The Survivors of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Today is Yom haShoah, the day we remember the murder of 6,000,000 Jews in the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators.
Many historians repeat over and over again that had the State of Israel existed before 1939, more Jews could have migrated to the land of Israel, and millions of Jewish lives could have been saved…
The story of a Jewish family in Thessaloniki, Greece, the family of Rabbi Habib, could serve as an example.

JEWISH GREECE

In 1900 the Jewish community of Thessaloniki was the most important Sephardic community in the world, with more than 90,000 Jews, more than half the total population of the city. The Jews excelled in all professions: lawyers, doctors, teachers and maritime trade specialists. The Jewish stevedores of the port of Thessaloniki were famous throughout the world. And during Shabbat, the port of Thessaloniki, one of the most important in Europe, remained closed, since most of the port workers and entrepreneurs were Jews.
There were 49 synagogues in Thessaloniki, and a 500-year-old cemetery with half a million graves. The community of Thessaloniki was always considered the Sephardic community "par excellence". From the time of the expulsion from Spain in 1492, Salonica was the favorite destination of tens of thousands of Jewish refugees who escaped the Inquisition. The official language of the Jews of Salonika was Ladino, that is, the ancient Judeo-Spanish language.

RABBI HABIB and HIS FAMILY

Rabbi Hayim Habib, born in Salonika in 1882, was a descendant

of one of the most prestigious families of Rabanim and Dayanim (rabbinical judges).Rabbi Habib had 4 children: 3 daughters and a son. At the age of 40, Rabbi Habib was offered to serve as the great Chief Rabbi of Thessaloniki. Between 1920 and 1940 the Zionist movement was very active in Thessaloniki. Rabbi Habib was an enthusiastic supporter of emigration to Israel and took care that modern Hebrew be taught in all the schools under his jurisdiction, in order to prepare the youth for Aliya. **A daughter and the son of Rabbi Habib emigrated to the land of Israel before the war and settled Tel Aviv**.
During that time thousands of Jews from Salonika also came to Israel. Some of these families today own important companies, such as the family of Mordechai Mano, the pioneer of maritime commercial transport companies in Israel, which owns Seagull Maritime, Mano Maritime, etc. Or the Recanati family, also from Thessaloniki, who established the famous Israel Discount Bank.

FROM THESSALONIKI to AUSCHWITZ

When World War II began, the Jewish population of Thessaloniki consisted of 56,000 souls. In April 1941 Germany invaded Greece, the Greek King George the II fled Athens, and the country was divided into three different zones: Athens and certain Greek islands were under the control of Italy; East Macedonia was under the control of Bulgaria; Thessaloniki fell under the control of the Nazis. The Germans destroyed synagogues, Jewish schools, libraries, and the Jewish cemetery. Soon, a ghetto was created for the Jews of Thessaloniki, and they were forced to move there wearing the yellow Star of David. This led to widespread looting of Jewish homes and businesses by collaborators among the local population. The Jews of Thessaloniki – **virtually the entire community** – were deported to the concentration camps, by March 1943.
95 percent of the Jews in Thessaloniki, 54,000 Jews, were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, or died during the terrible

“Death March” from January to May 1945. In this march the surviving Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz had to walk out in the field in temperatures that reached -4 degrees F. They were taken to die there to “erase any evidence” that could incriminate the Nazis from the horrors of the concentration camps (nowadays the famous “March of the Living” are organized in memory of these marches).
Rabbi Hayim Habib, his wife and two of his daughters died in Auschwitz or on the death march, in 1945. However, **a third of Rabbi Habib’s family –**-as it happened to thousands of Thessaloniki’s Jews– survived because they migrated to Israel, where they now live BH with their numerous families descendants.

*To better understand and appreciate the value and meaning of Medinat Israel, and to be infinitely grateful to HaShem for its miraculous existence today, we should remember these tragic number*s

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT

This film tells the story of a Salonika Jew, Salomon Arukh, a Jewish boxer who miraculously survived Auschwitz.
The film contains some scenes recreating the life of Jews in Thessaloniki, their deportation to Auschwitz and their extermination. Many scenes of this film were recorded in Auschwitz