

THE ART OF KAHAL JOSEPH SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE



A C O M M E N T A R Y ...

Some of the information in this book was written several years ago.

I still feel the thoughts and memories are as relevant today as they were then.

The original booklet did not contain any photographs of the art and therefore this new book further enhances the statements made at that time and enriches the viewing of the art.

Additionally, more art has been added since then which further adds to the value of the booklet.

SAUL E. LEVI
March 2010

**Dear Rabbi, Cantor, Members of the Board, The Congregation, The Sisterhood,
Invited Guests, Beloved Family and Friends,**

The memories of the past are all so bittersweet, yet the passing of time has acted as a monumental bridge; allowing the mind to think clearly, the eye to see what is before it, and the heart to understand what is truly significant in the present, and so, we acknowledge the essence of today's dedication, in everlasting visual tributes.

So many thoughts enter my mind, as I think back to September 22, 1985, the day in which we originally invited the congregation to share with us in the dedication of the six magnificent stained glass windows that have since adorned the west wall of our Synagogue, and we titled them ***The Windows of Life***. On that meaningful day nearly six years ago, both my wife Helen and my mother Matilda were alive, and I remember them both being so filled with emotion, for it seemed that those family members who were memorialized by each of these six windows, and whom we loved so dearly, and missed so much, were somehow brought closer to us by the creation of these windows.

Our feelings on that day were very emotional. As deep as they were, they were also positive. Through the eternal memories of those we held so dear, we also realized how these six windows enhanced and contributed to the beautification of our Synagogue, and for that, we felt a great sense of accomplishment.

The experiences and feelings that were generated on that September day in 1985 provided the inspiration for us to continue this tradition of memorial beautification of the Synagogue, and I later added in Helen's memory, the five windows on the south wall, with words from the ***Song of Songs***.

Today my innermost thoughts and emotions focus once again on the memory of my lovely wife Helen, and my mother Matilda. For those who were privileged to know my mother and Helen, this is a most meaningful and heartfelt day.

The significance of the windows is reaffirmed today in two very special dedications in loving and fitting tribute. This magnificent 100 year old Sefer Torah from India has been completely restored and brought to its original luster, from the decades-old parchment inside to the beautifully carved solid silver case, enriched by silver filigree, is all truly astounding. The inside is crowned in solid gold where Helen's name has now been permanently engraved in gold lettering. May this Sefer be prayed from by our Rabbi and Cantor for many years to come.

In memory of my mother, we had created a companion piece to the six original ***Windows of Life***. This window we have titled the ***Kavannah***, meaning prayer. The hands depicted in this beautiful window are meant to show the various emotions of praying and supplication. My mother was a very religious woman, and we had strong feelings about the appropriate subject matter to memorialize her.

The intention to perpetuate the memory of Helen, my mother, my son Errol and those family members to whom these windows are dedicated is one that goes far beyond our own lifetime. Ultimately, I feel that the spirit of those who have gone before us never die, but continue through our good deeds, and remain forever embedded in our hearts and in our minds.

I now take this moment to gratefully thank a dear friend, Isaac Abraham who resides in London, and was instrumental in gaining access to this magnificent Sefer Torah, and helping me to bring it to Los Angeles.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the support and untiring participation of Rabbi Benzaquen, for his assistance in the creation of these stained glass windows. The Rabbi has encouraged the concept that the beautification of our Synagogue should be a significant goal. In that spirit these beautiful stained glass windows, the ***Tree of Life*** in the lobby, the many Sefer Torahs, the Tebah and other art add to our religious experience and enjoyment. There will be a major renovation of the Errol Levi social hall, lobby and classrooms after this year's High Holiday services, which will continue this beautification process and further contribute to the art of the Kahal Joseph Synagogue, to remain in perpetuity for the many generations of members yet to come.

Today fills me with a vast range of emotions, from sadness to a sense of accomplishment. I realize how much the love, support, understanding and efforts of my family and friends have meant to me while bringing these special tributes to fruition.

I offer a special thank you to my nephew, Ronald Einy, for his continuous inspiration and hands-on efforts from the very onset of ***The Windows of Life***, and his compilation of the literature that has accompanied these dedications. I wish to thank my lovely daughter Michelle, my brother, and my sisters for their participation in the window for our mother, and to Helen's family for their continuous support.

For those of you who have made a special effort to come from afar, to members and friends of our Synagogue, I thank you one and all for sharing this important day with me and my family. Your presence is truly touching and will forever be greatly appreciated.

Thank you all so very much.

SAUL E. LEVI
June, 1991

A TRIBUTE GIVEN

By RABBI ELIAS LEVI Z"l

September 1985

Beauty comes from the Divine force which permeates the world. It represents the altar-stairs that leads to mortal beauty. It is an essential requirement for joy of the spirit. Beauty is a quality that is not possessed but is absorbed by the mind to provide happiness and uplift of spirit. We remember the dictum of the mystics: *"There is no grief in the presence of G-d"* (Zohar Exodus 16.3A).

Religion is sober and serious, and deals with the destiny and salvation of man. It speaks the language of ultimate realities. Art that "quickens the spirit" is borrowed from the world of creation to help man, a dreamy, perplexed and eternally seeking creature to discover the eternal verities.

The Decalogue prohibits the making of graven images. Idolatry through its dissemblance and illusions, weans and seduces man from discovering the truth. It debases and corrupts the spirit.

In Israel the quality of beauty as an instrument of aid in the worship service gave rise to distinctive decorative arts in the Synagogue. Our people utilized the instruments and the inspirations of the fine arts and made an adroit manipulation of sensuous exciting material. The widespread excavations in the Land of Israel during the past century, have revealed Synagogues of the early centuries of the common era, which have mosaic floors with adornments of artistic work.

Especially in the Galilee region, where there was Jewish settlement, the mosaic floors reveal a remarkable blend of colors to give impetus to vivid, exciting contrast to feast the eyes: the white of marble, the black of basalt, and the purple of porphyry. The motifs used were the precious ritual objects in Judaism, the Menorah, the Shofar, the Lulav and Ethrog and the signs of the Zodiac.

The beauty of religious art was used to aid and animate religious worship. Tinnius Rufus, the Roman asked: "Which is more beautiful G-d's work or man's?" Rabbi Akiba replied: *"Unquestionably, man's work; for nature supplies only the raw material, while human skill makes of it works of art and of good taste."* (Midrash Tanhuma Tazria 5.)

The great Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) asserts that the mind needs to relax by contemplating pictures and other beautiful objects." (Shemona Perakim.) The colors, lines, signs, materials and forms of art are all borrowed from the natural world of appearance. In both pattern and form, Synagogue art ceased to be "gifted trifles" and became eloquent expressions of the ultimate values and realities of Judaism.

The Sanctuary is a sacred place that provides the atmosphere of calm grace. Within it the Shekhina becomes palpable. Worship is honor to G-d to the nth degree. When man comes to express the deepest yearnings of his soul in aesthetic surroundings, he can attain the mystic joy of worship, something intense, indescribable, powerful and transcendent.

THE WINDOWS OF LIFE

A Synopsis by SAUL AND HELEN LEVI

September 1985

On April 13th, 1979, at 1:30 p.m. our son Errol was walking toward the Beach at Big Sur, California, when he was struck by an automobile and killed instantly. We thought our world had ended. When we were able to think clearly again, we decided we had to do something special for Errol. He always loved beautiful things, so we thought nothing would have pleased him more than to have us create stained glass windows that could be looked at and enjoyed by everybody.

We scouted around the Los Angeles area and found a studio in Pasadena that specialized in stained glass for churches. However, our Synagogue being strictly Orthodox may not have been able to obtain the flexibility needed from this studio. After all, there are many restrictions in installing stained glass in an Orthodox sanctuary.

In the fall of 1979, we met a young man, Win Hall, who was creating other decorative work in our house, and in a conversation with Win, we found that he had knowledge of stained glass which, at that time, he utilized primarily as a hobby. This really interested us and we eagerly gave him the go-ahead to design several stained and leaded glass panels for our home. The work he did in glass made it immediately clear to us that we had discovered a truly unique talent and a very gifted artist. We were so satisfied with his work that we recommended him to Kahal Joseph to create the three intricate pieces of glass you now see over the Echal which have adorned this Synagogue for several years.

The design of the windows we wanted to create were still eluding us, however, and it seemed difficult to put in actual drawings what our imaginations were creating. We continued to discuss our desires and ideas and really researched this project in several foreign countries including Israel. We brought back books, brochures, pamphlets and became quickly inspired by the lovely windows in Jerusalem created by Marc Chagall. These trips abroad further enhanced our desire to continue working at this goal, and this inspiration put pencil to paper forming the initial drawings of various themes that were to become the basis for these six windows in our Synagogue.

When Rabbi Benzaquen joined our temple, we felt that we had somebody who could devote some time and knowledge of religious themes to work closely with Win Hall, so that Win would stay within the elements of religious understanding. The Rabbi also created the beautiful Hebrew lettering on the glass. Both Rabbi Benzaquen and Rabbi Levi gave us religious parameters with which to work, and their insights were instrumental in the culmination of these windows.

As this project began to materialize, and our creative impetus became even greater, we invited another young artist and designer to be part of our collaborative effort. This young man, Richard DeMars, came to this project with a complete understanding of glass, light and color, and between Win and Richard, a new plateau of creativity was reached that even surpassed our initial expectations.

As you can see, it has taken us many years, from our first conception of our goals to the realization of the scope of such a project; and now as we look upon the permanent installation of these windows, we know that we have reached the fulfillment of our dream.

Though our son Errol was a young man of 26 years of age when he passed away, his goals and direction in life were always well defined. We feel that our goal in creating these remarkable windows parallel and become an extension of the goals Errol had set in his own lifetime.

It is our desire to perpetuate his name and the names of the other wonderful people to whom these windows are dedicated.

We wish to thank the following people who worked with us on this project: Rabbi Levi, Rabbi Benzaquen, Morton Einy, Ronald Einy, our daughter Michelle, and our two artists Win Hall and his family, and Richard DeMars.

May these stained glass windows adorn and shine upon our Synagogue from generation to generation. That is why we named them ***The Windows of Life.***

THE ART OF STAINED GLASS

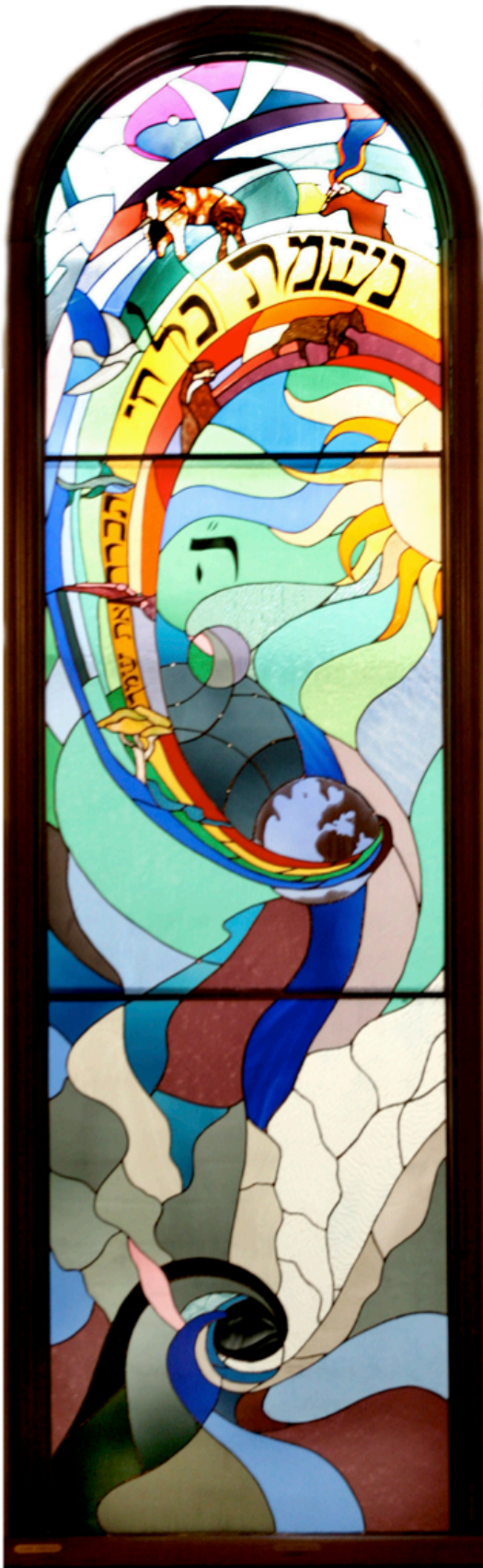
By RONALD EINY

*T*he resplendent art of stained glass is one of stylized grandeur, with an opulent history dating back to the 12th Century. Ultimately a drawing comes alive when translated into glass, where G-d's Light plays its most creative role. Because natural light is unpredictable and its brightness changes from moment to moment it may suddenly transform the shapes, shining more or less strongly through the glass so that form and color depend ultimately on its power, giving the glass its resonant beauty by day, and a wondrous celestial illumination by night. This is not just a question of technique, of the position of the leads, or the scale, for the effect is quite different from a canvas covered with paint which deflects the light rays: on the contrary, the colored areas of glass framed by lead are penetrated by light and density is achieved by creating more or less opaque areas of pure color.

As the vision of the final result becomes more and more focused, the artist gradually makes a complete range of colors with laminated glass, which allows modulation within each single piece. By using literally thousands of pieces of glass created in all parts of the world, the artist excites a once uncompleted mosaic of ideas into a marriage of color, shape and subject all in perfect balance with one another.

The successful collaboration between the artist and each window depends chiefly on interpreting the original colors of each drawing in pieces of glass. But the work does not end there: the role given to the lead is also quite interesting; it is needed of course to join the pieces of colored glass together, but in these ***Windows of Life*** the lead also performs a colissone effect limiting and defining the forms, and is usually arranged in sweeping lines which in large-scale work, carry right across the composition, giving it a curved, ladder-like construction. Sometimes the line of lead follows the sweep of an animal's back, as for instance in the ***Creation*** window; at other times it is used to increase the expressive curve of a figure, as in ***The Chosen*** window. In one window, ***The Cycle of Life***, the lead takes the organic form of a tree. Thus, the ***Kavanah*** window, with its paired hands rising in anguished prayer, splendidly provides the figurative impact and dimensional possibilities subsequently brought to the fore.

The artist brings to these ***Windows of Life*** a lifetime's experience of color relationships, and the art of stained glass has allowed him full reign for his pleasure in color. From the medieval windows at Chartres, to the magnificent Chagall windows in the Synagogue of the Hadassah Medical Center, and now the wondrous ***Windows of Life*** at the Kahal Joseph Synagogue, I can only describe this amazing artistic achievement thus: "The spiritual experience of the Beyond, the transcendental, met with by the artist in the Bible and in his own heart is articulated to perfection in the transparency of this life and of living, all in supreme balance with the translucency of the colors in these brilliantly inspirational and heart-warming panels of many inter-related themes, that make up the ***Windows of Life***, the ***Kavanah*** and the ***Song of Songs***.



WHAT THE WINDOWS OF LIFE DEPICT

By RABBI MOISES BENZAQUEN

WINDOW 1 *THE CREATION*

Dedicated in memory of
ERROL LEVI

From bottom to top: The artist arranged the designing colors and characters following the story of the creation as narrated in the Bible. The colors of the glass became more brilliant and expressive as the days of the creation advance, culminating all the colors of the spectrum.

The Hebrew words inserted in the yellow segment of the rainbow are the familiar words of the beginning of the Shabbat Morning Prayer, *"THE BREATH of EVERY LIVING BEING SHALL BLESS THY NAME, O LORD ... "*



WINDOW 2
THE CHOSEN

Dedicated in memory of
 EZRA KELLY LEVI

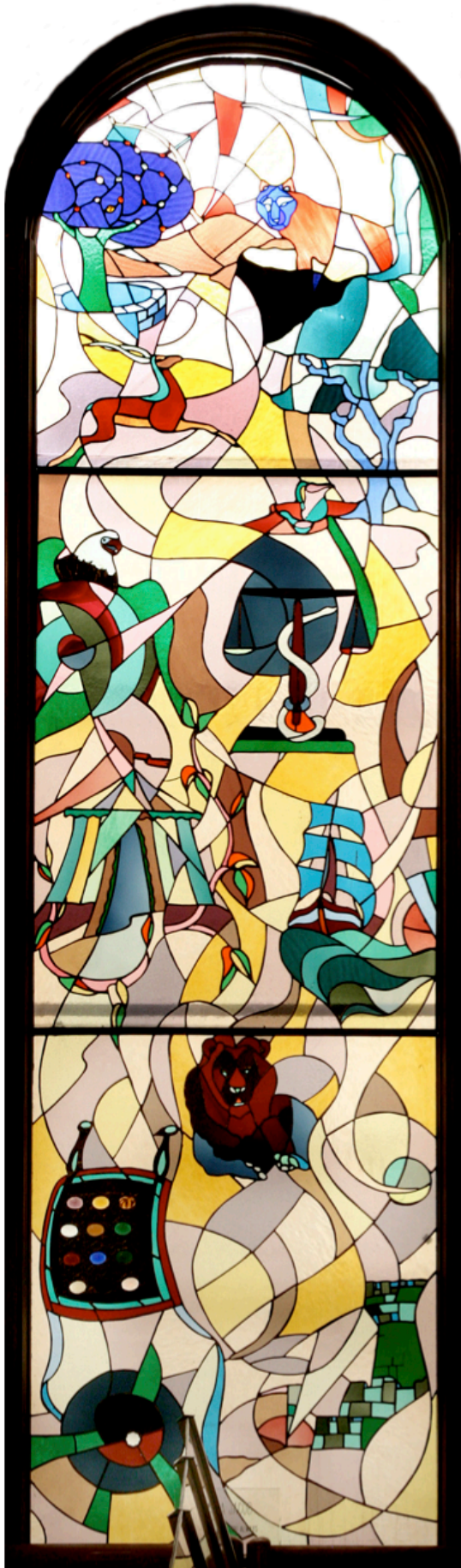
From bottom to top: The artist depicts the burning bush in vibrant colors, as the beginning Israel's redemption from Egypt to the culmination of Israel's birth as a nation.

A rising from the burning bush is depicting their journey through the wilderness; accompanied *"BY DAY WITH A PILLAR OF CLOUD TO LEAD THEM THE WAY AND BY NIGHT IN A PILLAR OF FIRE, TO GIVE THEM LIGHT"* (EX:XIII:21).

Above it, the Ten Commandments as the central focal point.

The lightening bolt symbolizes G-d's writing.

The Ark of the Covenant epitomizes G-d's promise to. Preserve the chosen people forever *"AND LET THEM MAKE ME A SANCTUARY; THAT I MAY DWELL AMONG THEM"* (EX:XXV:8).



WINDOW 3
THE TRIBES

Dedicated in memory of
 MORTON R. EINY

From bottom to top: The twelve tribes of Israel are depicted as narrated in GENESIS: XLIX

Jacob, the last Of the Patriarchs, gathers his twelve children at his deathbed and blesses them. Preceded by the blessing, Jacob gives a brief description of their characters, their shortcomings, their greatness and potentials. The twelve tribes Depicted are:

Reuben	Judah	Joseph
Naphtali	Simeon	Issachar
Benjamin	Gad	Levi
Zebulun	Dan	Asher



From bottom to top: Beginning with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succot, Simchat Torah, Hanukkah, Tubishvat, Purim, Pesach, and closing with the festival of SHAVUOT "The giving of the Torah," all the festivals are arranged in a chronological order.

The endless variety of colors is a living description of the many different facets of each festival throughout the cycle of the Jewish year.



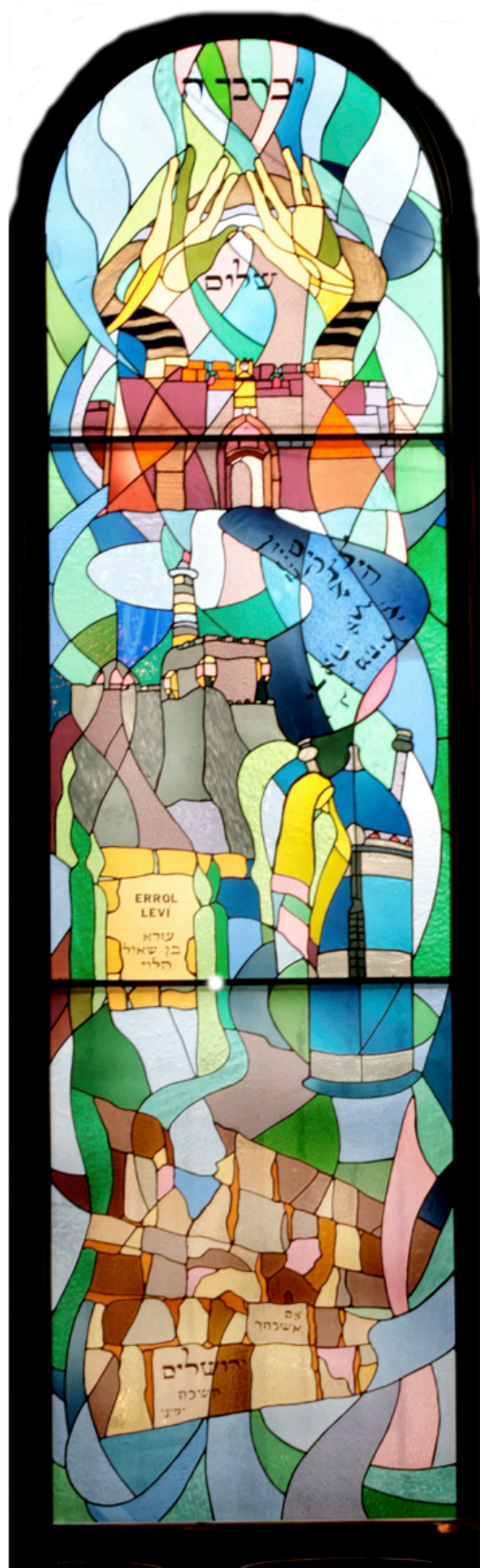
WINDOW 5
CYCLE OF LIFE

**Dedicated in memory of
 JACOB M. JACOB AND ELIZA JACOB**

From bottom to top: From the bottom rises the tree of life fed by the waters of life as vividly described in the first chapter of the book of Psalms. Above it is illustrated the annual cycle of a harvest, symbolic of man's toil, planting and reaping his reward.

The eternal light symbolizes the soul of man which is eternal {*PROVERBS:XX,27, "THE SPIRIT OF MAN IS THE CANDLE OF THE LORD"*}.

The twelve signs of the zodiac, "THE MAZALOT" surrounds the annual cycle.



WINDOW 6 JERUSALEM

Dedicated in memory of
ERROL LEVI

From bottom to top: The Wailing Wall.

Dramatized in vibrant colors are shown various trails symbolizing the journey of the Jewish people from around the world to pray at the remaining Holy site which was once the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

The Hebrew words inscribed in the wall are the Psalmist longing and promise never to forget Jerusalem though living in captivity in the land of Babylon. *"IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM, LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING"* {PSALMS:137.7.

Above the wailing wall is pictured a Sefer Torah presently at Kahal Joseph given in the name of Errol's grandfather EZRA ELIYAHU EZRA HALEVI.

The Tower of David is shown alongside the path that leads to the West Hill Gate, known otherwise as the Lion's gate.

The Hebrew words illustrated upon the path are taken from the book of Psalms, where the Psalmist recounts his deep happiness in standing once more within the sacred precincts. *"THEY GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH. EVERYONE OF THEM APPEAR BEFORE G-D IN ZION"* {PSALMS: 84,8}.

Above it are the hands of the Cohen, through which G-d's blessing to his people from Jerusalem is expressed in one unique word, "SHALOM."

SONG OF SONGS WINDOWS

Dedicated in memory of
HELEN LEVI



The five windows that adorn our upper south wall are inscribed with a verse from the bible ***The Song of Songs***.

The Song of Songs, this highly emotional, seemingly sensuous song is an allegory. As such, a literal translation would be misleading, even false, because it would not convey the meaning intended by King Solomon, the composer.

In this verse, G-d addresses Israel and praises her virtues: "*THE SWEETNESS OF TORAH DROPS FROM YOUR LIPS, LIKE HONEY AND MILK, IT LIES UNDER YOUR TONGUE; YOUR VERY GARMENTS ARE SCENTED WITH PRECEPTS LIKE THE SCENT OF LEBANON*" {SONG OF SONGS CHAP. 4:11}.

The classical structure of these windows were taken from a trip to the palaces of India; the gold rosettes on each window and the large crystal "Star of David" on the center window, were inserted to adorn these ***Song of Songs*** windows.

KAVANAH WINDOW

Dedicated in memory of
MATILDA LEVI



*The **Kavanah Window** is illustrated in dramatic colors. The red symbolizes pure prayer bursting forth from the broken heart, the anguished soul conveying a desperate need propelled by a momentum that finally comes to rest at the point of true thanksgiving to the Almighty. Letters flying upwards are the utterances of the 'A'Nenu' prayer sung by the entire community during Selihoth services of Yom Kippur. The mystics tell us there are twelve "gates" with which to channel our prayers, and the channel of prayers with tears will always be received.*

As we look upwards on the window we notice the changes from red to blue, symbolizing the colors of the heavens. Mystical teachings also state that the color blue is the color of the Shehinah - the glory of G-d.

From top to bottom is the request from G-d to man to secure social justice on earth. The verse is taken from Micah 6:8, *"IT HAS BEEN TOLD TO YOU O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD, AND WHAT THE LORD DOES REQUIRE OF YOU: ONLY TO DO JUSTLY, AND TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR G-D."* This ongoing dialogue between G-d and Israel beginning on Mount Sinai continues to this day to symbolically mark the unbroken bond and covenant between the Almighty and His people - the very reason for our existence.

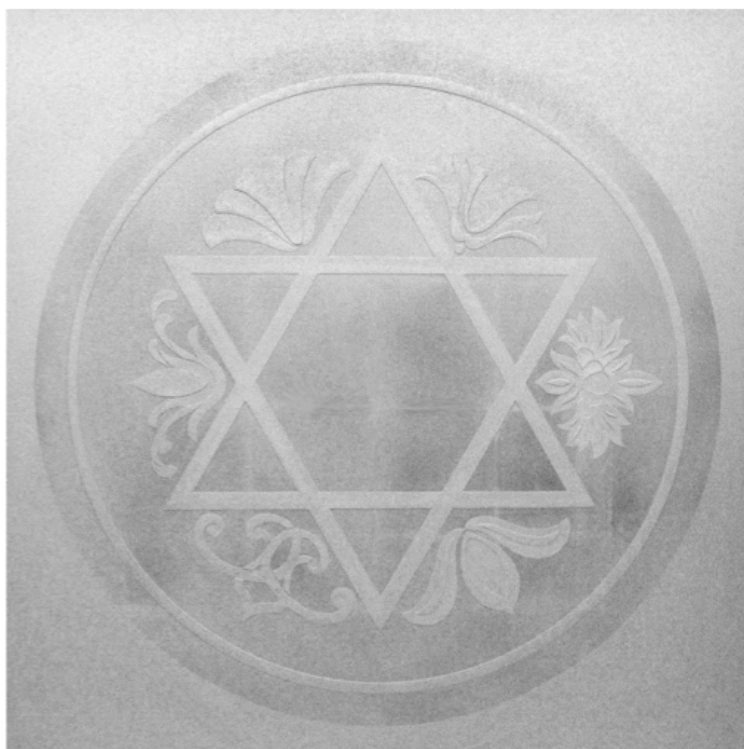
THREE WINDOWS ABOVE THE ECHAL ~ HOLY ARK



The focal object in Jewish worship is the Torah scroll, and ritual art in the Synagogue centers around it. Due to the partial prohibition of plastic arts, Jews found an outlet for their artistic abilities in the Synagogue and in producing beautiful ceremonial objects. .

The beautiful middle window directly above the Echal is called the "SHIVITI," and it's writing is taken from Psalm 67L. "I have set the Lord before me forever." This window of stained glass is electrically lit from the back illuminating its contents of 49 words and 7 verses illustrated in the shape of a Menorah: According to mystical teachings, when a person recites the Psalm and looks through the shape of the Menorah it is considered as if the person himself is lighting the Menorah at the time. "And no harm befalls him throughout the entire day!"

The two windows on each side are the "SHIVITI" adornments. Included on each are the holy verses that come right before the opening of the ark arousing the congregation to stand before the presence of the Torah.



ראש העיר
رئيس البلدية
MAYOR OF JERUSALEM

July 7, 1981

Micha Bar Am is without doubt one of the finest photographers in Israel, whose reputation has reached far beyond the borders of our country. There are no superlatives which adequately describe his talent, his creativity, his initiative and his imagination.

Micha Bar Am has succeeded in a difficult feat: combining eminence in the field of photojournalism - his work is familiar to anyone who reads the major papers of the world - and eminence in other fields of photography - his work has been shown in many museums and galleries.

When one talks of Micha Bar Am, there is great truth to the old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Teddy Kollek

Teddy Kollek

Photographs by Micha Bar Am
Donated by
Michelle, Stan, Jenna & Ethan



SONG OF SONGS

Eight Original Serigraphs By RAPHAEL ABECASSIS

Dedicated in memory of
RABBI ELIAS LEVI



Raphael Abecassis's *Song of Songs* is a multicolored paean to creation. The universe, from green flowerbeds to starry firmaments, is filled with angels, ladders, musical instruments, and Hebrew letters. At the center: a lovely, pure feminine form blends into the shape of a large white dove and the gold-capped domes and walls of Jerusalem. Near her is the King, her lover (traditionally symbol of the Creator and Ruler of the Universe) reaching towards her. Together, they unite the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine. The atmosphere is one of intense and pure joy which appears to rise from blooming fruitful earth to the highest spheres.

In subtly varied compositions, precise calligraphy and freshly, often daringly, natural colors, Abecassis creates works of the finest aesthetic harmony and formal perfection.

To reflect the world of *Song and Songs*, the artist employs symbols: the ladders, angels and doves connecting the upper and lower worlds; the sun, crescent moon and stars representing the cosmos; Menoraot, Hebrew letters and Kabbalistic trees and geometrical patterns, the tradition; pomegranates, palm trees and the stalk of barley, the natural world. The colors, too, are symbolic: white for purity, gold for holiness, blue for the upper spaces of sky and cosmos connecting the

supernatural and natural world, green for the world of plants and red for strong human emotions.

In these exquisitely delicate, musical renderings of the ***Song of Songs***, Abecassis communicates a joyful rising towards the upper spheres in which colors, forms, musical rhythms join in creating a hymn of praise to both creation and the Creator and the union of the two.

Abecassis's works are a synthesis of the natural and the supernatural, the traditional and the modern, the decorative and the mystic.

PAINTING BY BEN YEHUDA

Dedicated in memory of
RONNY ASSIA



IN MEMORY OF
RONNY ASSIA
September 8, 1961 - January 5, 1997

Ben Yehuda was born in Egypt, raised in Switzerland and England. Artistic from an early age, upon his arrival in Israel in 1976, he turned his creative enthusiasm to painting biblical narratives in oils. These innately spiritual paintings reflect an affinity to detail and texture, in swift fields of color and light, an enchanted world of his own.

Ben Yehuda, with a directness and fluency which is quite characteristic of his Semitic ancestry, paints from the heart. He is, in fact, a lyricist in paint, and his pictures have their analogies in poetry. He sees in painting, not a means of interpreting the outer world, but a means of expressing the inner self. That is why he uses the essential types of individualistic art – lyricism and symbolism.

TREE OF LIFE

Dedicated in memory of
HELEN LEVI

*"The Torah is a Tree of Life to them that hold fast to it,
and all who sustain it are happy."*



The words ***Tree of Life*** have a special significance to Jews the world over, for this is the descriptive name our Rabbis attach to the Torah. In a broader sense, Judaism itself is a ***Tree of Life*** to us, nourishing us, sustaining us, giving purpose to our lives.

In the foyer of Kahal Joseph Congregation, a beautiful stylized ***Tree of Life*** provides a focal point for congregants and visitors alike. Opportunity is provided to honor a loved one, to celebrate a happy occasion, to thank those around us for the bountiful pleasures of life. By doing so, we also support the synagogue's role in meeting the needs of Jews in our community. The "major donor stone" underneath the ***Tree of Life*** commemorate special contributions by synagogue members.

The branches of the ***Tree of Life*** abound with leaves, so that the ***Tree of Life*** may blossom and flower before our eyes, serving as an ever-present reminder of the important people and events in our lives. For virtually any occasion, a leaf on the ***Tree of Life*** is an especially significant gift of recognition.

TEBAH

Dedicated in memory of
REVEREND ALBERT FORAJ MORRIS



The significance of the **Tebah**, or Podium, is a Sephardic custom dating back to the Middle Ages. The spectre of prayer strategically placed in the center of the Synagogue was done so that the entire congregation would be able to hear the Rabbi and Cantor, and be equally able to see the Seferim from every angle in the Synagogue during services.

This updated version replicates the **Tebah** at the Mogen David Synagogue in Calcutta, and was created from specially aged woods from mahogany and walnut trees, with a hand polished veneer that took several hundred man hours to create.

There are six pure silver ornaments called **Rimmonim**, that adorn the top of the **Tebah**. These six Rimmonim are each from the 1800's with beautiful carvings, each inlaid with precious stones. These were the six actual Rimmonim used at the Mogen David Synagogue in Calcutta over one hundred years ago. These finials (Rimmonim) are usually placed on top of the staves of the Torah. They are beautifully decorated with bells whose chimes symbolize both the joy of the Torah and the bells which were attached to the robe of the high priest in ancient times.

ELIJAH'S CHAIR

The seats are now arranged – one for the Sandek, the other for Elijah. The baby is first placed on the **Chair of Elijah** by the man designated Kisei Eliyahu, and the Mohel says:

זֶה הַכִּסֵּא שֶׁל אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא, זָכוֹר לְטוֹב.

"This is the throne of Elijah the prophet, who is remembered for good."



At the Brit Milah, a special chair called Kisei Eliyahu ha-Navi, **Chair of Elijah**, is designated for *Elijah the Prophet*. In some communities a regular chair is used and covered with a special cloth embroidered with the name *Elijah the Prophet*. It is customary that the baby is placed on the **Chair of Elijah** at the beginning of the circumcision ceremony, and then on the knees of the Sandek.

NER TAMID ~ ETERNAL LIGHT

"AND THE LORD SPOKE TO MOSES SAYING: 'COMMAND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY BRING TO YOU PURE OLIVE OIL BEATEN FOR THE LIGHT TO CAUSE A LAMP TO BURN CONTINUALLY'" {LEVIT.24:2}.

At the center of the synagogue, is a most beautiful silver and crystal Ner Tamid which originally hung in the Mogen David Synagogue in Calcutta. This permanent memorial light was used by individual families in olden days. The Ner Tamid was originally burnt by oil and water on Friday nights before the Sabbath, and would then burn for seven days. In modern times, the Ner Tamid was adapted to electricity, yet its bulb flickers, giving it the same effect as an oil lamp. The silver chains holding the beautiful crystal bowl are over forty pounds in weight and were hand-wrought nearly eighty years ago.

The ***Ner Tamid ~ Eternal Light*** is a moving symbol of G-d's presence amid His people.



RABBI ELIAS LEVI MEMORIAL LIBRARY

*T*he Rabbi Elias Levi Memorial Library was dedicated on September 7, 1997, in memory of Kahal Joseph's first spiritual leader, Rabbi Elias Levi.

Born in Baghdad in 1910, Rabbi Levi was ordained and graduated from Yeshiva University in New York as a Sephardic Rabbi. He came to Los Angeles in 1966, and held the title of Kahal's Rabbi until his passing in 1987.

The Library was built to house Rabbi Levi's extensive collection of sacred Hebrew texts, studies on Judaica, liturgical and biblical manuscripts, his published articles and lectures, and one of the finest works on Sephardic historical references and literature assembled on the west coast.

The library also contains a collection of Jewish artifacts from India, Burma, Iraq, Israel, Singapore, Tunisia, Ethiopia and many other lands.

A worthy memorial honoring this wonderful person.



PAROKHET ~ CURTAIN

The curtain, **Parokhet** adorning the Torah ark was originally intended as an illusion to the sanctuary, representing the veil which partitioned off the Holy Ark. In many Sephardic congregations, the **Parokhet** is placed behind the doors of the Torah ark, while in Ashkenazi congregations, it is placed in front of the ark door.

The **Parokhets** given to Kahal Joseph by various families in memory of loved ones are made of the finest hand-loomed velvets, silk, chintz, brocaded with lace and tassels, some of which are made using silver and gold thread. Many of the 40 **Parokhets** are embedded with jewels and cut crystals hand sewn to the fabric, giving each curtain its unique quality and complexity. Usually these **Parokhets** are displayed in the synagogue during the Festival of Simchat Torah.



*"And I shall give unto them,
In my house and within my walls
A monument and a memorial ...
An everlasting memorial shall I give them."
(ISAIA 56:5)*

WRITING OF THE SCROLL

The Sefer Torah is normally written by a specialist known as a sofer ("scribe"). The tools and materials used by the scribe are parchment, quill, ink, stylus and ruler, and Tikkun ("guide") - a book with the Torah text. The Torah is written on parchment manufactured from specified sections of the hide of a kosher animal. The hide consists of three layers, but only the flesh side of the inner layer and the outer side of the hairy layer may be used for Torah parchment. The method of cleaning and softening the hide, which must be of the best quality, has changed throughout the centuries. During Talmudic times, salt and barley flour were sprinkled on the skins which were then soaked in the juice of gallnuts. Nowadays the skins are softened by soaking them in clear water for two days after which the hair is removed by soaking the hides in limewater for nine days. Finally, the skins are rinsed and dried and the creases ironed out with presses. The processor must make a verbal declaration when soaking the skins that his action is being performed for the holiness of the Sefer Torah. Whereas reeds were used as pens in the days of the Talmud, quills are used today, the quill of the turkey feather, which is sturdy and long lasting, being preferred. The sofer cuts the point of the feather to give it a flat surface, which is desirable for forming the square letters, and then slits it lengthwise.

The ink must be black, durable, but not indelible. During Talmudic times, viscous ink was made by heating a vessel with the flame of olive oil, and the soot thus produced on the sides of the vessel was scraped off and mixed with oil, honey, and gallnuts. Ink is now made by boiling a mixture of gallnuts, gum arabic, and copper sulfate crystals. Some scribes also add vinegar and alcohol. To ensure that the letters will be straight and the lines equally spaced, 43 thin lines are drawn across the width of the parchment with a stylus and ruler. Two additional longitudinal lines are drawn at the end of the page to ensure that all the lines end equally. To enhance the appearance of the printing on the parchment a four-inch margin is left at the bottom, a three-inch margin at the top, and a two-inch margin between the columns.

Before the sofer begins his daily work, he performs ritual absolution in a mikveh. Before commencing, the scribe tests the feather and ink by writing the name "Amalek" and crossing it out. He then makes the declaration, *"I am writing the Torah in the name of its sanctity and the name of G-d in its sanctity."* The scribe then looks into the tikkun, reads the sentence aloud, and proceeds to write it. Before writing the name of G-d the sofer repeats, *"I am writing the name of G-d for the holiness of His name."*

The Torah is written in the square script known as Ketav Ashuri, of which there are two different types: the Ashkenazi, which resembles the script described in the Talmud, and the Sephardi, which is identical with the printed letters of the Hebrew alphabet currently used in sacred texts. The thickness of the letters varies and it is often necessary for the sofer to make several strokes to form a letter. The scribe holds the feather sideways to make thin flat lines, so that the entire point

writes, to make thick lines. Particular care must be given to those letters that are similar in appearance (e.g., dalet and resh) so that they can be easily distinguished. Each letter must be complete, with the exception of the "split vav" in the word shalom. Although Hebrew is read from right to left each individual letter in the Sefer Torah is written from left to right. There must be a space between the letters, a greater space between the words, and a nine letter gap between the portions. A four line separation is made between each of the Five Books of Moses.

After the copying of the Torah has been completed, the sheets of parchment are sewn together with giddin, a special thread made of tendon tissue taken from the foot muscles of a kosher animal. Every four pages are sewn together to form a section or yeri'ah. These sections of parchment are sewn on the outer side of the parchment with one inch left unsewn both at the very top and bottom. To reinforce the giddin, thin strips of parchment are pasted on the top and bottom of the page. After connecting the sheets the ends are tied to wooden rollers, called azei hayyim, by inserting the giddin in holes in the rollers. The azei hayyim consists of a center pole, with handles of wood and flat circular rollers to support the rolled-up scroll. Besides serving as a means of rolling the scroll, the azei hayyim also prevent people from touching the holy parchment with their hands. In oriental and some Sephardi communities, the flat rollers are not employed since the Torah scrolls are kept in an ornamental or metal case.

DUTY TO POSSESS A SEFER TORAH

It is regarded as a positive biblical commandment for every Jew to possess a Sefer Torah, the word "song" in Deuteronomy 31:19, "now therefore write ye this song for you," being interpreted to apply to the Torah as a whole. Even if he has inherited one from his father he is still obliged to have one of his own. He may write it himself, or have it written on his behalf by a sofer, or purchase one, but "he who writes it himself is regarded as though it had been given to him on Mt. Sinai."

On the basis of the statement of the Talmud to the effect that he who corrects even one letter in a Sefer Torah is regarded as though he had himself written it, a custom that developed, which gives every Jew a portion in a Sefer Torah and symbolically regards him as having fulfilled the command of writing one. The sofer writes only the outline of the words in the first and last passages of the Sefer Torah and they are completed at a ceremony known as Siyyum ha-Torah ("the completion of the Torah"). Those present are honored by each being invited to fill in one of the hollow letters, or formally authorize the sofer to do so.

SANCTITY OF THE SEFER TORAH

The Sefer Torah is the most sacred of all Jewish books. A valid Sefer Torah must be treated with special sanctity and great reverence. Its sanctity is higher than that of all other scrolls of the book of the Bible, and therefore, though one Sefer Torah may be placed on top of another, or on the scroll of another book, another scroll must not be placed on it.

It is obligatory to stand in the presence of a Sefer Torah both when the ark is opened to reveal the scrolls and when it is being carried, and it is customary to bow reverently or kiss it when it passes. The bare parchment must not be touched with the hand. So insistent were the rabbis on this that they declared "He who touches a naked Sefer Torah will be buried naked," although the statement was modified to mean either "naked of good deeds" or "naked of the reward for good deeds" which he would otherwise have had from reading it. For this reason the yad ("pointer") is used for reading and the Sephardim cover the outside of the parchment with silk for the same reason.

It is forbidden to sell a Sefer Torah except to provide the means for marrying, studying, and for the ransom of captives. Should a Sefer Torah accidentally fall to the ground, the whole congregation is obliged to fast for that day. It was permitted and even enjoined to disregard the Sabbath in order to save not only the Sefer Torah but even its case from destruction, and should it be burnt one had to rend one's garment: if one saw it torn one had to rend the garment twice, "once for the writing and once for the parchment." The Sefer Torah must not be carried about unless for religious purposes, and even for the purpose of reading from it at services held at a temporary place of worship, such as a shivah, it may not be taken there unless it is read on at least three occasions. When it is transferred to a permanent site it is usually done with full ceremony. The Sefer Torah is carried through the streets under a canopy and the procession is accompanied by songs and dances.

SEFER TORAHS

The Kahal Joseph Synagogue has one of the largest collections of old style *Sefer Torahs* in the western world. Presently, **thirty-four** Seferim grace the Synagogue with their majestic and holy presence. The scroll of the Sefer contains the **Five Books of Moses** written on parchment according to strict rules and used mainly for reading at public worship.

There are also two Haftarah Sefers. Haftarah means an addition to the Torah, made up of the books of the prophets, and is always read after the Torah during public service.

These scrolls of parchment are housed in beautifully sculpted casings made of the finest metals, including silver, gold and platinum, with carved embossings, filigree and engravings of flowers, fruits, ancient patterns and biblical scenes. Several of these casings are embedded with precious jewels and semi-precious stones, all significantly created to house the rich and profound sacred Books inside. Some of the Kahal Seferim are made in the present day, but most are as old as fifty to one hundred years and have been brought to Kahal from many parts of the Middle East. Families from India, Indonesia, Israel, Singapore, Baghdad and other countries have brought these magnificent Seferim and have dedicated them to the memory of their family members who have passed on.



Dedicated to
Ezra Ellyahu Ezra
Halevi

Dedicated to
Ezra ben Shaoul
Halevi

Dedicated to
Yosef Hayim ben
Yahiskel Ezra Yosef

Dedicated to
Yaacov Menashe
Yaacov

Dedicated to
Aziza Girglye bat
Farha



SEFER TORAH

**Dedicated in memory of
HELEN LEVI**

*T*he Sefer Torah being dedicated today is one of the oldest Sefers to be taken out of Calcutta, India, where it was originally housed at the Beth-El Synagogue. In more recent years it was in the keeping of the New York board of Rabbis at the International Synagogue in Jamaica, New York.

Dating back to the turn-of-the-century, the casing of pure silver is intricately carved with a beautiful rosette floral pattern and fine, delicate filigree work crowning the upper half, and the interior upper half is embedded with solid 22 karat gold where the name of HELEN LEVI has now been permanently debossed using lettering from the pure gold.

1991 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rabbi

MOISES BENZAQUEN

Hazan

SASSOON EZRA

OFFICERS

Chairman

JOSEPH SASSOON

President

JACK JONAH

Vice President

MAURICE MORRIS

Treasurer

RUEBEN SOLOMON

Secretary

LUNA EINY

Board of Directors

ABE ABRAHAM

JOSEPH AZAR

MORDECAI COHEN

JOSEPH DABBY

FRED JACOB

SAEED JALALI

SUNNY J. SASSOON

FLORENCE SHAMASH

ELSA SINGMAN

ISAAC SOLOMON

AARON ZAKOO

President of Sisterhood

YVETTE DABBY

Past Presidents

J.R. SAUL Z"l

SAUL E. LEVI

BENJAMIN ELIAS

JOSEPH SASSOON

2010 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rabbi

HAGAY BATZRI

Sr. Hazan

SASSOON EZRA

Hazan

SAEED JALALI

EXECUTIVE BOARD

President

MOUSSA SHAAYA

Sr. Vice President/Chair

RONALD EINY

Treasurer

ABE MATHALON

Secretary

RAFAEL ITZHAKI

Vice Presidents

MICHELLE KURTZ, *Education*

YVETTE DABBY, *Membership*

EDMOND HAGOOLI, *Operations*

NEIL J. SHEFF, *Religions Affairs*

JONATHAN KELLY, *Ways and Means*

Directors at Large

ABE ABRAHAM

MORDECAI A. COHEN

SUZY ASSIA

LISA DABBY JOYCE

SELENA DALLAL

DROR IRONI

TRACY MATHALON

ALBERT NISSAN

RENEE REIZ

AARON F. SASSOON

SAM SHAAYA

Past Presidents

J.R. SAUL Z"l

SAUL E. LEVI

BENJAMIN ELIAS

JOSEPH SASSOON

JACK JONAH, Z"l

JOSEPH DABBY

President of Sisterhood

ELSA SINGMAN

KAHAL JOSEPH SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION
10505 West Santa Monica Boulevard, West Los Angeles, California 90025
Telephone 310-474-0559
KahalJoseph.org