

NEW PRAYER BOOKS FOR EZRA BESSAROTH

I had a project in mind that had been a lifelong dream for me. There was no Sephardic prayer book that incorporated the order of prayer of the Seattle Sephardic community, Turkish or Rhodesli. I had made mental notes of those portions of the service where words or phrases were inserted or deleted from that which are written in the DeSola Pool prayer books. As I would lead a service, I inserted or left out those words or phrases from memory. Both Seattle Sephardic congregations had been using the Spanish-Portugese De Sola Pool Daily/Sabbath Prayer Book (as well as the other Holiday prayer books) for approximately sixty years. Both Seattle Sephardic synagogues initially opted for the De Sola Pool series of prayer books in the early '40's because it was the only Sephardic prayer book in America with an English translation. Most of the old-timers in the synagogue were still using the old prayer books they had brought with them from Rhodes. Even those who did switch to the De Sola Pool siddur knew those words and phrases that were inserted or deleted by heart. However, in later years, many of the young men

growing up in the synagogue had been treating the De Sola Pool as if it were their ‘tradition’, which it was not.

In order to preserve the unique flavor of the Seattle Sephardic community ‘tradition’, being a computer ‘buff’, I bought a Hebrew Word Processing program from the Davka Corporation in Chicago. It came on a small floppy disk. However, I learned very quickly that, at the rate I was putting in one letter and one vowel, it would take several years before I would be able to finish the siddur. There was no Hebrew scanning software available that would have allowed me to scan in a siddur and modify it to my needs. A few months later, Davka came out with an Ashkenazic siddur on disk. I thought, “this is my big break!” I assumed that the Ashkenazic siddur must be at least fifty to sixty percent compatible with most Sephardic siddurim. I was very excited and couldn’t wait until the disk arrived. When it did arrive, I dropped everything I was doing, cancelled the Bar Mitzvah lessons for that day, and spent the next several hours on the siddur, working until three or four in the morning. It gave me a great sense of accomplishment. Of course, those original programs

were very rudimentary with limited capabilities. Some time later, Davka came out with Dagesh, version 1.0, then versions 2.0 and 2.1. I later switched to a different Hebrew Word Processor called Davkawriter, which had far more capabilities than Dagesh. In October of 1999, I finished a first proof copy of the siddur, and placed copies in the hands of several knowledgeable people from both synagogues as well as a few outside Seattle to help proof-read it before publication. I published Siddur Zehut Yosef in January, 2002 and delivered 1,000 copies each to both synagogues. They were formally put out for use on Shabbat, March 9th. I have also sold them to Sephardic synagogues in Portland, Oregon, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and Johannesburg and Cape Town in South Africa. I have even sold 600 siddurim to a Sephardic Congregation in Rockville, Maryland in the Washington, D.C. area whose members' traditions were from Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. I had to make a special edition for them because their members' backgrounds were based on the Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese tradition. My prayer book came with a Pirkeh Avot (Sayings of the Fathers) with a translation only in Ladino, which

they did not know at all and they preferred one in English. I made a special edition of Zehut Yosef consisting of 1,000 siddurim; 600 for Rockville, and I sold the other 400 individually until they sold out.

Siddur Zehut Yosef, the Seattle Sephardic Community Daily and Sabbath Siddur, as the book cover reads, documents both the Rhodesli and Turkish traditions. I have also finished the entire series, with a Makhzor for the three Festival Holidays; Pesakh, Shavuot and Sukkot. Only the Daily-Sabbath and the Festivals mahzor are based on both Turkish **and** Rhodes traditions, while there are many differences between the two traditions in the New Year and Yom Kippur mahzors, as well as a siddur for the Five Fast Days. I feel that I have left a legacy for the Seattle Sephardic community for many years to come.

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