Sephardic customs

6th day of Tebet, 5771

Kiddush and Aliya la-Tora

In most Sephardic families, children pay a special tribute to their grandparents and parents on the occasion of the Kiddush. The children would come to be blessed by their father and mother on Friday night, even when they are older. The parents or grandparents blesses the child with the Priestly benediction (yebarekhekha haShem veYishmerekha… Many parents would also say: yesimekha/yesimekh Elokim) and any additional prayer that he wants to offer to see his desires for his child fulfilled. Immediately after that, the children will kiss the hand of the grandparents and parents as a signal of filial love and devotion.
When a grandparent or father is called for a Aliya la Torah, all the members of the family will rise at their seats in the synagogue in order to express respect for their elder. This recognition is accorded by children, younger brothers, and sometimes nephews of the elder, who has been called to the Sefer Torah. As he returns to his seat, his grandchildren and children express their reverence for him kissing the back of his hand.

When an older patriarch of the community is called to the Torah it is not uncommon to find dozens of people rising in his honor. This is a major symbolic public expression of the deep and abiding respect for family which has preserved the ‘congregational family’ as well.

(Adapted from ‘A treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs’ by Rabbi H. Dobrinsky)

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