

## THE LITURGY CDS AND LADINO REFLECTIONS

Over the years, many individuals have asked me to record various and sundry parts of the liturgy for them, and I have accommodated them whenever I could. Many have asked me to professionally record a cassette of portions of the service. The stock answer was ‘I hope to, whenever I can get some free time’. However, the ‘free time’ never seemed to come. In 1998, one of the members of Ezra Bessaroth, Steven Baral, took the bull by the horns and told me that I would just have to set aside some time to record some of the liturgy of Ezra Bessaroth. Thinking it over, I believed it would be a wonderful legacy for the synagogue, and possibly for any other synagogue carrying on the traditions from Rhodes. Mr. Baral, underwriting the project, set aside a block of time in a studio for me to do my recording in July 1998. There was so much recorded that it turned out to be a two CD set. It is by no means comprehensive of the entire liturgy but gives a fairly good representation of the Shabbat, Holiday and High Holiday liturgy. Not all of the selections are done in their entirety. In many cases, only the first and last stanzas of a particular

selection have been recorded in order to give a flavor of the pizmon or tune. The 2cd set is called 'The Liturgy of Ezra Bessaroth'.

Additionally, I have had a lifelong dream as well, to record some Ladino Romansas. Ladino is the medieval Spanish that was spoken in the Iberian peninsula by the Jews prior to the expulsion from Spain. Not all of the songs came from Spain. One of them is called 'Los Caminos de Sirkedji. Sirkedji is a section of Istanbul, and the song also has the word 'pasha' in it, which is a Turkish word. I went to the home of a musician friend who had the capability of recording a song and being able to capture it on his computer in musical notation. He was an expert and helped me to produce a 2cd set which I called 'Ladino Reflections.

Ladino was spoken in the lands of their dispersion, but primarily in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, which, at one time, reached all the way up to Vienna, Austria. There was a very vibrant Sephardic Ladino-speaking community in Vienna. An Ashkenazic book publisher in Vienna in the late 1800's and the early 1900's by the name of Joseph Schlesinger, produced most of the prayer books for the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman

Empire. Those books were brought to Seattle by the pioneers from Turkey and Rhodes. I have a theory that the reason Ladino was spoken up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that the Jews of the Ottoman Empire lived primarily among themselves in their own sections of the cities in which they settled. Once in America, as the first-generation children started going to school and learning and speaking English, Ladino dropped by the wayside. Since I am the oldest of my siblings, and born in 1930, as I mentioned, I grew up speaking Ladino to my parents and to other members of the Seattle Sephardic community. I've lost some of my capability with the language, but I can still get by very well. It served me in good stead when my youngest brother, Rabbi Michael Azose and his wife Bonnie, now living in Jerusalem, joined Lily and me on a 'Looking for our Roots' trip to Turkey in 1992 where we visited with Sephardic Jews in Istanbul and other parts of Turkey.