intellectual devastation which is concomitant with every dangerous exercise of collective fanaticism, and to build from these lessons a new bridge among nations. In order to make this enterprise possible, it is necessary to go beyond the superficiality of many attitudes vis-a-vis the common Hispano-Jewish past. The lack of intellectual honesty as well as a somewhat folkloric approach to the past have too often prevailed.

However, the Jewish dilemma in Spain is contradictory and rich in paradoxes. It is important to notice that Spain is probably one of the few European countries which does not have an important cultural or political rightist antisemitic movement. This is undoubtedly one of the wonders of the current Spanish reality: the fact that 15 years after Franco's death, the extreme right is virtually non-existent in the political life of the country. {{There is simply no lepenism in Spain.}} As a consequence, the anti-Jewish feelings, although largely present in the popular culture, do not have any solid institutional support nor any political future. The Spaniards' anti-Jewish feelings are of normative order, latent but not active, they seem to lack of any real perspective, they are of the indifferent type, just as the

reaction of the so called liberals is indifferent to the anti-semitic comments.

It would be unfair to insist on the importance of the anti-semitic tendencies in Spanish life.

The philosemitism or rather philosephardism is also an important phenomenon of modern Spanish history. This philosephardism is undoubtedly inspired in the memory of a common past and is based on the idea that the Sephardic Jew is an essential part of the Spanish soul, an important part of its cultural baggage. It is this deep, almost innate affinity with Sephardism which explains the frequent and affectionate interventions of Spanish governments in favor of the Jews persecuted in Europe.

The Prime Minister Sagasta even wanted to give the Spanish nationality to the victims of Southern Russia programs in order to avoid their extermination. However, it is clear that the awakening of the Spanish society and its political class to the Jewish Question as well as the formation of a collective guilt feeling for the Jewish Tragedy are very recent phenomena.

It is precisely from the most democratic and liberal currents of Spanish society that, during the last generation, an invitation to a reconciliation of Spain with its Jewish past and even to a repatriation of the Jews has been made. The

liberals of the glorious revolution of 1868 fought for total religious freedom, which would have inevitably brought the renaissance of Jewish life in Spain.

Along this century a great number of voluntary associations have exerted a constant pressure on the consecutive governments to allow the return of the Jews to Spain. The most cultivated Spanish spirits - Perez Galdós, Gumersindo de Azcarate, Rafael Altamira, Manuel Azaña - have always explicitly opposed to the Jewish persecution in the Ottoman empire. The idea of the reconciliation with the Jewish heritage had a very clear university character. The Hebraic Studies Chair was inaugurated under the reign of Alfonso XIII who personally assumed the presidency of the Hispano-Jewish Association, whose objective was the promotion of the fraternity between the two nations.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable that philosephardism in Spain was not confined to the liberal context. It was precisely under the rightist dictatorship of Primo de Rivera that the philosephardism wave reached its summit in the form of a decree of 1924, according to which the Spanish nationality was given to "these persons of Spanish origin ----- being under the protection of our foreign representatives as ----- if they were Spanish". In addition, we cannot forget that at ----- the time when the democratic Europe was tragically indifferent to the fate of the Jews massacred in the nazi

occupied Europe, Franco and his consuls all over the continent saved thousands of Sephardim Jews from the massacre.

Also, it was thanks to the intervention of his brother Nicolas Franco that the first synagogue was opened in Barcelona in 1945, another synagogue being inaugurated four years later in Madrid. Franco personally was responsible of the creation in 1941 of the Arias Montano Institute for Jewish and Sephardim studies, with its prestigious publication, SEFARAD. This Institute became the center of an intense and serious academic work under the direction of prestigious specialists such as Francisco Cantera Burgos, Millas Vallicrosa and Perez Castro. Spain authorized in 1948 the establishment of a section of the World Sephardi Federation, and one year later a Jewish Sephardic Cultural Exposition was inaugurated in Madrid. In 1964 Franco signed the decree by which a Sephardic Museum was created in Toledo. In January 1965, the presidents of the Jewish Communities of Madrid and Barcelona were granted an audience by the Caudillo who, one month later, took the decisive and historic measure of legalizing their status. In 1979, the new Spanish Constitution adopted the religious freedom. By restoring the Jewish organizations and by establishing on January 17 1986 diplomatic relations with Israel, Spain accomplished a historic effort to reduce the abyss of estrangement that

separated it from the Jewish people. The current challenge for Spain in 1992, the almost mythical date of the Fifth Hundred Anniversary of the discovery and of the eviction, consists in going beyond the purely legal and institutional aspects of the reconciliation. Thus 1992 will mark the Fifth Centenary of the sudden interruption of our fifteen centuries of presence in SEFARAD.

Under the effect of fanaticism and intolerance, Jews and Muslims were expelled from the home they had built and lived in.

After five centuries, the wounds of the expulsion have had time to heal, and together, we have been able to prove that the spirit never dies.

We, the International Jewish Committee SEFARAD'92 - Jewish because this spiritual odyssey belongs to the Jewish patrimony, Sephardim and Ashkenazes alike - wish to give a positive version of history, in particular of our own History, in the dawn of the XXI Century. 1992 must not only represent the legitimate reminder of the tragedy we went through, but also the occasion to acknowledge and to make the entire world acknowledge the message of the previous eight centuries: tolerance as a desirable form of civilization for humanity and as a formula of progress in the future of nations.

I will now open a parenthesis because the message we have been sending in the past few months has recently become a matter of present interest. The horrible atrocity that took place a few months ago in Carpentras covers with shame all Europeans, dwellers of a so called border-free, civilized and progressive continent.

Mr. Edgar Bronfman, member of our Committee and President of the World Jewish Council, rightly stated in Wannsee that we cannot forget the Holocaust and the outrages committed by the nazis: "Our forgiveness can only be based on the painful bridge of memory." I must add that this bridge has to be supported by very strict antiracist laws that all European Parliaments will have to elaborate.

Coming back to our message which will start its journey in 1992, although it targets particularly the Spanish society, it is also directed to the worldwide public opinion and stresses the importance of Jewish contribution to the reconstitution of moral, cultural and spiritual values as well as our secular fight against any exercise of collective fanaticism.

This message is about the unbreakable relation between the Past and the Present of the Jewish people, about the strength of Historical Memory which forges the symbiosis between the Jewish People and Culture in capital letters.

The message was presented on April 25 by our Honorary Chairman, Mr. Elie Wiesel, to the King and the Queen of Spain, who personally insisted in presiding the brilliant lecture given by the Nobel Prize winner on the subject: "Judaism and Historical Memory".

During the audience granted after the lecture, the President Mr. Felipe Gonzalez assured us of the unconditional support that his government gives to both our message and our program. With regard to the latter, our International Committee, formed by the main North American and European Jewish Organizations, has created a network of Committees in North and South America, Spain, Israel, Turkey, Morocco, France, Italy, Holland, etc.. These committees in turn are formed by work commissions of which one has to be academic. The existing academic committees already count with distinguished historians, philosophers and researchers whose goal is to look for ways of establishing a cultural and scientific dialogue with their Christian and Moslem colleagues.

{{The president, Mr. Pierre Dray, the Chief Rabbi Sirat and Mr. Jacques Attali will be pleased to give you more information regarding the French Committee and its future activities, which have profoundly interested the intellectuals of this country.}}

I have the pleasure of announcing that this Committee has obtained from the University of Paris the



creation of a Jewish Sephardi Civilization chair for October 1990. This chair will complete the Sephardi Language and Literature course that Professor Haïm Vidal Sephira brilliantly conducts.

Our International Committee is preparing, together with the Washington-based SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, a worldwide itinerant exposition about SEFARAD that in 1992 will be presented in Washington, Seville, Madrid and Jerusalem. In 1993 the exposition will travel to Istanbul, Paris, a Latin American capital and another U.S. major city.

Our Committee, together with the Spanish Government commission for SEFARAD 92, is projecting to re-open the School of Translators of Toledo, where the cultural symbiosis will be possible by establishing corresponding cultural institutes in France, Jerusalem, Fez, Cairo and Istanbul.

The restoration of the old Jewish quarters of Toledo, Gerona and Seville are planned. In the latter, a monument to Tolerance by the sculptor CHILLIDA and a Museum of the Jewish contribution to the discovery of the New World, next to the "Real Alcazar" or Royal Palace, will be erected.

A facsimile of the Alba Bible dating from 1422 will be edited thanks to the Duke of Alba, President of the Friends of Sefarad Foundation and of our European Committee, who has voluntarily and immediately adhered to our message.

A great number of these projects will be carried out with the collaboration of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, for whose Minister Mr. Jorge Semprun we have the greatest of friendships and admirations, and of the Spanish State Commission Sefarad 92, presided by the State Secretary Mr. Luis Yañez.

The "Concord Prize", equivalent to the Peace Nobel Prize in the Latin-American world, was awarded on June 1st to the Sephardim Communities spread all over the world and will be handed in October 1990.

All of Spain will know in 1992 the Jewish Dimension of the Fifth Centenary and tonight I wish that through you, our message will be transmitted just as it has been done in several other countries and that you will participate actively in our Committee.

You know and I know that the journey will be long but I also know, from the bottom of my Jewish roots, that it is an important one and that these words of ISRAEL BAL SHEM TOV will help us every morning to continue: "Forgetfulness leads to exile while remembrance is the secret of Redemption, of our Redemption".

Thank you for your attention.