

333 Seasingtown Road, Manhasset, NY 11030

**Visitor to Temple Judea:
Rabbi Barbara Aiello of Italy
Gives Presentation about the
Oldest Jewish Community in Europe**

On Sunday afternoon, January 11th, 2008 Temple Judea of Manhasset's senior group, known as "The Greatest Generation", presented its regular monthly program. The guest speaker was Rabbi Barbara Aiello, the first and only female Rabbi in Italy, who happened to be visiting in the U.S. Rabbi Aiello is the spiritual leader of Synagogue *Ner Tamid del Sur* (the Eternal Light of the South) a Progressive/Reform Synagogue, located in Nicastro, province of Calabria, Italy. It is the first active synagogue there since the Inquisition over 500 years ago. The Rabbi's topic was "The Oldest Jewish Community of Europe: the Amalfi Coast of Italy."

Rabbi Aiello is a first generation American, born and raised in Pittsburgh, fluent in both English and Italian. After earning her baccalaureate and master's degrees, she subsequently studied for the rabbinate and received her ordination. Curious about her roots, she chose to return to the area where her parents had been born and raised. There, in southern Italy, she became the spiritual leader for a small but dedicated group of congregants.

Rabbi Aiello, whose talk was punctuated with photos and Jewish relics, explained that many people living in that part of southern Italy arrived from Spain over 500 years ago. They were forced to flee the country during the Inquisition to avoid conversion or death. Through the years, Judaism was sublimated and many families were absorbed by other cultures. Recently, a renewed interest in genealogy has resulted in many people investigating their roots and beginning to reconnect to their Jewish heritage.

Rabbi Aiello showed photos of her great grandparents, taken in Italy. She also showed a Jewish candelabra, about 200 years old, from her own family, which was passed down from generation to generation. She held up the *tallit* which she wears at services and compared it to shawls made in a small town in southern Italy. Interestingly, the shawls made by non-Jewish women of that town were almost identical

to the Rabbi's *tallit*, showing how the tradition of Jewish prayer shawls were probably passed down through generations without even knowing their Jewish origin.

The Rabbi also spent part of her talk discussing names that we might assume to be Italian, which were actually names derived from Jewish roots. "Italia", for example, is derived from the Hebrew root "alee" meaning coastline; "Tal," the Hebrew prayer for rain or dew and "Ya" for God. Italia becomes the coastline of God's dew. Early maps of Italy have Hebrew writing.

Among the family names the Rabbi mentioned were Bonanno meaning "Good Year" derived from Rosh Hashanah when Jewish people pray for a good year ahead; Sacerdoti, indicating Kohane, a high priest in ancient Israel; Spagnolo, an emigrant from Spain during the Inquisition, and Aprile, a spring month related to the Hebrew month of Nisan and the celebration of Passover.

The Rabbi's presentation ended on a high note when members of the audience gathered around her with questions and comments. All agreed that the program was most successful. Future presentations sponsored by The Greatest Generation will be announced soon.

While the Greatest Generation is a committee designed to address the needs of Temple Judea congregants who are generally 60 years old plus, the programs are generally open to the public. They have included a genealogy event, film presentations and discussions, barbeques and special Shabbat Services. For more information on upcoming events, please contact Temple Judea directly.

Temple Judea of Manhasset was established in 1955 and has over 500 member families. One of the few temples on Long Island that is completely handicapped accessible, Temple Judea is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism. It is located at 333 Searingtown Road, Manhasset. Please call (516) 621-8049 for further information and visit its website at **temple-judea.com**.

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