**2 July 2018 - in the library….**

There is an old Jewish tradition that any document containing God’s name or quotes from religious texts, should be preserved until it is buried in the ground. The Genizah is a place to store these documents, to conceal and hide them away. Some people say that these works, like people, are living things. There is an element of the sacred about them and so, when they die or become worn out, they must be honored and protected.

Walking down the lane in Cairo that leads to the Ben Ezra Synagogue, it seems that very little has changed since it was built in the 9th Century. There is the same hustle and bustle, the noise and smells, the cramped houses and shops… and then you arrive at the iron gates with the Star of David on the top. There is a quiet courtyard and in the middle of this busy neighborhood, it’s as if it prepares you for prayer.

The Genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue stored the religious documents and social history of this community for a thousand years. It contained more than 30,000 documents which have been archived in Libraries around the world.

In the National Library of Israel we have a document from the Cairo Genizah that tells the most astounding story.

It is a letter written in Judeo Arabic that was sent from the Jewish Karait community in Jerusalem to the Karait community in Cairo. It is a plea for help as they try to resolve a communal dispute.

Ibrahim and Suliman both wanted to marry Rivka. The community leaders considered the dilemma and made the decision that Rivka should marry Ibrahim. But she wanted to marry Suliman.

Ibrahim was furious. He said he would kill them both if the marriage went ahead.

The community put Rivka under house arrest and vowed that she would not marry either of them. She was to be concealed, hidden away.

Suliman must have been a desperate man. He found someone who could forge all the signatures that were required for the wedding agreement, the Ketuba, and presented it to the leaders of the community. They realized that the document was forged, banished the forger and wrote this letter for help to the wise leaders of Cairo.

What were they to do?

The Ben Ezra Synagogue was once on the shores of the Nile, not far from where Moses was found in the rushes by a Princess of Egypt.

He had been banished, concealed, hidden away.

Just like Rivka

Just like the documents in the Genizah.

What happens when we conceal ourselves, our heritage and our history?
And what amazing treasure awaits us when we rediscover that which has been hidden.

It is often in the most hidden of places, that we find the richest and most interesting stories.