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Rabbi Benjamin Hassan

SUMMARY

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan reflects on his role at the Sephardic Synagogue, highlighting his outreach to the community, his family's Sephardic and Ashkenazic heritage, and his efforts to connect members with their roots. He shares his journey from uncertainty about becoming a rabbi to his international rabbinic career, emphasizing the importance of community involvement, especially during the COVID pandemic, and his views on the future of Jewish life with a focus on Zionism. The interview concludes with gratitude from the interviewers, acknowledging his impact in Seattle and his upcoming move to Israel.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Esther Sharon Kaplan.

Lilly De Jaen: And my name is Lilly Dejean.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: And we are members of the Jewish Archive and Research Committee for the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Today is Monday, June 24th, 2024. This is an oral history interview with Rabbi Benjamin Hassan, who is the rabbi for the Sephardic Bkkur Holim Synagogue in Seattle, Washington. This interview is part of a series documenting rabbis in the Seattle, Washington area and will be part of the archives of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. We are conducting this interview remotely, uh, using Zoom, and Dennis Barnes is hosting and assisting us with the technical parts of the interview, though he does not appear. Rabbi, as members of the Sephardic Bikur Holim, we are very proud to be and very proud and honored to interview you on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society.

Lilly De Jaen: So, first of all, Rabbi. [Yes.] So happy for you and your family. There you are making aliyah and just less than two months. And that you're taking this time for this interview.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Well, it's a very important time for us, and making time for SBH members and making time for the historical society was, uh, important to me. So, uh, I'm happy that, uh, this is going to be, uh, uh, preserved and that I get a chance to talk to you both about, uh, about myself and about the community.

Lilly De Jaen: Well, we so appreciate your time here in Seattle, that you have made such a great impact on our Sephardic community, as well as the general community. You and your wife, Rubisa Sharona, with your daughters, Moved here in 2013 to be a scholar-in-residence, and in February of 2014, you accepted the position of rabbi. Thank you.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: And on a personal note, what comes to my mind is your tremendous outreach, Rabbi, to the whole community. And what most impacted me personally was your outreach to the Sephardic Eastside community.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: It's a community deep, uh, deep to my heart. It's, uh, a community that has, uh, welcomed me in. And, uh, many of those members, uh, consider me a son. And my children, they're their own grandchildren. So, uh, it's very much, uh, very, uh, very mutually beneficial, very mutually, uh, feelings there of, uh, one to another. Absolutely.

Lilly De Jaen: Yes. Please tell us something about your family background? We want to know you even better.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yeah, sure. I'd love to start telling you, but I want to, I want to start with, uh, when people ask you about

your family backgrounds, they really want to know, where do your parents come from? Where do your grandparents.

Lilly De Jaen: That's right. That's a common question. [Speaking in Ladino] Whose son are you? [Exactly right] And etcetera, it's very Jewish, and that's what we're about.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: So I can tell you that, uh, I'm a child of a mixed marriage. My, uh, father was Sephardic, and my mother is Ashkenazic. My, uh, I identify primarily with my father's family, which come from Gibraltar and from Tetuan in Spanish Morocco. And, uh, my family or my father's side go back to Morocco, to Morocco and Gibraltar over 300 years. Uh, it's a place where I have visited, uh, as a small child and as a teen, uh, as a young adult. And I brought my family there, and it's, uh, it's, it's a, it's a, it's a second spiritual home for me after Israel, where if I want to plug in to my family heritage. Uh, going back to Gibraltar is wonderful. I've taken the girls there, uh, twice. And, uh, as I said, outside of Israel, it's maybe even for them, perhaps even closer than Israel for them. They really do love connecting with, uh, aunts and uncles and cousins and extended family. It's a very special place for them. Uh, my mother's side, uh, she's, uh, a child of, uh, her, her parents and her grandparents, uh, escaped Germany after Kristallnacht and came to England, uh, in, uh, 1939, very late, but very late. And, uh, and my parents met, uh, in England. My, my father came over to Birmingham to study, uh, for medical school, and, uh, my mother was looking for someone Sephardic to talk about some Sephardic customs she'd heard about at, uh, the Jewish Society at university. And, uh, apparently my father was very impressive. So they went out on a date. So, uh, from there, uh, my, my own, uh, nucleus of my own family. My, uh, I met my wife, uh, when I was studying, uh, in Israel, and she was doing a Master's in Social Work, and, uh, I was yet unsure of my next moves. Uh, and I was, uh, I was just taking a year after, uh, my biology degree. I was actually pre, uh, I was a pre-med, and, uh, I asked my father if I could take another year, uh, to study in Israel. And he was very gracious in, uh, allowed me to. But, uh, from there, and so we have lived all over the world. We've lived in Israel, we've lived in Melbourne, and we've called, uh, Seattle home these past 11 years.

Lilly De Jaen: What motivated you to become a rabbi? You took biology, you were pre-med. And can you tell us about your education and beginning roles as a rabbi?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yeah, I can tell you how I became a rabbi. Uh, it's called The Rubisa. The rubisa wanted to be a rubisa. So, uh, she told me, I think you should become a rabbi at a time where I didn't. I wasn't sure of my next steps. Uh, there was a rabbi here a few years ago who both know, uh, Rabbi Ron-Ami Meyers, the rabbi at, uh, Ezra Bessaroth. And. But I knew Rabbi Meyers back in Israel. He was a teacher of mine in yeshiva. And he recommended that I go to Yeshivat Hamivtar under the, uh, the main teachers of Rabbi Brovender and Rabbi Riskin. He said that would be a really good place for you after you get married. So I went there with Rabbi Meyers, uh, blessing. And I started. I started there learning, but I wasn't yet, uh, joining the, uh, rabbinic program yet. I was just doing another year, and there will be Sharon. She said to me at our table, you're going to share the Torah every Friday night, every Shabbat lunch. And it was from there that I started, uh, giving, uh, D'var Torah. In fact, I always tell young bar mitzvah boys I never gave a speech at my bar mitzvah because I was very shy. Mhm. So she was my first, uh. First person who believed in me and said, I think you should become a rabbi and I think you should give a devout Torah from there. As I mentioned, Rabbi Meyers, uh uh, Rabbi Riskin was a major impact on my rabbinic trajectory. He encouraged me, whether it was weekly or monthly sessions, to develop myself and to go on to go out after receiving rabbinic ordination and to go to, uh, you know, go back to communities in the diaspora and give back. Uh, it was while I was in my final year in Yeshivat Hamivtar in Efrat in Israel, that, uh, there was a new, uh, rabbi in the yeshiva. Rabbi Zeff. And Rabbi Joel Zeff gave the Rubisa and I our first jobs, and our jobs was to be the community, uh, directors of the yeshiva. And it was our responsibility to help the young men, the Bachurim, who are studying there to connect with the kollelim families, with the married men and their families, and to set up, uh, meals where the young men would come to the families for weeknight meals and for Shabbat meals. Uh, and I was given the opportunity to organize social events, dinners, sporting events, mid-week uh, soccer games and ultimate frisbee games. Uh, and it was also there that I was given the opportunity to start teaching my, uh, my first classes in the yeshiva. So that's how I started, uh, my first major position where I was probably paid to be, uh, that was all like, uh, good jobs, but, uh, didn't pay very well. But my first job was in Melbourne, Australia, and it was a fascinating time because in Melbourne, uh, they were looking for rabbis. I sent my resume to jobs in America and England. No one was hiring in 2009. It was the year after 2008, the global financial crisis. No one was hiring. Rabbis were staying in positions, no one was retiring. And I'd done interviews and, uh, nothing was going. And then I got a call, uh, right before Shavu'ot would I go on an interview to Australia? And I said, Australia. Now, that sounds like an adventure. And I interviewed in all these different, uh, communities in Melbourne and Sydney. There were different positions, uh, teaching and uh, uh, and some were pulpit positions. And I landed on a wonderful opportunity of teaching at uh Leibler Jaffna College in Melbourne, Australia. And six weeks into my time there, they said, uh, there's a Sephardic synagogue that doesn't have a rabbi, and would I be willing to help them over the summer for three or four weeks? And I said, okay, I'm Sephardic. But as you may have heard from my background story of my yeshiva, they were Ashkenazi yeshiva. They were Modern Orthodox Israeli yeshiva. They weren't particularly Sephardic. I said, I know how to do, uh, the Sephardic rites of reading the Sefer in the Moroccan style. But, uh, I might need some help in the, in the hazzanut. And they said, don't worry, Rabbi, you'll do just fine. And after three

or four weeks, they said, we have no rabbi. Would you take on the job and be our rabbi and help? And it was a very part time job, just on Shabbats and Sundays. And it soon became more than just Shabbat and Sundays. And I did more, more rabbinics there, less teaching. We tried to play the game there. Which job was the primary job and which one was the secondary? But I, uh, I started off quarter time at the Sephardic synagogue and three quarters at the, uh, the school, and then half and half and then a little bit, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. And. It was really, uh, an adventure. I think I was, uh, only 26. No, 27 when I, uh, got my rabbinic ordination and went for my first, uh, position. So we were very young. I think we just had, uh, two, uh, little girls. Kokava and Gabby. Kokava was three, and Gabby was one and a half, uh, when we, uh, when we went to Australia. But by the time we left, uh, Kokava was just shy of her seventh birthday. Uh, Gabby was six. Ruthie was, uh, almost two, no, a year and a half just under- just over. And Tova had just been born. Tova was, uh, eight weeks old when we when we left Melbourne. But that was, uh, a very special time in our lives.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Rabbi. That's fascinating. It's so wonderful to hear your background. Uh, many of us really didn't know all of that. So, um, now I want to ask you, as the rabbi of Sephardic Bkur Holim, can you share with us what role has been most rewarding to you?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yeah. So I think you touched upon it, Esther, when you said what has been meaningful for you with me, which is...I have always loved, and this is true also in Australia, but I have loved connecting with traditional members. And when I heard the job description of SBH, which was they were looking for a rabbi with three or four years experience, I said, "Check." "We're looking for a rabbi who can speak English." I said, "Okay." "Maybe check someone who's college educated." "Check." And then they said, "can work with a very, uh, wide ranging group of members from young to old to religious to traditional to everything in between." Uh, I said, "this feels like it has my name on it." And the most meaningful thing which I've had is helping members reconnect with SBH. A lot of members said, "I grew up at SBH. We then went to Herzl, we went to Temple, and Rabbi, you brought us home." And I think that's probably if I wanted to say, what is my legacy of my 11 years in Seattle? I would say that trying-I wouldn't necessarily say I made anyone more religious, but I made people more connected to their Sephardic roots, so much so that they didn't feel like second class citizens, didn't feel they weren't welcomed, that they felt this is my home, this is my this is my community and the rabbi and rubisa. They want us there. We invited many-of-many people into our homes for Friday nights or Shabbat lunches and for holiday meals. And it's those friendships, as I said, you know, a lot of, uh, you know, my children have lots of Pappas and Nonna's. Uh, and a lot of I can, there's faces I can see right now, people who've been instrumental in making my children feel so blessed, uh, and so loved in this community and making us feel blessed and loved in this community.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Um, okay. So now this kind of connects, this next question kind of connects to this, the one you just answered. Can you tell us how you successfully reached out and connected SBH, Sephardic Bikur Holim to so many local congregations? And if you could give us some examples, like your outreach on the east side as you spoke about and uh, uh, also one of them being the rabbinical trustee for the Samis Foundation and many others, if you could kind of elaborate that?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yes. So I think here's the piece, I, I tried to help this with mentioning some of the people who were involved in my in my development. Uh, Rabbi Riskin was very clear to me that a successful rabbi engages all of his membership. Uh, and gets to know his membership. And as you get to know your members, they talk about the institutions and the organizations that that are meaningful to them. So I kept on hearing about Herzl-Ner Tamid. I kept on hearing about Temple De Hirsch Sinai. I heard a lot about Federation. I heard a lot about Samis. And so it was natural that as I heard more and more, and people were saying to me, "Rabbi, you should really meet the rabbi of Temple De Hirsch, you should really meet the rabbi at Herzl. You should really get to know the different rabbis in the community. It was very, uh, simple. It was very important. Jewish family service. It was important to get to know the different community leaders and. Every time I met a non-Orthodox rabbi or community leader, they were always surprised and said, Rabbi, "How come you're not like everybody else?" I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "We've been told Orthodox rabbis don't come to temples, they don't go to non-Orthodox synagogues." And I said. "That's not the way that I was raised, not by my parents and not by my teachers. And if I am invited and encouraged to attend, whether that's after the Pittsburgh tragedy, whether that was after October 7th, if I am invited by a fellow rabbi to speak at their temple, I see it as a great honor to represent SBH and the broader Sephardic community and the broader Orthodox community." Uh, I have been involved with the JCRC, the Jewish Community Relations Council. I've been involved with Samis I was, uh, two years ago, I was asked to serve as a Rabbinic Trustee, uh, of the Board of Directors of Samis Foundation, which has allowed me to, uh, see close hand how the Samis Foundation supports day schools and summer programs like the camps. Uh, Sephardic Adventure Camp and, uh, Solomon Schechter, uh, the Schechter Camp and uh, URJ. And to see those camps, which I probably would not have seen, uh, the non I would I only would have seen Sephardic Adventure Camp, but to see the other camps, to go to trips to Israel and see how they're making a difference there to those on the periphery to see how Samis is making a difference in the day schools. So I've always seen those opportunities in the broader community, uh, to represent and to give back a little bit and, and to make and make a difference wherever I can.

Lilly De Jaen: Can you comment on the positive impact of your family's participation in so many of the events at SBH? And by that I mean personally, I see them serving ice cream. I see them with a children's programs. They're all over the place. And that's not to say that your Rubisa I don't call her Sharona, but I call her Rubisa, because I know she wants to be called her Rubisa, and she is a golden rubisa. She is a coordinator, but it's obvious that they're all participating. Can you tell us something how that happens, because we've never seen that to this extent before?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Uh, well, thank you for for for seeing that and for noticing that, uh, I would be nowhere without there would be some there would be some, uh, organizes, uh, and creates so much. She's she's a creative force. She has so many different ideas every day. She writes children's books. She is artistic. She is creative. She, uh, she runs the, uh, she she helps with the Judaic programming at the preschool at, uh, the early childhood center at Seattle Hebrew Academy. She was a youth director for at SBH for many years. Uh, she hosts so many meals. I have one responsibility or maybe two. I make the invite list and maybe sometimes do the shopping. But she makes all the all the menus, all the, uh, she, and she's learned all the Sephardic baking and dishes here. These are things which she did not grow up with. And certainly my Ashkenazic mother, I didn't grow up with them either. So, uh, and she makes a wonderful, uh, pescado tomate and, uh, but it's more interesting is that my children, our eldest, she's a real baker. And when she comes home for Pesach or or before she went to Israel, she would be leading baking sessions at the synagogue. And from all the nonnas that she had learned from as a child, she went and, you know, she sat on the knees. Uh, I mean, Lilly, you were there. I mean, every time we were baking for Bazaar, you know, my little girls were were going there first. They were putting on the, uh, the egg wash and the sesame seeds. But, uh, you know, gradually they progressed during Covid when we had Sephardic baking videos. Uh, that's where Kova really learned how to do a lot of her Sephardic baking. And, you know, that's just something that we have done. But I would also say the members have welcomed in there. Lilly, I just think of, uh, of your brother Mordo. You know, he's so warm and welcoming to my girls that they, uh, they all know him, and they and they they run to greet him every Shabbat. And he is one of many where the girls feel that, that is. You know, it's that interesting point of who is leading and who is serving and who is receiving and who is giving. You know, I think that, uh, my whole family, uh, we don't feel that we are giving. I feel that we are receiving so much love, uh, from the community. And, you know, as I said, the very fact that, uh, my children have learned so much of the baking tradition and that they have wanted to do it, the fact that they run so many of the youth activities, it just comes from a place of, uh, of mutual admiration.

Lilly De Jaen: It's contagious also. I think it's very contagious.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: And speaking of Lilly, I do want to tell you, though, one of the things which makes the movie so unique is that we've had in the past. Maybe better. Uh, that might get in trouble with this. Now it's being recorded. Better chefs or better, uh, uh, bandit manners than, uh, than Sharona. But what Sharona does in particular, which people have told her is unique, is that there will be some as an educator, there will be some loves to teach. Even this past Shabbat, she was teaching to over 30 ladies, uh, talking about the beauty of the of of the Torah and the Sephardic tradition. Uh, and I think that's it's those it's a combination of wanting to to take on the traditional role, but also wanting to fill that gap of a thirst and a love of, uh, of teaching Torah. Uh, to women in our community.

Lilly De Jaen: Well, speaking of contagion or whatever, can you relate to us what the challenges and opportunities were at SBH during the Covid pandemic? And I know that you and a committee did some good work. Great work then.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yeah.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: So I will say that it does take a village and, uh. Uh, I was blessed to have, uh, strong leadership. Jack Shalom was a very was an excellent president during, uh, those difficult years. And there was a committee of, uh, of doctors, uh, and health care providers, uh, who are members of the synagogue who gave their advice. And it was a real opportunity to show community love, which is at the beginning, all that we could do after we went into lockdown was just share best practices, how to lower the risk of, uh, of infection, how to share, uh, resources, how to do online shopping, how to do. We were the first synagogue to start zoom services. We had Zoom minyan. I think we closed on, uh, on a Friday and we on Sunday morning we had Zoom minyan. And then after having daily morning and evening services, we said, now we've got to have pre-Shabbat services. And I remember some of the traditional members saying, Rabbi, why can't we have Shabbat services? And I said, "We'll give you a taste, we'll give you a taste." So we had pre Kabbalat-we had like early Friday night services where we, where Rabbi Aharon and I would lead the services. I give a short, uh, d'var Torah a little sermonette, uh, and then we'd have, uh, online havdallah. And then we started classes and we then went into the baking classes, which were very, uh, successful. We went into, uh, come into come into our Sephardic home. I know that, uh, there will be some I did it, I know that, uh, Rabbi and Rina Varon also, uh, invited people into their home virtually to see how they, uh, like to do Shabbat. And it was one of those things where we learned different things about each other. But it was. As things started to open up and people were getting vaccinations because we have an older membership, it was, how can the younger members support the older members who was comfortable doing the grocery shopping for for older members and dropping it over, and who had masks and who had screens and who had like we had new positions. I

remember for a year or so, maybe it was less. Rabbi Varon, uh, was reading Sapphire, and he was getting all of the alerts. And then. No, now we're going to have a perspex screen, and, you know, the person's going to stand over there, and Rabbi is going to be over here, and we're going to try and figure out how we're going to read the Torah. It was uh, it was, you know, can can the person still see the Torah? Can, you know, but is the person breathing on Rabbi Aharon like? It was a whole it was a whole dance of, uh, getting it through, but, uh, it built community, I think a lot of congregations, uh, struggled during Covid. And for SBH, we blossomed because it brought out the best, which is at a time of difficulty when someone is sick or someone passes away. That is the strength of SBH. Uh, we really understand because I'm visiting the sick. We understand how to comfort the mourners. And the same is true here. When everyone was struggling, members were turning around to themselves saying, "How can I help my my cousin? How can I help my neighbor? How can I help my parents?" And it was just something which we, uh, which I was, you know, proud to see. But as I said, it took a village. And as much as I'm proud of that period, it was also a period of, uh, watching and admiration, a community stepping up.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Absolutely. Rabbi. Um, I'm going to go to the next question, a more global question. Uh, if you could please comment on how you see the future of world Jewry, uh, focusing on anti-Semitism and Zionism?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Uh.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: I feel like it's a set up question because had you asked me maybe a few months ago, I'd maybe give you a more guarded answer. But, uh, as I've mentioned to others in person, and I discussed it from the pulpits, uh, at a recent sermon, I feel we're living. On the edge here in Seattle, and we're watching history. But in Israel, you're part of history. You're part of what's going on. You're part of the of, uh, of life taking over. Jewish life is happening. And that is the, the, the future of of Jewish life. I, uh. We have moments. I remember after Pittsburgh where people said, "Oh, antisemitism is on the rise. What do you think?" And I looked at them and I said, "I'm not too concerned. We'll have a little bit more security." But, uh, you know, you're always going to have people who hate, and not to worry about it. But since October 7th and even before that, I felt that, uh, life is changing in this country and in this part of, uh, the Pacific Northwest. And for me, I want to be on the lead. I want to be in Israel, uh, at the ground floor. And I feel like I'm paving the way for others, whether others will come to visit as it gets quieter, as they as Hashem, please God, there'll be peace in Israel. You know, or whether that's families saying, "You know what? It's time. It's time to move back." I want to be there, ready to welcome and to greet people moving. I know it's not a choice or a decision which everyone will make, but as I said, I think for those who can't or are not able to make the the move to Israel, that they will strongly consider spending more time in Israel on visits. I've always been, uh, impressed by, uh, the youngest Zionist in Israel, in Israel, the youngest Zionist in Seattle, uh, Lilly De jean. And, uh, Lilly's, uh, a role model to me, because when I first came here, when she mentioned me as the, uh, Scholar- in-Residence, when I didn't yet have my, uh, my my my my, uh, my my green card, uh, she she told me that, she told me all about her, uh, her love of Israel, from her, from her grandmother and the family. And to me, we have our Nonnas had Zionism running through their veins. And it's our duty that to have that opportunity to be Zionist, to be a Zionist doesn't mean you need to move to Israel. To be a Zionist means, "I want to visit there regularly, and I want Israel to be in my heart daily.: And, uh, I hope and I yearn for that time where more of us spend more time there and more of us will consider Israel our home.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Um., yes, Rabbi. And I agree with you. With Lilly, she's definitely a role model for the whole of her Zionism, her love of Judaism. And, uh, we thank you. And I do have a last question for you. Mhm. Um, could you tell us what you're most proud of having accomplished during your time here at Sephardic Bikur Holim and I know you have a lot?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Well. I'll start with one, which is a little surprising from a rabbi. You'd probably be something you'd expect from, uh, a president or a treasurer. Uh, I'm most proud that when I came to Sephardic Bikur Holim, I was told that the congregation would pay month to month, and it wasn't always sure if they would be able to make payroll. And I can tell you, leaving the synagogue, you know, you know, [speaks in Hebrew], without putting any pressure on anyone. Uh, the synagogue has done tremendously well. We've had a number of very generous members leave legacy gifts to the synagogue, and we've had, uh, two fantastic, uh, fundraisers. One was the 101st, uh, anniversary of the synagogue, which was done in December of 2015, where the synagogue raised over $650,000. And one was when we did brand new Sifrei Torah covers, what we call vestidos. And, uh, we got 30 new Vestidos, ten for the High Holidays, ten for the for Pesach, and ten for the regular Shabbats for all of our ten beautiful Sifrei Torah. And we had new, uh, parocets, new covers for the, uh, for the, for the ark. Uh, and that was also a very big fundraiser, over $350,000. And it has changed dramatically. The the synagogue we have a large endowment. The synagogue has savings and it has provided a continuity for the synagogue to make bigger projects possible, which means if we're looking at, uh, youth directors and program directors and extra programming and extra youth activities and more scholars and residents and more, more everything, the synagogue can do that. So that's something which, again, surprising to hear from a rabbi. But one of those where I know that I leave the synagogue much stronger than I found it, uh, from a financial perspective. The other thing which I'm tremendously proud of, and again, we've mentioned it several times on this call, has been the relationships. There are more. There are as many members today as there were when I started. So when you imagine an elderly community, you're going to have

a lot of funerals. And despite so many funerals and losing so many wonderful, uh, members of our community, we have introduced young families. And we've also introduced people who have grown up in the synagogue and have left the synagogue and now are returning. So, uh, my, uh, the proudest, uh, the biggest pride that I have is I'm leaving the synagogue stronger than I found it, both financially and both in the, uh, the vibrancy of the membership. It's a membership that is engaged and cares and loves that synagogue. And, uh, those are the things, you know, we can look to, you know, what is I remember when I was in Melbourne, Australia, one of my proudest moments was we did a, uh, Sefer Torah dedication, just like we did in Seattle. But unlike in Seattle, where it was just one note and many highlights in Melbourne, it felt like that was the one highlight. This has been a highlight reel in in Seattle like it's been, you know, there's a couple of weeks, a couple Shabbats ago we had an Avraham Seev, a special ceremony which we do the Shabbat after a bride and groom gets married and the joy and the fullness of the synagogue, uh, was, was palpable. And, uh, I said, I wonder that's probably going to be my last Avraham Seev before we before we move back to Israel. And then I just got an email yesterday saying, there's going to be an Avraham Seev for a for a new bride and groom, and there's going to be a bar mitzvah, uh, on the same Shabbat and just. In other synagogues, those would be the highlights. But for us, it's another Shabbat at SBH. It's another. And that's what we have, which is we go from one event to another, whether one Shabbat. Yes, there are quiet Shabbats here and there, but it's, uh. I'm proud of the people that, uh, I've had the fortune to work with, whether it's, uh, the presidents or all wonderful and their boards, or having that opportunity of working with Hazzan with Rabbi Aharon and working with El Gabbai Larry Elmo so closely. Uh, those are my, those are my achievements. Those are my accomplishments. I was just, uh, there's a funeral today. Uh, and I said, uh, this man had many accomplishments, and I outlined the accomplishments he had. I said, but his biggest accomplishments are his beloved wife and his children and his grandchildren and I and I, and I say that my accomplishments are, you know, are the members of Sephardic Bikur Holim. And, uh, they're more than just, uh, members, their friends and their family. And, uh, I look forward to seeing them, uh, when they visit me in Eretz Israel.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Um, so, Rabbi, we thank you so much for taking the time for this interview. As you are preparing to leave Seattle to make aliyah, aliyah in a couple of months. Um, and as Lilly, as Lilly said in the beginning, uh, we're so happy for you, you and your family for making aliyha, uh, in just a few months. And that you're taking the time for this. You know, we're going to miss you. You know that, uh, you've been such an inspiration to many of us here in Seattle, and you've added so much life and heart to our community. We will never forget the impact that you have made here in Seattle. And may your legacy of strengthening our community be built upon in the future.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Um.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Lilly, would you like to say something? And, Rabbi todah rabah.

Lilly De Jaen: I think we said it all. We miss you and you haven't left yet.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Thank you.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: I'm hoping you're going to have one more trip.

Lilly De Jaen: Uh, I hope so, Rabbi.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: You know, you got somewhere to stay in...

Lilly De Jaen: At 95, I'm going to go, have to go first class, I can't...[laughing]

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Absolutely, absolutely. We'll get, uh, maybe Esther can be your companion.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: We'll have to think about that one.

Lilly De Jaen: If I was Esther's first babysitter with her aunt. But we only did it once. She was a miserable baby. She cried all the time. She cried all the time.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: I have to say one thing. When I was taking my first trip to Israel, uh, my daughter was there on a on a summer program. We got a call from the program saying that I'm sorry to tell you, your daughter, uh, has broken her foot-broken her ankle.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Wow.

Esther Scharhon Caplan: Um, so we had to pick her up, and we got her, and we brought her to Hadassah Hospital. And as I'm getting, we had to change hotels, go, going to Jerusalem. We went to the La Rome Hotel. We're getting off the bus. We're stepping

off the bus. Who do we see? But Lilly, she looks at Rachel, my daughter. She looks at me and she goes, "I'm not telling your mother." [laughing] Later, anyhow. Um, thank you so, so much. And, uh, we so appreciate it. And, uh.

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Thank you. All the best.

Lilly De Jaen: You're going home, Rabbi?

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan: Yes. Thank you.