Sephardic Birth and Naming Customs in American Jewish Religious Education, An Analysis of Materials Available and a Naming Unit Proposal

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I. Introduction:

> *The inclusion of the Sephardic experience in a curriculum on the Modern Jewish Experience is a desideratum today. Sephardim constitute 60 percent of the population of Israel, a majority of the Jewish population in France, and approximately one-quarter of the Jewish people. Their experience, in many ways, is the experience of all the Jewish people.*
>
> -Jane Gerber, "Integrating the Sephardic Experience into the teaching of Modern Jewish History", Sephardic Studies in the University, 1995.[1]

There is a striking lack of curriculum and educational resources on Sephardic culture and history in the American Jewish educational community. The little that has been published and circulated varies wildly. Moreover, very few classroom materials that address the history and minhagim of the Sephardic world find their way into Reform or Conservative classrooms. The most frequent source of Sephardic education in Reform and Conservative religious schools is via the "over-arching" or "world view" curricula. These curricula, like those published by Behrman House, touch briefly on the Sephardim (most often in an overview of world Jewry) but rarely discuss Sephardic history or minhag in detail.[2]

The purpose of this thesis is to delineate the current state of curricula in American Jewish religious schools that address Sephardic culture and history, and to propose a

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[1] Jane S Gerber, ed., Sephardic Studies in the University (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/ Associated University Presses, 1995), 27.

[2] Seymour Rossel's Journey Through Jewish History is a fine introduction to Jewish history, and has a chapter on Sephardic Jewry, but is not fully inclusive.

curricular unit based upon Sephardic birth and naming minhagim as practiced in the United States. This study is limited to current minhagim among four American Sephardic 'ethnic' groups: Judeo-Spanish, Syrian and Moroccan. A detailed analysis of curricula developed to address Sephardic history, culture and ritual minhagim will proceed a comprehensive analysis of birth and naming rituals in traditional, contemporary and historical Judaism. The analysis of Sephardic curricular materials will appear as a narrative, dividing the curricula into several categories relating to age appropriateness, specified sphere of study (e.g. historical, cultural) and relevance to current educational trends. A corresponding appendix reviewing this curricular material follows in section IX.

The proposed curriculum will consist of six 60-minute lessons. A brief overview and sample lesson are included in this thesis, intended for use with middle school aged students in supplementary Reform and Conservative religious schools. It is designed for use in both Sephardic and Ashkenazi school settings, not for either one exclusively. (Though, I realize the majority of American Reform and Conservative Jews are Ashkenazic.) This curriculum is easily adaptable for use with High School aged students, or even Adult and Family education programs. The curriculum, and the thesis bibliography, can also serve as a template for construction of age appropriate lesson plans using the 'Spiral Unfoldment Method.' This method involves covering the same topic several times at increasing levels of sophistication, thereby developing a profound, intuitive understanding of the subject as a whole and an appreciation for the accepted development of ideas.[3]

[3] The 'spiral method' is quite common in mathematics education, engineering and computer software design. I suggest the 'spiral method' merely because it is thorough and easy to replicate.

Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky writes, "Few would disagree that the current absence of a course of study of the major Sephardic groups who reside in North America, and the resultant lessening of religious observance, is a natural outgrowth of the neglect in the Sephardic community due to lack of self-knowledge of their traditions."[4] While Dobrinsky speaks from an Orthodox background, and directly to Sephardim, I would argue that a same "lessening" in Sephardic education is true in Reform and Conservative communities, if it ever existed there in the first place. In the same way that Rabbi Dobrinsky writes "our task... is to provide Sephardic students who attend day schools with a rich cultural offering reflecting their own respective heritage", the task of this thesis, and proposed curriculum, is to provide Ashkenazic and Sephardic students in American Reform and Conservative religious schools with an appreciation for the heritage of the Sephardim.[5]

A. Overview of Methodology:

The research for thesis began with an interest in teaching Sephardic minhag and history in general.[6] It appears that very little about the Sephardic world is being taught other than coverage of the "Golden Age of Spain" and the "Expulsion." The publication of the four-part series Our Story: The Jews of Sepharad (1991) by the Coalition for the Advancement for Jewish Education provided initial perspective, particularly Carolyn

[4] Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky, Teacher's Guide for A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1988), 14.

[5] Ibid., 15.

[6] My own Sephardic heritage, while not familiar, prompted my interest in Sephardic history and culture many years ago. While at Hebrew Union College my work as a research assistant on the Sephardic Studies Curricular Project, funded by the Maurice Amado Foundation, furthered my interest and gave me a much-needed contemporary perspective.

Starman Hessel's The Jews of Sepharad: A Resource Guide (1992). It became clear that Sephardic birth and naming rituals were particularly absent from traditional Jewish education. While the Our Story: The Jews of Sepharad series provides much Sephardic historical information, and some teaching resources, it neglects a clear, and informative, lesson/unit on Sephardic birth and naming rituals. While the volume Celebrations and Stories by Lea Nora Kordova and Annette and Eugene Labovitz contains a good deal of information about particular Sephardic minhagim relating to naming, especially *brit milah* and *pidyon haben*, it does not include information on how to successfully approach and teach these customs.

When one analyzes curricula and texts that teach Jewish birth and naming rituals, there is clearly a lack of Sephardic perspective (for examples, see the curricular reviews in section IV). While the texts often mention the Sephardic forename naming custom, they usually fail to address Sephardic customs relating to *brit milah*, *zebed habat* or *pidyon haben*. The texts attempt to place these rituals in timeless, basic Jewish contexts, but the basic Jewish context in American Jewish education is Ashkenazic. A more multicultural, and even worldly, approach recognizes both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic minhagim in ritual practice. Such minhagim as the Syrian *seneet eliyahu hanabi* ("Tray of Elijah"), the Judeo-Spanish "slapping" custom or the Moroccan *Tahdid* ceremony are not mentioned at all.

After analyzing both the Sephardic specific curricula and the basic Judaic birth and naming curricula, I examine the challenge of combining them into a single curriculum. The particulars of Sephardic birth and naming minhagim are presented, as they relate to Syrian, Judeo-Spanish and Moroccan Jews in America. Finally, I make a

proposal of a curriculum incorporating Sephardic birth and naming minhagim with life cycle studies.

II. General Delineation of the Current State of Sephardic Curricular Materials in American Jewish Education:

It is not uncommon to be raised an American Reform Jew and know very little about Sephardic Jewry. In fact, most American supplementary religious schools teach small bits and pieces of Sephardic history, and most mention notable Sephardic personalities like Rambam outside of their contextual histories. For example, a curriculum used in Reform Jewish education will mention that Maimonides was of Sephardic descent but place his thought outside a historical milieu and into the general category of Medieval Jewish thought. The history of Spanish Jewry is simply not often discussed in conjunction with Maimonides. For most American Jews the Sephardim are worlds away in history, thought and practice. As Marc Angel writes in The Rhythms of Jewish Living, "...few... Westerners ever stopped to think that the non-Westerners had worthy cultural traits which deserved to be maintained."[7]

Jane Gerber, in her overview of Sephardic history The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience hypothesizes about the reasons for this marked dislocation of Sephardic history in our American Jewish ethos,

[7] Mark Angel, The Rhythms of Jewish Living: A Sephardic Exploration of the Basic Teachings of Judaism. (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997), 176.

After 1492, centuries of wandering muted the separate identity of Spain's Jewish offspring... The "Exiles of Jerusalem who were in Sepharad" became the exiles of Sepharad in Djerba and Gibraltar, Belgrade and Valona, Cairo and Alexandria, Casablanca and Meknes. Neither the paths nor their dispersion nor the process of cultural amalgamation have been predictable or easily comprehended.[8]

The history of Jewish education in America largely follows the trajectory of Ashkenazic history in America. The first Reform educators were Ashkenazic Rabbis who, seeking assimilation, chose to embrace similarity amongst Jews and Americans rather than difference. Sephardim, present in the United States since the late 1600's, have not been a majority since the 1700's. Moreover, the Sephardim present in the United States have often sought, as a minority, a more insular Jewish life. Herbert C. Dobrinsky clarifies,

Sephardim in North America have, for the most part, maintained their own religious institutions and cultural organizations distinct and apart from the general Jewish community, although in recent years (especially since the founding of the State of Israel) they have often joined forces with Ashkenazim on behalf of the State of Israel and other matters of worldwide concern to the Jewish world.[9]

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[8] Jane Gerber, The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience (New York: The Free Press, 1992), XXV.

[9] Dobrinsky, 6.

Dobrinsky goes on to point out that the differences between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the United States extends beyond cultural minhag to include economics, geographical dispersion and religious observance. The insular lifestyle common among the Sephardim in the United States has assured in many instances the construction and maintenance of a tight-knit community. The Syrian community, in particular, has, according to Dobrinsky, "contained its intermarriage rate with non-Jews to well under 5 percent, with some claiming it to be less than 1 percent."[10] However, this insular lifestyle has also served as a barrier between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim educational spheres. Orthodox Sephardim, according to Dobrinsky, are most likely to teach their children in Sephardic day schools.[11] Because of these barriers many Ashkenazi American Jews are unfamiliar with the culture and minhag of the Sephardim.

The Jewish population of the United States is overwhelmingly Ashkenazic, as a 1990 Council of Jewish Federation (CJF) National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of American Jews found only 8.1 percent of those polled identified themselves as of Sephardi origin (3 percent identified themselves as being of African origin and another 3.1 percent identified themselves as being of Hispanic origin).[12] A large influx, nearly 40,000, of Iranian Jews, in the past decade, has dramatically affected the number of Sephardim in both New York and L.A.[13] This combination of "muted" historical resonance, insular community living and low demographic percentages in the United

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[10] Ibid., 7.

[11] Ibid., Though, these Sephardic Day Schools are few and far between.

[12] "Following the recommendation of the NTAC, CJF commissioned ICR Survey Research Group of Media, PA, to undertake a national sample survey of 2,500 households drawn from a qualified universe of households containing at least one person identified as currently or previously Jewish." http://www.jewishdatabank.com/njps90/njps90.html, accessed: 12/2/01.

[13] Price, Massoume, "A brief history of Iranian Jews" http://www.persianoutpost.com/htdocs/iranianjews.html, accessed: 05.02.

States have combined to create a significant lack of educational resources designed to teach Sephardic history and culture. Once we've familiarized ourselves with this current reality, creating an effective Sephardic curriculum involves a weaving of cultures and histories, as Gerber writes,

> Constructing an inclusive curriculum on the modern Jewish experience does not require a discussion of all the Jewries of the Sephardic disapora; beneath this mosaic of diversity there was a basic similarity of response to the major challenges of Westernization, modernization, and migration... To the extent that a curriculum on the modern Jewish experience is representative of the breadth and varieties of Jewish life in modern times, such a curriculum can comfortably treat the Sephardim from a thematic point of view; unity amid local diversity can be accommodated without dilution or distortion.[14]

While I agree with Dr. Gerber that a truly inclusive curriculum can encompass the whole of the Jewish experience, without covering all of Jewish knowledge, I do not think many of these truly inclusive curricula exist. Moreover, they are incredibly difficult to successfully create and initiate. This is merely a reflection of the larger educational world, with a focus on specifics rather than generalities. While my focus here is on the creation of a curriculum that appropriately addresses Sephardic culture and history, the long-term goal, I would argue, is community wide education. With the inclusion of Sephardic materials in staff developmental and educational resources Sephardic culture

[14] Gerber, 31.

and history in the classroom would be enhanced. The more educators know about Sephardica, the more students will learn about it. Sephardic history and culture should not be relegated only to the classroom, it is a living and vibrant history that needs to become more a part of American Jewish heritage than it currently is. However, to be truly effective we must start slowly, and resolutely, and to that extent my thesis only addresses curricular integration and student instruction, rather than teacher education.

A. Materials:

Analyzing the many curricular materials published and circulated in the past twenty years one comes to the conclusion that there is much still to be done, if Jewish education is to fully incorporate Sephardic culture. The ways curriculum approach Sephardic culture and history have varied significantly over the years. Originally, 'historical setting' was the primary focus of curricula designed to teach about the Sephardim. Such curricular pieces as Norton Belth's The World Story Book (1963), Dorothy Zeglis's A History of Jewish Life in Modern Times (1947) and Joseph H. Gumbiner's Leaders of Our People (1963), place Sephardic culture within a historical context. While not focusing entirely on Sephardic history, the Golden age of Spain or the expulsion, these curricular pieces place the Sephardim largely within the context of Jewish history. These early curriculum view the Sephardim within the locus of world-wide Jewry, presenting Sephardic history and pioneering thinkers, as facets of world Jewish culture. The focus here is on events and individuals, as they relate to Sephardim, but more importantly as they relate to Jewry, and not upon Sephardic minhag or culture.

In the 70's and 80's there was a shift as the curriculum centered on teaching Sephardic history as it relates to modern Jewry began focusing solely on early Sephardic history of and within itself. Rather than just placing the Sephardic experience within the context of modern Judaism, curriculum began to present the history of the Sephardim from the Golden Age to the expulsion and the settling of Sephardim in other lands, particularly Arab lands. Curricular works like Yom Tov Assis' The Jews of Spain: From Settlement to Expulsion (1988), presented Sephardic history in an academic system, tracing the history of the Jews of the Iberian peninsula as a single pedagogical focus. A similar educational project, Martin Gilbert's The Jews of Arab Lands (1976), gives students an overview of Sephardic history in Arabic lands after the expulsion from Spain. Removing the spotlight from world Jewry, and how the Sephardim fit into it, these programs of study presented, and appreciated, Sephardic history on its own terms. This focus on Sephardic history as a valuable source of study in and of itself marks a significant change in Jewish education.

Along with this pioneering focus on Sephardic history as a defined and important medium of study, the texts written in the 70's and 80's begin to explore Sephardic culture and minhag more intimately. Tzvia Ehrlich-Klein's A Children's Treasury of Sephardic Tales (1985), is a pioneering compendium of Sephardic folk tales. Rather than compiling Jewish folk tales in general, as done in Howard Schwartz's Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales (also 1985), Ehrlich-Klein's focus on Sephardic storytelling is novel. Narrowing the focus significantly, Sarah Kammens' Jews of Israel: Yemenite Jewry concentrates on Yemenite tradition through games, songs, dance and crafts.

The curricular and resource materials written in the 1990's show a wide range of diversity, including intimate portraits of famous Sephardim, Avishai Stockhamer's Don Yosef Nasi (1991), curricular materials focused on individual Sephardic communities, Anti-Defamation League's Jews of Syria (1991) and the Quincentennial Foundation of Istanbul's A Curriculum on Five Hundred Years of Turkish Jewish Experience: Major Aspects and Their Present –Day Significance (1992) to curricular materials exploring Sephardic history in its broadest sense, Sugar's Our Story: You are the Historian (1991). This diversity, while highly influenced by the prevalence of multiculturalism in academia at the time, reflects the growing appreciation of Sephardic history and culture in the United States. A few of the earlier works documenting Sephardic culture and minhagim in Spanish and Ladino are now appearing in English translation, much to the benefit of those seeking information on Sephardim.[15] It is not surprising that these materials are only now appearing in English, as Jane Gerber writes, "Since Sephardic Studies is still in its early stages of development and not crisply defined, it is not surprising that translated source material, teaching aids such as maps and readers, and English renditions of some of the major works of scholarship remain a desideratum."[16]

The curricular work addressing the Sephardim has shifted focus. The Sephardim are no longer seen as either being a segment of world Jewry, or an isolated bubble of culture, rather, they have come to be appreciated as a vibrant, living, distinctive part of Jewish life. This thesis will attempt to extrapolate what has already been done in integrating Sephardic history and minhagim into religious education, and further, to suggest a path we might take in order to reach an integrated curriculum. I will

[15] Paloma Diaz-Mas' influential Los Sefardies: Historia, lengua y cultura (1986) has been translated into English in 1992.

[16] Gerber, 33.

demonstrate this via a curricular lesson, part of a larger unit, that teachers Sephardic birth and naming practices within the larger context of life cycle education.

B. Analysis of CAJE's Our Story: The Jews of Sepharad

Perhaps the most comprehensive and up to date series exploring Sephardic history and culture was published in 1991 by the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE) entitled Our Story: the Jews of Sepharad, and edited by Richard Wagner. The series is made up of four books, respectively, You are the Historian, Celebrations and Stories, Two Traditions- One People, and The Jews of Sepharad: A Resource Guide. This series spans elementary, middle and high schools though the majority of the texts are best suited for use with high school students.

Robert Sugar, You Are The Historian (New York: CAJE, 1991.)

The first book in the series is Robert Sugars' You are the Historian. This textbook attempts to paint a vivid picture of Judeo-Spanish history from the destruction of the Second Temple to the expulsion in 1492. Sugar uses both primary and secondary sources to explore the often turbulent and complicated history of the Western Sephardim. Without tackling the "whole story," Sugar focuses on brief but illuminating passages of history. The curriculum is divided into eight units, and the book effectively functions as a

workbook with blank pages and activities. You are the Historian is designed for elementary and middle school use.

Sugar's book is an example of an interactive textbook. Utilizing both primary and secondary textual analysis, You are the Historian covers a diverse range of Judeo-Spanish Sephardic history. The text begins with an exploration of how the Jews arrived in Spain. Unit one follows with "The Gate of Toledo" and the Arab conquering of the Iberian peninsula. Unit two chronicles the Christian "recovery" of Spain. Unit three looks at the work of Golden Age writers Samuel Ibn-Nagrela and Judah Halevi. Unit four covers the charter of Tudela. Unit five looks at the travels of Benjamin of Tudela and his journey across the East and near East. Unit six surveys the work of Maimonides and the atlas of Abraham Cresques. Unit seven encompasses the year 1391 and the Inquisition, and unit eight deals with the exodus and living in *galut*.

Sugar divides each of these units into smaller sections, most units having three sections. Each section begins with a text, and textual analysis and concludes with reading comprehension questions and some creative writing assignments. The textbook is thoroughly illustrated with detailed maps, timelines and reproductions of Judeo-Spanish Sephardic artwork, engravings and illuminations. While Sugar asserts that the text is intended for elementary as well as middle school students, I think he would be hard-pressed to find elementary school students prepared enough for this material.

Sugar's textbook covers a span of many hundred years and introduces students to the enormous cache of Judaic knowledge in traditional Sephardic history. That being said, Sugar selected the texts and edited them into easily digestible portions. For example, rather than present a whole poem by Halevi, Sugar provides a few stanzas of his more

famous poems. Sugar's questions at the end of each section are both rational and appealing, though they don't probe much beyond surface reactions to the text.

Sugar's You are the Historian is certainly the best realized, and well written, book in this series. It is longer than the other texts, detailed with many illustrations and photographs and contains many well-edited passages of source texts, including significant letters from Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and excerpts from *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela.* While Sugar's textbook is to be used by students directly, I believe it is designed to be read aloud and studied in the classroom and in conjunction with lectures.[17] This is an appropriate approach to the teaching of Sephardic history. By involving the students with the text through group discussion and textual reading comprehension work, the textbook approaches the students from several effective directions. Sugar's approach, to combine small frames of information, espousing a main idea, with longer, more emotional, narrative passages is both novel and effective.

Lea Nora Kordova and Annette and Eugene Labovitz Celebrations and Stories,
(New York: CAJE, 1991.)

Celebrations and Stories is a teacher's guide written, "to enhance" the teaching of Sephardic minhag to lower grade students. As Lea-Nora Kordova writes, " This is not meant to be a comprehensive study, but a beginning guide for teachers... this is a starting point, a springboard into the world of Sephardic Jewry."[18] Kordova adds, " This guide is written in a format that makes it an easy teacher reference..." and her rational for writing

[17] It should be noted that there is no Teacher's guide, or at least I have not been informed of one.

[18] Kordova and Labovitz, 2.

the book is summed up as, "... it is another way of promoting a sense of *klal Yisrael* among our students."[19] The book is broken into two sections; the first is a detailed grid of minhagim. The grid contains six columns, In the first is a life cycle event of holiday, and in the remaining five columns are different Jewish minhagim regarding that event or holiday in the following order: Ashkenazi, Judeo-Spanish, Moroccan, Spanish-Portuguese and Syrian. The authors give no explanation as to why they chose these particular groups and the divisions between them. The life-cycle events/holidays discussed include: Shabbat, Passover, Omer and Shavuot, Rosh Hodesh and Elul, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Simhat Torah, Hanukkah, Tu Bishebat, Purim, Birth (Naming a girl, Birth of a son, *Zeved Habet*, *Brit milah*, *Pidyon Haben*, Adoption), Bar Mitzvah (*Bat Mitzvah*), and Engagement and Marriage (funerary rites are not discussed.)

The second section of the book is made up of stories and classroom activities written by Annette and Eugene Labovitz. These stories include reading from works by Yehuda Halevi, Moshe ben Nachman, Dona Garcia Mendes, Maimonides, Yosef Karo, Christopher Columbus, Schmuel Ibn Nagrela Ha-Nagid and Ibn Ezra.[20] The classroom activities revolve around reading comprehension questions asked after each portion of text. Several of the classroom activities involve research projects, such as a research paper presenting the biography of several of the key Sephardic Torah scholars (all are Judeo-Spanish.)

Kordova's section of minhagim is both compelling and sadly fragmentary. There are no lessons, no discussion questions and very little guidance through the grid of

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[19] Ibid.

[20] The texts utilized for each of these thinkers range from diary entries, Christopher Columbus, to larger works like Ramban's disputation at Barcelona.

minhagim. Kordova provides the reader with an exploration of different practices but does not supply a key, or guide to those readers unfamiliar with the terms of liturgy.[21]

The second section of stories and classroom activities by Annette and Eugene Labovitz is a less clearly realized section. The Labovitzs' objective, " to describe, through story, the contribution of the Jewish people to Spain during the Golden Age"[22] and follow their wanderings after the expulsion, does not seem a fully fleshed out rationale. Are these works to be presented to us as historical documents? Are they presented as fiction? The title of the section, "Stories", would seem to imply the later. This section is best considered as an addendum to the previous entry in the series, Sugar's You are the Historian.

Rabbi Eliyahu Stewart and Rochelle and Dr. David Rabeeya Two Traditions – One People, (New York: CAJE, 1991.)

Designed for use by high school and adult education classes Two Traditions –One People provides "the historical antecedents of Sephardic Jewry as well as contemporary issues confronting Sephardim in Israel and the Diaspora."[23] Two Traditions- One People is a textbook, much in the same fashion as Sugar's You are the Historian, with readings, discussion questions and worksheets. The book is divided into two sections, a workbook for students and a teacher's guide, and smaller units within each. Unit one opens the book with an introduction, unit two explores "Great Rabbis of the Early Middle Ages", unit three consists of "Differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim", unit four is the

[21] Though, clearly this text is designed for use by those educators familiar with liturgical terminology.

[22] Ibid., 1.

[23] Stewart and Rabeeya, i.

conclusion: "Unity in Diversity." The teacher's guide is divided in much the same way, with lessons and an appendix for texts, and charts. The five lessons include: Prejudice; Assimilation and Acculturation; Implications of receiving "Equality"; Problems of absorption- assimilation?; Acculturation?; and Israel, France and America. Each lesson contains a series of texts and several reading comprehension questions and guided activities.

The authors of Two Traditions- One People discuss their objectives in the introduction to the teacher's guide. They point out that this curriculum is to give Sephardic students "a positive feeling of 'self' and to appreciate their particular heritage, tradition and identity."[24] The authors also present Two Traditions- One People as a tool for Ashkenazi Jews to learn about their neighbors in the Sephardic world, and, as the title of the project suggests, to build a feeling of "peoplehood" despite difference in minhag and halachot.

Despite the author's assertions that this project is designed for high school and adult students, I found it to be the weakest book of the series. The readings included in Two Traditions- One People are sparse, and the comprehension questions are too simplistic to be constructive (an example: "Name three famous Sephardic poets") generally not wandering far from the basic textual inferences. While the texts chosen are indeed from a broad array of sources, they are heavily edited to fit with the author's political and cultural agendas. For example, lesson 2 in the teacher's guide, "The implications of receiving 'equality', focuses on the anti-Jewish measures the Arab rulers of Spain took during the Middle Ages, the lesson contains portions of the Koran that degrade Jews, Koranic pronunciations on the Jews and the 7th Pact of Umar. All of these

[24] Ibid., 33.

texts, reprinted from Norman Stillman's *The Jews in Arab Lands, A History and a Source Book* (1979) (see appendix in section IX) are edited to give the reader the idea that these texts are inherently anti-Jewish and paint a picture of Arab-Jewish relations as being highly strained at all times.[25] Furthermore, these texts, dated from the 7th and 11th centuries, are directly contrasted with the much later American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and the Pact of Umar is directed at Christians, not Jews. The lesson goes on to discuss Jewish values, bordering on an inference of superiority.

While I do not feel the lesson is purposely antagonistic, I do think it is highly charged and supportive of positions not held by all Reform educators. (This is most interesting in light of a note found in the lesson on the problems of absorption and acculturation, which reads: "These resources are recommended with a strong caveat. In these resources the Sephardic are often stereotyped... These depictions are prejudicial generalizations..."[26]) While the intentions of the authors are clearly stated, "one of the goals of this series is to emphasize the courage and resiliency of the Jewish people throughout time and place and to provide greater insight into the effects of prejudice and discrimination" [27] I don't think contrasting portions of older vitriolic texts with newer, quite different, texts serves the purpose.

Two Traditions- One People is essentially a re-hashing of the previous books in the series, with a more serious reflection on the Sephardim today. However, it is not a successful text and works better as a reading resource for educators seeking more knowledge regarding Sephardic history and minhag.

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[25] Stillman himself edited these passages down into "portions" to convey clear messages of Jewish mistreatment. However, the full texts are not reproduced.

[26] Ibid., 61.

[27] Ibid., 39.

Carolyn Starman Hessel, The Jews of Sepharad: A Resource Guide (New York: CAJE, 1991.)

The final book in the series is Starman Hessel's Resource Guide also known as the Whole Sephardic Catalog. It is an annotated listing of print and audio-visual media suggested by the other units in the series. The material in the resource guide is divided into five parts. Part one consists of Sephardic experience: where it happened and when it happened. Part two is an annotated bibliography. Part three is media selections. Part four is resources: people, places, experiences and part five contains the authors' index. The first section, the Sephardic experience: where it happened, when it happened, is highly detailed. Broken into subdivisions according to region, such regions are the Balkans, Iberian Peninsula, Syria and Iraq, the first section contains a wealth of print material including literature, and classroom materials (with short paragraphs reviewing each one). Among the bibliographical lists included in this section are: conversos, Sephardic literature, Algerian history and the Yemenite experience.

The Whole Sephardic Catalog is an essential tool for both educators and students who wish to know, or teach, more about worldwide Sephardim.

The Our Story: the Jews of Sepharad series is a first-step towards a valuable Sephardic curriculum for our students. Hindered by age-inappropriate material and poorly written classroom activities, the CAJE series is nevertheless a unique curriculum. Since we have no other well-distributed curricula regarding the Sephardic experience, Our Story: the Jews of Sepharad is critical to current Sephardic discussion.

Our Story: the Jews of Sepharad succeeds most in presenting the many varying viewpoints, and educational models (from lectures, and discussion questions to worksheets) that can be adopted to teach Sephardic history and culture. Yet, it is not an interconnected series. Our Story: the Jews of Sepharad offers pieces of a full curriculum, portions of a fuller text. The first book in the series, Sugar's You are the Historian is a textbook, filled with text study lessons to be used by the student directly. The second book in the series Celebrations and Stories is a teacher's reference guide supplemented with curricular materials and made for use with elementary school students. The third, Two Traditions - One People is a workbook designed for high school students and adults with text study lessons and inappropriately simple discussion questions ("Where did Ladino begin?"). The final book, The Whole Sephardic Catalog, is a listing of curricular materials, and audio and video media with Sephardic content. While CAJE may never have intended Our Story to read one book to another seamlessly, clearly each book was written with a different age spectrum in mind, it would be beneficial to have just such a curricular series.

Despite the fact that CAJE's Our Story introduces Sephardic history and culture to the American Jewish supplementary and day school populations, it does not go as far as it could. A first step yes, but what American Jewish supplementary and day school populations need now is a cohesive and rigorous Sephardic curriculum; a curriculum that both introduces, and develops, Sephardic history and culture as part and parcel of Jewish life worldwide. The main strength in Our Story is that Sephardic history and ritual is presented in these texts as valuable assets, thoroughly engaging and precious.

III. General Overview of Jewish Birth and Naming Rituals:

In this next chapter I will give a general overview of the history and impact of Jewish birth and naming rituals. As mentioned previously my thesis will proposal a lesson, and unit, that incorporates Sephardic birth and naming rituals into a life cycle curriculum. To clearly understand the meaning behind Sephardic birth and naming rituals, we must explore the history of Jewish birth and naming rituals in general. In this chapter I give detailed descriptions of the development, and meaning, behind naming rituals, *brit milah* and *pidyon haben*. It is essential that we understand the origins and development of these rituals, described here in anthropological terminology, to appropriately teach them. We cannot hope to include Sephardic minhagim, as relates to birth and naming, without fully understanding the underlying, and wide-ranging, implications these rituals have on the 'average' Jew.

What makes us Jews?

Is it our ritual practices? Hebrew? Our folklore and customs? Or is it the sign of the covenant inscribed with circumcision? Individual members of any group that identifies itself as "distinctive" may question why they are who they are. Most groups, faiths, societies recruit new members primarily from procreation, that is, generally members of distinctive groups are born into those groups. Paul G. Heibert writes in Cultural Anthropology,

> All societies must admit new members in order to survive, and, with few exceptions, such addition is by birth. But simply bearing children is not enough; they must be assigned a place in the society and taught its ways if they are to survive. Rituals associated with birth are one of the ways a society admits and incorporates new members into its ranks and recognizes the changes that take place in the roles of others when this occurs.[28]

For Jews the dynamics are the same. The majority of Jews are born into Judaism, indoctrinated at a young age, and grow with the knowledge that they belong to a distinct social unit. This is "socialization", defined by H. Paul Chalfant, Robert E. Beckley and C. Eddie Palmer as "the means by which an individual learns the expectations society has for particular statuses and internalizes them. It is the way in which the individual comes to take one the values, beliefs, and attitudes characteristic of a particular position or status...".[29] Socialization is typically divided into two phases, primary and secondary. The primary stages, focused upon here, are in childhood, when the new member of a society learns roles and attitudes from their parents. At the earliest stages of life some forms of socialization are compulsory for juvenile new members, examples of such socialization rituals include, naming, baptism and circumcision. These socialization rituals are for the future benefit of the child, but also have great impact on the parents and religious community at large. Early socialization rituals provide the family with a sense of security and ensure continued identity, as Chalfant, Beckley and Palmer write, " many

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[28] Paul G. Heibert, Cultural Anthropology (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1976), 158.

[29] H. Paul Chalfant, Robert E. Beckley and C. Eddie Palmer, Religion in Contemporary Society (Sherman Oaks: Alfred Publishing Co., 1981), 69.

of the formal religious ceremonials related to the various 'faiths' attempt to tie the youngster to the religious community through the family... encouraging parents to undertake responsibility for inculcating religious beliefs and attitudes in their children."[30]

For a child to become fully incorporated into a distinct group, and larger society, they must have a name. As Heibert writes, "a person's social identity develops, in part, from a name; nameless people are categories, not persons."[31] An individual's name is a badge, worn from birth, announcing social status and group affiliation. Françoise Zonabend records, the name is "a mnemonic tool whose function is to mark out the different field of reference of the society in question: the kinship field, the social field, the symbolic field."[32] Naming is essential to identity, and birth and naming rituals associated with particular groups reinforce the importance of naming in the dynamics of the group. For American Jews, living in a Western society, the act of naming a child must address two issues, 1) the ritual aspects according to Jewish law and 2) the social dimensions of a name in America. Religious rituals associated with birth and naming have been perceived as theologically based, commanded by God. Religious rituals are

> ...primarily a re-enactment of sacred prototypes, the repetition of the actions of divine beings or mythical ancestors. Ritual recalls these past events, preserving and transmitting the foundations of society. Participants in the ritual become identified with the sacred past and thus perpetuate

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[30] Ibid., 71.

[31] Heibert, 161.

[32] Francoise Zonabend, "La Nom de Personne", L'Homme 20 (1980): 12-17 quoted in Stephen Wilson, The Means of Naming (London: UCL Press, 1998), xii

tradition as they reestablish the principles by which the group lives and functions.[33]

For people living in smaller communities, the birth and naming of a new child is of great concern to the whole community. For people in large cities, participation is selective, but the rituals often remain the same. As Jews entered the modern world, in many cases moving from small, insular communities to large cities, the practice of religious rituals associated with birth and naming continued. While amongst liberal Jews the focus has shifted from the theological implications of the enactment of the rituals towards the socio-political implications of said rituals, the practice of the birth and naming rituals within Jewish life has remained.

The most common rituals associated with birth and naming among Jews are *brit milah*, called *birkat milah* in Sephardic cultures, the giving of a name and *pidyon haben*. While the tradition of *pidyon haben* has received little or no attention outside of Orthodox and traditional Conservative tradition until recently, *brit milah* has continued to be seen as an 'essential' Jewish ritual in all movements of Judaism.

Brit milah, in particular, has taken its place in the Reform and Conservative movements as a required ritual, that is to say it is seen by the majority of liberal American Jews as a requirement to be recognized as Jewish. Rabbi Larry Hoffman writes, " Indeed for vast numbers of Jews, circumcision remains what it has always been – an absolute requirement with ritual force comparable to baptism for Christians." [34] It is

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[33] Annemarie De Waal Malefijt, Religion and Culture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 193.

[34] Lawrence Hoffman, Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 212.

significant that Hoffman compares circumcision with baptism and Christian ritual, as it points to the liberal, and secular American Jew's reason for maintaining the circumcision ritual; to be identified as Jewish, as belonging to a certain group.

A. Naming:

Naming is an essential part of human existence. We have always named ourselves, others, animals, things and spaces. For human beings to communicate properly there must be designated names. Names developed to signify particular persons and families, thus names have been used to describe a personal trait, or to signify a habit, or explain a region, show the heritage e.g. Sam son of John. In Judaism names are exceedingly important. David Novak writes, "the name given a child is considered to be a matter of great importance, having considerable influence on the development of that child's character."[35] There is a Hebrew folk saying, recorded in the Bible, that reads, *Kishmo ken hu* ("Like his name so is he.") (1 Samuel 25:25.)

Jewish naming has changed with the assimilation of Jews into varying societies and cultures. Jews have adapted personal and surnames as they have moved through different lands.[36] Appellations were adapted to fit the Jews eager to move into medieval Europe. During the Middle Ages Jews retained Hebrew forenames, which tended towards being easily adapted to cultural circumstances. The designation of "ben" or "ibn" also

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[35] David Novak, "Be Fruitful and Multiply: Issues Relating to Birth in Judaism", Celebration and Renewal: Rites of Passage in Judaism, ed. Rela M. Geffen, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 20.

[36] Cecil Roth Ed., Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 9, (Jerusalem: Keter Press Enterprises Ltd., 1972), 806-812.

began with Jewish forays into Medieval Europe. The surnames, primarily patronyms, designated a family relation, though place names were also quite common. With Jews being occasionally expelled from countries, surnames that reflected place names became more and more common both for practical necessity and nostalgia. The Middle Ages also saw a blossoming of several particular types of Jewish designations. The first, the acronym, consisted of title and full name, an example of this style is RaMBaM (Rabbi Moses b. Maimon), the second is a reference to the authors magnum opus, an example of this style is Tur (R. Jacob b. Asher).

With emancipation in Europe came an adoption of European forenames and surnames, a vogue of the period both for assimilation and survival reasons. In the case of German Jewry, the adoption of Christian German forename and surnames became quite common. (This adoption of host country names soon became a concern and many edicts were launched against Jews limiting their use of surnames and restricting them to either use of certain Biblical first names, or prohibiting them from using Hebrew names.)[37] The surnames of European Jews soon became fixed as the appropriation of a distinct surname became more and more important. Patronyms (Abramson, Jacobson), names based on regions (Moscowitz), vocations (Schneider) and personal characteristics (Klein, Schwartz) soon became models of European Jewish surnames.

With Zionism came a renewed interest in the Hebrew language and Hebrew forenames. In some cases, originally European surnames were made to sound more Semitic, or recreated in Hebrew, such names as Gruen were transposed as Ben-Gurion. As Jews moved into modernity the changing of familial names became common (in many cases names with "too Slavic" sounding endings were changed to suit immigrants moving

[37] Wilson, 246.

to America.) It is not uncommon for a Jew to have very differing fore and surnames, such as Jose Klein, and it is quite common for descendents of the same family, dwelling in different countries, to have entirely different surnames.

As surnames have been adapted to reflect cultural assimilation so forenames have also undergone dramatic changes to reflect differing cultural mores. Biblical names, like Saul and Abraham, once considered the only appropriate names, have given way to regional names like Pierre and in some rare instances even non-Jewish names like Christian.[38]

B. Circumcision:

Circumcision, and the ritual of *brit milah*, has been the subject of countless books, articles and academic investigations. Circumcision is widely practiced surgery, and is considered routine in the United States. According to a recent, July 2001, National Center for Health Statistics of the Department of Heath and Human Services of the U.S. Federal Government study in 1997 62.8% of male babies born in the United States are circumcised.[39] (Interestingly circumcision in the United States, as Lawrence Hoffman records, "was instituted in the 1870s as part of America's fling with what Sydney Ahlstrom calls the age of 'sentimental moralism.' By the 1870s, doctors adopted circumcision because they believed it would discourage masturbation, which Presbyterian

[38] However, in some circles we have seen an increase in Biblical naming, a reclaiming of naming heritage and an embracing of Jewish names.

[39] "United States Government Official Circumcision Statistics", Department of Health and Human Services, http://www.cirp.org/library/statistics/USA/, accessed 2/5/02.

minister Sylvester Graham had posited as a prime cause of insanity.")[40] Yet the historical origins of the practice are somewhat cloaked in mystery.

Traditionally it is assumed, and there is some archeological evidence to support this, that the practice began some 6000 years ago in Africa. Today, circumcision is practiced by roughly one sixth of the world's population, from Central Asia to South American tribes people. Douglas Gairdner writes in his 1949 article "The Fate of the Foreskin: A Study of Circumcision",

> Male circumcision, often associated with analogous sexual mutilations of the female such as clitoric circumcision and infibulation, is practiced (sic) over a wide area of the world... Over the Near East, patchily throughout tribal Africa, amongst the Moslem peoples of India and of South-East Asia, and amongst the Australasian aborigines circumcision has been regularly practiced (sic) for as long as we can tell. Many of the natives that Columbus found inhabiting the American continent were circumcised. The earliest Egyptian mummies (2300 B.C.) were circumcised, and wall paintings to be seen in Egypt show that it was customary several thousand years earlier still.[41]

The reasons most often given for the surgery involve sexual promiscuity and health benefits. In some cultures, including Near Eastern tribal and nomadic groups, the foreskin of the penis is seen as a corruption, inciting both promiscuity and "animal"

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[40] Hoffman, 215.

[41] Douglas Gairdner M.D., "The Fate of the Foreskin: A Study of Circumcision", British Medical Journal 2 (December 24, 1949), 1433-1437.

behavior. To quell the desires of the phallus, these cultures remove the foreskin as both an act of restraint and a ritual act of subservience. The Hebrews, in the presence of such hedonistic cults as the cult of Dionysus and Astarte, may have adopted circumcision to separate themselves from these "sinful" groups. Other early religious cultures engaged in castration, as a sign of obedience before their Gods. This may have been adapted, though in a much less dramatic way, by the Hebrews with the act of circumcision.

For Jews, circumcision is a religious rite, a ritual that signifies the backbone of Jewish faith: the covenant. In the Bible we have significant evidence that Jews saw circumcision as an extremely important marking of their faith; the ancient Hebrews held those peoples who were uncircumcised in contempt. Genesis 17:10-11 records the significance of circumcision in simple terms, "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you." However, there was a time when, under the rule of Queen Jezebel, that circumcision was abandoned (I Kings 19:14). Elijah rallied to restore the banned ritual, and thus was dubbed "Elijah, Herald of the Covenant." (This is why when circumcision are performed the Chair of Elijah, or in some Sephardic traditions, the Tray of Elijah is present.) Many ancient Mediterranean cultures, like the Greeks, banned circumcision and many times Jews chose to undergo painful operations to restore foreskins in order to play in Greek athletic tournaments. [42]However,

[42] The surgery is called infibulation, and there remain today Greek sculptures and drawings of the procedure. Gerald M. Weiss, MD and Andrea W. Harter, Circumcision: Frankly Speaking (Fort Collins: Wiser Publications, 1998), 22.

circumcision seems to have been adopted by the Romans in Diaspora, perhaps because of the Jewish community's presence in Rome.[43]

With the rise of Christianity, particularly in Rome, the ritual of circumcision was threatened yet again. Paul claimed that justification by faith was enough for converts to Christianity and thus circumcision was an unnecessary ritual. In fact, Paul saw circumcision as an outward sign of wickedness, as he writes in Titus 1:10-11, " For there are many rebellious people, idle-talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they mislead whole families by teaching for dishonest gain what ought not to be taught." Paul goes even further in Galatians 5:1-12 as he writes,

> It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace...As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

While Christianity came to dominate Western culture, and circumcision was all but abandoned by non-Jews who had adopted it, Jews continued circumcising well into modernity without hesitation. In fact, in 1607 Spinoza wrote in his Tractatus Theologico-

[43] This was, however, quickly stopped with Paul's assertion that circumcision was no longer necessary so long as we "circumcise our hearts."

Politicus 3:53, that circumcision alone was enough to ensure the survival of the Jewish people. Circumcision moved from the original act of "marking", to the symbol of the Jewish people. The symbolism of circumcision has been quite controversial. Assuming that the removal of foreskin is a removal of unwanted, unnecessary, flesh, then how could we be then made in God's image? Why would we want to change God's creation? And is not God's creation already perfect? The Rabbis struggled with these very questions, and they came up with many explanations. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 2) contains passages about *brit milah* that say that foreskin is "extra"; man achieves physical perfection when he removes it. This is God's way of telling us that just as we cannot achieve corporeal perfection without our own effort, so too we cannot reach spiritual perfection without our own religious effort. Rambam disagrees, arguing that we cannot control our own impulses, that man is too weak for God's perfection and that we must remove the foreskin in order to better serve God without averring to temptation. Rabbi Mandy Feder of Yeshiva B'nei Torah writes in "The *Bris* of Abraham",

> Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed states that an uncircumcised person is more perfect physically. Since he is born that way he is more physically perfect. G-d created man uncircumcised, which must be a physically more perfect state respecting his physical existence. Circumcision reduces man's instinctual drive. It makes us less perfect physically but demonstrates that we must perfect ourselves spiritually. Milah signifies man's conquest over the instinctual part of his nature. Circumcision represents an institution in man which demonstrates a

reduction of his instinctual drive. The instinctual part of man's nature is the source of his superstitious tendencies.[44]

In modern times debate about circumcision has centered on medical practice and psychological trauma. Those who are pro-circumcision beyond ritual see the surgery as beneficial (a deterrent against cancer and urinary tract infections), while the anti-circumcision groups see the surgery as unnecessarily, unproven medically and psychologically damaging for young children. While many studies have been done the findings have always been blurry, and for those who circumcise for religious reasons, the debate is moot. However, for secular Jews who identify as Jews but remain happily unaffiliated and for liberal Jews who question the validity and necessity of ritual circumcision the question of whether or not to circumcise is truly agonizing.

A good deal of research has been done on just how unaffiliated, American Reform and Reconstructionist Jews feel about circumcision. Hoffman, in his book Covenant of Blood, cites the work of Daniel Landes and Sheryl Robbin on circumcision in modern America, and posits their pro-circumcision argument within the liberal Jewish framework of endogamy. Hoffman writes,

> They cite Maimonides to the effect that "it provides all (sic) Jewish people with a common bodily sign," thereby fostering community, solidarity, and commitment. Since it is an act that we perform on ourselves, it constitutes a symbolic rejection of Sartre's notion that Judaism is a status ascribed by a hostile outer world intent on labeling

[44] Mandy Feder, "The Bris of Abraham", http://www.ybt.org/, 2/2002.

Jews as different. And it is sacrifice both theologically and physically, demonstrating the reality that, as a serious and mature religion, Judaism demands personal sacrifice... It also constitutes an affirmation of tikkum olam... because (contra Romberg) it is a demonstration of the fact that, far from being perfect, the state of nature exists only to be corrected so as to bring about a messianic age.[45]

Clearly, Landes and Robbin are addressing circumcision to the modern, liberal American Jew who, passionate about "betterment", seeks to explain ritual activity in the prism of social action. In our religious schools this presentation of circumcision is the one most focused upon. While liberal American Jews have struggled with circumcision, they retain it out of duty to heritage and communal pride.

Those Jews who are anti-circumcision in America often site the infliction of pain upon infants as barbaric, and the ritual of *brit milah* as archaic. Hoffman writes,

" ... opposition is slowly growing, and for the first time in history, it includes outspoken rabbis as well. It will be recalled that even Holdheim, who despised circumcision as barbaric, arrayed himself publicly with the conservatives on the issue, as did the more moderate Geiger. Recall that Geiger wrote his real feelings about the rite to Zunz but refused to make them public. What has changed is that some rabbis are less resistant to

[45] Hoffman, 217.

admit their ambivalence over circumcisions; more and more of them are voicing their misgivings, at least to each other, and often in print." [46]

This grassroots movement against circumcision runs several websites and publications. The following excerpt, taken from "A Mother Questions *Brit milah*", by Nelly Karsenty in Humanistic Judaism, 1988, is an excellent example of the debate that regarding circumcision,

> When I began to question the practice of circumcision among American Jews, to say that I had no idea of what a great taboo it was would be an understatement. Coming from a European background where routine circumcisions as practiced in most American hospitals are nonexistent, and where many Jews reject brit milla (sic) as an archaic and barbaric ritual, I simply assumed that the Jewish community had divergent approaches on this issue just as with every other aspect of Judaism. I was stunned to realize that questioning this ritual is the ultimate taboo among American Jews. . . . The extent of the repression surrounding this issue is astounding. Anyone who dares to question the brit milla (sic) is angrily silenced, laughed at, lightly dismissed, or labeled a traitor undermining Judaism.[47]

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[46] Ibid., 218.

[47] Nelly Karsenty, "A Mother Questions Brit Milah", Humanistic Judaism 16(3) (1988), 14-20.

Feminists have also looked closely at *brit milah*, some wishing to abandon the practice and others seeking to create an equivalent ritual for girls. While no one has advocated a similar surgery, in fact, the practice of clitoral removal in Africa is considered highly offensive to most Americans, there have been new liturgies introduced for a female *brit milah* ritual. Hoffman discusses these developments saying,

> ...mothers and fathers now say together what was once just the father's blessing, and the same prayers are said both for sons and for daughters in a rite that is no longer called "the covenant of circumcision" (*brit milah*) but simply, "covenant" (brit). Thus, on the eighth day after their birth, both boys and girls are initiated into the "covenant of our People Israel" (instead of the traditional "covenant of Abraham our father") by their mother and father.[48]

C. Redemption:

Pidyon haben, redemption of the first-born son, is a ceremony that finds its roots in the Bible, in Numbers 18:15–16. The firstborn, be it human or animal, belongs to God because of God spared the Jewish firstborn in Egypt. According to Arlene Rossen Cardozo in Jewish Family Celebrations, *pidyon haben* was probably a Jewish refashioning of the ancient ritual of sacrificing first-born sons.[49] Some scholars go

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[48] Hoffman, 219.

[49] Arlene Rossen Cardozo, Jewish Family Celebrations: The Sabbath, Festivals, and Ceremonies (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 195.

further, suggesting that ancient Jews actually practiced child sacrifice. Professor Zvi Howard Adelman, at The Department for Jewish Zionist Education, writes,

> While in other places, there are strong condemnations of child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 18:10), fulminations that would be unnecessary were such a practice not prevalent, there are instances where child sacrifice was reported, often in a matter-of-fact manner, sometimes even with approval... Hebrews and Hebrew kings also practiced child sacrifice. In 2 Kings 16:3, the king of Judah, Ahaz, made his son pass through fire, a practice elsewhere associated with "molech" (2 Kings 23:10), but often not. This practice was regularly condemned by the prophet Jeremiah... A condemnation so excessive and so defensive-God has to disassociate himself personally from such sacrifices-- that, according to Levenson (see below), "The prophet does protest too much." This discussion raises the question whether, contrary to conventional wisdom and most translations, Molech was the name of a pagan deity, as most would like to believe, or the name of a sacrifice offered to God by the Hebrews as members of any other people would do in the ancient near east, a phenomenon illustrated in several other prophetic passages.[50]

Paul M. van Buren writes in his article, "Can Jews and Christians share the same Bible stories without abandoning the core truth claims of their respective religions "... we are led, by way of the explicit command of Exodus 22:29b, "The first born of your sons

[50] Zvi Howard Adelman, "A Cultural History of the Jews", The Department for Jewish Zionist Education, The Pedagogic Center, http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/juice/history1/week3.html, 2/2002.

you shall give to Me," to see that child sacrifice was not practiced only by Israel's neighbors and that it is a major theme underlying the Joseph story and the Exodus itself. But Levenson argues that even when little practiced, it remained an ideal, for ideally, devotion to God could go so far as to offer up that which was most precious: that which is most precious belongs to God."[51] Levenson argues that Jews are ignorant of and uncomfortable with the notion of child sacrifice and resurrection inherent in Judaism, he writes,

> On the Jewish side is a discomfort with theology in general and with the mythopoetic and sacrificial dimensions of the Hebrew Bible in particular and a corollary eagerness to present Judaism as liberal and enlightened, as the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century understood the term. The persistence and reemergence of the story of the death and resurrection of the beloved son is a major embarrassment to many Jews of all sorts.[52]

Whether or not these assertions are true, we can never fully know, but the evolution of child sacrifice into animal sacrifice and finally into redemption is intriguing. As the sacrificial system changed, and the story of the Aqedah became the foundation of the priesthood, the sacrificing of children became a giving of the firstborn and orphans to the priesthood. According to Rabbi Raj, if an infant was not redeemed by his parents, he

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[51] Paul M Van Buren., "Can Jews and Christians share the same Bible stories without abandoning the core truth claims of their respective religions?", A review of Professor Jon Levenson's The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983). ICJS' Interactive Discussion, http://www.icjs.org/info/vanburenessay.html, 2/2002.

[52] Jon Levenson, "Jon Levenson's Response", ICJS' Interactive Discussion, http://www.icjs.org/info/levenson.html, 2/2002.

belonged to the priests. When the priesthood was in existence *pidyon haben* was not a ritual, but a business agreement.

Today, *pidyon haben* is observed mainly by Conservative and Orthodox Jews and remains a dramatic ritual. Parents do not enact *pidyon haben* to ensure their child won't be given to the priests, rather it is a ritual of community acceptance. Rescued from obscurity in the Middle Ages, *pidyon haben* has become a cultural mainstay among Conservative and Orthodox Jews, a ritual that remains meaningful in its reenactment.

D. Conclusion:

For distinctive groups, like Jews, who identify themselves with a particular set of ideas, beliefs, values and standards, rituals of birth and naming are crucial, in many aspects, to the solidarity of the group. While many liberal, and secular, Jews have abandoned rituals that they see as obsolete, like *pidyon haben*, they retain others they consider crucial to life as a Jew (although, for the secular and reconstructionist Jew birth and naming rituals are viewed as rituals of heritage.) For Judaism to continue, there must be Jews to live it. To live as a Jew, in the most traditional sense, requires being born a Jew, that is, being inculcated into the faith via observable birth and naming rituals. Although for many Jews today being Jewish does not require *brit*, or *pidyon haben*, these rituals are important in the lexicon of Jewish dialogue. Though some Jews forgo the *brit milah* ceremony, most are circumcised. While some Jews may name their children gentile

names, they also retain traditional Hebrew names and Jewish surnames. The traditional rituals of the Jewish faith are retained, despite social and cultural changes.

This thesis proposes a curriculum designed to teach Sephardic minhagim and a portion of this curriculum, a unit on Sephardic birth and naming rituals, is explored in detail at the conclusion. To fully appreciate the differences, however slight some may be, between Sephardic and Ashkenazic birth and naming minhagim, I have endeavored to investigate the history and meaning of these rituals in a larger sense. Exploring the history of rituals like *pidyon h ben* and ***brit*** is essential to understanding the significance of these rituals in Jewish life. Rituals bind Jews to their communities. Rituals create Jewish space, as Angel writes, "These rituals and prayers are a constant reminder to an individual Jew of his connection with his entire people. He is reminded to think of others even before he thinks of his own needs." [53]

The next section of this thesis deals exclusively with Sephardic minhagim, as relating to birth and naming, in detail.

[53] Angel, Rhythms,174.

IV: Focus on Sephardic minhagim regarding Birth and Naming.

While the differences in minhagim between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewry are notable, they are not profound. Founded on the same textual passages and halachic decrees, the birth and naming rituals of the Sephardim are, at their core, in line with all Jewish birth and ritual practice. The underlying goal of these rituals is the same world over, to introduce new Jewish boys to the covenant, to name children and to redeem the first-born. Though these rituals are practiced to varying degree in different communities and movements, they are regarded as fundamentally Jewish rituals. An interesting aspect of the perception of Sephardic minhagim is highlighted in Marc Angel's book, The Rhythms of Jewish Living. According to Angel, the Sephardim have a different take on *halakah* and ritual practice. Angel writes,

> One element that needs to be considered is *joie de vivre*. While Sephardim living in Moslem lands over the past four centuries were generally quite observant of *halakah*, their observance did not lead them to become somber or overly serious. Pious Sephardim sang Judeo-Spanish love ballads and drinking songs at family celebrations in a natural way, without self-consciousness. Singing in a lighthearted spirit, even at public gatherings, did not strike them as being irreverent. Rather, the pleasures and aesthetics of this world were viewed in a positive light. Sephardic holiday celebrations and life cycle observances, for example, were

characterized by the preparation of elaborate delicacies to eat, the singing of songs, and a general spirit of gaiety and hospitality.[54]

While Sephardim practice the same rituals as Ashkenazi Jews do, they add their own sense of community, their own *joie de vivre* that permeates their ritual expression. Angel argues that non-Western Jews may be living Jewish values more easily, and more comfortably, that Western Jews. Angel writes,

> ...it may be that the original Jewish values of life are best manifested in the non-Western communities, rather than in the Western communities. The real question any culture must answer is: do the people of this culture have meaning in life? Are they happy? Do their lives make sense to them? Obviously, it is difficult to answer these questions with generalizations. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the non-Western Jews are able to answer these questions with more confidence than Western Jews. Indeed, non-Western peoples, deeply rooted in their own cultures, may be able to answer these questions better than people living in Western cultures.[55]

Angels' point is not to pit non-Western against Western, but to emphasize that today we are living in a world of blending cultural backgrounds. Living in this "new era", we must "recognize the wisdom of Jewish tradition – especially in its non-Western

[54] Angel, Rhythms, 75.
[55] Ibid., 177.

manifestation."[56] For many Sephardim this new era begins in America, where Sephardic Jews have maintained a small and secluded, but comfortable, community.

The Sephardim first made a foothold in America in 1654 when a small group of Brazilian Jews, of Spanish and Portuguese descent, founded Congregation Shearith Israel in New Amsterdam. Other Spanish/Portuguese communities developed in Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Charleston. According to Angel's exploratory study, The Sephardim of the United States published in 1974, which documents the history of Sephardic communities in the United States. It is a widespread "myth" that Jewish immigration to America was largely Sephardic.[57] Angel writes,

> The fact is that relatively many Ashkenazim also came during this period, working with the Sephardim to build Jewish life on American soil. In New York for example Ashkenazim outnumbered the Sephardim by 1730... (However) the final determination of what makes a community Sephardi or Ashkenazi is based on culture rather than genetics. So long as the Spanish and Portuguese culture predominated in the community it could be accurately described as Sephardi, even if all its members were of Ashkenazi origin. [58]

Sephardim from the Levant, the Mediterranean and North African communities, did not begin arriving in the United States until the 20th century. Angel records,

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[56] Ibid., 178.

[57] Rabbi Marc Angel, The Sephardim of the United States: An Exploratory Study (New York: Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1974; repr., The American Jewish Yearbook, 1973), 81.

[58] Ibid. 81-82.

"According to figures derived from the records of the United States Commissioner General of Immigration, 2,738 Levantine Sephardim came to the United States between 1890 and 1907."[59] This number dramatically increased between 1899 and 1925 when 25,591 Levantine Jews entered the United States, fleeing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and poverty in the Balkans.[60] The majority of these Sephardim settled in New York. The second large wave of Sephardic immigration to the United States came in the aftermath of World War II, many of the Sephardim fleeing Holocaust ravaged lands in the Balkans but a significant number arrived in the wake of de-colonization in North Africa. However, exact points of origin are often difficult to ascertain. Daniel Elazar writes, in "The Other Jews," " Many Sephardim arrived individually, and, if they chose to identify themselves as Jews, were often assimilated into the Ashkenazic community." [61]

The Sephardim in America are more a coalition of cultures than a single colossal culture. Angel writes, " Because Sephardi communities in different lands developed under different cultural and historical conditions, it would be more proper to speak of Sephardi cultures than one monolithic Sephardi culture. Each group has had unique experiences and has made contributions to Jewish and general civilization. Each group deserves to have its own historians and researchers."[62] The Sephardim in America are not only comprised of distinct cultural groups, they are a small minority, as Elazar writes, "American Sephardim are a small minority within a small minority, a fact that raises concern among those interested in the survival of Sephardic group life."[63]

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[59] Ibid. 86.
[60] Ibid. 86-87.
[61] Daniel Elazar, The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1989), 166.
[62] Angel, Sephardim, 78.
[63] Elazar, 167.

The following descriptions are based on Sephardic ritual practices in America. While many of the practices originated in foreign lands, the practices are described as they occur presently in the United States. . I am heavily indebted to the work of Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky for his work on American Sephardic minhagim.

Syrian Jewry:

According to studies published in 1972, the vast majority of Syrian Jews lived in one section of Brooklyn.[64] This number has surely increased, though it is unclear if the population has expanded greatly beyond the Brooklyn borders. Angel writes, "Of all the Sephardi communities in the United States, the Syrian community of Brooklyn is doubtless the strongest and most viable. Syrians have kept their neighborhood intact. When the young marry, they often choose to settle within their community... The Syrian Jews... support several day schools attended by an estimated 85 to 90 percent of all the school-age children."[65]

Naming:

[64] Hayyim Cohen, "Sephardi Jews in the U.S., Marriage with Ashkenazim and Non-Jews," Dispersion and Unity 13-14 (1971-1972): 152-53, 159.
[65] Angel, Sephardim, 112-113.

Syrian Jews do not abide by the prohibition of Rabbi Yehuda Hehasid against naming a child after a living relative.[66] The priority of naming is as follows: the first male child is named after the paternal grandfather, the second male child is named after the maternal grandfather; the first female child is named after the paternal grandmother and the second female child is named after the maternal grandmother. Children after these are named after anyone in the family chosen by the parents for such an honor. Children's English names are often times given with corresponding Hebrew name of the grandparent. Often family names are selected from city names, professions or trades.[67]

Zeved Habat:

Girls are named in the synagogue, the father being called to an *aliyah*, the *mesader* calls for the *abi habat* (father of the daughter) and the congregation chants the chorus *pizmonim "lezebed habat."* A prayer is sung hoping the parents of the child receive much joy from her, see her married and produce many male offspring. A *sabt* (kiddush) and a *seudah* are provided in honor of the naming. [68]

Brit milah:

Brit milah is held early in the morning, usually at the *Shaharit* service, though it is often held at home. The community holds a festive gathering called, *Shadd-il-Asse* (in

[66] Dobrinksy, Treasury, 3.
[67] Ibid., 4.
[68] Ibid., 3.

Arabic), which is translated as "pulling the pods". The pods here refer to the Myrtle branches often used for ritual observance that, according to Kabbalistic teaching, protect the newborn male child.[69]

There is no special chair for Eliyahu hanabi; instead there is a special *parokhet* (Ark cover), which is inscribed with the name of Eliyahu hanabi. The *parokhet* is placed on top of a chair on which no one sits. Syrian Jews have a rather unique religious custom called *Seneet Eliyahu hanabi* (or, the Tray of Elijah the Prophet), a large round tray with several tiers with many flowers and lit candles. Guests place contributions on the tray as a good omen. At the conclusion of the ceremony the tray is auctioned off to the highest bidder who then donates the monies collected to charity. Often the monies are retained by the family as *Mamon shel Berakha* (blessed money) for down payments on a house, or investments in a business or are saved for the child's education.[70]

While the mother is not present at the *brit milah*, she does partake in the *seudah shel mizvah* (religious banquet) and traditionally wears a white gown. She is given a glass of wine as a special honor.

The baby boy is named after the brit and a religious banquet is held.

It is assumed that a baby girl is Jewish from birth and thus no special ceremony is needed, she is already considered protected.

Pidyon haben:

[69] Ibid., 5.
[70] Ibid.

The *pidyon haben* takes place on the evening of the thirty-first day. (There is an interesting division among the Aleppoan and the Damascene Syrian Jews. The Aleppoan insist on thirty days and 12 hours while the Damascene abide by thirty days plus so long as it is before the thirty first night.)

The mother attends in her bridal gown. Prior to the religious banquet the parents sit at a table with the Kohen and enact the following ritual: the Kohen asks the mother to declare, "This is my son, my first-born, and I have not miscarried." The Kohen then asks the father if he wishes to redeem his son and he gives five pieces of genuine silver. The father hands the coins to the Kohen stating, "This is the redemption of my son, my first-born." The Kohen takes the five silver pieces, declares he has received them and that "according to the laws of Moses and Israel" the boy is redeemed.[71]

Judeo-Spanish Jewry:

The Judeo-Spanish Jews, hailing from the Iberian Peninsula and immigrating to the United States from Western Europe, were the first Jews to settle in the Americas. Descendents of ex-Marranos, the Judeo-Spanish Sephardim were "characterized by pride, wealth, culture and grandeur" while in Europe.[72] When the Judeo-Spanish first arrived in the United States, in the 1600's, they had a flourishing and vibrant community. However, this vibrancy dulled as the 20th century approached, Angel writes, "Though they made many significant contributions to Jewish and American life, the Spanish and Portuguese communities gradually diminished in influence. Assimilation and intermarriage cost them

[71] Ibid., 8.
[72] Angel, Sephardim, 78.

some losses. The comparatively large immigration of Ashkenazi Jews in the early 19th century engulfed the old Sephardi communities... They tenaciously clung to their synagogue customs and rituals, fearful that without such rigor the entire *minhag* would collapse."[73]

Naming:

Judeo-Spanish Jews abide by the same naming rules as the Syrian Jews. Women do not have Hebrew names, only Spanish names, e.g. Rosa. The Spanish name is the name used on official documents, marriage contracts, and divorce papers. A first-born boy is always name *Bekhor* and a first-born girl is always named *Bekhureta*, they go by the diminutive names *Buki* (boy) and *Bukiza* (girl).[74]

Zeved Habat:

The ceremony for the naming of a girl is called a *fadas* and it is held at home when the mother has recovered. The girl is brought in on a pillow by a young girl dressed as a bride, the infant's parents and grandparents gather round her and sing. After the naming takes place there is a lavish feast. A yad is placed above the child's crib as an amulet for protection.

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[73] Ibid., 84.
[74] Dobrinsky, Treasury, 19.

Brit milah:

The *brit milah* is called *birkat milah* in the Judeo-Spanish tradition. The *birkat milah* is held in the afternoon to attract a larger crowd. The child is given a paper amulet and it is left under his pillow, one given to the mother and one to the father. This amulet is either in the shape of a *magen* (circumcision shield) or a male doll. At the *brit (birkat) Milah* ceremony the child is named. A fascinating tradition requires that if a child named at the ceremony shares the same name as one of the family members present, that family member is to be slapped. The slap reminds them that there is a new soul entering the world that shares their name and their attributes. Since a name and a soul are often interwoven it is crucial that the family members realizes how important this shared name becomes.[75]

There is a special *Kise shel Eliyahu* (Chair of Elijah) that is bedecked in purple and gold materials to give it the appearance of a throne. The drapes of purple and gold are passed down from generation to generation, this is known as *chevres*. A glass of water is placed under the chair, it is supposed that Elijah will bless this water and those present without children can drink of it in the hopes of fertility.

The sandak (godfather) is seated on an elaborately decorated pillow that is placed upon a table. (The selecting of the *sandak*, and *sandaka*, is as follows: for the first-boy the father's parents are chosen, for the second boy the mother's parents.) The sandak sits on this pillow, holding the child throughout the circumcision. (The pillow is part of the mother's trousseau and shows her handiwork to all present.) Rose water is often distributed along with fragrances. This tradition is linked with Kabbalism.

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[75] Ibid., 21.

Pidyon haben:

The mother wears her wedding gown for the ceremony of *pidyon haben*. The baby is placed upon an intricately decorated special pillow.

Moroccan Jewry:

Among the Sephardim in America the Moroccan Jews are the minority. However, there is quite a large population living in Canada, particularly in Quebec. According to research gathered by Angel, 8% of Montreal's Jewish population is Sephardic and 90% hails from Morocco.[76] Angel writes, "In the United States, they are represented in small numbers in nearly all Sephardi communities. They generally have enjoyed a steady upward mobility educationally, economically, and socially."[77]

Naming:

For Moroccan Jews a large family is deemed very important, and a premium is placed upon male offspring. When a child is named women often ululate in celebration. Moroccan Jews often surround infants with amulets to ward off Lilith. Lilith, according to Midrash, was Adam's first wife. The discrepancies between Genesis I and II are often cited as the genesis of the Lilith story, and the only direct Biblical reference to Lilith is in Isaiah 34:14. Lilith is presented in rabbinic texts as a rebellious woman who rejects

[76] Angel, Sephardim, 113.
[77] Ibid.

Adam's dominance and commands her own will. Lilith assumes the form of a Succubus, or Queen of Demons, and is often associated with SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) and men's nocturnal emissions.[78]

Zebed habat:

The naming of a girl takes place at home, there is a large *seudah* and women ululate as the naming takes place to express their joy.

Brit milah:

Moroccan Jews, fearful of Lilith, often arrange a ceremony called *tahdid* that protects the uncircumcised child. The room in which the child is kept is bedecked in amulets in each corner. These written amulets consist of Pslams 126 and 121 as well as the names of the three angels destined to return Lilith to Adam, they are Snwy, Snsnwy and Smnglf. On one of the amulets is a drawing of Lilith, arms bound, under which reads: "Protect this newborn child from all harm."[79]

The *tahdid* ceremony involves a knife or a sword. Men coming into the room at night wave a sword, or knife, through the air and run it along the walls killing demons that may attack the young boy. It is also common to place a knife under the pillow of the mother and the baby.

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[78] Siegmund Hurwitz, "Lilith – The First Eve" (excerpts), http://www.daimon.ch/385630522X_2E.htm, (April 11, 2002.)

[79] Dobrinsky, Treasury, Pg. 12-13.

On the night prior to the circumcision, the Chair of Elijah is brought from the synagogue. During the *brit milah* ceremony the sandak (called *padrino* in Tangiers) sits on the Chair of Elijah holding the infant. A small dish of sand is placed nearby, signifying the hope that the child will be a fruitful as the grains of sand. The naming of a male child in Moroccan tradition is similar to that of all Sephardim. If a child is born on a holiday, that child will be named after one of the characters in that particular festival, for example if a child is born on Purim he may be named Mordecai. (These names would be recognized after the names of the grandparents have been given.)

Pidyon haben:

As in the circumcision ceremony the Jews of Morocco hang amulets on the walls to dispel demons or other evil spirits. There are several different customs related to the *pidyon haben* that warrant mention: one custom is to dramatize the procedure of the *pidyon haben*. According to this custom the Kohen comes to the mother of the child with the woman who delivered the child, most often a midwife. He would question the mother, as to the veracity of her claim that this is her child, that she never had any other child and that this is her husband's child. At the *pidyon haben* ceremony the mother would come dressed in her finest clothing, and the Kohen would ask the same questions of her. The father meanwhile would distribute flowers and perfume to the guests. Suddenly, the Kohen would rise and appear to be taking the child from the house. At this the mother would wail and the father would approach the Kohen and offer a ransom of five jewels or

coins. When the "ransom" is selected then the child is given back to his mother and the ceremony continues.

A second custom is for the Kohen to return the redemption money to the father at the time of the redemption. The reason this is done is because a Kohen's authenticity may be in doubt and he should not take the money. A third custom requires the Kohen to give five pieces of silver to the mother, who then gives them to the father and he, in turn, gives them back to the Kohen.[80]

The ritual minhagim of the Sephardim discussed here, while not wholly separate from that of their Ashkenazic cousins, offers an insight into the dynamic and unique practices of Sephardim. To properly teach Sephardic history and minhagim having a clear picture of the many practices that separate Sephardic from Ashkenazic custom is essential. While this thesis has focused on three distinct Sephardic groups, there remain many Sephardim that may or may not have similar customs and, in a larger study, it would be pertinent to discuss these groups.[81]

[80] Ibid., 17.
[81] Principally, Iranian, Iraqi, Greek and Portuguese Sephardim.

V: Analysis of the ways in which Birth and Naming are currently being taught in Jewish supplementary schools.

The purpose of this thesis is to assess the ways in which we teach our students about Sephardic minhag, history and culture with a particular focus on Sephardic birth and naming minhagim in religious education. Because there are no textbooks designed specifically to teach Sephardic birth and naming rituals, a first step must be appropriately incorporating Sephardic birth and naming rituals into curricular materials intended to teach the life cycle.

Birth and naming rituals are traditionally taught in Jewish day schools and supplementary education programs in the sixth grade. The following books are texts used by day schools and synagogues to teach life cycle events. While many schools use these textbooks, most often teachers use the books in conjunction with their own materials and teaching styles. It would be nearly impossible, and quite impractical, to attempt to generalize about what individual teachers bring to the table regarding birth and naming rituals, so focusing on the texts they may be using helps to gather a clearer presentation of what information is available to teachers.

As the following reviews indicated, there is very little Sephardic content to most of the life cycle curricula currently used in Jewish education that have sections on birth and naming rituals. Most of the curricula reviewed mention one aspect of Sephardic minhagim, namely the Sephardic tradition of naming children after living relatives, but few mention anything more of the Sephardic traditions

as relating to these rituals. All of the materials reviewed below adhere to traditional Ashkenazic minhagim in discussing birth and naming rituals, while some mention recent ritual innovations like *simchat habat*, none include Sephardic customs as "normative" ritual practice.

In the following material reviews, only the sections dealing with birth and naming rituals will be addressed.

Harry Gersh, When a Jew Celebrates (New York: Behrman House Inc., 1986.)

Perhaps the most frequently used text discussing birth and naming rituals in general is Behrman House's When a Jew Celebrates by Harry Gersh. "When a Jew Celebrates" (dated 1971) covers the broad spectrum of Jewish celebrations, from holidays to life-cycle events. The first chapter, entitled "Time and the Individual", contains a section on birth, entitled "Life begins", and a section on naming, entitled "Naming." The fist section, "Life begins", covers birth, *brit milah*, and *pidyon haben*, while the second, "Naming", covers first names, surnames and Hebrew names. There is a brief, two sentence, discussion of Sephardim naming children after living relatives.

The book covers the *brit milah* ritual in the following way: firstly, the ritual of circumcision is presented as the male child's entry into the "congregation of Israel." Secondly, the text compares the marking of the male child with the marking of a wedding ring, or "signs of agreement between God and the Jewish people." Thirdly, When a Jew Celebrates discusses the reasons for, and history of, circumcision. (The textbook mentions that many ancient cultures ritually removed the foreskin, the health benefits to having a circumcised penis, and the *mitzvot* of circumcision.) When a Jew Celebrates

does make clear that the reasons behind the ritual are manifold and cannot be fully explained. The author mentions that the ritual is still practiced today by thoroughly non-observant and un-affiliated Jews.

The *brit milah* ceremony itself is discussed in detail. The words "*brit*" and "*milah*" are translated, as "covenant" and "circumcision" respectively, and the ritual is described as a "minor surgery" occurring, traditionally, on the eight day after a baby boy's birth. The trade of the mohel is discussed and there is a description of Elijah's chair, and the mohel's blessing is translated, as is the sheheheyanu, as recited by the parents. There is an attempt by the author to correlate the naming ritual for a girl with the circumcision ritual, making clear the intent to "equalize" the rituals. The *brit milah* section closes with a discussion of Elijah's presence at the circumcision of baby boy's and the corresponding midrashim explaining the tradition. There is no mention of Sephardic tradition.

Following *brit milah* the text discusses *pidyon haben*, describing the ritual practice in Biblical and midrashic imagery. The text describes the tradition, mentioning the five shekels, and the donation of the money offering to charity. Again, there is no mention of Sephardic practice or tradition. When a Jew Celebrates is carefully written, preferring to straddle the fences of affiliation than make bold, or controversial, statements. Every ritual and holiday is presented fairly, with descriptions that while not fully detailed give the reader a clear idea of how, and why, Jews celebrate certain occasions. The language in the book is simply written, meant primarily for older elementary school aged children, but contains a significant amount of transliterated Hebrew and a glossary.

Shirley Stern, Exploring the Jewish Holidays and Customs (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1981.)

Shirley Stern's Exploring the Jewish Holidays and Customs (Ktav Publishing, 1981) presents a similar picture of life cycle events and holidays as Harry Gersh's When a Jew Celebrates. Unit V in the book, entitled "The Jewish Life-Cycle," begins with a short section on birth and then proceeds to detail naming. The texts mentions Sephardic naming customs, "If you lived in Greece, Turkey, or other countries where Oriental or Sephardic Jews live, you and your friends would probably be named after close living relatives, but not your parents."[82] Hebrew names are discussed next, Simchat Bat is mentioned though the ritual is not named and this is followed by a two-sentence mention of *brit milah.*

Stern's text continues, after a classroom discussion question, with *pidyon haben.* The text is general, discussing the particulars of the ritual (the giving of five silver pieces) and a brief history of the Temple priesthood.

While Stern's Exploring the Jewish Holidays and Customs only scratches the surface of birth and naming rituals it is well written and appropriate for younger students. Again, the only mention of Sephardic ritual is in the section on naming. Stern ends each chapter of the book with a short, and many times insufficient, lesson. These lessons consist of discussion topics and translations of Hebrew words and phrases. The book is colorful, but bland with little in-depth discussion and little to provoke conversation.

[82] Stern, 170.

Rahel Musleah, Journey of a Lifetime: The Jewish Life Cycle Book (West Orange: Behrman House Inc., 1997)

Musleah's Journey of a Lifetime opens with *brit milah* and closes with rituals of mourning. Designed for middle school students, particularly Bat/Bar Mitzvah aged students, "Journey of a Lifetime" is presented in clear, concise and contemporary language. "Journey of a Lifetime" approaches *brit milah* from a ritual perspective, the particulars of the ritual are outlined and described in detail. There is mention of Elijah's chair and the mitzvah of circumcision, but no mention of particular customs, Sephardic or otherwise, associated with the circumcision.

Journey of a Lifetime, published more recently (1997) then the previously two books, presents the ritual of brit bat, or "covenant of the daughter", as a viable and respected ritual. While this ceremony, as described, is quite similar to the Sephardic *zebed habat* ceremony, the fact that it is mentioned, and explored, makes Journey of a Lifetime a particularly contemporary book. *Pidyon haben* receives a cursory examination, the ritual is described, and the text mentions the recent ritual of Pidyon HaBat. There are several worksheets following the section on *pidyon haben* and *brit milah* one of which incorporates tzedakah and birth.

Naming is handled with aplomb, thought there are no references made to Sephardic naming practices. Journey of a Lifetime discusses Hebrew names and how they are formatted, family names (including a fantastic list of Ashkenazic, particularly German, family names and their literal meanings) and names as gifts (Pirke Avot and the three crowns, including the crown of a good name).

Journey of a Lifetime is a fine introduction to Jewish birth and naming rituals in general, it is up-to-date and gender inclusive, but it contains no mention of Sephardic rite or minhagim.

Sarah Feldman, Let's Explore Being Jewish: The Life Cycle (West Orange: Behrman House Inc., 1996.)

Feldman's The Life Cycle is an issue of the educational magazine "Let's Explore Being Jewish" published by Behrman House. The Life Cycle issue is often used separately as a life cycle teaching tool, it contains many illustrations, is quite colorful, filled with activities and is primarily designed as a student's workbook. While short, it is only 16 pages long, The Life Cycle is a fine introduction to the Jewish life cycle. Of particular interest are the sections on *simhat habat*, *brit milah* and naming (there is no mention of *pidyon haben*). The section on naming contains an interesting reference to Sephardic naming customs that is entirely subtle. The passage in question is a quote from a, supposedly, fictitious young man who says, " I was named after an uncle who was a great artist." If we read this in conjunction with the photo beside it, of a man and child drawing together, we should assume that this character has been named after a living relative.

Joel Lurie Grishaver, The Life Cycle Workbook (Denver: A.R.E. Publishing Inc., 1983.)

Joel Grishaver's book is divided into six modules, one of which is "birth events" in which we *find* lessons and activities teaching *brit milah*, *pidyon haben* and naming.

The Life Cycle Workbook is very much as its title describes it, it is in "cartoon" format, which small frames and illustrations, interspersed with activities that require students to write in the books (e.g. fill in the blank, circle the correct answer, etc...). The Life Cycle Workbook is clearly biased towards Ashkenazic minhagim; we find such customs as wimple (embroidering the new child's diaper) and the eating of chickpeas on the Shalom Zachar. The text does not mention any Sephardic customs or minhagim relating to birth, *brit milah*, naming, or *pidyon haben*. Joel Grishaver's book is quite popular with students, both for its cartoons and its low-key, straightforward approach; however, it does not approach Sephardic minhagim in any capacity.

Barbara Binder Kadden and Bruce Kadden, Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Traditions and Activities (Denver: A.R.E. Publishing Inc., 1997).

Designed as a resource for teachers Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Traditions and Activities, contains chapters on birth, marriage, divorce, and aging among others. The first chapter, that relating to birth, *brit milah* and naming is quite useful as an introduction to the subject for educators with little advanced Judaic knowledge. The text provides historical context for each ceremony and relates each ritual to Biblical and Rabbinic sources. The section on *brit milah* does not contain any references to Sephardic tradition; such rituals as the Syrian Seneet Eliyahu hanabi ("Tray of Elijah") are not approached. However, the text is quite comprehensive in its discussion of basic, and Ashkenazic, *brit milah* customs. The section on *pidyon haben* makes no mention of Sephardic minhagim, though it concisely discusses the tradition ritual in detail. The section on naming does mention, quite briefly, the Sephardic tradition of naming children after living relatives,

though it is not discussed in detail and the reasons why this is done are not explained. *zebed habat* is discussed, through briefly, and no details beside "it includes singing, dancing and a festive meal" are included.

Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Traditions and Activities provides excellent activities to teach life cycle events from primary school aged students to adults, presenting ideas as vignettes and leading discussion questions the text contains a wealth of lesson suggestions. However, these lesson suggestions make no mention of Sephardic customs.

Ronald H. Isaacs, Rites of Passage: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1992.)

Isaacs' Rites of Passage is a reference textbook, designed with "a Conservative Jew in mind."[83] While it can be used by teachers as a resource for teaching life cycle rituals, it was written to provide interested congregants with ritual information, historical perspectives and ceremonial customs. The book includes lengthy sections on *brit milah*, *pidyon haben/habat* and Naming. Each section is organized as Q & A sessions, with the author posing frequently asked questions regarding elements of rituals, like *pidyon haben*, and then answering them.

The first section, that on *brit milah*, contains one explicit reference to Sephardic tradition. Isaacs mentions the Sephardic custom of commemorating a baby boy's brit by making charitable donations in multiples of twenty-six, the numerical equivalent of God's name. The *brit milah* section concludes with an order of service, mentioning only Ashkenazic rite and is followed by a list of "folk customs" which contain many

[83] Isaacs, 5.

Sephardic ritual practices. Amongst the Sephardic customs mentioned are *tahdid*, a Moroccan tradition of placing a knife under the pillow of the baby boy the night before the brit, and the hanging of amulets in the child and mother's rooms; neither of these "folk custom" descriptions mention where the custom originated or who practices it.

The piece on naming, entitled "What Shall We Name Our Child?" makes mention of the Sephardic custom of naming children after living relatives, though it ends with a curious exclamation point, "To the Sephardim this custom was an expression of honoring the living!"[84] (It is unclear why the mention of this custom is made in the past tense and ends with an exclamation point; it could be read as a derogatory statement.) This section goes on to mention the Sephardic custom of *zebed habat* amongst other innovative naming ceremonies, though the author fails to mention that *zebed habat* is not a recent innovation, as is the custom of *simchat bat*.

The segment on *pidyon haben/habat* makes no mention of Sephardic minhagim.

While Isaacs' Rites of Passage includes several references to Sephardic tradition, these references are brief and ill informed. Including Sephardic minhagim amongst "folk customs", rather than placing it alongside passages relating Ashkenazic minhagim could be seen by some readers as offensive. Overall, Isaacs' book is a decent introduction to Jewish life cycle rituals, but contains very little information, appropriately written or not, on Sephardic tradition.

It is clear from the analysis of the above texts, that Sephardic life-cycle minhagim are not adequately represented. Whether or not this is true of the vast majority of life-cycle textbooks used in Jewish religious and day schools cannot be ascertained, however,

[84] Ibid. 39.

it seems fair to suggest, based on the aforementioned texts, that this may well be the case. In the foreword to Kadden and Kadden's Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Traditions and Activities, Rabbi Jeffery Salkin writes, " I have always believed that the reclamation of the life cycle is a suitable spiritual project for modern Jews. At their best, when the poetry works and the magic does its stuff, life cycle celebrations keep Jews connected to the Jew(ish) people, to God and to Torah."[85] In the reclamation of life cycle, the reclamation of ritual, it seems only appropriate that we look beyond the borders of our predominantly Ashkenazie rituals and explore, and teach, the life cycle minhagim of the "other Jews", the Sephardim.

While some of these texts include Sephardic minhagim, what has been included is very slight. Rather than presenting birth and naming rituals from a universal Jewish perspective, these texts are Ashkenazic in focus with a dash of Sephardic minhagim included to represent the "other" traditions. As Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue write, "The history of the Sephardi Jews of the Levant continues to be marginalized in the standard narratives... at best to be given cursory and exoticized treatments that obscure, rather than enlighten."[86] This imbalanced presentation not only continues the myth of Ashkenazic ritual preeminence, but also neglects a rich and precious tradition. Today, in our multicultural society, we can no longer tolerate ignorance towards Sephardim. This thesis attempts to begin to redress the balance.

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[85] Kadden and Kadden, ix.

[86] Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, Sephardi Jewry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.), xvii.

VI. Conclusion:

Dobrinsky writes in his introduction to A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs, "For World Jewry, one whose main concerns is survival, a goal which can only be secured through Jewish knowledge, and for those who seek a better appreciation of the "unity in diversity" which has always been the hallmark of Judaism, the enlarged understanding of Sephardic Jewry's contributions to the preservation of our religious heritage is essential."[87] The significance of Sephardic minhagim is not merely to be found in the academies, in the dusty bookshelves of time, but in the vibrant faces of tomorrows Jews. The hallmark of Judaism is diversity, the accepting, moreover, the understanding, of difference. Our faith requires diversity. Rabbi Angel writes in the conclusion to his 1973 study Sephardim in the United States, "The Sephardi heritage belongs to *all* Jews, not merely those born of Sephardi ancestry. Within the Sephardi historical experiences there are sources of religious, literary and cultural power that could be meaningful to all Jews."[88]

To best appreciate the "cultural power" that the Sephardim bring to Judaism, we must teach it to our young people. The materials available today are inadequate in fulfilling this task; those general education materials that mention Sephardic rituals do so briefly. To successfully teach our students about Sephardim and the world of Judaism, we need to reach them in the religious schools. We need to reach them via every piece of curriculum we have, we must infuse each lesson with global Jewish experience. While

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[87] Ibid., XVII.
[88] Angel, Sephardim, 136.

curricula focusing solely on the Sephardic experience are useful, they are intended as supplements. We need to have Sephardic education become part of mainstream Jewish education. We must incorporate Sephardic history, culture and minhagim into our classroom materials, and we must remove long-standing and condescending presentations of Sephardim as "other." Elazar writes in his conclusion to The Other Jews,

> ...Ashkenazic condescension continues... It is especially prominent and painful in schools, where Sephardic culture is still treated as folklore and considered peripheral... The Ashkenazic world and its leadership must put a stop to the negative aspects of the Sephardic-Ashkenazic relationship, to get to know the Sephardim and their culture, not only repair the breach but also because the cultural heritage of the Sephardic world is for all Jews.[89]

In this thesis I have explored how Sephardic history and culture is taught in our religious schools, and explain ways in which we can dramatically improve it. By analyzing the curriculum, resource materials and teacher guides available, I have clarified the ways in which religious schools currently, and have in the recent past, approached the subject of Sephardic history and culture. Specifically, I have investigated Jewish birth and naming rituals, life cycle curricula and textbooks designed for middle school aged students and proposed a series of lessons to teach life cycle events from a Sephardic perspective. I believe my thesis can serve as a first step towards fully integrating Sephardic history and minhagim into our religious education. While my proposal is not new, it is nonetheless of

[89] Elazar, 203-204.

particular importance for Jews today. We live in communities divided by space, time and ideology, what Jews need now is not more division but unity. What Jews need now is a common understanding, a common language and ideally a universal perspective. My thesis suggests that this future is possible with the inclusion of the Sephardim, by gathering the fringes we shall create a secure future for Jews the world round.

VII: Proposal Of Curriculum to Teach Sephardic "Life Cycle" Rituals.

As mentioned earlier, life cycle rituals are most often taught in the 6th grade in conjunction with either sex education or an approaching *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Most often birth and naming rituals are taught as a small part of the life cycle, *brit milah* and naming are focused upon most while *pidyon haben* is rarely mentioned. Most texts designed to teach life cycle events to 6th grade students do not mention Sephardic ritual, most mention Sephardic naming customs but do not explain why the Sephardim name children after living relatives.

This lesson is one in a series of six designed to teach Sephardic life cycle rituals as they relate to Jewish traditions as a whole.

The six lessons include:

1) "Sephardim" –An introduction to the Sephardim and life cycle.
2) "Before birth"- conception and pregnancy, "kortadura de fashadura."
3) "A baby is born"- *Brit Milah* and naming.
4) "Entering the community" – *Pidyon Ha Ben* and *Bar/Bat Mitzvah.*
5) "From two to one" – marriage and family.
6) "The cycle continues" – death and mourning.

Each proposed unit would include pages that can be photocopied and handed out to students for individual and group work. Each unit will provide teachers with the necessary background information to teach the subjects, and it is hoped that teachers will

feel compelled to read this information in preparation for teaching Sephardic life cycle rituals.

VIII: Unit II: "A Baby: "A Baby is Born":

Goals:

This unit on naming customs is designed to teach middle school aged students the significance and meaning of Jewish naming customs, and concurrently the many ways Jews practice the tradition of naming babies.

Previous to this unit the students discussed and explored Sephardic history and minhag and Sephardic traditions and interpretations of procreation and pregnancy. In the previous unit we compared Ashkenazim and Sephardim to Texans and New Yorkers, to underscore the fact that while they practice different traditions they are both of the same faith, just as Texans and New Yorkers are of the same nation. The unit following this one will explore *pidyon ha ben* and *bar/bat mitzvah* as practice by the Sephardim. While this unit does mention *brit* it is not intended to be a sex education unit, and will not discuss human physiology, only rituals related to birth and naming.

By the end of this unit students will be able to identify the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic naming customs, be familiar with some Sephardic *brit* customs, recognize the tradition of the Judeo-Spanish "slapping" (here presented as a "tapping") ritual and Sephardic forename naming practices.

To be Jewish is to know Judaism, and to appreciate the many roads Jews build towards a peaceful and inspired life. While not all Jews name equally, each road towards a name is a blessing.

Procedure: 60-minute lesson: 6th grade

"A baby is born"

Discussion "Naming" introduction: 20 minutes:

1. Set up in the front of the classroom a large (photocopied if need be) photograph of a baby, it can be a boy or a girl.

2. Ask the students to write on a piece of paper what they think the name of this child should be. They are free to name this child after someone they know, a good friend, a relative etc...

3. Have each student read their name, and give a reason why they have named the child this particular name. If they have named the child after their brother, for example, have them explain why they feel their brother's name is a good name for this child.

4. When the students read aloud the names, if there is a student in the classroom that shares that particular name the teacher will tap this student on the shoulder. (In preparation for this lesson, should the students all pick names that are unfamiliar to the class, the teacher should be sure to have chosen a name for the child that they know is shared by another student in the classroom.)

5. Explain to the class why you have tapped the shoulders of those students who share names with the names chosen for the child. Explain: For many Jews your name is interlinked with your soul. The ceremony we just enacted is practiced by Judeo-Spanish Jews. These Jews are Sephardic, from Spain originally, but now living in Western European countries like France, or Italy, or in the United States or Israel. For many Judeo-Spanish Sephardim this ritual is a traditional act, handed down from generation to generation. The origins of the practice come from a belief, found in Jewish mysticism, that when someone has the same name as you, they share a bond with you, a bond between souls. Therefore, it is important that you realize that when someone else enters the world sharing your name, your soul is intertwined with that person.

6. Discussion: Naming:

Do you think your name is linked to who you are?

What is the best way to choose a name?

Discussion: 10 minutes:

In unit I we compared the Ashkenazi and Sephardim to Texans and New Yorkers. Ashkenazic Jews and Sephardic Jews are like Texans and New Yorkers, they are both Jewish but they practice rituals differently, eat different foods and sing different songs. Continue to couch the discussion in these terms so the students can grasp the differences more easily.

Explain that according to Ashkenazic Jews you cannot name a child after a living relative, but according to Sephardic Jews you can. Each side has a different argument: the Ashkenazic Jews say that you can't name a child after a living relative because a person's name is the essence of their being; the name is linked with the soul. For the Ashkenazic Jews, there is an old belief that if you name someone after someone still living then you are "sharing" their soul and perhaps shortening their life. However, Sephardic Jews say you should name a child after a living relative (though, not the mother or father) because it honors them and it does not harm.[90]

Ask:

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[90] Alfred J. Kolatch, New Name Dictionary (Middle Village: Jonathan David Publishers Inc., 1989), xx.

Do you know who you are named after?

Are you named after someone in your family?

Why do you think there is a difference between the Ashkenazic and Sephardic ways of naming?

What would you do?

Is one way wrong, and one way right?

Do you think names are important? Why?

What makes a name special?

Discussion: 10 minutes:

Ask the students:

Do you know when a boy is given his name?

When is a girl given her name?

Explain that most Jewish boys are given their names at the *Brit*, when the boy is circumcised. Explain that here too there are differences between the ways Ashkenazic Jews practice *Brit* and the ways that Sephardic Jews practice *Brit*. Girls, of course, cannot be circumcised, thus, they enter the covenant by naming ceremonies.

Ask the students:

Why do we circumcise boys?

What is covenant?

Why is circumcision associated with our covenant with God?

Explain to the students: A covenant is an agreement. The covenant of the Jewish people is a covenant with God. We symbolize this covenant, as commanded, with circumcision. Circumcision involves cutting of the skin. It is a surgery in which we remove part of the flesh. This changes the body, changes the appearance, and becomes a symbol. It used to be that Jews and Arabs were the only people in Europe and America who were circumcised, but today in America most men are.

Tell the class: Texans do things the Texas way, and New Yorkers do things the New York way. For example, it is popular in Texas to wear cowboy hats, which is part of the fashion. In New York you don't see many people wearing cowboy hats, they wear baseball caps because that is a New York tradition.

Well, when it comes to *Brit*, there is an Ashkenazic tradition and a Sephardic tradition, depending on which country the parents came from.

The Sephardic Jews do most of the same rituals that the Ashkenazic Jews do, like saying many of the same prayers. But they also add different customs, called *minhagim*, songs, and celebrations

For example, the Syrian Jews have a very beautiful custom called *Seneet Eliyahu hanabi* (The Tray of Elijah the Prophet). (Hand out photocopied

pictures.) Elijah is always invited to a *Brit*, and most of the time a chair is placed aside for Elijah to sit on. Ask the students:

What other occasion do we put aside something for Elijah?
Why might we invite Elijah to a *Brit?*

((Explain: Traditionally Elijah is invited to a *Brit* because he defended the practice after King Ahab, 874-852 B.C.E., abandoned the covenant. Elijah sees circumcision as our symbol for the covenant and thus champions it. Therefore, no *Brit* shall take place without the presence of Elijah.))

The Tray of Elijah the Prophet is a large tray, usually silver, and filled with flowers and candles. Guests at the *Brit* place money and other contributions on the tray as a good omen. After the *Brit*, the tray is auctioned off to the highest bidder and then all the money that was collected is either given to charity or given to the parents of the baby boy. The parents save this money, calling it "blessed money," for the child's use in the future.

After the ceremony the baby is named.

In Sephardic tradition girls are named in a ceremony called *Zebed Habat*. During this ceremony, in some Sephardic communities, the mother dresses as a bride and places the baby girl on a beautiful pillow to be named. After the naming there is a big celebration, and people sing and dance. Sometimes girls are named at home, and sometimes at the synagogue.

The Sephardim have these different traditions because they lived in different countries than the Ashkenazic Jews. Sephardic Jews were exposed to Arabic cultures, and in many countries they lived peacefully with their Arab neighbors.

Why do you think the Sephardic Jews developed different traditions?

Do you think that Ashkenazic Jews could use some of the same rituals that Sephardic Jews do? Would they want to?

Activity: Text Study: 15 minutes:

Have the students listen to the song, "When Nimrod was in the fields." (Available as *Cuando el Rey Nimrod* sung by the Zamir Chorale; Joshua Jacobson, conductor, Rebecca Gorlin, soloist recording excerpted from: Zamir Chorale of Boston, "Sepharad 92". The song is popular and there are many extant recordings.) After listening hand the students a lyric sheet for "When Nimrod was in the fields." This is a traditional folksong, sung amongst Judeo-Spanish Sephardim at the *Brit.*

When King Nimrod went into the fields
He looked at the heavens and at all the stars,
He saw a holy light above the Jewish quarter
That was a sign that Abraham our father was
about to be born.

Immediately the midwives recommended
That every pregnant women tarry
Because if a son were born they would have to kill him.
(That told of the birth of Abraham our father.)

Terah's wife was pregnant.
Daily he asked her the question:
"Why is your face so pale"
Already she knew the good she had within her

At the end of nine months she was determined to give birth
She walked through the countryside and vineyards.
Her husband did not know she was gone.
She found a cave in which to give birth.

At that time the newborn spoke:
"Go out of the cave, mother.
I have already found someone who will remove me.
An angel from heaven will accompany me
Because I was created blessed from heaven.

After twenty days she went to visit him.
She saw in front of her a young man leaping,
Looking at the sky, aiming to understand,
In order to know the God of truth.
"Mother, my mother what are you
looking for here?"
"I gave birth to a precious son here.

I came to look for him here.
If he is alive I will be consoled."
"Mother, my mother, what are you saying?
How could you leave your precious son?
After twenty days how do you visit him?
I am your precious son. Look mother, God is one,
The creation of the heavens was one by one.
Tell Nimrod that he has lost his common sense
Because he does not want to believe in the True One.

King Nimrod did not manage to learn.
"Bring him here immediately,
Before they cause a rebellion
And encourage others to believe in the True One
And not in me."

They brought him in great humility.
He strongly grabbed Nimrod's throne.
"Tell me, evil one. Why do you think you are God.
Because you do not want to believe in the True One."

"Light a fiery furnace, Throw him in immediately,
Protect yourself from him because he is sharp.
If God allows him to escape, then He is real."

He was thrown into the furnace
And he started to walk inside,
With the angels. As he strolled
The wood gave forth fruit.

Because of that we recognize the true God
Great merit has honorable Abraham —
Because of him we recognize the true God.

Great merit has the newborn master,
That fulfills the commandment of
Abraham our father.
We wish to greet the newborn master.
We wish *mazel tov* to the newborn.
Because Elijah the prophet appeared
And we give praises to the True One.

We greet the godfather and the circumciser.
Because of his merit he will bring us the redeemer,
And comfort all Israel
And we give praises to the True One.[91]

Contextual information: In the song Nimrod, a powerful king and hunter (his name literally means "leopard catcher") who not only declared himself ruler of the world, but also built an enormous tower that many consider to be the original Tower of Babel, demands that all newborn males be killed. Abraham is born and survives all the torments Nimrod imposes on him. Abraham, in a story similar to the Moses story, survives and leads by the grace of God.

Discussion: Ask the students:

[91] Yossi Zucker, "When Nimrod Went Into The Fields: Cuando el Rey Nimrod: A Ladino Folksong", http://www.jhom.com/topics/choir/cuando.htm, accessed 4/10/02.

Why is the song called "When Nimrod went into the fields?"

What is unusual about the birth in this song?

How does the song present Abraham's mother?

What does this song say about Abraham?

What type of man is he?

What does the song say about Nimrod?

Why is Abraham called the "circumciser"?

What does circumcision have to do with his merit?

Why would Sephardic Jews sing this song at a *Brit*?

What does the song tell you about how important a *Brit* is?

Warm down: 5 minutes.

Handout to be brought home, filled out and discussed next session:

Hand out the following form to each student and have him or her take it home and fill it out. Be sure to tell the students they should work with their parents on this handout. When they return next session have them read what they discovered about their names.

My Name:

My English First Name is:

My English Last Name is:

I Am Named After:

My Hebrew Name is:

I Am Named After:

My Hebrew Name means:

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Appendix. I.

The following is an overview of all the material that has been available to the Jewish educator on the topics of Sephardic minhagim, ritual, prayer and literature in the last 20 years. I am indebted to Carloyn Starman Hessel, and her compilation of these materials and untiring research from which I have derived this list. Please note, in some many cases these books are long out-of-print and are very hard to come by, I present this material as an overview of what has been made available, but caution that finding it will be difficult. The following materials are listed by author, title, organization or publisher:

Angel, Marc D, "Sephardic Approaches to Teaching Siddur, " Pedagogic Reporter, Vol. 33, No. 19, Dec. 1981. Angel observes, and discusses, the many ways Sephardic Jews approach Siddur. Recommended for educators as a supplementary guide.

_____. "An Approach to Teaching About Sephardic/Oriental Judaism", Pedagogic Reporter, Vol. 37, No. 4, Jan. 1987. Angel focuses on history and "local human resources" rather than folklore. Recommended for educators as a supplementary guide.

_____. "Judeo Spanish: A Language of the Sephardim," Journey Through Judaism, Alan Bennett ed., UAHC, New York, 1991. This article outlines the development of Ladino and its place in Jewish history. Recommended for High School students.

Anti-Defamation League, Jews of Syria, New York, 1991. 28 page tabloid encapsulating the history of Syrian Jewry. Among the topics discussed are Syrian Jews in modernity and Syrian Jewish relations with Islam. Recommended for Middle School students.

Assis, Yom Tov, The Jews of Spain: From Settlement to Expulsion, Dor Hemshech, W.Z.O., Jerusalem, 1988. A historical survey of Iberian Jewry designed for group discussion. Recommended for High School seniors.

Baltimore Board of Jewish Education, Jewish Survival: A Tale of Three Communities. A teaching unit about the cultural differences among Yemenite, Russian and Ethiopian Jewry, with lesson plans and readings, designed for grades 3-7.

Belth, Norton, The World Story Book, Bloch, NY 1963. While significantly dated, this compilation of stories gives a decent overview of Jewry worldwide, including stories from Morocco and Syria. This was designed with middle school students in mind.

Ben- Zvi Institute, The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, W.Z.O., New York/Jerusalem. A teacher's guide with lesson plans and discussion questions regarding the expulsion and

dissemination of Sephardic Jewry. A student study book is included, and is designed for High School students.

Bernstein, Louis, "Israel's Citizens of Tomorrow," World Over, Vol. 12, No. 9, Feb. 21 1951. Very dated, but fantastic two-page photo essay showcasing Yemenite Jews arriving in Israel soon after 1948. A fine visual aid for elementary school, and middle school, classrooms.

Bureau of Jewish Education, Dilemmas and Adaptations, Massachusetts, 1982. A source book and teacher's guide designed for High School students with four units devoted to Sephardic history in the Spanish era.

Chorowsky, Joshua, ed, Discover the Sephardi Experience, Milwaukee Association for Jewish Education, Milwaukee, 1992. Recommended for Middle School aged students and family ed programs, this booklet answers familiar historical, and cultural questions about the history of the Sephardim.

Costabel, Eva Deutch, The Jews of New Amsterdam, Atheneum, New York, 1988. A book written for readers in the Middle school age ranges about early Jewish settlers in New York.

Davka Corporation, Jews of Spain, A Judaica Computer Program for Apple II. While the Apple II is no longer a used PC this software is an exciting first foray into Sephardic

computer education. The discs contain reproductions of documents from ibn Gabriol and Rambam and maps, picture and quizzes. Designed for students in High School.

Ehrlich-Klein,Tziva, A Children's Treasury of Sephardic Tales, Mesorah, New York, 1985. A book of four-stories written for older elementary aged students. While this text was designed for use in Orthodox schools, it is a valuable resource for Sephardic tales and is suitable for Reform and Conservative use.

Gilbert, Martin, The Jews of Arab Lands, Jewish National Fund, New York, 1976. An illustrated 32-page booklet that gives an overview of the history of Jews in Arabic lands with maps and photographs. Recommended for all ages.

Grans, Samuel and Tamar, Jews in Distant Lands, UAHC, New York, 1973. Tabloid format book covers the world of Jewry with special focus on Ethiopian, Spanish and Caribbean Jewish communities. This text comes with a teachers guide with classroom materials and lesson plans.

Gumbiner, Joseph H., Leaders of Our People, UAHC, New York 1963. A book of stories about famous Jewish leaders, including a chapter of Spain and Samuel ha Nagid, Yehudah Ha Levi, Rambam and Don Isaac Abravanel. For Middle School aged students.

Hacohen, Dvora and Menachem, One People: The Story of the Eastern Jews, Adama Books, New York, 1986. This book describes twenty-three communities in depth including the Sephardim of Bukhara, Tunisia and Syria. Recommended for educators.

Hexter, Esther, A Sephardic Fest, Educational Resource Center, OH, 1992. Recommended for communal/school planners. This text documents one community's Sephardic fest, a model, which can easily be adapted by smaller synagogues.

Highlights, Teaching Sephardic Jewry, CAJE Resource Center, New York, 1991. A guide presenting suggested classroom readings and hands-on student activities. For elementary school aged students.

Kammens, Sarah, Jews of Israel: Yemenite Jewry, Hadassah/Young Judea, New York, 1982. This is a collection of songs, games, dances and stories for young people and geared toward informal education.

Lebeson, Anita Leibman, Pilgrim People, Minerva Press, New York 1975. A book detailing the history of Sephardim in America, and a good text for Middle School aged students.

Melton Center for Jewish Education, Teaching Rambam, His Thought and His Time, New York, 1992. A three-part exploration of Maimonides with ready-made lesson plans and activities, this is ideal for High School aged students.

Milgrom, Shira and David Elcott, The Sephardic Journey, CAJE Curriculum Bank, New York. This is a unit for young elementary school students (1st -3rd grade) and initiates young children to the history of the Sephardim in a dynamic way; it includes introductions to Rambam and others.

Pe'er M., The Story of Maram Bet Yosef, Artscroll Sephardic Heritage Series, New York, 1986. An exploration of the life and work of Joseph Caro, beginning with his compiling of *Shulchan Aruch*, designed for High School students.

Quincentennial Foundation of Istanbul, A Curriculum on Five Hundred Years of Turkish Jewish Experience: Major Aspects and Their Present –Day Significance, NY, 1992. Designed for High School aged students this is an exploration of Turkish Jewish life and history, it is divided into seventeen units and is fairly comprehensive.

Resnick, Martha Ezor, Jewish History Through Primary Texts: An Approach to Teaching the Golden Age of Spain to High School Students, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, New York, 1990. A unit of primary sources designed for study over a two-month period, this curriculum examines Jewish history via a socio-political lens. Recommended for High School aged students.

Rossel, Seymour, Journey Through Jewish History, Book II, Behrman House, New York, 1983. One of the most widely used Jewish history texts, includes an activity book, and

contains a chapter entitled "The Jews of Sepharad." Recommended for Middle School students.

Singer, Ellen and Finkel, Vivian, The History of the Jews of Spain: A Curriculum for the Afternoon Hebrew School, NewYork. A little seen curriculum designed for Elementary school students.

Stadtler, Bea, The Story of Dona Gracia Mendes, United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, New York, 1969. Historical biography for Elementary school aged students.

Stein, Julie, From Spain to..., J.T.S., New York, 1991. Curriculum opens with the expulsion from Spain and follows the lives of ten personalities who became leaders in galut. Recommended for Elementary school aged students.

Stern, Shirley, Exploring Jewish History, Ktav, New York, 1979. Book designed for use with Elementary school aged students with a unit devoted to "Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews" and is presented historically.

Stockhamer, Avishai, Don Yosekf Nasi, New York, 1991. A text for Middle School aged students that recounts the life of Don Yosef, a marrano, and describes religious observance of the Sephardim.

Zeglis, Dorothy F., A History of Jewish Life in Modern Times, Bloch, New York, 1947. Dated exploration of lands in which Jews fled after the expulsion from Spain, of interest in its division of Judeo-Spanish and Spanish-Portuguese descent.