

October 18, 1999

Subject: **For Forthcoming Lectures**

Also, see France file
FB: NUS
"future
talks"

My visit to Paris this weekend was enlightening.

The Ashkenazi community of France, which once was powerful and rich, has now dwindled to almost nothing. While the leadership of organized Franco-Jewry is almost totally Askkenazi, their community is assimilating rapidly and they are not in contact with the Sephardim. There are few Haredim, few Modern Orthodox types, and mostly secularists who are "Frenchmen first" and who want little or nothing to do with Judaism or even Jews. If anything, those who are committed to Jewish continuity in some way or another, prefer the classical Franco-Jewish aspiration for invisibility. Even too many of the survivors are militantly secular and anti-Orthodox.

In comparison, the Sephardic community is vital, comfortable in their Jewishness, and growing. The great majority of 700,000 to 800,000 Jews in France is of North African origin or influence. Whereby there used to be several Kosher butches in Paris, all Ashkenazi, there is not a single Askkenazi Kosher restaurant left, whereas there are well in excess of 100 or 150 Kosher establishments of North African cuisine. The Chief Rabbi, Joseph Sitrouk, although associated with Shas, is organized, powerful, a real leader.

In a restaurant last night and the night before, for instance (and where, incidentally, the food was very good), the only Askenazim I noticed, other than one couple, were a few visitors from the States. Otherwise, the place was packed to capacity with Sephardim, mostly in their teens and twenties, many of whom wore *kippot* and many of the young boys and girls washed before eating, and where even half or a majority of whom ate without *kippot*, they preferred a Kosher restaurant. These Sephardim are what used to be accepted as generally characteristic of Sephardic religiosity: relaxed, committed, but without the intensity of Askenazim when it comes to *mitzvot*.

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