

## Report by the Levisson Institute, March 2010

The Levisson Institute was founded by the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism in 2002 for the purpose of training Rabbinic and other leadership for its congregations and organisations. In August 2008 the first group of five Rabbis received their semicha (Rabbinic Ordination) in a festive ceremony in the old Portuguese synagogue of the Liberal Congregation in The Hague<sup>1</sup>. Present were prominent representatives of the World Union Executive Board, Hebrew Union College, Leo Baeck College, Abraham Geiger Kolleg, CCAR, the Dutch government, local authorities and Dutch Jewish and non-Jewish religious and secular organisations. The semicha had earlier in the year been recognized by the World Union Rabbinic Review Committee after an extensive investigation.

The five-year **Rabbinic program** is of an academic level comparable to that of other progressive training institutions. The eight member Academic Committee — consisting of leading experts in the fields of Jewish Study in The Netherlands and other highly qualified individuals including three experienced Rabbis — are actively involved in the program. The day-to-day leadership is provided by the Dean.

The academic lecturers are mainly drawn from the universities in Amsterdam and Leiden. Lecturers for the vocational training modules come from other specialized institutions. A limited number of modules are given by visiting lecturers from HUC Jerusalem and Cincinnati and the Leo Baeck College, generally in the form of an intensive seminar of five to seven days. This is done in order to cover subjects for which no lecturer of sufficient expertise can be found in The Netherlands and in order to foster contacts with the greater Progressive Jewish world.

Until now there has been no requirement to spend time in Israel, since all students have extensive knowledge of the country and most have lived there for several years. They are, however, required to participate in a special trip to acquaint themselves with the Israeli Progressive Movement. One such trip was made in 2005; another one may follow in 2011.

The Institute is financed by three foundations and a circle of Friends and has a limited yearly budget of some €150.000 (£135.000, \$215.000). The financial crisis has not been helpful to us...

At the present time, there are three students in the Rabbinic Program, two of whom are scheduled to complete their studies by the end of 2011. One student has just rejoined the program having spent a year recovering from a car accident. He may be ready at the end of 2012. A fourth student has taken a 'time-out' in connection with his personal situation but is expected to return to the program in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> A video recording and a series of photographs of the ceremony can be seen on [www.levisson.nl/index.php/en/the-ordination-2009](http://www.levisson.nl/index.php/en/the-ordination-2009) or by going to [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > English flag above right > Photos/Videos > The Ordination Service 2008

In May 2009 a class of 15 *Sheliach Tzibbur* students completed their two year training, which had been led by professor Eliyahu Schleifer of the Hebrew Union College Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>. In addition, three of the experienced chazzanim in our congregations participated as students, in order to study with prof. Schleifer. This possibility also led dr. Annette Boeckler, the librarian of the Leo Baeck College, to join in this program as a student while also making valuable contributions as a lecturer.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in May 2010, our first two-year **Teacher Training program** will begin with 10-15 students. Interviews for this program are to be held in February 2010 approximately three weeks from the time of this writing. This program is specifically designed for teachers of Religious School classes up to and including Bar/Bat Mitsvah. It will be led by the directors of Rimon, the National Education Centre of the Union under the leadership of rabbi Hetty Groeneveld (Leo Baeck College 2007) and work in close co-operation with the Leo Baeck College Centre for Jewish Education.

Plans are now being developed for the **training of lay-leaders**. This will most likely entail a 16 session course centred on Jewish ethics and concepts. The goal is to demonstrate how Jewish values can and should be applied to the way congregations and organisations are run. While courses on synagogue and organisational management are occasionally given by the central body in which the major Dutch Jewish organisations co-operate (at this moment chaired by the chairman of our Progressive Movement), our focus is on the practical consequences of Jewish ethics. This course will be given by the Dutch Rabbis, probably using materials developed by the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

For additional information, please refer to our **website** at [www.levisson.nl/en](http://www.levisson.nl/en). Due to the recent renovation of the website, the English pages are not yet quite finished. Please note that these pages contain only general information concerning the Institute and not the parts that are relevant only to the staff, students, and Dutch readers, such as current events and a commentary on the parashat hashavua in Dutch.

Amsterdam, 15 January 2010  
Rabbi David Lilienthal  
Dean

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<sup>2</sup>A video recording and a series of photographs of the ceremony can be seen on <http://www.levisson.nl/index.php/en/closing-ceremony-shelichay-tzibbur> or by going to [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > English flag above right > Photos/Videos > Closing Ceremony Shelichay Tzibbur

<sup>3</sup> Recordings of several lectures and workshops can be found in the Music Library on our website, under heading Archive.