

# "Adio Kerida": Narrating the Sephardic Diaspora

## A GREAT JEWISH BOOKS TEACHER WORKSHOP RESOURCE KIT

### Teachers' Guide

This guide accompanies resources that can be found at: <http://teachgreatjewishbooks.org/resource-kits/adio-kerida-narrating-sephardic-diaspora>.

### Introduction

"Adio Kerida," or "Goodbye, Dear," is a popular song in the large repertoire of Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, songs. Currently endangered, Ladino was the common, everyday language of hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the Sephardic diaspora (especially in the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and the Mediterranean basin) after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Sephardic history and culture is a rich mosaic resulting from centuries of life in diverse Christian, Muslim, and Jewish societies across the world, and many words in Ladino reflect this diversity.

This resource kit presents resources to help teachers contextualize "Adio Kerida" and use it to teach about Sephardic history and culture, Ladino, and themes of diaspora, homeland, and nostalgia.

Cover image: Copy of the "Alhambra Decree/Edict of Expulsion," signed by King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I on March 31, 1492.

### Subjects

Anti-Semitism, Ladino, Music, Sephardi

### Reading and background:

- For a brief history of the Jews in Spain through 1492, read Jane Gerber's article "'Ornament of the World' and the Jews of Spain" or her book *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (Free Press, 1994).
- For an overview of Sephardic life in the Ottoman Empire, see *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* by Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (University of California Press, 2000).
- Both the University of Washington in Seattle and the University of California, Los Angeles, have websites devoted to Sephardic history in the United States and beyond. See UW's *Sephardic Studies Digital Collection* and UCLA's *100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles*.
- To learn some Ladino and see contemporary efforts to sustain it, see Professor Bryan Kirschen's *Documenting Judeo-Spanish website*, the *Ladino21 YouTube channel*, or the online forum *Ladinokomunita*.
- On Sephardic and Ladino literature, the following anthologies and texts are useful: *The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature* edited by Ilan Stavans (Schocken, 2005), *Sephardic-American Voices: Two Hundred Years of a Literary Legacy* edited by Diane Matza (University Press of New England, 1997); *Tela de Sevoya (Onioncloth)* by Myriam Moscona (Les Figues Press, 2017); *In Search of a Lost Ladino* by Marcel Cohen (Ibis, 2006).
- For more on Sephardic and Ladino music, see amateur collector Joel Bresler's *website* featuring a wealth of discographic information and sound clips; see also the work of ethnomusicologists Samuel Armistead, Joseph Silverman, and Israel Katz, which has been summarized and partially collected [here](#).

### Resources

1: Song lyrics, "Adio, Querida," 2019, recording, "Adio Kerida," 2009, and recording, "Adio Kerida," 2012.



The Great Jewish Books Teacher Workshop, a program of the Yiddish Book Center, is made possible with support from the Jim Joseph Foundation. The Foundation, established in 2006, is devoted to fostering compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for youth and young adults in the U.S.

Although the lyrics and subjects of many Ladino songs (*kantigas*) and ballads (*romanzas*) date to medieval Spain, the musical arrangements tended to come later, influenced by Turkish, Balkan, Muslim, and other regional and local cultural styles. While it is unlikely that the lyrics of "Adio Kerida" come from Spain, it is said that the tune comes from Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*, which debuted in 1853.

While the lyrics are broadly about lost love, many have interpreted them as a bittersweet message to Spain from its Jewish exiles, who felt rejected by the miserable persecutions and expulsions from a land in which they felt at home.

This song has inspired dozens of different arrangements and performances over the years, emphasizing different elements of Sephardic culture. Some highlight Spanish influences through nylon-string guitar, others feature Middle Eastern instrumentation like the oud or borrow Balkan rhythmic styles. The two contemporary versions below, one from Israel and the other from Bosnia, are quite different arrangements of this same song.

**Suggested Activities:** Have students read through the lyrics in English. If students speak Spanish, have them read the transliteration provided in the left-hand column. Then have students listen to both versions of the song. Musically, what are some of the differences? Can you identify to which musical tradition each version belongs? By emphasizing either Spanish or Balkan/Turkish musical styles, how might this song apply to or connect with different parts of Sephardic history? By favoring one style over another, what claims are the artists making about Sephardic culture?

**Sources:** "Adió, Querida" ("Goodbye, Beloved"), traditional, compiled by David ben Or (Sephardic Association of Órgiva, Granada, Andalusia, Spain, 2019), accessed [online](#).

n.b. The online version of the lyrics includes a built-in Ladino dictionary where students can follow along with the language word-for-word.

Yasmin Levy, "Adio Kerida," recorded in 2009, Israel, *Youtube*, accessed [online](#).

Arkul Orchestra, "Arkul Orchestra: Adio kerida," recorded in 2012, Bosnia, *Youtube*, accessed [online](#).

## 2: Edict of Expulsion, 1492, and David Raphael's fictionalized response from Isaac Abarbanel, 1988.

Building on efforts by the Catholic Church to strengthen and expand its power, the Inquisition was established in 1478 to root out and punish heretics, blasphemers, or otherwise unfaithful Catholics, especially those who had converted from Judaism or Islam. The culmination of over a century of persecution, violence, and forced conversions, the Edict of Expulsion (also known as the Alhambra Decree, after the Granada palace where it was signed) was signed by the Catholic monarchs of a newly united Spain, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, on March 31, 1492.

**Suggested Activities:** Read over the text of the Edict of Expulsion. What exactly are Jews being accused of, and what do the monarchs see as the solution?

After reading the Edict, read David Raphael's fictionalized response by the historical figure Isaac Abarbanel, an important Jewish leader and philosopher active at the time of the expulsion. How does Abarbanel, in Raphael's imaginative piece, argue against the Edict? What are his feelings about Spain, and how can you tell? What else might you add to or change in his response, if you were responding yourself?

Next, listen to "Adio Kerida" once again as a class, and review the English translation of the lyrics. Ask students to reconsider the question of whether the song might be a message from Jews to Spain. How does reading the Edict of Expulsion and the Raphael excerpt add to their understanding and interpretation of the song?

Finally, have students reflect about the advantages and disadvantages of learning about history through historical, primary sources and through fictionalized ones. What did they learn from reading the Edict? What did they learn from reading Raphael's fictionalized response?

**Sources:** Edward Peters. "Jewish History and Gentile Memory: The Expulsion of 1492." *Jewish History* 9, no. 1 (1995): 24–28. Accessed May 21, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/20101210](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20101210).

David Raphael, *The Alhambra Decree (El Decreto de la Alhambra)* (California, Carmi House Press, 1988).

n.b. There are multiple spellings of the name Isaac Abarbanel, and one of the variations is used in the second resource.

### 3: Memoir excerpt, Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi's "Turkish Music in the Synagogue: The Objections of a Rabbi," ca. 1881–1902.

After the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497, many Jews fled to and settled in the Ottoman Empire—a sprawling Muslim state where countries like Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Bulgaria, and others are today. Here, Spanish Jews became more commonly known as Sephardic Jews, from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sefarad*. Compared to their experiences in Catholic Spain, Islamic Ottoman rule provided a safer and more stable haven for Jews. The sultan, or ruler, of the Ottoman Empire at the time, Bayezit II, allowed Jews to settle there, and was even rumored to have said to his advisors: "You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler—he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!"

While Jews in the Ottoman Empire lived under *dhimmi* status, a protected but subservient legal category for non-Muslim religious groups, they largely controlled their own communal affairs and used Ladino instead of Turkish in daily life. Nevertheless, the boundaries between Jewish and other communities were porous, and Jews interacted regularly with Turkish, Arab, Armenian, Christian, and other groups, especially in the empire's large and diverse cities like Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonica.

Salonica (today Thessaloniki, in Greece) was, by many accounts, a Jewish center of the Ottoman world and was often referred to as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans" and a "mother-city of Israel." During the lifetime of Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi, a journalist, printer, and musician, Jews made up nearly half of the city's population.

**Suggested Activities:** Conflicts between more traditional and more flexible religious practices have always been present across Jewish communities throughout history, as has the comingling of Jewish culture with neighboring cultures. What are the specific issues at play in this excerpt of Sa'adi's memoir? Why do the more conservative rabbis condemn the incorporation of "Turkish" music, and why does Sa'adi defend its use? How does this argument relate to the different versions of "Adio Kerida" in Resource 1 of this kit? In what ways does musical style effect the meanings of lyrics and rituals?

**Sources:** Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi, "Turkish Music in the Synagogue: The Objections of a Rabbi [1881–1902]" in Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014), 69–72. Copyright 2012 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. All rights reserved. With the permission of Stanford University Press, [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org)

### 4: Text excerpts, Myriam Moscona's "Tela de Sevoya," 2017.

Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish or Judezmo, was the everyday spoken language of Sephardic Jews in Ottoman lands and elsewhere. Based on medieval Spanish, Ladino was typically handwritten in Hebrew characters in a unique script called solitreo and printed in a Rashi-style Hebrew font.

Mexican author and poet Myriam Moscona's semi-autobiographical *Tela de Sevoya (Onioncloth)*, originally published in Mexico, uses both modern Spanish and Ladino to explore the narrator's Bulgarian-Sephardic ancestry. Musing on the power of memory, language, and family, the narrator reflects in creative and nonlinear ways on Ladino and Ladino-speakers.

**Suggested Activities:** Note the use of Ladino in these excerpts. Why does Moscona include the original Ladino with the English translation, when so few readers can understand the Ladino? What are some of the associations Moscona makes with Ladino, historically, generationally, and culturally? How might these affect her own relationship to her ancestral language? Compare the emotional tone of "Adio Kerida" to the tone in these excerpts. What is the attitude of each narrator toward their personal or ancestral pasts?

**Sources:** Myriam Moscona, *Tela de Sevoya (Onioncloth)*, Les Figs Press, 2017, 1–2, 26–28, 44.

### 5: Letter to the editor, Bula Satula (Moise B. Soulam), 1928, and film trailer, Ruth Behar, 2002.

Like Myriam Moscona's family (see Resource 4 of this kit), many Sephardim left the Ottoman Empire and its successor states (including Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey) in the early twentieth century for countries like France, Cuba, Mexico, and the United

States. The years before and after World War I witnessed great political, social, and economic upheavals in the lands where Sephardim lived, and significant numbers emigrated in search of safety, stability, and opportunity. In these modern diasporas, adjusting to new environments, even Jewish or Spanish-speaking ones, created tremendous difficulty for these immigrants. For some, their Ladino language skills could either help or hinder their acclimation to new lives, while for others their Jewishness would be doubted or denied because it was so dissimilar from the Ashkenazi majority culture.

**Suggested Activities:** Read this letter-to-the-editor from a Ladino-language newspaper from New York City in 1928. What advice and warning does the author want to communicate to other Sephardic immigrants? What does this letter reveal about cultural and linguistic expectations of Sephardic Jews, and particularly of Sephardic immigrant women, in New York? What does it reveal about tensions that may have existed between Sephardim and their neighbors in New York?

Then watch the trailer for *Adio Kerida* (*Goodbye Dear Love*). How does this immigrant story differ from that portrayed in the letter-to-the-editor? What comparisons and connections are made between Sephardim on one hand and Cubans, Afro-Cubans, and Ashkenazi Jews on the other? Why do you think Ruth Behar chose “Adio Kerida” as the title of her film?

**Sources:** Bula Satula (Moise B. Soulam), *La Vara*, November 30, 1928. Reproduced in Aviva Ben-Ur, “‘We Speak and Write This Language Against Our Will’: Jews, Hispanics, and the Dilemma of Ladino-Speaking Sephardim in Early-Twentieth-Century New York,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 50:1–2 (1998): 136–38. Translated from Ladino by Aviva Ben-Ur. Reprinted as “When Spanish is No Longer a Jewish Language: Immigrant Encounters on the Streets of New York City (1928)” in Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014), 362–364.

Ruth Behar, “Adio Kerida (trailer)” 2002, accessed [online](#).

## 6: Song lyrics and recording (1993), “Arvoles Yoran por Luvias/Trees Cry for Rain,” and song lyrics, “En Tierras de Polonia/In Polish Lands,” 1945.

For Sephardic Jews in Europe, particularly in Greece and Yugoslavia, the Nazi occupation of Europe and its policy of exterminating Jews in the Holocaust hit particularly hard. Less than ten percent of the Jewish population of Salonica survived deportation and extermination. The overwhelming loss decimated the heartland of Sephardic life and Ladino culture.

**Suggested Activities:** Read the lyrics of these two songs side by side. “Arvoles yoran por luvias” is a traditional Ladino song, possibly dating from the sixteenth century post-expulsion Sephardic diaspora, while “En tierras de Polonia” is an adaptation of that same song created by concentration camp inmates during the Holocaust. Why would Ladino-speaking concentration camp prisoners organize a communal singing group? Why might they choose to adapt an old song into a new one expressing their grief and anguish? How does each version compare to “Adio Kerida” in tone and message? How is this song and the adaptation process similar to and different from the interpretation of “Adio Kerida” as a bittersweet ode to Spain?

**Sources:** “Arboles lloran por luvia,” lyrics translated from Ladino by Isaac Nehama, on USHMM [online](#).

“Arboles lloran por luvia,” performed by Dr. Avram Sadikario, Skopje, 1993, recorded by Susana Weich-Shahak, from the S. Weich-Shahak collection in the National Sound Archives at the National Jewish and University Library in Jerusalem, [online](#).

“En tierras de Polonia” in Isaac Jack Levy, ed. *And the World Stood Silent: Sephardic Poetry of the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 212–213.

## 7: Article excerpt, Kiku Adatto’s “Spain’s Attempt to Atone for a 500-Year-Old Sin,” 2019.

Since the early twentieth century, modern Spain has repeatedly made steps to reach out, formally apologize, and make reparations to Sephardic Jews. In 2015, the Spanish government passed a law providing the descendants of Jews expelled in 1492 with a pathway to obtaining Spanish citizenship that was open through 2019.

**Suggested Activities:** Read the excerpts from Kiku Adatto’s article and discuss the concept of reparations. What other kinds of reparations for historical events can you think of? Is an apology and a path to citizenship sufficient 500 years after expulsion? Since only 132,000 Jews—out of millions who were potentially eligible—actually applied for Spanish citizenship, what does this process tell us about the contemporary relationship between Spain and Sephardic Jews? How would this type of reparation

potentially affect the speaker in the song “Adio Kerida”? Can you imagine and try writing new verses of the song from the perspective of a contemporary Sephardic Jew returning to live in Spain?

**Sources:** Kiku Adatto, “Spain’s Attempt to Atone for a 500-Year-Old Sin,” *The Atlantic*, September 21, 2019, accessed [online](#).