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From: IJC - International Jewish Center [info@ijc.be]
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To: Kathryn Michael
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INTERNATIONAL JEWISH CENTER
 גִּשְׁר מַעְבַּר לַיִם **OF BELGIUM**

IJC Monthly Newsletter

Nisan/Iyyar 5770
 April 2010

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From President Steven Brummel



Napoleon is not normally associated with Passover, the festival we started celebrating March 29th . One might associate Napoleon with Egypt, the site of the Passover story, through the Rosetta Stone, discovered by his French troops in 1799, which allowed ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics to be deciphered. But what could be Napoleon's link to Passover?

The link came to mind during my recent visit to Paris to attend a WUPJ conference of Liberal/Reform synagogues from across Europe. The opening session was held in the Hotel de Ville in the hall used by Napoleon in 1806 to convene the Great Sanhedrin, the meeting of senior Jewish leaders of the French Jewish community. It was at this meeting that Napoleon announced his intention to abolish the ghetto and offer full citizenship to each and every Jew. Napoleon's initiative embodied in essential ways a basic Passover theme: emancipation.

Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt more than 3400 years ago. We celebrate the liberation of the Jews from slavery and their freedom to go to the Promised Land. At the Seder we all relive the Exodus tale. In fact, we are commanded to remember it as if we ourselves had once been slaves in Egypt and freed on that first

Welcome!

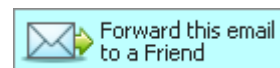


Welcome to our newest members!

Gordon & Deborah Swartz

Calendar of Events

Click here to see the full calendar of upcoming IJC events!



Contribute to our newsletter

All are welcome to submit newsletter articles, suggest a recipe for our recipe corner, or point out a "Jewish in Belgium" event for inclusion.

Send your contribution to newsletter@ijc.be

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The International Jewish Center

Passover.

But any cursory review of Jewish history makes clear that it has not been hard for Jews to comply with the Haggadah's admonition for Jews in every generation to act as if they had been slaves in Egypt. Life has often been very difficult for Jews. They have been excluded from civil society. They have been denied their civil liberties. They have been threatened by pogroms and worse. Emancipation has come and receded in waves over time.

In the 18th Century Jews in most European countries were confined to ghettos and not in any way equal members of civil society. Napoleon's action in 1806 in that hall marked a profound change. It tore down the ghetto walls and allowed Jews to enter general society as Jews. In essence, it freed the Jews from Pharaonic-type oppression and allowed them to begin their Exodus march toward a promised land. I'd say the Great Sanhedrin meeting marked the beginning of modern Judaism - a era in which all Jews have been wrestling with the interplay of religious and secular aims and desires and trying to find the right balance.

The Exodus has not proved easy. The road to full freedom was not a straight path. There have been reversals and detours, some minor and some major. As in the Passover story, those who originally consented to granting Jews emancipation at times reneged. Just as Pharaoh sent his armies to chase and capture the Jews besides the Red Sea, forces in France rose up to fight and eliminate Jews from French society. Some times the Red Sea parted and allowed the Jews to escape (ex. the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s) but other times the Jews were trapped at the shoreline (the Vichy Government deportation of Jews to the death camps in World War II). In Germany, another country in which Napoleon decreed the abolition of the ghetto, the very success of Jewish integration into German society became the basis for extreme racist challenges that culminated in the Nazi Final Solution.

Further, Jews, once free to pursue their own path, identified a variety of "promised lands" - some mutually exclusive - and had trouble agreeing on worthwhile goals. Freedom can be confusing. Some Jews pursued a goal of utter assimilation. Others pursued a more secular form of Jewish nationalism which underpinned the Zionist movement in the early 20th Century.

What Napoleon started in 1806 in that hall in the Paris Hotel de Ville pushed Jews rapidly into the modern world, deeply changing their everyday lives and prospects. It was therefore highly appropriate for the Liberal/Reform Jewish movement to hold one of its sessions in that hall.

So, in this Passover season, it is well worthwhile to reflect on this more recent emancipation, and how long it took before the principles of equality became an irreversible everyday reality throughout the Western world, and sensible to count your blessings.

Hag Sameach.

From Rabbi Nathan Alfred



The Pesach story is a timeless narrative of liberation. Each year at the seder we think ourselves back in

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Egypt, taking those first steps on a long journey towards the freedom of the Promised Land. We remind ourselves that this is our story, and that in every generation it has a relevance, a resonance and a message.

Many of you will be familiar with the 35's Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry. They were one of a number of organizations who worked tirelessly in the 1970s and 1980s to help free Jews who were living in the Soviet Union. Under Communism's Iron Curtain there was little freedom, and especially little freedom of religion, and Jews around the world campaigned to "let our people go". One of the most famous of the refuseniks was Anatoly Sharansky, who spent nine years imprisoned in a gulag, a Siberian labour camp. His release in 1986 came as a result of an international campaign, in which the 35's played a leading role.

For many years the 35's group in my synagogue organized the twinning of bar and bat mitzvahs with children in the Soviet Union who were unable to celebrate ceremonies of their own. In 1993, I was the last child in my shul to participate in this twinning scheme, and was paired with a boy from Leningrad.

Having a bar mitzvah twin entailed me writing letters to Leningrad, learning about life there, and being told never to expect a reply. I do not remember now what I wrote, but I expect I tried to write bright messages about my life, family and Jewish community. Imagine my delight one morning when through the letterbox came a reply - written in English - from the Soviet Union, and I could learn a bit more about my "twin"! The letter contained a telephone number, and one evening my mother and I went to the house of a Russian-speaker member of the synagogue, who made a clandestine phone call to the family on our behalf. I remember that connecting with them by telephone was quite complicated, though probably I did not understand all the dangers and difficulties at the time.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Jews were finally able to leave, and they moved to countries all over the world. Many went to Israel, where there are now more than one million Russian-speakers. Communities all over Germany have seen a revival, with the influx of between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews. And there were many who moved to Canada, the United States and elsewhere. Later I heard that my bar mitzvah twin had moved with his family to California, though as typical teenagers, we soon lost touch.

Back then we were both turning 13, and now with the age of 30 fast approaching, I wondered again what my twin was doing today. Luckily Facebook brings the world together now very easily, and a quick check put us swiftly back in touch. And I was so very pleased to see my twin's successes. He has gone on to study at the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard Business School, where he gained an MBA, and he now works as a senior associate at a private equity fund, specializing in investments in the Former Soviet Union. Such a path to freedom was unimaginable twenty years ago, but what a wonderful Pesach story for our times!

IJC Shabbaton: April 23-25

The IJC's community Shabbaton weekend

**retreat will be held April 23-25. Contact
info@ijc.be for more information.**



Adult Education

**The Adult Education session for April will be
held during the IJC Shabbaton!**

Rosh Chodesh group

Wednesday, April 21, 8pm

This meeting will feature Israeli Art and Artists and will be a joint presentation. Some members have already volunteered to talk about works of art or sculpture and more volunteers would be appreciated. Members and friends are very welcome to attend and participate and/or listen.

Shabbat mp3 files now on the IJC website

Studying for a bar or bat mitzvah? Or just want to brush up the tune for one (or more) of the Shabbat blessings? You can now find mp3 files of the full Shabbat services (Friday night and Saturday morning) on the IJC website! [Click here](#)

Each track includes the corresponding page number for the IJC siddur. If you would like to purchase a copy of the IJC siddur for your personal use, please contact info@ijc.be.

Member announcements

Mazal Tov!

David and Ulrike are (super) happy to announce

the arrival of

JONAH THOMAS SAPIRO

born 17th March 2010 in Brussels

3.280 kg 52cm



Jewish in Belgium

Hatikva

English-speaking women's group of Brussels.

On **Monday, 12th April at 10.30 am** prompt at Luce's home. We welcome **Karyn Allen** who will talk about **Japan**, its culture and history.

Kindly bring a plate of something dairy.

For information

Luce 02 374 6249 or Miriam 02 731 0206

The Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance seeks material

The Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance in Mechelen (Belgium) is undergoing a renovation project. The present museum, located in the Dossin barracks, which functioned as an SS-Sammellager between 1942 and 1944, is frequently visited (30000 visitors a year), but the exhibition room is rather small. For that reason, a new museum is being built after the example of other Holocaust museums in Europe (Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris). Next to the exhibition room, the collection itself will be expanded as well.

We are still looking for family photographs and amateur films made by Jewish people who lived in Belgium during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, either as Belgian citizens, or as refugees. The themes we are looking for are normal family life: children playing, birthday parties, religious feasts, holidays, etc. Ego documents, like diaries and letters, from Jewish inhabitants of Belgium are

also welcome: we are still looking for personal stories and experiences of war or hidden life in Belgium. Interesting objects that illustrate daily or religious life are also useful.

If you still have some old family photographs or amateur films, toys, other objects, or stories, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can assure you that the families and material concerned will be treated with the greatest care and discretion possible. The museum does not ask for the original photographs or films: scans or copies will be made. Thank you very much in advance.

Contact

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