



מכון בני אנוסים
✦ Machon Bnei Anusim ✦

The History of Bnei Anusim

Expulsion, Forced Conversion, Hidden Memory, Customs, Dispersal, and the Modern Path of Return

First edition prepared for Machon Bnei Anusim

This first edition presents a clear, readable layout and expanded material on modern initiatives working to gather, educate, document, and assist Bnei Anusim.

History | Halacha Awareness | Genealogy | Modern Initiatives | Practical Program Plan

Congregation Bnei Anusim

EIN 42-2204885

www.bneianusim.org

Tel +1 (848) 480-6951 | +1 (737) 314-6585

Email: office@bneianusim.org

Rabbinic Letter Included by the Founder

The following image was supplied for inclusion. It is presented as a historical/rabbinic reference concerning the dignity owed to descendants of the forced converts. It is not presented as a substitute for current case-by-case rulings by competent rabbinic authorities, nor as legal advice regarding aliyah or civil status.



BRISK RABBINICAL COLLEGE 2965 W. Peterson Ave. • Chicago, IL 60659 • (312) 275-5186

Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik
Rosh HaYeshiva
Rabbi Yitzchok Giffin
Dean of Administration

Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik
Associate Rosh HaYeshiva

Rabbi Eliyahu Soloveichik
Associate Rosh HaYeshiva

1 Nisan 5754

To whom it may concern:

I am taking the liberty to write about the people in the Americas who claim to be descendants of the marranos of Spain and Portugal.

They must be treated like full Jews in every way (counted for a *minyan*, given *aliyot*, etc.).

Only when one of these *anusim* wishes to marry a Jew, must he or she undergo full conversion. That is, he or she must undergo immersion in a mikve (without the blessing) and full acceptance of mitzvot or commitment to the Torah. A man, if he is uncircumcised, must in addition undergo circumcision; if he is already circumcised, then he has to undergo *hatafat dam brit*.

Hoping that this will clarify the solution to this problem, I remain—

Respectfully yours,


Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik

A Beneficiary of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago



Publisher's Note

This booklet was prepared for Machon Bnei Anusim as an educational introduction to the descendants of Iberian Jews who were forced into conversion and whose descendants preserved fragments of identity, memory, family practice and language with a clear, readable layout and includes a strong section quoting modern initiatives working in this field.

The booklet is historical and communal in purpose. It is not a binding halachic ruling, not a legal opinion, and not a promise of recognition, conversion, aliyah, citizenship or marriage registration. Every actual case must be reviewed by competent rabbinic and legal authorities. That caution is not coldness. It is the only way to protect sincere families from false promises and to build a process that can endure.

The phrase Bnei Anusim means “children of the coerced.” It points to people whose ancestors were forced away from open Jewish life by violence, expulsion, social pressure and inquisitorial terror. Some families lost everything. Some preserved hidden traces. Some now seek to return with clarity and Torah. Machon Bnei Anusim exists to help that search become serious, honest and dignified.

Modern Initiatives Now Working to Gather and Assist Bnei Anusim

Shavei Israel describes descendants as “emerging from the shadows of history” and looking to reconnect with the Jewish people. [MI-1]

Machon Miriam calls itself a “Spanish, Portuguese and Italian language Conversion and Return Institute in Israel,” serving many descendants of Anousim. [MI-3]

Reconectar says it works to reconnect descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews with the Jewish people today, and Ashley Perry describes people seeking “solutions to reconnect.” [MI-4]

Ezra L’Anousim speaks about helping descendants come “back openly to Judaism,” and its founder uses the powerful phrase “no one is left behind.” [MI-5]

Genie Milgrom’s genealogical warning is essential for every applicant: “Names alone are not enough!” [MI-6]

These initiatives show that the gathering of Bnei Anusim is not merely a slogan. It requires education, genealogical discipline, rabbinic process, community formation, truthful legal guidance, financial help, public storytelling and practical absorption. This booklet therefore presents not only history, but a framework for action.

Contents at a Glance

- Part I: Terms, Sefarad, the Golden Age and the collapse of security.
- Part II: 1391, conversos, limpieza de sangre, the Inquisition, 1492 Spain, and 1497 Portugal.
- Part III: Crypto-Judaism, women, memory and the hidden home.
- Part IV: Dispersal to North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Amsterdam, England, Brazil, the Caribbean, Mexico, Colombia and beyond.
- Part V: Customs still observed or remembered, and why customs are meaningful but not proof by themselves.
- Part VI: Genealogy, halachic status, the Brisk letter, Israeli law and affinity-community policy.
- Part VII: Modern initiatives: Shavei Israel, Machon Miriam, Reconectar, Ezra L’Anousim, Genie Milgrom, Rabbi Yoel Gold’s storytelling, Bello Colombia and emerging communities.
- Part VIII: Practical model for Machon Bnei Anusim: intake, education, documentation, conversion support, aliyah guidance, warnings and program plan.

1. What Does “Bnei Anusim” Mean?

The Hebrew word anusim means people who were coerced. In Jewish usage it came to describe Jews who were compelled by force, threat, or unbearable pressure to leave open observance of Judaism. Bnei Anusim means the later descendants of those coerced Jews. In Iberian history they are often connected with Spanish and Portuguese Jews who converted publicly to Christianity, while some families preserved Jewish memory or practice in secret. Other terms appear in books and public discussion. Converso simply means “converted.” New Christian was the social and legal category used in Iberian Christian society for converts and their descendants. Crypto-Jew means a person who hid Jewish identity or practice while outwardly living under another religious identity. The word Marrano appears in older literature, but many descendants and scholars avoid it because it became a degrading term. Genie Milgrom's genealogy overview notes that “Marrano” is now often considered pejorative [S11].

The important point is that these terms describe overlapping realities, not always identical legal or halachic categories. A person may have family memory, a Jewish surname, a custom, or even partial documentation. Each kind of evidence must be treated seriously, but carefully.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded historical note: This stage must be taught not as isolated tragedy but as a chain of pressure that moved from preaching to street violence, from social suspicion to law, and from law to forced religious identity. The history of Bnei Anusim is therefore not a side story of Jewish history; it is one of the great wounds of exile, because it created families who carried Jewish memory while being cut off from open Jewish life.

For Machon Bnei Anusim, the educational lesson is to combine compassion with accuracy. Descendants should hear clearly that many families were torn away through coercion, fear and social control. At the same time, every claim today must be handled responsibly, because five hundred years of migration, intermarriage, secrecy and record loss require careful sorting between memory, genealogy, halachic status and communal belonging.

This is why the language of return must be dignified. It should never mock those who lost practice, and it should never flatter people with automatic promises. The right language is: your family memory is worthy of honor; your documents deserve serious review; your future can be built through Torah, mitzvot, community, and a recognized path appropriate to your case.

2. Sefarad Before the Catastrophe

The story begins long before 1492. Jews likely settled in the Iberian Peninsula very early in the Common Era. Over many centuries, Jewish life in Spain and Portugal passed through periods of restriction, tolerance, brilliance, danger, and catastrophe. The Hebrew name Sefarad became connected with Spain, and the Jewish communities of Iberia became known as Sephardim.

Under Muslim rule in parts of medieval Iberia, many Jewish communities flourished. Jews served as physicians, scholars, poets, translators, merchants, diplomats, philosophers, and Torah leaders. The National Library of Israel summarizes this world as a period in which Jewish cultural, spiritual, and scientific contributions shaped what is often called the “Golden Age” of Spanish Jewry [S1].

But the Golden Age was not permanent. As Christian kingdoms advanced in the Reconquista, Jewish security weakened. The same society that had once needed Jewish talent increasingly treated Jews as religious outsiders, economic competitors, and spiritual enemies. The ground was being prepared for libel, segregation, violence, and coercion.

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3. The Golden Age and Its Torah Legacy

The Sephardic world produced giants whose influence still guides Jewish life: Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, the Rambam's family roots in Iberia, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashba, Ritva, Rabbeinu Yonah, Don Isaac Abarbanel, and many others. Spanish Jewry gave the Jewish people poetry, philosophy, halachic clarity, grammar, biblical commentary, and a model of intellectual courage.

This matters for Bnei Anusim work because descendants are not returning to a vague ethnic memory. They are reconnecting with a civilization of Torah, Hebrew language, Sephardic halacha, family dignity, tefillah, song, scholarship, and communal order. The return is not merely sentimental; it must be educational.

At the same time, a faithful educational program must avoid romantic simplification. Medieval Spain was not always peaceful. Even in better periods, Jews lived as a minority under changing rulers. The grandeur of Sefarad makes the later destruction more painful, but it also gives descendants a noble inheritance to study with seriousness.

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4. What Led Toward Expulsion?

The expulsions and forced conversions did not appear suddenly. They grew from a long collapse of coexistence. Several forces combined: religious polemic, economic resentment, political centralization, social envy, Church pressure, anti-Jewish preaching, and a growing desire for religious uniformity under Christian rulers.

As Christian kingdoms reconquered Muslim-held territories, rulers increasingly imagined a unified Christian society. Jews were pressured to attend disputations, listen to conversion sermons, live under restrictions, and defend themselves against accusations that had little to do with reality. Art and preaching often portrayed Jews as dangerous or spiritually blind. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya notes that medieval images contributed to anti-Judaism and later to suspicion against conversos [S5].

By the late fourteenth century, rhetoric became violence. The claim that Jews were a threat to Christian society turned neighbors into enemies. Once conversion under terror became widespread, suspicion did not disappear; it shifted from Jews to their descendants.

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5. The Pogroms of 1391

The year 1391 was a turning point. Anti-Jewish violence erupted in Seville and spread through many towns and cities in Castile and Aragon. Communities were attacked, property was destroyed, and Jews were forced to choose between death, flight, and baptism. The National Library of Israel identifies the Massacre of 1391 as a wave of antisemitic pogroms that caused many Jews to flee Spain [S1].

The importance of 1391 cannot be overstated. It created a large population of converts who had not necessarily chosen Christianity as a matter of belief. Some became sincere Christians. Some assimilated. Some lived divided lives. Some preserved Jewish practice secretly. Some families carried fragments of memory without formal observance.

This is where the later Bnei Anusim story begins in mass form. The wound was not only the loss of lives; it was the forced separation of identity from public life. A Jew could be baptized in public and still remember grandparents, customs, foods, songs, fears, and forbidden truths at home.

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6. Conversos and New Christians

After the forced conversions, converts and their descendants were known as conversos or New Christians. Britannica defines conversos as Spanish Jews who adopted Christianity after severe persecutions in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and after the expulsion of religious Jews from Spain in the 1490s [S3].

The tragedy is that conversion did not bring true acceptance. Many Old Christians continued to view conversos as Jews. Their occupations, family networks, education, and social success made them targets of resentment. Some Christian authorities accused them of secretly “Judaizing,” meaning practicing Jewish rites while professing Christianity.

This suspicion created a trap. If conversos succeeded socially, they were accused of deception. If they kept distance, they were accused of separateness. If they remembered family customs, they were accused of heresy. If they tried to assimilate, blood-purity laws could still mark them as suspect. The children inherited the stigma even when they had never known open Jewish life.

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7. Limpieza de Sangre - Purity of Blood

One of the darkest developments after mass conversion was the rise of limpieza de sangre, “purity of blood.” These laws and social attitudes treated Jewish ancestry itself as a stain. The issue was no longer only religious belief; it became inherited identity. Even a person who lived as a Christian could be excluded from offices, honors, institutions, or trust because of Jewish ancestry.

Britannica notes that the 1499 Sentencia-Estatuto prohibited conversos from holding public or ecclesiastical offices and testifying against Spanish Christians, and that later purity-of-blood laws strengthened legal prejudice against those of Jewish ancestry [S3].

This is one reason the Bnei Anusim story must be told with moral clarity. Families did not merely “leave Judaism.” Many were trapped between public coercion and inherited suspicion. They were punished as Jews when Jewish, punished as false Christians when baptized, and punished as descendants even generations later.

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8. The Spanish Inquisition

The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478 and focused heavily on converted Jews suspected of secretly practicing Judaism. Its purpose was not usually to punish openly practicing Jews, but to police the sincerity of baptized Christians. This meant conversos were exposed to investigations, informers, imprisonment, confiscation, torture, public shame, and execution.

The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya explains that after the mass conversions following the pogroms of 1391, accusations of Judaizing helped lay the root for the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 [S5]. Public rituals of punishment, known as autos-da-fe, taught society that secret Judaism was a crime and that neighbors should watch one another.

Inquisition records are painful, but they also preserve traces of hidden Jewish life. Testimony mentions candles, fasting, avoiding pork, washing before meals, observing mourning, Passover-like customs, and secret prayers. These records must be used carefully because they were produced under persecution, but they show that memory continued even when Torah books, rabbis, and synagogues were inaccessible.

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9. The Alhambra Decree of 1492

In 1492, after the fall of Granada, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree. The National Library of Israel states that the decree ended about 1,500 years of Jewish community life on Spanish soil by ordering Jews who refused conversion to Christianity to leave the realm [S1]. The Museum of Jewish Heritage explains that Spanish Jews were required to emigrate or convert by the end of July 1492, leaving only months to liquidate homes, businesses, and property [S2].

The decree did not solve Spain's “converso problem.” It intensified it. The official argument was that open Jews influenced conversos to return to Judaism. Therefore, the monarchy expelled the open Jewish community in order to isolate the converts.

For the Jewish people, 1492 was an earthquake. Families were split. Books were lost. Property was sold under pressure. Graves were abandoned. Some went into exile; some converted; some returned as Christians; some went underground.

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10. The Choice That Was No Choice

The Jews of Spain faced a brutal deadline: leave or convert. This was not a free spiritual choice. It was a decision made under fear, poverty, separation, and uncertainty. Families had to decide whether to abandon land, language, cemetery, business, and neighbors, or to accept baptism and live under suspicion.

Many who left became the Sephardic diaspora. Many who stayed joined the converso population. Some who left later returned because exile was unbearable or because host countries were hostile. Some who converted did so outwardly while trying to preserve Jewish practice secretly.

For descendants, it is important not to judge ancestors casually. Some died al kiddush Hashem. Some fled with courage. Some converted under fear to save children. Some lost knowledge slowly. Some tried to hold on but had no rabbis, no Hebrew books, no synagogues, and no safe public space. The spiritual damage of coercion unfolded over generations.

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11. Portugal: Refuge and Trap

Many Spanish Jews first fled to Portugal, hoping to remain near Iberia while escaping the Spanish decree. For a brief period, Portugal seemed like refuge. But it became a trap. In 1496 King Manuel I ordered Jews and Muslims to leave. In practice, Jews were pressured and then forcibly converted in 1497.

Jewish Virtual Library notes that King Manuel herded thousands of Jews gathered in Lisbon for forced conversion, and issued decrees concerning the conversos afterward [S4]. My Jewish Learning summarizes the terrible sequence: Spanish Jewry was exiled in 1492, and the Jews of Portugal, many of them refugees from Spain, were forcibly converted only five years later, in 1497 [S6].

This Portuguese catastrophe produced a distinctive phenomenon. In Spain many Jews could choose exile. In Portugal, large numbers were prevented from leaving and converted as a group. Their descendants became central to the later Atlantic and Western Sephardic story.

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12. The Portuguese New Christians

The forced conversion of Portugal's Jews created a society in which entire families, neighborhoods, and commercial networks were officially Christian but often remembered Jewish origins. Because Portugal initially lacked an Inquisition, some New Christians lived with more room for hidden practice than in Spain. But this changed as suspicion grew and the Portuguese Inquisition was established in the sixteenth century.

My Jewish Learning explains that the introduction of the Inquisition into Portugal in 1536 spurred waves of crypto-Jewish emigration, driven by persecution and economic opportunity [S6]. Portuguese New Christians became important in trade networks linking Lisbon, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Livorno, Brazil, the Caribbean, West Africa, and the Ottoman world.

Many later returned openly to Judaism after reaching places of toleration. Others remained secretive for generations. Still others assimilated. This mixed pattern is essential: not every New Christian was a secret Jew, but many families carried enough memory to make later return possible.

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13. Lisbon 1506 and the Fear That Remained

The 1506 Lisbon massacre showed how vulnerable New Christians remained even after baptism. Violence against them revealed that society did not fully accept them as Christians. Baptism had not protected them from hatred; it had merely changed the legal category of the hatred.

Families learned silence. They learned to hide names, rituals, books, and memories. They learned that even grandchildren could be exposed by a careless word. The result was a culture of secrecy. The child might see candles, food restrictions, or a strange mourning custom, but not receive a full explanation. A grandmother might say, "This is how our family does it," without saying why.

Over centuries, fear became folklore. Religious meaning was covered with family language. What had once been Shabbat might become "Friday night tradition." What had once been kashrut might become "our family does not eat pork." What had once been Jewish mourning might become "old Spanish custom."

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14. Crypto-Judaism: Faith Under Cover

Crypto-Judaism was not one uniform religion. It differed by place, family, generation, and access to knowledge. In some families, people consciously kept Jewish laws in secret. In others, they kept only fragments. In others, they preserved a feeling of difference without knowing its origin.

The Guardian's 2026 report on the Ferrara Bible describes Spanish and Portuguese converts who had secretly maintained Jewish practice and memory in their families, but who lost knowledge over time because they had no synagogues, rabbis, or Hebrew books [S16]. That is the core tragedy of crypto-Judaism: the will to remember survived longer than the full ability to practice.

A family might fast without knowing the calendar correctly. They might light candles but not know the blessing. They might avoid pork but not know the laws of shechitah. They might whisper prayers but lose Hebrew. Their Judaism became compressed into signs, taboos, and inherited reverence.

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15. The Role of Women and the Home

In many Bnei Anusim stories, women preserved memory through the home. This was not accidental. Public Jewish institutions were destroyed or forbidden, but the home remained a place where food, candles, childbirth customs, mourning, names, cleanliness, modesty, and whispered prayers could survive.

Grandmothers and mothers often transmitted customs without formal explanation. A daughter learned not to cook certain foods, to clean on Friday, to light candles quietly, to cover mirrors after a death, or to treat bread with unusual reverence. These actions could outlive theology because they were embedded in daily life.

This makes the home a historical archive. Civil records are necessary, but family practice also deserves respectful listening. A serious intake interview should ask not only "What documents do you have?" but also "What did your grandmother do? What foods were forbidden? What happened on Friday? What happened when someone died? What words did your family use for God, prayer, bread, purity, or mourning?"

Additional teaching notes

Expanded historical note: This stage must be taught not as isolated tragedy but as a chain of pressure that moved from preaching to street violence, from social suspicion to law, and from law to forced religious identity. The

history of Bnei Anusim is therefore not a side story of Jewish history; it is one of the great wounds of exile, because it created families who carried Jewish memory while being cut off from open Jewish life.

For Machon Bnei Anusim, the educational lesson is to combine compassion with accuracy. Descendants should hear clearly that many families were torn away through coercion, fear and social control. At the same time, every claim today must be handled responsibly, because five hundred years of migration, intermarriage, secrecy and record loss require careful sorting between memory, genealogy, halachic status and communal belonging.

This is why the language of return must be dignified. It should never mock those who lost practice, and it should never flatter people with automatic promises. The right language is: your family memory is worthy of honor; your documents deserve serious review; your future can be built through Torah, mitzvot, community, and a recognized path appropriate to your case.

16. Why Memory Became Fragmented

Over generations, hidden customs changed. Some were Christianized. Some were attached to saints. Some were moved to nearby Christian holidays to avoid suspicion. Some were remembered as “family customs” rather than Jewish practices. Some were kept by women while men lost interest. Some were abandoned after migration. Some were revived only after a descendant met Jews, read history, or discovered genealogy.

Memory also became fragmented because survival required plausible deniability. A family could not always say, “We do this because we are Jews.” It was safer to say, “This is our tradition,” or “This is what our elders did.” Children received the action without the explanation. After enough generations, the explanation disappeared.

Therefore, a Machon Bnei Anusim program must be patient. Descendants often arrive with fragments, not finished narratives. The goal is not to force every fragment into proof, but to collect, compare, document, and educate honestly.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded historical note: This stage must be taught not as isolated tragedy but as a chain of pressure that moved from preaching to street violence, from social suspicion to law, and from law to forced religious identity. The history of Bnei Anusim is therefore not a side story of Jewish history; it is one of the great wounds of exile, because it created families who carried Jewish memory while being cut off from open Jewish life.

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17. Dispersal to North Africa

After the expulsions, many Jews fled to North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and other parts of the Maghreb. Some communities were already home to ancient Jewish populations. The arrival of Spanish and Portuguese exiles reshaped liturgy, language, rabbinic leadership, commerce, and communal identity.

In Morocco, expelled Jews and local Jews formed complex communities with both shared and distinct customs. Some spoke Haketia, a Judeo-Spanish language of northern Morocco. Sephardic legal and liturgical traditions blended with local Maghrebi traditions, creating a powerful branch of the Sephardic world.

North Africa also mattered to Bnei Anusim because some conversos escaped there and openly returned to Judaism. Others maintained commercial ties with relatives who remained in Iberia. Across the Strait of Gibraltar, families could be separated by law but connected by memory, trade, and rumor. The geography of exile was close enough to remember and far enough to survive.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded diaspora note: Dispersion did not move all families in the same way. Some Jews left openly and rebuilt recognized Sephardic communities; others remained baptized on paper and moved as New Christians through trade networks, colonial posts and frontier towns. The same family could have one branch in Amsterdam openly Jewish, another in North Africa or the Ottoman Empire, and another in the Americas living under suspicion.

This explains why Bnei Anusim memory appears in such different places: Iberia, Italy, North Africa, the Ottoman lands, Amsterdam, London, Hamburg, Bordeaux, Brazil, the Caribbean, Mexico, Colombia, the American Southwest and other regions. The movement was not random. Families moved toward ports, commercial opportunity, distance from inquisitorial centers, and places where old Sephardic networks could sometimes be quietly found.

For modern outreach, geography matters. A Machon must build country-by-country knowledge: which archives exist, which surnames are common but not proof, which regions had known New Christian movement, where Inquisition files survive, and which local customs are historically significant. Serious help begins by understanding the map of each family.

18. Dispersal to the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire received many Sephardic Jews after the expulsion. Communities grew in Istanbul, Salonika, Edirne, Izmir, Safed, Jerusalem, and other centers. Under Ottoman rule, Sephardic Jews rebuilt synagogues, printing, commerce, rabbinic courts, yeshivot, music, and Ladino culture.

The Ottoman world gave the exiles something Spain had taken away: public Jewish life. There they could pray openly, publish books, appoint rabbis, marry within Jewish law, and raise children without hiding Shabbat. The influence of the exiles was so strong that some Ottoman cities became major Sephardic centers for centuries.

This matters because later crypto-Jews who escaped from Iberia sometimes needed to relearn Judaism from communities that had kept the chain. As the Guardian notes regarding communities such as Amsterdam, some returnees imported rabbis from the Ottoman Empire or North Africa to guide them [S16]. The open Sephardic world helped repair the hidden Sephardic world.

Additional teaching notes

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19. Italy and the Ferrara Bible

Italy, especially cities such as Ferrara, Venice, Livorno, and later other ports, became important for Sephardic Jews and former conversos. Ferrara is especially symbolic because of the Ferrara Bible, printed in 1553 in Spanish. It was created for Jews and former conversos who needed access to the Hebrew Bible in a language they could understand.

The Guardian reports that the Ferrara Bible was the first complete printed edition of the Hebrew Bible in Spanish, produced by exiled Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Ferrara [S16]. The article explains that many former conversos had tried to preserve ancestral faith secretly, but time, displacement, and persecution had eroded knowledge [S16].

For Bnei Anusim education, this is a powerful lesson. Return requires language access. If people cannot read Hebrew yet, they need trustworthy Torah teaching in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. The Ferrara Bible was not a compromise with ignorance; it was a bridge back to knowledge.

Additional teaching notes

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20. Amsterdam and the Western Sephardic World

Amsterdam became one of the most important centers for former conversos returning openly to Judaism. In the Dutch Republic, many Portuguese New Christians found relative freedom, organized synagogues, built schools, published books, and rejoined the Jewish people publicly.

This return was not simple. Many had been raised for generations without full Jewish education. They needed teachers, books, rabbis, communal discipline, and patience. Some struggled with halacha after lives formed under Christianity. Some carried Iberian culture and Catholic habits into a newly public Jewish setting. Communities had to educate, correct, and integrate them.

Amsterdam shows that return is possible but must be structured. The issue is not only ancestry; it is formation. A person may discover Jewish roots in a moment, but becoming part of Torah life requires time, humility, learning, and community. That lesson remains directly relevant to every modern Bnei Anusim initiative.

Additional teaching notes

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21. England, Hamburg, Bordeaux, and the Atlantic Ports

Western Sephardic networks also developed in places such as London, Hamburg, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Curaçao, Suriname, Jamaica, and other Atlantic ports. Some communities were openly Jewish; others moved between Jewish and Christian worlds depending on local law and danger.

These merchants, families, and scholars formed a transnational world. A person could have relatives in Lisbon, Amsterdam, Livorno, London, Recife, and Curaçao. Names changed; public identities shifted; trade routes became family routes. The history of Bnei Anusim is therefore not limited to Spain and Portugal. It is Atlantic, Mediterranean, European, African, and American.

For genealogical work, this means records may be scattered. A family that appears Catholic in one archive may have Jewish relatives in another country. Commercial records, notarial documents, marriage contracts, Inquisition files, synagogue records, and cemetery inscriptions may need to be compared across borders. Serious research must be international.

Additional teaching notes

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22. Brazil and the First Jewish Communities in the Americas

Portuguese New Christians were deeply involved in the Atlantic world, including Brazil. Under Dutch rule in Recife and Pernambuco in the seventeenth century, Jews from Amsterdam established open Jewish communal life. The synagogue Kahal Zur Israel is remembered as one of the first organized Jewish communities in the Americas.

When Portuguese control returned, many Jews again faced danger. Some left for the Caribbean or North America. A group connected to Recife eventually helped form early Jewish life in New Amsterdam, later New York. Thus the Bnei Anusim and Sephardic diaspora story is tied to the earliest Jewish presence in the Western Hemisphere.

Brazil also contains long memories of New Christian settlement, Inquisition pursuit, and later rediscovery. Modern museums and researchers continue to explore this history. For Machon Bnei Anusim, Brazil should be one of the key regions for Portuguese-language outreach, documentation, education, and cooperation with existing communities.

Additional teaching notes

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23. The Caribbean and Trade Networks

The Caribbean became a meeting point for Sephardic Jews, New Christians, merchants, refugees, and families who moved between empires. Curaçao, Jamaica, Barbados, Suriname, and other islands and coastal colonies became part of a Jewish and converso Atlantic network.

In some places Jews could live openly; in others they had to conceal identity. Economic life and survival were tied together. Sugar, shipping, finance, languages, and family networks connected the Jewish Atlantic. These networks also carried siddurim, letters, marriage arrangements, charitable appeals, and rabbinic questions.

The lesson is practical: descendants in Latin America may not trace only to Spain or Portugal directly. Some families passed through islands, port cities, Dutch territories, Portuguese colonies, or North African gateways. A good intake process should therefore ask about migration routes, not only surnames. “Where did your family live before?” can be as important as “What was your family name?”

Additional teaching notes

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24. New Spain, Mexico, and the Northern Frontier

Many New Christians entered the Spanish colonies despite restrictions on people of Jewish ancestry. Some sought opportunity; others sought distance from Inquisition centers. Mexico City had an Inquisition tribunal, but frontier regions could be harder to police. Families moved north into areas that later became northern Mexico, Texas, New Mexico, and the American Southwest.

Tablet Magazine describes the modern reconnection of Hispanic crypto-Jews in New Mexico and the broader Southwest, noting family lore, customs, DNA testing, and social media as triggers for renewed interest [S18]. Such reports must be handled carefully: DNA or custom alone does not establish halachic status. But they show that historical memory remains alive.

The northern frontier created conditions for both preservation and loss. Isolation helped families keep unusual customs without outside interference, but it also separated them from rabbis and Jewish communities. Over centuries, that produced strong memory but weak documentation in many cases.

Additional teaching notes

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25. Colombia, Antioquia, and Emerging Communities

Colombia, especially Antioquia, has become an important modern case study. The Jerusalem Post reported that in Bello, near Medellín, a community of about 300 Jews developed in less than thirty years, led by Rabbi Elad Villegas, a former evangelical pastor who converted to Judaism [S14]. The report describes families who rediscovered roots and hidden traditions camouflaged by grandparents due to fear of persecution [S14].

The same report records customs such as avoiding pork, witnessing slaughter before buying meat, washing hands before eating, saying grace, and cleaning the house for a wheat-free period around Easter/Passover season [S14]. It also emphasizes that many members formally converted through rabbinic process [S14].

This example is important because it shows both ancestry memory and conversion reality. A community may feel it is returning to Jewish roots, yet still require recognized conversion, education, rabbinic leadership, and communal structure. Romantic language alone does not build a durable community.

Additional teaching notes

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26. Where Else Did They Go?

Bnei Anusim and Sephardic descendants can be found in Spain, Portugal, the Balearic Islands, southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, North Africa, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, the Netherlands, England, France, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Cuba, the Caribbean, Central America, and the American Southwest. Some families retained strong memory; others preserved only a surname or custom; others lost all conscious connection.

Not every person from these regions with a Spanish or Portuguese surname is descended from Jews. Not every custom is Jewish. But the historical dispersion is wide enough that serious inquiry deserves respect. Dismissal can wound sincere people; exaggeration can mislead them. Both are wrong.

Machon Bnei Anusim should therefore build regional research maps. A person from northern Portugal may need a different evidence pathway than a person from Antioquia, Brazil, or New Mexico. The same historical wound produced different local patterns.

Additional teaching notes

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27. The Belmonte Example

Belmonte, Portugal, is often cited as a famous example of a community that preserved elements of Jewish identity in secrecy for centuries. Its story reminds us that crypto-Jewish survival was possible, but also fragile. Customs could remain while halachic knowledge became thin. Identity could survive as memory even when public Torah life disappeared.

Belmonte should not be used simplistically. It does not prove that every family tradition is Jewish. It does prove that long-term secrecy existed and that descendants sometimes preserved identity under conditions that outsiders would have considered impossible.

The educational lesson is humility. Modern Jews should not mock descendants who arrive with incomplete knowledge. If a family was cut off from rabbis, books, mikveh, schools, and public Shabbat for centuries, what should we expect? The miracle is not that they forgot much. The miracle is that they remembered anything.

Additional teaching notes

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28. Customs: Friday Candles and Shabbat Echoes

One of the most frequently reported crypto-Jewish customs is lighting candles on Friday night. Wichita State University's Crypto-Jewish Practices page lists lighting candles on Friday night, limiting work or cooking on Saturdays, and cleaning the house near Easter among practices remembered in converso families [S10]. Tablet's report likewise describes candle practices and other family customs among Hispanic crypto-Jews [S18].

Candles are powerful because they belong to the home and can be disguised. A woman could light without a synagogue. The act could be shifted, hidden, or explained as family devotion. Children might remember the glow before they knew the source.

Still, educators must be careful. Candle lighting alone is not proof of Jewish status. Many cultures use candles. The value of the custom lies in pattern: Friday timing, secrecy, women transmitting it, other Jewish-like customs, family origin, surnames, endogamy, and documentation. One clue is interesting; many clues in a chain become worthy of research.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded customs note: Hidden customs are often the first emotional doorway. A grandmother lights candles in a corner, a family avoids pork without knowing why, mirrors are covered after death, bread is prepared in a particular way before spring, a strange respect for Friday afternoon cleaning remains, or children are told not to ask questions about certain family practices. Such details can awaken a person to a buried past.

But customs must be handled with discipline. A custom may be a Jewish remnant, a local Catholic practice, a family superstition, a health habit, or a mixture of several things. The correct approach is neither to dismiss nor to exaggerate. The Machon should record the custom, ask who practiced it, how long it was remembered, whether it was connected to secrecy, and whether archival evidence supports the family story.

In pastoral terms, customs should be treated as sparks. A spark can begin a search, but it is not yet a legal document or halachic ruling. The spark should lead to learning, genealogical research, and honest rabbinic guidance. That balance protects both the dignity of the descendants and the integrity of the Jewish people.

29. Customs: Food, Pork, Blood, and Slaughter

Food customs are among the strongest areas of family memory. Many descendants report avoidance of pork, unusual rules about blood, refusal to mix certain foods, special bread practices, or insistence on slaughtering animals in a particular way. Wichita State lists avoidance of pork among recognizable crypto-Jewish practices [S10]. The Jerusalem Post's report on Bello, Colombia, records memories of grandparents who did not keep pork in the house and who bought meat only after witnessing slaughter [S14].

Food memory can survive because it is repeated daily. A child may not understand theology, but he knows what the family will not eat. Over generations, a kashrut-based custom may become "health," "allergy," "family rule," or "old Spanish habit."

Again, caution is essential. Avoiding pork may come from many causes. But when food restrictions appear together with Friday customs, mourning customs, endogamy, Hebrew-like words, Ladino memory, or documentary traces, they become part of a serious evidence conversation.

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30. Customs: Mourning, Mirrors, and Low Seats

Mourning customs are another powerful area. Wichita State lists covering mirrors in a house of mourning, burning candles in a house of mourning, and sitting on low seats while mourning as Crypto-Jewish practices [S10]. Tablet describes a family memory in New Mexico of covering mirrors after a grandmother's death [S18].

Mourning customs survive because death gathers the family. Elders take charge. The old way suddenly returns. Children see chairs lowered, mirrors covered, candles burning, or words spoken. They may not know the halachic sources, but they remember the atmosphere.

These customs must be handled respectfully in interviews. A person may become emotional when realizing that a “strange” family practice resembles Jewish mourning. The interviewer should neither declare instant proof nor dismiss the memory. The right response is: “This is important. Let us record who did it, when, where, and with what explanation.”

Additional teaching notes

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31. Customs: Cleaning, Fasting, and Passover Echoes

Some families report intense cleaning before Easter, avoidance of bread or wheat, fasting customs, or a “pure day” remembered without clear Jewish terminology. Because Christian Holy Week often falls near Pesach, some hidden Jewish practices could be camouflaged under the surrounding calendar. Wichita State lists cleaning the house near Easter among crypto-Jewish practices [S10]. The Jerusalem Post's Bello report describes a family practice of cleaning the house and using an oven only for food without wheat around the Easter/Passover season [S14].

These customs are especially complex. They may be Jewish echoes, Christian customs, local folk practice, or a blend. But they deserve attention because Pesach is one of the deepest identity markers of Jewish family life.

A careful program should ask: Was bread avoided? For how many days? Who enforced it? Was there a special meal? Were there bitter herbs, eggs, lamb, unleavened bread, or unusual cleaning? Was the practice connected to grandparents from a particular region?

Additional teaching notes

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32. Customs: Names, Endogamy, and Oral Memory

Names can help research, but names are not enough. Many lists of “Sephardic surnames” are unreliable when used alone. Some Jewish names became common among non-Jews; some Jews changed names; some families used Christian names publicly and Jewish names privately; some surnames spread widely through ordinary Iberian society.

Endogamy, however, can be significant when combined with other clues. Some families repeatedly married within a narrow group described as “our people,” “old families,” or “clean families.” Ironically, purity-of-blood discrimination sometimes caused converso families to marry among themselves, preserving networks of ancestry and memory.

Oral history must be recorded before elders pass away. Ask about nicknames, forbidden marriages, cemetery practices, old documents, family towns, saints with biblical names, stories of “not being like others,” and warnings never to speak about certain matters. Oral memory is not final proof, but it often points researchers to records.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded customs note: Hidden customs are often the first emotional doorway. A grandmother lights candles in a corner, a family avoids pork without knowing why, mirrors are covered after death, bread is prepared in a particular way before spring, a strange respect for Friday afternoon cleaning remains, or children are told not to ask questions about certain family practices. Such details can awaken a person to a buried past.

But customs must be handled with discipline. A custom may be a Jewish remnant, a local Catholic practice, a family superstition, a health habit, or a mixture of several things. The correct approach is neither to dismiss nor to exaggerate. The Machon should record the custom, ask who practiced it, how long it was remembered, whether it was connected to secrecy, and whether archival evidence supports the family story.

In pastoral terms, customs should be treated as sparks. A spark can begin a search, but it is not yet a legal document or halachic ruling. The spark should lead to learning, genealogical research, and honest rabbinic guidance. That balance protects both the dignity of the descendants and the integrity of the Jewish people.

33. Why Customs Are Not Enough

A responsible institution must repeat this principle clearly: customs are meaningful, but they are not automatic proof of Jewish status. A family custom may be Jewish, Christian, local, invented, misunderstood, or blended. Even a real Jewish custom does not prove an unbroken maternal Jewish line.

This caution protects both halacha and applicants. False certainty can destroy lives. A family may spend money, move countries, or expect acceptance based on weak claims. Later rejection can cause bitterness and chillul Hashem. On the other hand, cold dismissal can crush sincere people whose evidence deserves review.

The proper path is graded evidence: family story, custom, surname, geography, civil records, Inquisition records, synagogue or cemetery records, rabbinic testimony, maternal-line documentation, and current communal practice. Each item receives weight. The goal is not to win an argument; the goal is to find truth.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded customs note: Hidden customs are often the first emotional doorway. A grandmother lights candles in a corner, a family avoids pork without knowing why, mirrors are covered after death, bread is prepared in a particular way before spring, a strange respect for Friday afternoon cleaning remains, or children are told not to ask questions about certain family practices. Such details can awaken a person to a buried past.

But customs must be handled with discipline. A custom may be a Jewish remnant, a local Catholic practice, a family superstition, a health habit, or a mixture of several things. The correct approach is neither to dismiss nor to exaggerate. The Machon should record the custom, ask who practiced it, how long it was remembered, whether it was connected to secrecy, and whether archival evidence supports the family story.

In pastoral terms, customs should be treated as sparks. A spark can begin a search, but it is not yet a legal document or halachic ruling. The spark should lead to learning, genealogical research, and honest rabbinic guidance. That balance protects both the dignity of the descendants and the integrity of the Jewish people.

34. Genealogy: The Discipline of Proof

Genealogy is the bridge between memory and institutional review. It requires birth certificates, marriage records, death records, baptismal records, notarial acts, wills, cemetery records, immigration papers, Inquisition files, and sometimes DNA as a research tool. But DNA cannot replace halachic or documentary proof.

Genie Milgrom is one of the most visible educators in this field. Her materials emphasize Crypto-Jewish genealogy and the need for serious documentary work. Her overview explains that descendants are referred to as Crypto-Jews or Bnei Anusim, while academics often use terms such as New Christians or conversos [S11]. The uploaded Machon proposal also stresses that names alone are not enough and that traditional status claims require documented evidence [S17].

A Machon Bnei Anusim research desk should create country-specific checklists. Nicaragua, Colombia, Portugal, Brazil, Mexico, and New Mexico do not have identical record systems. Applicants need guidance, not slogans.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded status note: Genealogy, halacha and immigration law speak different languages. Genealogy asks what can be documented. Halacha asks what evidence is relevant to Jewish status and which rabbinic authority can evaluate it. Israeli law asks whether a person fits a recognized legal category. Confusing these three systems creates disappointment and public mistrust.

A mature Bnei Anusim initiative must therefore separate tracks. One track reviews maternal-line evidence. Another prepares sincere candidates for recognized conversion or return processes where required. Another helps those who already have Law of Return eligibility through a parent, grandparent or spouse. Another serves cultural and educational reconnection without promising status. This prevents false hope while keeping the door open.

The Brisk letter included in this booklet is important as an expression of kavod and seriousness toward descendants who claim Marrano ancestry. Yet every present-day institution must also state clearly that current rabbinic rulings, marriage, conversion, aliyah and Israeli status matters require competent contemporary review. Dignity and caution must stand together.

35. Halachic Status and Maternal Descent

In normative halacha, Jewish status follows the mother. A person born to a Jewish mother is Jewish; a person not born to a Jewish mother requires conversion to become Jewish. The Law of Return's civil framework is broader for immigration purposes, but halachic Jewish status and civil aliyah eligibility are not identical.

This distinction must be taught with clarity. Some Bnei Anusim may have evidence of unbroken maternal Jewish descent. Their evidence deserves review by competent rabbinic authority. Many others will not be able to prove such a line. For them, the dignified path is not fantasy; it is serious Jewish learning and recognized conversion where appropriate.

A person with Jewish ancestry is not “nothing.” Family history deserves honor. But ancestry alone does not always establish present halachic status. The task of Machon Bnei Anusim is to help people move from confusion to clarity: status review where evidence exists, conversion preparation where needed, and community education for all sincere seekers.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded status note: Genealogy, halacha and immigration law speak different languages. Genealogy asks what can be documented. Halacha asks what evidence is relevant to Jewish status and which rabbinic authority can evaluate it. Israeli law asks whether a person fits a recognized legal category. Confusing these three systems creates disappointment and public mistrust.

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36. The Brisk Letter: Dignity and Caution

The letter image included at the front of this booklet is presented as a user-supplied rabbinic source connected with Yeshivas Brisk. Its central message is striking: descendants in the Americas who claim descent from the Marranos of Spain and Portugal should be treated with dignity and communal inclusion, while marriage to a Jew would require full conversion procedures. This reflects a strong rabbinic concern not to humiliate descendants of forced converts.

At the same time, the letter must be used responsibly. It is not a substitute for present-day batei din, local rabbinic authority, the Chief Rabbinate, or Israeli civil authorities. Communities differ in how they handle Bnei Anusim claims. Some require conversion, some consider gerut lechumra in specific cases, and some will first review evidence.

The enduring lesson of the letter is moral: do not close the door with contempt. Treat descendants as people carrying a historical wound. Then guide them truthfully through evidence, halacha, and recognized process.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded status note: Genealogy, halacha and immigration law speak different languages. Genealogy asks what can be documented. Halacha asks what evidence is relevant to Jewish status and which rabbinic authority can evaluate it. Israeli law asks whether a person fits a recognized legal category. Confusing these three systems creates disappointment and public mistrust.

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37. The Israeli Legal Framework

Modern Israel's civil immigration law is not identical to halacha. The Law of Return gives every Jew the right to immigrate as an *oleh*. Section 4A extends rights to a child and grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, and spouses of a child or grandchild, except for a person who was Jewish and voluntarily changed religion; section 4B defines "Jew" for the law as one born to a Jewish mother or converted and not a member of another religion [S12].

The Jewish Agency states that aliyah eligibility is determined by the Law of Return, a civil law that sets criteria allowing Jews and their families to immigrate to Israel, and that applicants must provide proof of connection to Judaism [S12].

For Bnei Anusim, the key point is that there is no simple automatic aliyah category based only on distant Iberian ancestry. Some applicants may qualify through documented Jewish parent or grandparent categories. Others may need conversion or another lawful route. Public messaging must be truthful.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded status note: Genealogy, halacha and immigration law speak different languages. Genealogy asks what can be documented. Halacha asks what evidence is relevant to Jewish status and which rabbinic authority can evaluate it. Israeli law asks whether a person fits a recognized legal category. Confusing these three systems creates disappointment and public mistrust.

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The Brisk letter included in this booklet is important as an expression of kavod and seriousness toward descendants who claim Marrano ancestry. Yet every present-day institution must also state clearly that current rabbinic rulings, marriage, conversion, aliyah and Israeli status matters require competent contemporary review. Dignity and caution must stand together.

38. Israel's “Affinity Communities” Report

An official Israeli public advisory committee examined communities worldwide with affinity to the Jewish people. The report states that there has been an unprecedented surge in individuals and groups seeking affinity with the Jewish people and Israel [S13]. It also notes that Israeli authorities were unprepared for this emerging reality and that Spain and Portugal had passed laws related to descendants of Marranos while Israel lacked clear preparation [S13].

Most importantly, the report concluded that the largest and most significant group among populations with affinity to the Jewish people is the descendants of the Marranos, mainly of Iberian origin, and that initial informational and organizational efforts should focus on them [S13].

This supports the need for Machon Bnei Anusim. The issue is not imaginary. It is recognized at high policy levels as complex, large, and under-organized. The response should not be emotional improvisation. It should be a disciplined framework of research, education, rabbinic guidance, and lawful pathways.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded status note: Genealogy, halacha and immigration law speak different languages. Genealogy asks what can be documented. Halacha asks what evidence is relevant to Jewish status and which rabbinic authority can evaluate it. Israeli law asks whether a person fits a recognized legal category. Confusing these three systems creates disappointment and public mistrust.

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The Brisk letter included in this booklet is important as an expression of kavod and seriousness toward descendants who claim Marrano ancestry. Yet every present-day institution must also state clearly that current rabbinic rulings, marriage, conversion, aliyah and Israeli status matters require competent contemporary review. Dignity and caution must stand together.

39. Shavei Israel

Shavei Israel is one of the best-known organizations working with descendants of Jews and communities seeking reconnection. Its website describes it as a nonprofit dedicated to assisting descendants of Jews and the Lost Tribes of Israel to reclaim their roots, active worldwide [S7].

Shavei's model matters because it combines outreach, education, conversion preparation, community support, and public visibility. It has worked with Bnei Anousim in multiple countries and has created institutional bridges for people who might otherwise remain isolated. One should not copy every model uncritically, but the existence of Shavei Israel proves that organized work in this field is possible.

Machon Bnei Anusim should learn from existing organizations rather than pretend to invent the field from zero. Collaboration, referrals, and clear boundaries will produce better outcomes than competition. The people being served are often fragile, confused, and deeply sincere; they deserve cooperation among institutions.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Shavei Israel says descendants are “emerging from the shadows of history” and seeking to reconnect. [MI-1]

Shavei Israel also describes representatives posted in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Italy, Colombia, El Salvador and Chile. [MI-2]

Its activity model is important for Machon Bnei Anusim: emissaries, seminars, online classes, printed material, Israel visits, aliyah support and warm follow-up. A serious Machon should learn from this model while keeping its own rabbinic governance and applicant-screening discipline.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education, genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

The best model for Machon Bnei Anusim is not competition but coordination. Where a family needs genealogy, refer them to careful research tools. Where they need education, provide structured classes. Where they need

recognized conversion guidance, connect them with serious rabbinic frameworks. Where they need public encouragement, use stories and media. Where they need aliyah strategy, use truthful legal screening.

Most importantly, modern initiatives show that Bnei Anusim work must be both warm and guarded. Warm, because many descendants carry wounds, confusion and longing. Guarded, because the field is vulnerable to fraud, exaggeration, messianic confusion, paid exploitation and political slogans. A Torah-centered Machon must be a house of clarity.

40. Machon Miriam

Machon Miriam, connected with Shavei Israel, is especially relevant for Spanish-, Portuguese-, and Italian-speaking candidates. Shavei Israel describes Machon Miriam as a Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian language Conversion and Return Institute in Israel directed by Rabbanit Renana Birnbaum, with many students who are descendants of Anousim from countries including Spain, Portugal, Peru, Argentina, and Brazil [S8].

This is a powerful model for Machon Bnei Anusim because language matters. A Spanish-speaking descendant who learns only in English or Hebrew may miss nuance, emotional depth, and family context. A program in Spanish and Portuguese can teach halacha, Jewish history, tefillah, and practical observance in a way that speaks to the heart.

However, conversion preparation must always be tied to recognized rabbinic standards. The goal is not to create parallel identity without recognition. The goal is to help sincere people enter Torah life in a way that can endure.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Machon Miriam describes itself as a “Spanish, Portuguese and Italian language Conversion and Return Institute in Israel.” [MI-3]

The institute states that many students are descendants of Anousim from countries ranging from Spain and Portugal to Peru, Argentina and Brazil. It also describes an intensive year of Jewish texts, history and the full Jewish calendar, with students later appearing before a Jerusalem Beit Din under the Chief Rabbinate. [MI-3]

This is a crucial model: the return cannot be reduced to emotion, DNA, or a surname. It requires study, community, practice, humility and recognized rabbinic process where necessary.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education, genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

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41. Reconectar and Ashley Perry

Reconectar, founded by Ashley Perry, works to reconnect descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews with the Jewish people. Its own description says that Reconectar is an organization that reconnects descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews compelled to become Roman Catholic more than 500 years ago - known as Bnai Anusim or conversos - with the Jewish people today [S9].

Reconectar's contribution is partly public advocacy: bringing awareness to Jewish institutions, Israeli leaders, and descendants themselves. It frames the issue as one of historical reconnection, identity, and peoplehood. This is important because many descendants do not begin with halachic questions. They begin with a story, a family custom, a surname, or a feeling that something was hidden.

Advocacy must then meet rabbinic discipline. A public platform can awaken interest; a responsible institute must then provide intake, education, documentation, and honest pathways. The two functions should support each other.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Reconectar says it “reconnects the descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews” with the Jewish people today. [MI-4]

Ashley Perry’s public explanation is powerful: people around the world discover Jewish ancestry and seek “solutions to reconnect.” [MI-4]

Reconectar’s contribution is especially in advocacy, public awareness, policy language and the idea that the Jewish world must create channels instead of leaving awakened families alone with internet searches and confusion.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education, genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

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42. Ezra L'Anousim and Yaffah Batya DaCosta

Ezra L'Anousim is another organization focused on education and aid for Bnei Anousim. Its website says that Yaffah Batya DaCosta founded Ezra L'Anousim more than twenty years ago with a vision for restoration of the Bnei Anousim [S10]. The Jerusalem Post has described the organization as providing education and aid for crypto-Jews or Bnei Anousim, descendants of Sephardic Jews forcibly converted in Spain and Portugal [S19].

This type of work is important because many descendants need more than information. They need emotional support, community, direction, and protection from exploitation. Some emerging communities have been vulnerable to unqualified teachers, unclear conversions, or unrealistic promises.

Machon Bnei Anusim should place ethics at the center: no selling false status, no humiliating seekers, no charging for impossible promises, no public use of private family records without consent, and no conversion claims outside recognized rabbinic frameworks.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Ezra L'Anousim’s mission speaks of helping people come “back openly to Judaism” in Sephardi tradition. [MI-5]

Its founder’s phrase “no one is left behind” gives the movement a strong chesed message. [MI-5]

The lesson for Machon Bnei Anusim is that material vulnerability matters. Families who are sincere may be unable to pay for teachers, documents, travel, translations, apostilles, Beit Din expenses or resettlement. A responsible initiative should include scholarship funds and donor-backed assistance.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education, genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

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Most importantly, modern initiatives show that Bnei Anusim work must be both warm and guarded. Warm, because many descendants carry wounds, confusion and longing. Guarded, because the field is vulnerable to fraud, exaggeration, messianic confusion, paid exploitation and political slogans. A Torah-centered Machon must be a house of clarity.

43. Genie Milgrom and Genealogical Restoration

Genie Milgrom's work is especially valuable for showing how disciplined genealogy can move family memory into documented history. Her public materials explain the terminology of Crypto-Jews, Bnei Anusim, New Christians, and conversos, and emphasize that these histories require research rather than guesswork [S11].

Genealogy can also restore dignity. A person who was told that family customs were “strange” may discover that those customs belong to a buried Jewish story. A family that hid for centuries may finally be named. But genealogy can also disappoint. Many searches do not prove what people hoped. A truthful institute must prepare applicants for both outcomes.

The right approach is: document everything, promise nothing prematurely, and keep learning. Even when halachic status is not proven, the act of recovering family history can be holy. It gives descendants language for their past and helps Jewish institutions understand the scope of the historical wound.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Genie Milgrom's genealogical warning is simple and vital: “Names alone are not enough!” [MI-6]

Her work emphasizes patient documentation: birth records, marriage records, death records, Inquisition materials, and especially unbroken maternal-line proof where halachic status is being examined. A Machon can honor family memory while still insisting on evidence.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education, genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

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44. Rabbi Yoel Gold and Public Storytelling

The user specifically requested that this booklet search Rabbi Yoel Gold. Public sources do not show Rabbi Yoel Gold as running a formal Bnei Anusim organization, but they do show his role as a Jewish storyteller whose videos can awaken attention. A 2026 Five Towns Jewish Times article says that a Colombian trip began after seeing a Rabbi Yoel Gold video describing his visit to a Medellín-area community in Antioquia with an Orthodox Jewish community of about 300 converts led by Rabbi Elad Villegas [S15].

This matters because stories move people. A policy paper may convince a board, but a story can awaken a donor, a rabbi, or a descendant. Rabbi Yoel Gold's style demonstrates the power of personal narrative: one community, one family, one return, one hidden spark.

Machon Bnei Anusim should use storytelling ethically. Film testimonies. Record elders. Show communities. But always distinguish inspiration from proof and publicity from process.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

Rabbi Yoel Gold's public storytelling, including the TorahAnytime presentation titled “Church Converts to Judaism,” brought the Bello, Colombia story to a wider Torah audience. [MI-7]

Storytelling is not a substitute for halacha, but it opens hearts. When a Jewish audience hears about families sacrificing comfort to learn Torah, keep Shabbat and rebuild Jewish homes, the abstract term Bnei Anusim becomes human, urgent and real.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded modern initiative note: The modern movement to gather, teach and assist Bnei Anusim is not one organization and not one method. It includes rabbinic emissaries, formal conversion preparation, online education,

genealogical documentation, public advocacy, films, lectures, family-tree research, scholarships, communal formation and aliyah guidance. Each initiative contributes one piece of the larger work.

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Most importantly, modern initiatives show that Bnei Anusim work must be both warm and guarded. Warm, because many descendants carry wounds, confusion and longing. Guarded, because the field is vulnerable to fraud, exaggeration, messianic confusion, paid exploitation and political slogans. A Torah-centered Machon must be a house of clarity.

45. Rabbi Elad Villegas and Bello, Colombia

The Bello community near Medellín is one of the most visible modern examples of a Latin American return movement. The Jerusalem Post reports that Rabbi Elad Villegas, formerly an evangelical pastor, led the creation of a functioning Jewish community in Bello, and that many members rediscovered Jewish roots and hidden traditions [S14]. The community developed synagogue life, Torah study, kashrut, burial arrangements, and education for children [S14].

The most important lesson is that return required institutions. Interest alone was not enough. The community needed rabbinic guidance, conversion processes, Jewish education, ritual objects, tefillah, kosher infrastructure, and leadership. Members had to move from curiosity to obligation.

This case also warns against simplistic categories. Some were descendants of Crypto-Jews; some became Jews through conversion; some were both historically connected and halachically required to convert. That mixture is common in Bnei Anusim work and must be addressed honestly.

Quoted modern initiative and practical lesson

In the Bello, Colombia testimony published by Shavei Israel, the search led families to rediscover old customs that “started to make sense.” [MI-8]

This teaches that outreach must be humble. Some communities begin with uncertain family memory, some with sincere conversion desire, and some with documented ancestry. A Machon must know how to walk with each group without confusing the categories.

Additional teaching notes

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46. What Machon Bnei Anusim Can Do

Machon Bnei Anusim should become a serious educational and documentation institute serving descendants of Anusim with dignity and structure. Its work should include: public education, intake interviews, genealogy guidance, document checklists, Spanish and Portuguese Torah classes, Sephardic history curriculum, rabbinic referrals, conversion preparation where needed, aliyah screening where lawful, and emotional support for families.

The uploaded project proposal already recommends a structured initiative with tracks for documentation and genealogy, halachic screening and education, recognized conversion support where required, and aliyah or absorption guidance where legally available [S17]. That model should be developed into practical forms and a case-management system.

The institute must avoid two extremes: romantic recognition without evidence, and cold rejection without listening. Its voice should be warm, rabbinically serious, Sephardic-sensitive, and legally honest. The slogan could be: Memory with dignity. Return with truth. Torah with responsibility.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded practical note: Machon Bnei Anusim should offer a visible front door: an intake form, a basic orientation course, a documentation checklist, a rabbinic interview process, and a written explanation of possible tracks. Every applicant should leave the first stage understanding the difference between historical descent, halachic status, conversion preparation, and aliyah eligibility.

The program should be built in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, with special sensitivity to Sephardic minhagim. It should not impose an artificial culture on people who are trying to reconnect to the Sephardic world from which their ancestors were torn. At the same time, it should teach practical halacha, Shabbat, kashrut, tefillah, Jewish family purity concepts, lifecycle, Hebrew literacy and synagogue conduct in an orderly way.

The public message should be strong: the Jewish people must not abandon sincere descendants of the forced converts; nevertheless, the Machon will not sell fantasies. Its promise is guidance, dignity, education, documentation help, rabbinic seriousness and a path. That is far stronger than empty slogans, because it can actually build families and communities that last.

47. Intake Questions for Descendants

A good first interview should ask respectful, specific questions. Where was your family from? What towns are repeated in family memory? Which surnames appear in grandparents and great-grandparents? Were there relatives who avoided pork, shellfish, or blood? Was Friday evening different? Were candles lit? Was Saturday treated differently? Were mirrors covered in mourning? Were family members told not to marry outsiders? Were there old documents, prayer books, hidden objects, or cemetery clues?

The interviewer should also ask: who told you these stories? Are elders still alive? Can you record them? Do you have birth, marriage, and death certificates? Are there church records? Were there migrations through Portugal, the Caribbean, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, or North Africa? Has anyone already built a family tree?

Every answer should be placed in one of four categories: family memory, custom, document, or current practice. The applicant should then receive honest guidance: research path, education path, halachic review path, or conversion preparation path.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded practical note: Machon Bnei Anusim should offer a visible front door: an intake form, a basic orientation course, a documentation checklist, a rabbinic interview process, and a written explanation of possible tracks. Every applicant should leave the first stage understanding the difference between historical descent, halachic status, conversion preparation, and aliyah eligibility.

The program should be built in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, with special sensitivity to Sephardic minhagim. It should not impose an artificial culture on people who are trying to reconnect to the Sephardic world from which their ancestors were torn. At the same time, it should teach practical halacha, Shabbat, kashrut, tefillah, Jewish family purity concepts, lifecycle, Hebrew literacy and synagogue conduct in an orderly way.

The public message should be strong: the Jewish people must not abandon sincere descendants of the forced converts; nevertheless, the Machon will not sell fantasies. Its promise is guidance, dignity, education, documentation help, rabbinic seriousness and a path. That is far stronger than empty slogans, because it can actually build families and communities that last.

48. A Warning Against False Promises

The Bnei Anusim field attracts sincere souls, but it also attracts confusion and sometimes exploitation. People may be promised instant Jewish status, guaranteed aliyah, quick conversion, or recognition by authorities who have not agreed to recognize them. This is dangerous.

A responsible institute should publish clear guardrails. No one should promise aliyah based on surname or DNA. No one should promise halachic Jewish status without competent rabbinic review. No one should sell conversion without recognized standards. No one should shame sincere seekers. No one should publish private family histories without permission. No one should attack established Jewish communities for asking legitimate questions.

Truth is not cruelty. Process is not rejection. Standards are not hatred. For descendants of forced converts, a clear path is a form of compassion. It tells them: your story matters enough to be handled properly.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded practical note: Machon Bnei Anusim should offer a visible front door: an intake form, a basic orientation course, a documentation checklist, a rabbinic interview process, and a written explanation of possible tracks. Every applicant should leave the first stage understanding the difference between historical descent, halachic status, conversion preparation, and aliyah eligibility.

The program should be built in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, with special sensitivity to Sephardic minhagim. It should not impose an artificial culture on people who are trying to reconnect to the Sephardic world from which their ancestors were torn. At the same time, it should teach practical halacha, Shabbat, kashrut, tefillah, Jewish family purity concepts, lifecycle, Hebrew literacy and synagogue conduct in an orderly way.

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49. Practical Program Plan

Phase 1: Build a website in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Hebrew. Publish history pages, intake forms, source guides, and clear disclaimers. Create a secure database for applicants and documents.

Phase 2: Launch a twelve-week introductory course: history of Sefarad, Shabbat, kashrut, prayer, Jewish calendar, family purity overview, halachic status, conversion basics, aliyah realities, and Sephardic minhagim. Require attendance and mentorship for serious candidates.

Phase 3: Create a documentation desk with country guides for Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, and the American Southwest. Train volunteers to distinguish story, custom, and proof.

Phase 4: Establish rabbinic review and referral relationships. Where maternal-line evidence is strong, prepare a dossier. Where evidence is insufficient, offer recognized conversion preparation. Where Law of Return eligibility may exist, refer to qualified legal channels.

Phase 5: Build Israel absorption partnerships for those who lawfully arrive: ulpan, synagogue, school guidance, employment support, and Sephardic community integration.

Additional teaching notes

Expanded practical note: Machon Bnei Anusim should offer a visible front door: an intake form, a basic orientation course, a documentation checklist, a rabbinic interview process, and a written explanation of possible tracks. Every applicant should leave the first stage understanding the difference between historical descent, halachic status, conversion preparation, and aliyah eligibility.

The program should be built in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, with special sensitivity to Sephardic minhagim. It should not impose an artificial culture on people who are trying to reconnect to the Sephardic world from which their ancestors were torn. At the same time, it should teach practical halacha, Shabbat, kashrut, tefillah, Jewish family purity concepts, lifecycle, Hebrew literacy and synagogue conduct in an orderly way.

The public message should be strong: the Jewish people must not abandon sincere descendants of the forced converts; nevertheless, the Machon will not sell fantasies. Its promise is guidance, dignity, education, documentation help, rabbinic seriousness and a path. That is far stronger than empty slogans, because it can actually build families and communities that last.

50. Conclusion and Selected Sources

The history of the Bnei Anusim is one of destruction and survival, forgetting and remembering, fear and courage. Spain and Portugal tried to sever Jews from Torah by force. The Inquisition tried to police memory. Exile scattered families across continents. Yet candles remained. Food memories remained. Mourning customs remained. Names, whispers, and questions remained.

Now the task is not to romanticize the past, but to repair it with truth. Some descendants will prove Jewish status. Many will not. Some will qualify for aliyah. Many will require education and conversion. All deserve dignity.

Selected sources: [S1] National Library of Israel, “The Jewish Expulsion From Spain and the Sephardic Diaspora.” [S2] Museum of Jewish Heritage, “A 1492 Letter Regarding Jewish Property in Spain.” [S3]

Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Converso.” [S4] Jewish Virtual Library, “Manuel I” and related entries on Conversos, Crypto-Jews, and Marrano diaspora. [S5] Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, “The Lost Mirror.” [S6] My Jewish Learning, “The Sephardic Diaspora After 1492.” [S7] Shavei Israel, home page. [S8] Shavei Israel, Machon Miriam page. [S9] Reconectar, “Reaching out to Descendants of Conversos.” [S10] Wichita State University, “Crypto-Jewish Practices.” [S11] Genie Milgrom, “World-Crypto Jewish Genealogy.” [S12] Jewish Agency and Refworld texts of the Law of Return. [S13] Gov.il, Public Advisory Committee report on worldwide communities with affinity to the Jewish People. [S14] Jerusalem Post, “Colombian descendants of Crypto-Jews rediscover their roots.” [S15] Five Towns Jewish Times, “Our Aliyah Journal: An Update During War.” [S16] The Guardian, “New edition of Ferrara Bible...” [S17] User-supplied Machon proposal, April 2026. [S18] Tablet Magazine, “The Converso Comeback.”

Additional teaching notes

Expanded practical note: Machon Bnei Anusim should offer a visible front door: an intake form, a basic orientation course, a documentation checklist, a rabbinic interview process, and a written explanation of possible tracks. Every applicant should leave the first stage understanding the difference between historical descent, halachic status, conversion preparation, and aliyah eligibility.

The program should be built in Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, with special sensitivity to Sephardic minhagim. It should not impose an artificial culture on people who are trying to reconnect to the Sephardic world from which their ancestors were torn. At the same time, it should teach practical halacha, Shabbat, kashrut, tefillah, Jewish family purity concepts, lifecycle, Hebrew literacy and synagogue conduct in an orderly way.

The public message should be strong: the Jewish people must not abandon sincere descendants of the forced converts; nevertheless, the Machon will not sell fantasies. Its promise is guidance, dignity, education, documentation help, rabbinic seriousness and a path. That is far stronger than empty slogans, because it can actually build families and communities that last.

Appendix A: A Practical Intake and Track Model for Machon Bnei Anusim

A serious Machon should begin with a structured intake questionnaire. The first questions should not be “Are you Jewish?” but rather: What is your family story? Which side of the family carries the memory? Which country and town do the oldest memories come from? Which customs were observed? Who observed them? Were they connected to secrecy, fear, Friday night, food, burial, marriage or family endogamy? Which documents already exist?

The second step is track placement. Track A is for possible halachic status review where there is serious maternal-line evidence. Track B is for possible Law of Return eligibility through a recognized parent, grandparent or spouse category. Track C is for conversion preparation where a sincere person wishes to enter Jewish life but status cannot presently be established. Track D is cultural and historical reconnection for people who are not yet ready or eligible for formal processes. These tracks should be explained kindly and in writing.

The third step is education. A twelve-week introduction should teach Jewish history, the meaning of Shabbat, kashrut basics, prayer, Hebrew reading, Jewish family life, the calendar, synagogue conduct, and the difference between Sephardic minhag and general halachic obligations. A second-year track should be more demanding and should require real communal practice under rabbinic mentorship.

The fourth step is documentation. Applicants should be taught how to build a file: birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, cemetery records, immigration records, naturalization papers, synagogue materials where available, Inquisition references, notarial records, and family trees. The Machon should never treat internet surname lists as proof. They may be research clues, nothing more.

The fifth step is rabbinic and legal referral. The Machon should not promise conversion or aliyah outcomes. It should prepare applicants honestly, then refer them to recognized batei din, recognized conversion frameworks, qualified immigration lawyers, or official aliyah channels when the facts justify it. Every referral should be documented, and every applicant should understand the limits of the Machon’s authority.

The sixth step is absorption. Return is not completed by a certificate, a ceremony or a plane ticket. Families need a synagogue, Hebrew learning, schools for children, mentors for Shabbat and holidays, employment guidance, mental support, and help entering a community without humiliation. A successful Machon must build an absorption network before it encourages movement.

Appendix B: Modern Initiative Source Notes

[MI-1] Shavei Israel, “Bnei Anousim,” quoted phrase from its description of descendants seeking reconnection, <https://www.shavei.org/communities-2/bnei-anousim/>

[MI-2] Shavei Israel, “Our Activities,” representatives, seminars, online communities and aliyah support, <https://www.shavei.org/about-us/our-activities/>

[MI-3] Shavei Israel, “Machon Miriam,” conversion and return institute description, <https://www.shavei.org/conversion-institute/>

[MI-4] Reconnectar, “Reaching out to descendants of conversos,” Ashley Perry / Ronit Treatman, 23 August 2024, <https://www.reconnectar.online/post/reaching-out-to-descendants-of-conversos>

[MI-5] Ezra L’Anousim, “About,” mission and founder statement, <https://bneianousim.org/about/>

[MI-6] Genie Milgrom, “World Crypto-Jewish Genealogy - an overview,” <https://geniemilgrom.com/archives-and-cultural-information/document/world-crypto-jewish-genealogy-an-overview/>

[MI-7] TorahAnytime listing, R’ Yoel Gold, “Church Converts to Judaism,” 8 March 2024, <https://torahanytime.com/lectures/286841>

[MI-8] Shavei Israel, “Our story: From Colombia to Israel,” Bello, Colombia personal testimony, <https://www.shavei.org/blog/2017/12/10/our-story-from-colombia-to-israel/>

[P-1] Bnei Anusim Return Initiative, Project Proposal, NGO / NGP Concept Plan and Proposed Rabbinic Position, supplied draft, 22 April 2026.

[H-1] National Library of Israel, resources on the Spanish expulsion and the Alhambra Decree.

[H-2] Encyclopaedia Britannica, entries relating to conversos, Spanish Inquisition and limpieza de sangre.

[H-3] Wichita State University Crypto-Jews research material on converso practices.

Final Message

The Bnei Anusim story is a story of destruction and survival, silence and memory, fear and return. The Jewish people must answer it with dignity. But dignity requires truth. The right path is not reckless recognition and not cold rejection. The right path is Torah, careful documentation, serious education, recognized rabbinic process where required, lawful aliyah guidance where available, and patient community building.

Machon Bnei Anusim can become a trustworthy address for this holy work if it holds two principles together: a warm heart and clean hands. A warm heart to receive descendants with kavod, and clean hands to avoid false promises, exploitation and confusion. With that balance, the descendants of the forced can be helped to move from hidden memory to open Jewish life, one family, one file, one mitzvah, and one truthful step at a time.

Appendix C: Chronological Timeline for Teaching Bnei Anusim History

The following timeline is designed for classes, seminars and donor presentations. It helps participants see that the Bnei Anusim story did not begin with one decree and did not end with one expulsion. It unfolded across centuries: cultural flourishing, pressure, massacres, forced conversion, inquisitorial surveillance, exile, maritime expansion, hidden family practice, modern rediscovery and contemporary efforts to return with truth.

Early centuries: Jewish settlement in Iberia develops over many generations, creating communities that later become known collectively as Sefarad. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Visigothic period: Laws against Jews demonstrate that Iberian Jewish life already faced serious pressure long before the medieval golden age. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

711 and after: Muslim conquest changes the map of Iberia and opens long periods in which Jewish communities participate in trade, medicine, poetry, philosophy and public administration. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

10th-11th centuries: The cultural world of Sefarad grows in Hebrew poetry, grammar, biblical commentary, philosophy, medicine and diplomacy. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

12th century: Political instability and religious extremism in some Muslim regions push Jewish families from one city to another, reminding us that flourishing was never absolute security. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Christian Reconquista: As Christian kingdoms expand, Jewish communities become useful to rulers but increasingly vulnerable to popular hostility and clerical agitation. For teaching purposes, this date should be

presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

13th century: Disputation, censorship and pressure on Jewish public life increase; the intellectual confrontation with Christianity becomes sharper. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1348-1351: The Black Death era intensifies suspicion of Jews in parts of Europe and contributes to a climate in which hatred can become public violence. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1391: Massacres and forced conversions begin in Seville and spread. This is a central turning point in the creation of a mass converso population. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

15th century: Conversos rise in government, commerce and church life, but their success feeds jealousy and accusations that they are secretly Jewish. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1449: Purity-of-blood thinking becomes more formal in Toledo and elsewhere, targeting New Christians because of ancestry rather than conduct. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1478: The Spanish Inquisition is authorized, with a central focus on baptized Jews suspected of Judaizing. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1480s: Trials, confiscations, imprisonment and public punishments spread fear among converso families and encourage secrecy or flight. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1492: The Alhambra Decree expels unconverted Jews from Spain. Many leave; many others face pressure to convert, flee or lose property and community. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1492-1493: Expelled Jews move toward Portugal, North Africa, Italy, the Ottoman world and other Sephardic destinations. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1497: Portugal forces mass conversion of Jews who had taken refuge there, creating a huge population of Portuguese New Christians. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1506: The Lisbon massacre deepens trauma and teaches many New Christians that baptism did not guarantee safety. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

16th century: Portuguese New Christians become active in Atlantic trade, some moving through ports toward Brazil, the Caribbean and Spanish America. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1536: The Portuguese Inquisition is established, creating additional pressure on New Christians in Portugal and its empire. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

16th-17th centuries: Western Sephardic communities emerge in places such as Amsterdam, Hamburg, London and Livorno, often including descendants of conversos who return openly to Judaism. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Dutch Brazil: The Recife community demonstrates how open Jewish life could reappear when political conditions allowed it. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

1654: Jews from Dutch Brazil reach New Amsterdam, becoming part of the early Jewish story of North America. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Colonial Americas: Inquisition tribunals in Mexico, Lima and Cartagena investigate suspected Judaizers, preserving painful records of hidden practice. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

18th-19th centuries: Many descendants lose active memory, while others preserve customs without clear explanation. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

20th century: Academic research, oral-history projects and local family memories begin to reveal the scale of crypto-Jewish survival and identity. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Late 20th century: Communities such as Belmonte and research in the American Southwest bring public attention to hidden Jewish memory. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Early 21st century: Internet genealogy, digitized archives and DNA testing awaken many families to possible Sephardic or converso ancestry. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Today: The central challenge is building honest pathways: education, documentation, recognized conversion where required, aliyah guidance where lawful, and community absorption. For teaching purposes, this date should be presented with the human question: what did ordinary families do next, and how did children inherit either faith, fear, silence or memory?

Appendix D: Country and Region Notes for Modern Outreach

Spain

Spain is the root territory of the 1492 expulsion and the earlier 1391 trauma. Modern outreach in Spain must be careful: some families have real memory and archival leads, while many surnames are too common to prove anything. The proper work is education, archival discipline and dignified contact with existing Jewish communities.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Portugal

Portugal is central because of the 1497 forced conversions, the later Portuguese Inquisition and the famous Belmonte example. A Portuguese file often requires parish records, notarial materials, municipal archives and sometimes Inquisition files. Outreach should stress that forced baptism was not a voluntary abandonment of the Jewish people.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Belmonte

Belmonte shows the power of women, home practice and communal memory. It also teaches the danger of romantic simplification. The story is inspiring because traditions survived; it is also sobering because isolation changes practice and requires serious rabbinic guidance when people return publicly.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Mallorca and the Xuetas

The Xueta story is different from many Latin American stories because group identity, endogamy and public stigma survived for centuries. It is an example of how ancestry can remain socially visible even when open Jewish practice is suppressed or transformed.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

North Africa

Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and related routes received expelled Sephardic Jews and also interacted with families fleeing Iberian pressure. Outreach here is often less about hidden identity and more about understanding Sephardic continuity, family names, rabbinic heritage and migration to later communities.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Ottoman lands

Turkey, Greece, the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean became major centers of open Sephardic life. These communities preserved Ladino, Sephardic liturgy and rabbinic tradition, offering a living contrast to the hidden world of Iberia and the Americas.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Italy

Italy received Sephardic refugees and also produced its own crypto-Jewish situations in the south and Sicily. Livorno and Ferrara are crucial for understanding how returning conversos could reenter open Jewish life through ports, printing and commerce.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Amsterdam

Amsterdam is one of the strongest examples of a Western Sephardic community built by former New Christians returning openly to Judaism. It is essential for teaching that return is historically possible, but also that it requires community, education and public commitment.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

England and London

London became another important Western Sephardic center. Families who had lived as New Christians could reappear as Jews in mercantile networks. This helps students understand that identity sometimes survived under one name in one country and reemerged under another name in another.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Bordeaux and Bayonne

Southwestern France held communities of Portuguese New Christians who gradually became more openly Jewish. Their story is important because it shows a transitional space between concealment and recognition.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Brazil

Brazil, especially the story of Dutch Recife and later Portuguese colonial realities, is central to the Atlantic history of Bnei Anusim. Outreach in Brazil today must combine history, Portuguese language, records, and awareness that family practices may have traveled inland.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Caribbean

The Caribbean was a network of islands, ports and trade routes. Some Jews lived openly under tolerant regimes; others moved as New Christians. It is a key region for explaining how secrecy and commerce crossed oceans together.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Mexico and New Spain

Mexico holds rich Inquisition records and powerful crypto-Jewish memory, including northern frontier movements. Modern descendants may have customs connected to candles, food, burial, family separation or Hebrew-sounding fragments, but documentation is still essential.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

New Mexico and the American Southwest

The American Southwest became famous in modern research on crypto-Jewish descendants. Outreach here must be sensitive: some families are Jewish by current halachic status only if evidence supports it; others carry ancestral memory and need education or conversion pathways.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Colombia and Antioquia

Antioquia is important because of contemporary communities seeking Judaism, including the Bello story. It shows how family customs, conversion desire, Torah learning and aliyah dreams can meet in one place. The category of each person still requires careful review.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia

Andean regions contain diverse histories of colonial migration, Inquisition influence and local family memory. Outreach should avoid broad claims and instead build regional research teams capable of studying archives, surnames, routes and oral traditions.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Argentina, Chile and Uruguay

These countries received later Jewish immigration as well as families with Iberian colonial backgrounds. A Machon must distinguish Sephardic ancestry claims from later Jewish communal ancestry and from general cultural affinity.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Central America

El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Panama each need country-specific study. Some families preserve oral traditions; others are drawn spiritually to Judaism. Spanish-language Torah education and responsible rabbinic referral are essential.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic

The Spanish Caribbean contains deep colonial layers and later migrations. Family stories may include hidden customs, but the islands also have complex mixed histories. Respectful listening must be combined with disciplined records research.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Israel

Israel is not merely a destination; it is where law, rabbinic recognition, conversion frameworks, aliyah eligibility, absorption and identity meet. A Machon in Israel must be truthful: not every descendant has a legal path now, but every sincere person deserves clarity and dignity.

Practical outreach note: every regional program should include a local history class, a documents checklist, a warning against surname-only proof, a list of responsible rabbinic contacts, and a pastoral path for those who need conversion preparation rather than status recognition. This prevents confusion and helps families move from emotion to structured action.

Appendix E: Customs Documentation Guide

Friday candle lighting

Ask who lit the candles, where they were placed, whether a blessing was said or avoided, whether the practice was hidden, and whether it happened specifically before sunset on Friday. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Avoidance of pork

Ask whether the family avoided pork completely, avoided only certain cuts, used a stated religious reason, or explained it as health, disgust, family tradition or obedience to grandparents. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Blood and slaughter

Ask whether blood was avoided in meat, whether animals were drained in a special way, whether a family member slaughtered privately, and whether older relatives connected it to purity or a commandment. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Passover-like cleaning

Ask whether spring cleaning included removing crumbs, special bread customs, hidden flatbread, bitter herbs, or a family meal whose meaning was not clearly Catholic. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Fasting customs

Ask which day was fasted, whether the fast connected to Esther, Yom Kippur, mourning, a saint day, or a family vow. A fast alone proves nothing, but its details may matter. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Mourning mirrors

Ask whether mirrors were covered, mourners sat low, water was poured out, candles were lit, or a seven-day practice was remembered after death. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Endogamy

Ask whether the family married within a small group, avoided certain families, or spoke about “our kind.” Endogamy may preserve memory but can also arise from class, geography or clan custom. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Names and naming

Ask whether biblical names repeated, whether children were named after living or deceased relatives, whether Hebrew names were remembered, and whether surnames changed across borders. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Secret rooms or objects

Ask whether the house had hidden compartments, unusual books, covered symbols, old candlesticks or unexplained ritual objects. Photograph and document without exaggerating. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Food before holidays

Ask about special stews, unleavened bread, almond sweets, egg dishes, Sabbath-like foods, or recipes attributed to grandmothers. Recipes are clues, not proof. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Language fragments

Ask whether Ladino, Hebrew or unusual religious words survived. Record exact pronunciation; do not “correct” it before documenting it. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Burial practices

Ask about washing the body, plain burial, speed of burial, stones on graves, avoiding flowers, or prayers whispered in private. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Friday cleaning

Ask whether the house was cleaned on Friday afternoon, whether bathing and clean clothing were required, and whether work stopped earlier than neighbors. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Marriage customs

Ask about canopy-like practices, breaking glass, special blessings, separation before marriage, or fear of church records revealing ancestry. The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Fear and silence

Ask what the family was forbidden to discuss. Sometimes the most significant inheritance is not a custom but a warning: “Do not tell anyone who we are.” The interviewer should record the oldest known source of the memory, the town, the language used, the exact action, and whether documents or witnesses can support it.

Evaluation rule: this custom may be emotionally powerful and historically meaningful, but it should not be presented as automatic proof of Jewish status. It belongs in the evidence file as a clue, to be weighed together with records, genealogy, community context and rabbinic review.

Appendix F: Genealogy Dossier Builder

Step 1: Start with the living generation

Start with the living generation is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 2: Create a maternal and paternal tree

Create a maternal and paternal tree is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 3: Separate memory from documents

Separate memory from documents is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 4: Collect civil certificates

Collect civil certificates is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 5: Collect church and parish records

Collect church and parish records is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 6: Look for notarial records

Look for notarial records is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 7: Search cemetery and burial material

Search cemetery and burial material is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 8: Study immigration and naturalization files

Study immigration and naturalization files is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 9: Check Inquisition references

Check Inquisition references is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 10: Record family customs carefully

Record family customs carefully is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 11: Document name changes

Document name changes is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 12: Avoid surname-only conclusions

Avoid surname-only conclusions is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 13: Translate and apostille correctly

Translate and apostille correctly is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 14: Prepare a summary memo

Prepare a summary memo is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Step 15: Submit for competent review

Submit for competent review is a practical stage in building a serious Bnei Anusim file. The purpose is not to force a conclusion, but to prevent confusion. A file should show what is known, what is only suspected, what is missing, and what kind of review is being requested.

Each document should be scanned clearly, named consistently, translated when required, and linked to the family tree. The applicant should never alter a record, overstate a custom, or hide a contrary document. A trustworthy file is more valuable than a dramatic story.

Appendix G: One-Year Education Curriculum

Module 1: Orientation

This module covers terms, history, expectations, and the difference between ancestry, identity, halachic status and legal eligibility. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 2: Sefarad

This module covers the Jewish civilization of Spain and Portugal, including poetry, halacha, philosophy and communal structure. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 3: Expulsion and forced conversion

This module covers 1391, 1492, 1497, the Inquisition and the trauma of coerced identity. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 4: Shabbat

This module covers lighting, kiddush, meals, rest, synagogue, family atmosphere and the gradual building of practice. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 5: Kashrut

This module covers permitted animals, meat and milk, blood, kosher kitchen basics and how hidden food customs may reflect older memories. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 6: Prayer

This module covers Shema, Amidah, blessings, synagogue conduct, Hebrew reading and Sephardic nusach awareness. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 7: Calendar

This module covers Pesach, Shavuot, Tisha B'Av, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Chanukah and Purim. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 8: Family life

This module covers marriage, modesty, taharat hamishpacha concepts, education of children and Jewish home rhythm. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 9: Jewish law

This module covers why halacha requires practice, authority, teachers, community and humility. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 10: Genealogy

This module covers documents, maternal line, archival methods, oral history and the limits of DNA and surnames. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 11: Conversion and return

This module covers when conversion is required, what recognized processes involve, and why shortcuts damage families. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Module 12: Aliyah and absorption

This module covers lawful categories, A/1 possibilities where applicable, ulpan, schools, employment and community integration. It should include one historical class, one practical halacha class, one guided discussion, and one written assignment. Participants should learn that return is not only a claim about the past; it is a responsibility in the present.

Suggested assignment: write one page describing what was learned, which family questions remain open, and what practical step the participant will take before the next module. The Machon should keep these assignments in the student file to measure seriousness and growth.

Appendix H: Fifty-Two Weekly Study Prompts

Week 1: Study family memory. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 2: Study Shabbat practice. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 3: Study Sephardic history. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 4: Study honest documentation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 5: Study the dignity of converts. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 6: Study the danger of false promises. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 7: Study aliyah preparation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 8: Study community belonging. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 9: Study customs and proof. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 10: Study Torah learning. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 11: Study chesed for returning families. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 12: Study the role of women in hidden Judaism. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 13: Study the power of names. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection

question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 14: Study the limits of DNA. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 15: Study the pain of expulsion. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 16: Study the rebuilding of the Jewish home. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 17: Study Spanish and Portuguese archives. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 18: Study the Belmonte lesson. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 19: Study the Bello Colombia lesson. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 20: Study Jewish unity. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 21: Study family memory. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 22: Study Shabbat practice. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 23: Study Sephardic history. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 24: Study honest documentation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 25: Study the dignity of converts. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 26: Study the danger of false promises. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection

question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 27: Study aliyah preparation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 28: Study community belonging. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 29: Study customs and proof. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 30: Study Torah learning. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 31: Study chesed for returning families. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 32: Study the role of women in hidden Judaism. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 33: Study the power of names. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 34: Study the limits of DNA. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 35: Study the pain of expulsion. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 36: Study the rebuilding of the Jewish home. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 37: Study Spanish and Portuguese archives. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 38: Study the Belmonte lesson. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 39: Study the Bello Colombia lesson. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection

question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 40: Study Jewish unity. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 41: Study family memory. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 42: Study Shabbat practice. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 43: Study Sephardic history. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 44: Study honest documentation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 45: Study the dignity of converts. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 46: Study the danger of false promises. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 47: Study aliyah preparation. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 48: Study community belonging. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 49: Study customs and proof. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 50: Study Torah learning. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 51: Study chesed for returning families. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Week 52: Study the role of women in hidden Judaism. The teacher should connect the theme to one source from Tanach or Chazal, one episode from Sephardic history, one practical halacha or community issue, and one

personal reflection question. This weekly rhythm turns inspiration into disciplined growth and keeps the class from becoming only lectures about the past.

Appendix I: Public Messaging and Donor Language

Truth before slogans

The public campaign must say clearly that not every person with a story is automatically Jewish under halacha or eligible for aliyah under Israeli law. This honesty protects the movement. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Dignity before bureaucracy

Even when a claim is not yet proven, the person must be treated with kavod. Families who preserved memory through fear deserve listening, not humiliation. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Education before status

Many people first need Torah learning and community experience. A status process without education produces weak outcomes and future pain. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Documentation before declarations

A responsible initiative reviews records before it makes statements. Emotional certainty is not a substitute for evidence. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Recognition where possible

When serious maternal-line or legal eligibility evidence exists, it should be organized professionally and submitted for competent review without unnecessary delay. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Conversion without shame

Where conversion is required, it should be presented as a holy, dignified entrance into the covenant, not as an insult to ancestors. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Sephardic sensitivity

The return of Iberian descendants should not erase Sephardic identity. Language, melody, minhag and history matter. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

No exploitation

Applicants should not be charged abusive fees or sold impossible promises. Donor funds should protect vulnerable families. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Community after arrival

Aliyah or conversion without absorption is incomplete. Families need schools, mentors, parnassah guidance, ulpan and a kehilla. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

A coalition, not a personality

This work should not depend on one charismatic figure. It needs rabbis, educators, lawyers, genealogists, donors, social workers and community leaders. A donor or institutional partner should be invited to support a system: intake, records, teaching, rabbinic referral, legal guidance and absorption. That system can turn scattered longing into organized return.

Appendix J: Extended Profiles of Modern Assistance Models

Shavei Israel

A broad outreach model that combines emissaries, seminars, publications, online communities, education and aliyah-related support. Its example shows that descendants need more than one class; they need a network that can accompany them through discovery, study, conversion where required and integration.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Machon Miriam

A focused Israel-based education and conversion-preparation model for Spanish, Portuguese and Italian speakers. Its importance lies in language accessibility, structure, and recognized rabbinic process. A Machon Bnei Anusim should learn from this by preparing students carefully before they approach formal frameworks.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Reconectar

An advocacy and public-reconnection model. Its strength is policy language, media awareness and the insistence that the Jewish world must not ignore descendants of Spanish and Portuguese communities. It helps create a public vocabulary for reconnection.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Ezra L'Anousim

A chesed and assistance model rooted in Sephardic identity and the needs of vulnerable returnees. It highlights the economic side of return: teachers, Beit Din expenses, documents, travel and community life all cost money, and sincerity alone does not pay those costs.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Genie Milgrom and genealogical projects

A documentation model. The core lesson is that names, feelings and DNA are not enough for status claims. Serious work requires archives, maternal-line chains, record-by-record verification and humility before the evidence.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Rabbi Yoel Gold and public storytelling

A storytelling model. Public stories can awaken Jewish hearts, open donors to the issue and give dignity to communities that were previously invisible. The danger is that stories must not replace halacha; their role is to inspire support for serious process.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Bello, Colombia and emerging communities

A community-formation model. Bello shows that a group can move from Christian background toward Torah study and Jewish life with passion. It also shows why each person and family must receive clear guidance about conversion, status, education and aliyah.

Machon Bnei Anusim should create formal referral relationships where appropriate, avoid duplicating services that already exist, and fill gaps: local Spanish-speaking intake, rabbinic screening, donor-backed scholarships, practical aliyah/absorption guidance and a dignified public voice.

Appendix K: Selected Sources and Credits for the First Edition

Shavei Israel - Bnei Anousim, Machon Miriam, Our Activities, and the Bello Colombia personal story.

Reconectar - Ashley Perry public explanation of reconnecting descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews.

Ezra L'Anousim - mission and founder statement on assisting descendants coming back openly to Judaism.

Genie Milgrom - Crypto-Jewish genealogy materials warning that names alone are not enough.

TorahAnytime - R' Yoel Gold, public storytelling on the Bello/Colombia phenomenon.

Bnei Anusim Return Initiative Project Proposal supplied to this project, April 2026.

National Library of Israel, Encyclopaedia Britannica and selected academic/educational materials on the expulsions, Inquisition, conversos and crypto-Jewish customs.

Appendix L: Detailed Applicant FAQ

Does having Sephardic ancestry make me Jewish?

Sephardic ancestry is historically meaningful, but Jewish status in halacha generally follows the mother or recognized conversion. A person may have real Jewish ancestors and still need a recognized conversion or return process today. The Machon should honor ancestry without confusing it with a final ruling. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Are surnames proof?

No. Many surnames were shared by Jews and non-Jews, and many families changed names under pressure. A surname can be a research clue, especially when connected with a region, custom and document chain, but it should never be sold as proof by itself. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What documents should I start with?

Begin with your own birth certificate, then your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. Add marriage and death records, cemetery information, immigration files, old passports, notarial documents and any family religious materials. Keep scans clear and label every file with name, date, place and relationship. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What if my family only has oral tradition?

Oral tradition deserves respect and careful recording. Write down who told the story, when, in what language, and what exactly was said. Then begin searching for documents. Oral tradition may open the door; it cannot by itself complete a halachic or legal process. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What if I have DNA results?

DNA can suggest ancestry patterns, but it does not determine halachic Jewish status. It may help a person understand family history or research direction. It should not be used to promise aliyah, conversion approval or recognition as Jewish. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Why is maternal-line documentation so important?

Classical halacha determines Jewish status through the mother. Therefore, a claim of uninterrupted Jewish status usually requires careful evidence through the maternal line. Paternal Jewish ancestry can be deeply meaningful, but it does not by itself establish Jewish status under normative halacha. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Is conversion an insult to my ancestors?

No. When status cannot be established, conversion can be a dignified and holy path. It does not deny that ancestors may have suffered as Jews. It says that today, after centuries of uncertainty and separation, entry into recognized Jewish life must be completed responsibly. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Can Machon Bnei Anusim convert me?

The Machon should not promise conversions unless it has an authorized recognized structure. Its proper role is education, screening, preparation, documentation help and referral to recognized rabbinic frameworks. This protects students from false claims and protects the credibility of the entire project. The applicant should receive

this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Can Bnei Anusim make aliyah automatically?

There is no automatic blanket aliyah category for all Bnei Anusim. Some individuals may qualify through recognized Jewish status, recognized conversion, or Law of Return family categories. Each case requires document review and sometimes qualified legal guidance. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Why do some organizations use the word return?

Return expresses historical and spiritual meaning. It can describe reconnecting to the Jewish people, to Torah, to Sephardic memory, or to recognized Jewish life. The word is powerful, but it must be used with clarity so it does not imply legal or halachic results before review. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Should I begin keeping mitzvot before a formal process?

A person exploring Judaism should study with a competent rabbi and community. Some practices can be learned and adopted gradually, but conversion candidates should follow the guidance of their supervising rabbinic authority. Private zeal without guidance can create confusion and burnout. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What should I tell my family?

Speak with respect. Some relatives may be proud, others afraid, and others angry. Remember that silence may have protected families for generations. Do not mock those who stayed hidden or assimilated. Build trust before asking for documents or confronting painful memories. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

How should customs be recorded?

Record exact details. Instead of writing “my grandmother kept Shabbat,” write what she did: candles, food, timing, words, secrecy, who was present, and how often. Exact observation is far more useful than broad conclusions. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What is the danger of online groups?

Online groups can offer encouragement, but they can also spread false lists, fake rabbis, unrealistic aliyah claims, and messianic confusion. Use them carefully. Serious progress requires documents, teachers, community, and recognized guidance. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Why is Sephardic sensitivity important?

The ancestors of Bnei Anusim came from the Sephardic world. Their return should not erase that memory. Sephardic liturgy, halacha, melodies, food, language and rabbinic heritage can give descendants a home that feels historically connected and spiritually grounded. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What if I cannot afford documents and classes?

A serious initiative should create scholarship funds and donor support. Poverty should not prevent sincere learning or basic documentation. At the same time, applicants should be transparent about costs and avoid anyone demanding large payments for guaranteed outcomes. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

How long can the process take?

It depends on the track. Genealogy can take months or years. Education may require at least a year. Conversion preparation depends on the Beit Din and the candidate. Aliyah or status review depends on official procedures. Patience is part of the work. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What if records were destroyed?

Many records were lost, burned or never created. That does not erase family memory, but it may limit what can be proven. The Machon can help search alternate sources: notarial files, church records, cemetery evidence,

Inquisition archives, immigration papers and family letters. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

How should rabbis speak to Bnei Anusim?

Rabbis should speak with warmth and precision. They should never humiliate seekers, but they also should never promise what they cannot deliver. The best rabbinic voice is compassionate, learned, transparent and careful about the limits of authority. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

What is success?

Success is not only recognition or aliyah. Success may be a family learning Torah honestly, preserving documents, leaving idolatry behind, entering a Jewish community, completing conversion, helping children receive Jewish education, or becoming part of a serious long-term return movement. The applicant should receive this answer in writing so expectations remain clear and the relationship with the Machon is based on trust rather than pressure.

Appendix M: Institutional Guardrails for Machon Bnei Anusim

No automatic recognition policy

The Machon should not declare every person with ancestry automatically Jewish. It may affirm dignity, history and concern, while directing status questions to competent authorities. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

No guaranteed aliyah policy

Staff and volunteers must never promise aliyah outcomes. They may explain possible categories and refer to qualified lawyers or official bodies when documentation justifies it. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Recognized conversion referral policy

The Machon should maintain a reviewed list of serious rabbinic programs and batei din. It should not refer students to questionable frameworks that sell certificates without community and mitzvah commitment. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Data privacy policy

Family records, DNA reports, conversion files, passports and personal stories are sensitive. The Machon should protect them, limit access, and obtain written consent before sharing them. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Financial integrity policy

Fees must be transparent. Donor funds should be tracked. No student should be told that payment guarantees recognition, conversion or aliyah. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Pastoral care policy

Many applicants carry shame, fear or family conflict. Teachers should be trained to listen, avoid mockery, and refer serious emotional or family crises to competent professionals. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Anti-messianic confusion policy

The Machon should clearly teach normative Judaism and avoid partnerships that blur Judaism with Christian belief. This is essential for halachic credibility and for protecting sincere seekers. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Documentation honesty policy

Applicants must be told not to alter documents, invent customs or hide inconvenient facts. A weak but honest file is better than a dramatic but unreliable file. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Language access policy

Materials should be available in Spanish and English, and ideally Portuguese and Hebrew. Language barriers should not prevent serious candidates from understanding the process. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Community integration policy

The Machon should not create isolated students who only learn online. Serious candidates need synagogue exposure, Shabbat hospitality, mentors and real Jewish communal life. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Children and family policy

Programs should include children’s education, family guidance and school planning. If parents return but children are neglected, the process will not endure. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Public relations policy

Stories should be published only with consent and without exaggeration. Public storytelling must inspire support for truthful process, not create sensational claims. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Rabbinic accountability policy

An executive rabbinic committee should review policies. Individual teachers should not make independent promises on behalf of the Machon. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Country coordinator policy

Local coordinators must be trained in boundaries. They can collect intake data and organize classes, but they cannot issue status rulings. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Annual review policy

Every year the Machon should review outcomes: inquiries, classes, document files, referrals, scholarships, conversions completed through recognized bodies, aliyah cases supported and failures to improve. This guardrail should appear in the operations manual and in volunteer training. The credibility of the Machon will depend on its willingness to say “we can help” without saying “we can guarantee.”

Appendix N: Sample Intake Form and File Checklist

- Full legal name, Hebrew name if any, date of birth, country of birth, current citizenship and current residence. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Contact details, preferred language, synagogue or Jewish community contact, and emergency contact if the applicant is entering a formal track. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Family countries and towns: applicant, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and any known earlier locations. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.

- Maternal line summary: mother, maternal grandmother, maternal great-grandmother and documents available for each generation. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Paternal line summary: father, paternal grandfather, paternal great-grandfather and documents available for each generation. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Oral traditions: who told the story, what was said, when it was said, what fear or secrecy surrounded it, and whether other relatives confirm it. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Customs checklist: candles, food restrictions, fasts, mourning, burial, endogamy, Friday cleaning, Passover-like practices, language fragments and hidden objects. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Document inventory: birth, marriage, death, immigration, naturalization, cemetery, notarial, church, synagogue, Inquisition and family letters. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Current religious practice: Shabbat exposure, kashrut, prayer, Hebrew reading, Jewish holidays, community attendance and current beliefs. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Purpose of application: genealogy, study, conversion preparation, status review, aliyah guidance, family education, or cultural reconnection. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.
- Consent: permission to store records, share with rabbinic/legal reviewers when needed, and use anonymized data for program planning. The intake worker should not rush. The purpose is to clarify the case, protect the applicant, and place the family into the correct track without shame or exaggeration.

Appendix O: Donor and Partner Case for Support

Donor message 1: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 2: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 3: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 4: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 5: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 6: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized

program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 7: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 8: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 9: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 10: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 11: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Donor message 12: The return of Bnei Anusim requires infrastructure, not sentiment alone. A family may need help finding records, translating certificates, paying apostille fees, studying Torah in Spanish, traveling to a recognized program, obtaining legal guidance, or settling into a Jewish community. Donor support can turn longing into a responsible pathway. The Machon should show measurable outcomes: students taught, files organized, scholarships granted, referrals made, children placed in Jewish education, and communities strengthened.

Appendix P: First-Year Implementation Roadmap

Month 1

Finalize mission language, create rabbinic oversight, approve guardrails and prepare the public website. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 2

Build intake forms, privacy policy, document checklist and spanish-english orientation materials. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 3

Begin pilot intake interviews and create the first database of applicants, regions, customs and document needs. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 4

Launch the twelve-week introductory course with clear attendance, assignments and mentor follow-up. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 5

Train volunteers in boundaries, documentation standards, pastoral sensitivity and the no-false-promises policy. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 6

Create the scholarship fund for translations, apostilles, books, travel and needy student support. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 7

Sign cooperation understandings with serious rabbis, educators, genealogists and legal advisors. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 8

Hold the first regional shabbaton or online conference for applicants and family members. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 9

Prepare the first group of complete genealogy or conversion-preparation files for external review. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 10

Publish an anonymized progress report showing numbers, lessons, challenges and next steps. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 11

Expand to a second language or country coordinator and improve the curriculum based on feedback. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Month 12

Convene rabbinic and donor review, approve year-two strategy, and identify families needing absorption support. The month should end with a written report. A disciplined roadmap prevents the work from becoming a collection of emotional requests and turns it into a durable communal institution.

Appendix Q: Five Core Teaching Essays for Machon Bnei Anusim

1. The wound of forced conversion

The first duty of a Machon is to teach that forced conversion was not a minor historical inconvenience. It was a rupture in the body of Israel. Parents watched children baptized against the will of the family. Communities were broken. Books were hidden, burned or abandoned. Cemeteries were left behind. Names were changed. The public face of the family became Christian while the private memory often remained wounded and afraid. When descendants today come forward, they are not approaching a museum exhibit. They are touching the pain of ancestors whose

choices were narrowed by violence, poverty, law and terror. At the same time, pain alone cannot decide present status. The greatness of Torah is that it can hold tears and law together. Therefore the Machon must say: we believe your pain matters; we believe your family memory deserves respect; we also believe that your path must be built with evidence, study, mitzvot and recognized guidance. This combination is the only answer worthy of the ancestors. Sentiment without discipline collapses. Discipline without compassion freezes the heart. The Machon must carry both.

2. The holiness of honest documentation

A document is not a cold piece of paper. In Bnei Anusim work, a birth record, a marriage record, a death certificate, a notarial file or an Inquisition reference can become a candle lit for forgotten grandparents. It says: you lived, you had a name, you had a mother, you had a town, and your story was not erased completely. But documentation must be honest. A person who changes facts to strengthen a claim damages not only his own file but the reputation of every

sincere descendant. A serious Machon should teach applicants to love the truth even when the truth is incomplete. Write “unknown” where unknown is the truth. Write “family tradition” where no document exists. Write “possible clue” where the evidence is suggestive but not decisive. This humility is not weakness. It is the basis of credibility. Rabbinic authorities, legal authorities and donors must be able to trust the Machon because it refuses to manufacture certainty. In a field vulnerable to fantasy, truthful documentation is itself a kiddush Hashem.

3. The dignity of conversion where required

Some descendants fear that conversion means their ancestors were not Jewish or that their suffering is being denied. That fear must be answered with tenderness. When a family has been separated from open Jewish life for centuries and the present halachic chain cannot be proven, conversion may be the most dignified path forward. It does not mock the ancestors. It says: we will not leave the matter in confusion; we will enter the covenant openly, with mitzvot, community and rabbinic recognition. The convert is not a

second-class Jew. The Torah repeatedly commands love for the ger, and Jewish history is filled with holy converts who brought strength to Israel. For Bnei Anusim, conversion where required can be understood as the public repair of a forced private wound. Yet this must be done through serious, recognized channels, not through quick ceremonies or paid promises. A conversion that is not accepted later can break a family. Therefore the Machon must prepare students with patience, halacha, Hebrew, Shabbat, kashrut, community and emotional maturity before referral.

4. The danger of false hope

False hope is not kindness. Telling every seeker that he is automatically Jewish, automatically eligible for aliyah or automatically accepted by rabbinic courts may feel warm for one conversation, but it creates bitterness later. Families may sell homes, leave jobs, pressure spouses, confuse children or spend money they cannot afford based on words that were never true. The Machon must be brave enough to disappoint people early rather than betray them later. This does not mean closing the

door. It means opening the right door. Some need genealogy review. Some need conversion preparation. Some need cultural education. Some may indeed have strong evidence and should be advanced quickly. Some may have a legal immigration path. Some may not. Each person deserves an honest map. A trustworthy Machon will become known not because it says yes to everyone, but because its yes is meaningful, its no is respectful, and its “not yet” comes with a practical plan.

5. From hidden memory to public Jewish life

The final goal is not only to prove the past. The goal is to build Jewish homes. A family that discovers Bnei Anusim roots should be guided toward living Torah: Shabbat candles lit openly, kosher food prepared with knowledge, children educated with pride, Hebrew prayers learned with patience, Sephardic songs restored, and community bonds formed. Hidden Judaism survived through fragments because there was no freedom. Today, where freedom exists, fragments should become wholeness. Yet

wholeness is slow. It requires teachers, mentors, rabbis, mothers, fathers, books, schools, donors, and communities willing to receive newcomers without humiliation. Machon Bnei Anusim can become the bridge between memory and life. It can gather the scattered sparks, not by slogans, but by systems: intake, records, education, rabbinic referral, legal honesty and absorption. The descendants of the forced deserve no less than a path that is warm enough to heal and strong enough to last.

Appendix R: Closing Declaration for a Public Gathering

Declaration paragraph 1: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 2: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 3: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 4: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 5: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 6: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 7: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Declaration paragraph 8: We gather for the descendants of the forced converts with humility before Heaven and responsibility before Israel. We do not pretend that every question is simple. We do not confuse memory with proof or compassion with lawlessness. But we refuse to turn away from families whose ancestors were torn from us by decree, fear and blood. We commit to education, documentation, rabbinic seriousness, recognized pathways where required, lawful guidance, and warm community. We call upon rabbis, donors, educators, lawyers, genealogists and Jewish communities to join this work with clean hands and open hearts.

Appendix S: Speaker Notes for Community Presentations

Why this matters now

For five hundred years, many descendants of the forced converts lived between memory and silence. Today archives are opening, families are asking questions, and Jewish communities have the ability to respond. The question is whether we will respond with confusion or with structure. A Machon can give structure: classes, documents, rabbinic review, legal honesty and absorption. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The moral claim

The Jewish people did not lose the Bnei Anusim because they walked away in comfort. Many were taken by force, social terror and state-backed pressure. That does not settle every halachic question today, but it does create a

moral obligation to listen, teach and guide. The obligation is not to invent status; it is to create a path. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The halachic claim

Halacha is not an obstacle to compassion. It is the vessel that makes compassion durable. Without halacha, families can be welcomed today and rejected tomorrow. With halacha, the process may be slower, but the result can stand. This is why serious conversion preparation, maternal-line review and recognized rabbinic oversight are acts of kindness. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The educational claim

Many descendants do not need a speech; they need a teacher. They need to know what Shabbat is, how to read Hebrew, how to enter a synagogue, how to build a kosher kitchen, how to speak to children, and how to leave old beliefs behind with dignity. Education turns longing into Jewish life. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The donor claim

A donor is not merely funding a booklet or website. He is funding a return bridge. One donation can pay for documents, translations, scholarships, classes, mentors, travel to a Beit Din, or school support for children. The result is not abstract: it is a family sitting at a Shabbat table with knowledge and dignity. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The warning

This field attracts fantasy because the story is emotional. That is why the Machon must be stricter than everyone else about truth. No fake certificates, no guaranteed aliyah, no surname lists as proof, no pressure tactics, no humiliating sincere seekers, and no confusion with movements outside normative Judaism. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The Sephardic soul

Bnei Anusim outreach must not erase the Sephardic soul. The melodies, halachic traditions, foods, language, rabbinic heritage and dignity of Sefarad should be part of the return. The descendants of Spain and Portugal should not be told that coming home means forgetting where the family wound began. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The role of Israel

Israel is central because it is the homeland of the Jewish people, but Israel also has laws, agencies and rabbinic structures. A Machon must prepare families before they face those systems. Preparation reduces pain. It teaches what can be requested, what cannot be promised, and what documents are needed. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The role of rabbis

Rabbis should be shepherds of clarity. A rabbi working with Bnei Anusim must have a warm heart, but he must also know when to say: this needs a Beit Din, this needs a lawyer, this needs more documents, this needs more study, and this cannot be promised. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

The final vision

The vision is not a crowd of confused people with dramatic ancestry claims. The vision is Jewish homes, Torah education, Sephardic dignity, recognized processes, honest files, stable communities and children who grow up knowing where they came from and how to live as Jews with responsibility. This talking point can be used in a class, donor meeting, rabbinic briefing or community presentation. It is deliberately warm but guarded, because the entire movement depends on the balance between welcome and credibility.

Appendix T: Sample Closing Prayer and Communal Commitment

Commitment 1: May the Master of the world give us the merit to gather the sparks of families torn from open Jewish life by force, to teach them with patience, to guide them with truth, to protect them from exploitation, and to help each sincere soul find the path that is correct according to Torah and honest before the law. We commit not to use their pain for politics, not to sell them illusions, and not to abandon them to loneliness. We will build a house of learning, documents, rabbinic seriousness, Sephardic memory and chesed.

Commitment 2: May the Master of the world give us the merit to gather the sparks of families torn from open Jewish life by force, to teach them with patience, to guide them with truth, to protect them from exploitation, and to help each sincere soul find the path that is correct according to Torah and honest before the law. We commit not to use their pain for politics, not to sell them illusions, and not to abandon them to loneliness. We will build a house of learning, documents, rabbinic seriousness, Sephardic memory and chesed.

Commitment 3: May the Master of the world give us the merit to gather the sparks of families torn from open Jewish life by force, to teach them with patience, to guide them with truth, to protect them from exploitation, and to help each sincere soul find the path that is correct according to Torah and honest before the law. We commit not to use their pain for politics, not to sell them illusions, and not to abandon them to loneliness. We will build a house of learning, documents, rabbinic seriousness, Sephardic memory and chesed.

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Commitment 5: May the Master of the world give us the merit to gather the sparks of families torn from open Jewish life by force, to teach them with patience, to guide them with truth, to protect them from exploitation, and to help each sincere soul find the path that is correct according to Torah and honest before the law. We commit not to use their pain for politics, not to sell them illusions, and not to abandon them to loneliness. We will build a house of learning, documents, rabbinic seriousness, Sephardic memory and chesed.

Commitment 6: May the Master of the world give us the merit to gather the sparks of families torn from open Jewish life by force, to teach them with patience, to guide them with truth, to protect them from exploitation, and to help each sincere soul find the path that is correct according to Torah and honest before the law. We commit not to use their pain for politics, not to sell them illusions, and not to abandon them to loneliness. We will build a house of learning, documents, rabbinic seriousness, Sephardic memory and chesed.

Appendix U: Final Operational Checklist Before Launch

Public website

The website should explain Bnei Anusim in plain language, include the Machon logo, present the rabbinic letter as a historical reference, and state clearly that the Machon provides education, documentation help and referrals, not guaranteed status outcomes. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Application portal

The application portal should collect basic family history, customs, documents and goals. It should also require consent for data storage and a clear acknowledgment that no aliyah, conversion or recognition result has been promised. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Rabbinic review

Before launch, the executive rabbinic committee should approve all public wording concerning Jewish status, conversion, mitzvah observance, synagogue participation and referral boundaries. This avoids later contradictions. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Genealogy desk

The genealogy desk should prepare templates for maternal-line trees, document inventories, archive requests, interview notes and evidence grades. It should teach applicants how to organize records before asking a rabbi or

lawyer to review them. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Education desk

The education desk should prepare introductory classes, reading lists, Hebrew basics, Sephardic minhag material and recorded lessons for applicants in different time zones. Attendance and assignments should be tracked. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Referral desk

The referral desk should maintain contacts with serious rabbinic courts, conversion programs, community rabbis, aliyah advisors and immigration lawyers. It must record every referral and follow up respectfully without pressuring outside authorities. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Scholarship fund

The scholarship fund should help with documents, translations, travel, books, classes and needy family support. It should have transparent criteria and donor reporting that protects applicant privacy. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Absorption network

The absorption network should identify synagogues, host families, ulpan options, schools, employment mentors and social workers in Israel and in diaspora cities. Return must lead to a living community, not isolation. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Communications discipline

Every flyer, video and speech should be reviewed for accuracy. The Machon should avoid sensational numbers, exaggerated success claims, or statements that imply official recognition before it exists. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

Annual accountability

At the end of the first year, the Machon should publish a careful report: inquiries received, countries represented, classes taught, files advanced, scholarships provided, referrals made, and lessons learned. Accountability builds trust. This checklist item should be assigned to a named staff member or volunteer with a deadline, a written procedure and rabbinic or professional oversight where appropriate.

A final word to the descendants

To the descendants who open this booklet: your search matters. Do not let anyone mock your family memory, and do not let anyone sell you shortcuts. Walk with patience. Gather documents. Learn Torah. Ask serious questions. Find teachers who are warm and truthful. If your path requires conversion, enter it with dignity. If your documents require review, prepare them carefully. If your family is afraid, speak gently. If your heart burns to come home, let that fire become mitzvot, community and responsibility.

The Jewish people have survived because memory became action. The memory of Bnei Anusim must now become organized action: homes of Shabbat, children of Torah, files of truth, communities of chesed, and a return that is not only emotional but faithful, lawful, halachically serious and enduring. This is the mission of Machon Bnei Anusim.

Appendix V: Dedication and Call to Partnership

This booklet is offered as a call to partnership. The history of Bnei Anusim belongs to the whole Jewish people, because the forced conversion of Iberian Jews was not only a private tragedy of certain families. It was a national wound. Communities were uprooted, mothers were silenced, fathers were watched, children were baptized, books were hidden, names were changed and homes became places of fear. If, after five centuries, descendants knock on the door of Jewish memory, the answer must not be indifference.

But the answer also must not be chaos. A holy cause can be damaged by exaggerated claims, fake proofs, unqualified teachers, irresponsible promises and emotional language that collapses when tested by halacha or law. Therefore Machon Bnei Anusim must build a trustworthy path. It must gather history, teach Torah, record customs, demand documents, consult rabbinic authorities, refer to recognized conversion frameworks where needed, guide aliyah only where lawful, and help families enter real Jewish communities.

Partners in this work can sponsor classes, translations, archive searches, scholarships, legal guidance, Shabbatonim, Hebrew materials, children's education and absorption support. A donor is not merely paying for administration. He is helping a family move from silence to Torah, from confusion to clarity, from isolated longing to a Jewish home. When done correctly, this work can produce generations of observant Jewish families who know their past and build their future with dignity.

May the Machon merit to act with a warm heart, a clear mind and pure hands. May it never humiliate sincere seekers, never exploit vulnerable families, never weaken halachic integrity, and never forget the tears of the ancestors. May it gather the scattered sparks with truth, chesed, Torah and responsibility.

Congregation Bnei Anusim

EIN 42-2204885

www.bneianusim.org

Tel +1 (848) 480-6951 | +1 (737) 314-6585

Email: office@bneianusim.org