Our Institute's "Sephardic Initiative"

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Rabbi Marc D. Angel is Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and Editor of its journal, Conversations.

One of the remarkable features of the Jewish People is our incredible diversity. We have an amazing treasure of teachings, customs, folklore, spiritual insights...from Jewish communities spanning thousands of years and flourishing in many lands. As we appreciate the "wholeness" of the Jewish People, we provide ourselves and our new generations with a sense of sharing in the grandness of the Jewish experience.

For a variety of reasons, Jewish education has largely focused on the history, traditions and personalities of the Ashkenazic communities. Indeed, there is much to learn from the Ashkenazic experience, and all of us are strengthened and enlightened by it. However, Jewish education has largely tended to ignore or under-emphasize the history, traditions and personalities of the Sephardic and pan-Sephardic Jewish communities. In some sense, it is as though the Sephardim dropped out of history after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, and became even more obscure after the Shabbatai Sevi debacle in 1666. The history and culture of Sephardim, Middle Eastern and North African Jews are relatively unknown to large numbers of Jews. And when attempts are made to be inclusive, they generally relate to foods and music...and almost never to intellectual and spiritual contributions.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and the Sephardic Educational Center have launched a "Sephardic Initiative," to promote a greater inclusiveness and "wholeness" in Jewish education.

TEACHER EDUCATION: We have sponsored three conferences for teachers in Jewish schools. In October 2017, 25 educators from 9 schools in the New York City

area participated. In March 2018, 15 educators from 7 schools in the Los Angeles area participated. In October, we held a conference in Paramus, New Jersey, with 20 educators in attendance. We are planning other conferences in cities throughout North America. These conferences provide practical information on how inclusiveness in Jewish education can be enhanced. Teachers engage in serious discussion and serious learning. Teachers are given a set of publications to help them in their own study of Sephardic/pan-Sephardic civilization. Teachers write reports on how they have gone on to implement a Sephardic component in their classes, and these reports are circulated among the group so that they can learn from each other.

PUBLICATIONS: The Institute is planning a series of publications that will provide readily accesible material for educators, as well as for the general public. We have recently reprinted our pamphlet "Exploring Sephardic Customs and Traditions," and are in the process of arranging for other publications.

ONLINE EDUCATION: We are planning to greatly increase our online presence, so as to be able to reach educators throughout the world. Rabbi Hayyim Angel recently conducted an inter-active session for teachers in South Africa...while he was at his desk in New Jersey.

EDUCATORS' RESOURCE CENTER: Educators are invited to enroll in our Educators' Resource Center. There is no fee to register, and educators will receive various emailings, publications, links to informative material etc. To register, go to this link: https://www.jewishideas.org/resources-educators

The "Sephardic Initiative" will certainly be of benefit to children who are themselves of Sephardic/Middle Eastern/North African backgrounds. By including materials from their traditions, they will feel a stronger sense of self-worth and a greater pride in their own community's role in the Jewish adventure. But this initiative is vitally important for children of non-Sephardic backgrounds as well. It will enhance and deepen their vision of the "wholeness" of the Jewish People. It will teach them the value of diversity and inclusivity, and will enable them to learn Jewish ideas and ideals that they otherwise would have missed.

The "Sephardic Initiative" has received initial funding from Nugi and Isabelle Jakobishvili, who provided a generous matching grant with the goal of our raising a minimum of $100,000 for this project.

We invite you to support the "Sephardic Initiative," so that you will be the Institute's partner in advancing a highly significant enhancement of Jewish

education. You may contribute online at jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. If you contribute on our website, please also email info@jewishideas.org to let us know that the contribution is to be earmarked for the "Sephardic Initiative." If you send a check, please note in the memo section that it's for the "Sephardic Initiative."

A hundred years from now, the ethnic components of Judaism will be very different from what they are now. We will have a Judaism that is composed of many of the best contributions of Jews and Jewish communities from throughout our history and throughout the world. We need to ensure that the voices of the Sephardic/pan-Sephardic world are part of the Jewish future. We need to do this as an investment in a stronger, happier and wiser Jewish People.