

## Muestra Istoriya - La Influenza Espanyola

Looking back at our history, I decided to search through the old Sephardic Newspapers in the United States, specifically in the city of New York, to see if they were reporting on the Spanish Flu that broke in 1918, a bit over one hundred years ago.

The two newspapers that I was able to locate and that published reports on the pandemic were, La Boz Del Pueblo and La America.

It seems that La America was the first to publish a report on this matter on Friday, October 4, 1918, page 6. The heading states, “La Hazinura Influenza Espanyiola puja.” (The Spanish Influenza sickness spreads.) The report goes on to say that according to the advice from Washington the sickness is spreading throughout the entire country. “El governo Amerikano, voto la suma de 1 miyion de dolares en ayudo del publiko por sostener doktores, nursas i dar melizinas gratuitas a los proves.” (The american government has given one million dollars to help the public with doctors, nurses and free medicine for the poor.)

The report goes on to give seven “reglas”, rules, that have been ordered by the competent authorities. It states that these instructions must be followed, “Striktemente”, strictly, in order to stay healthy.

1. No estar en lugar estrecho o de aver suzio.  
Do not stay in a tight space or in dirty air.
2. No sikliarse ninguno, no apretarse el korason.  
Noone should be upset or depressed (*lit.* tighten the heart)
3. No apretarse ninguno en las entradas de trenos, tiatros i lugares publikos.  
Noone should squeeze into entrances to trains, theaters, or public places.
4. No komer kozas suzias, no komer i beber en lugares suzios, guadar de yelor i umedad.  
No forsarvos kon mucho lavorar.  
Do not eat anything dirty, do not eat or drink in dirty places, stay away from the cold and humidity. Do not overwork yourselves.
5. No kaminar por la kaye.  
Do not walk on the streets.
6. No konsintiendovos bueno de taparse siempre la boka kon una limpia riza en kavzo de toser i sarnudar.  
If you don't feel well, always cover the mouth with a clean handkerchief if you cough or sneeze.
7. No komer sin lavarse las manos.  
Do not eat without washing the hands.

The report ends with no further comment, one must assume that the public was well aware of the “Hazinura” that had spread and that was causing havoc all over the country and the world at large.

“Tomad Kuido Sovre La Influenza”, Be careful of the Influenza, reads the heading on the front page of La Boz Del Pueblo on Friday, October 18, 1918, two weeks later. The report goes on to state, “Un grupo de doctores kapaches distribuyeron oy mizmo unos sirkulares kon las rekomendaciones sigientes sovre la influenza i la pnumoniya.” A group of competent doctors have distributed today pamphlets with the following recommendations in regards to influenza and pneumonia.

The recommendations are more detailed than the ones found in La America two weeks before. Here the symptoms are also included, it states, “Si te sientes hazino, kon titerias o dolor de guesos i kaientura o kalada en el garon o en la kavesa, es ke probablemente te vierna influenza.” If you feel sick with shivers, bone aches, fever, sore throat and headaches, it is probably the onset of influenza. In which in case the advice is that one must lay down until a doctor becomes available.

What food can you eat? “Leche, yiogurt, sereales, pan de manteka o kualunke sorta de kaldo o patata menuda, huevos, ma nunca mas de dos al dia.” Milk, yogurt, cereals, buttered bread, any kind of broth or mashed potato, eggs, but not more than two a day. No meat or wine, nor beer.

At the end, the report gives further instructions in case the individual continues to feel ill after two or three days. Call a doctor, request help from the nearest hospital or the nurse center or simply notify the nearest clinic of the Board of Public Health.

Thinking about our current situation, are there any lessons that we can draw from reading these reports? For one, it is indeed interesting to see how to some degree history repeats itself. To see and learn about how the world reacted to that pandemic. It is of further interest to be able to see it through the eyes of the members of the Sephardic community that had recently settled in the United States. Still, one very important distinction remains. The people of the world then, and our community had a very poor understanding of what was happening and how to react to it. We can consider ourselves very lucky since our medicine has advanced so very much. Our understanding of what it is, our knowledge of how it travels, our prospects of countering it, are much greater. Currently, there are hundreds and thousands of doctors and scientists looking for the cure and the vaccine that will bite it and stamp it out. We pray that el Dio Barukh Hu will give humanity the wisdom to do so, and we look forward to that day.