



Dear members of our communities, dear friends and supporters,

The day has finally arrived! Before their summer vacation, the Cabinet of the North Rhine

Westphalia government had already decided to grant the UPJD the status of a public corporation (Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts, or K.d.ö.R.). The necessary laws have now been passed, and the UPJD was granted K.d.ö.R. status on September 30, 2015.

We have been working toward this for a long time, and there were a number of setbacks along the way. Therefore, I want to give my heartfelt thanks to all those inside and outside of our movement, who have accompanied and supported us during this effort.

We will now have the same legal structure as the Central Council of Jews in Germany. As an institution, we can now connect to the pluralism, religious liberalism and open world view that were the hallmark of the majority movement within German Jewry before the Shoah and of the majority of Jews in the world today. Our success was due to mainly this history: this means a lot to us.



During the coming months, we will make all the practical and technical changes made necessary by the change of legal status. Of course, we will also

work on our strategic direction. We will report on all these things in future newsletters.

One other point is very important to me in this editorial: For many of us unexpectedly, our country has received a large wave of refugees during the past month, mainly from the war-torn regions of Syria. There is broad political debate about this, and the reactions of the populace have ranged from great openness and willingness to help to violent rejection of the idea and acts of violence against the refugees. The UPJD is not a political organization and we are not in a position to take a public position on this issue. Still, within the modest context of this newsletter, I would like to congratulate those of our communities which have addressed the suffering of the refugees, often in connection with Mitzvah Day in November. These people found various ways to provide support, relief and assistance, which could sometimes be as simple as a few untroubled hours for the refugees. I see no other correct behavior, from both the human and religious point of view.

Of course we should mention the fears and anxieties experienced by many, given the large number of people coming to us. Their biggest worry is that the values of German Constitution could be in danger. To address this, the government must act to ensure that the refugees who remain in Germany receive both a chance and a responsibility. A chance to enjoy the freedom and democracy that

shape our country, and the responsibility to respect those freedoms and democracy through their own behavior.

It's a good time for all of us, in our families and communities, to think about what it means to lose one's home or to give up and to start over somewhere else. Many of us have had such an experience ourselves. I very much hope that, in the present situation, it will be possible for all of us, on the basis of our own experiences, to act as a force for good and as a bright, clear light of humanity.

With best wishes for the upcoming Festival of Lights: Chag Chanukah Sameach!

Sonja Guentner
Sonja Guentner

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- January 22nd to 24th, Presidents' Day in Unna
- February 26th to 28th, Seminar for Leynen (reading from the Torah scroll) in Bad Sobernheim

Abraham Geiger College ordains four liberal rabbis in Bielefeld, first woman since 1945 will cover three West German cities

Bielefeld. On Monday afternoon, Aug. 31, Bielefeld was the capital of Jewish Germany. Five graduates of the Abraham Geiger College at the University of Potsdam were installed in their new roles in the Beit Tikva synagogue in Bielefeld. To the enthusiastic applause of 350 guests, including the Governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hannelore Kraft, as well as numerous federal and state parliament members, the new rabbis Eli Reich, Sonja Keren Pilz, Alexander Grodensky und Natalia (Natascha) Verzhbovska received their certificates of ordination.

On September 1, Verzhbovska became the first woman since the Shoah to lead three Jewish communities in North Rhine-Westphalia: Unna, Cologne and Oberhausen. During the Perestroika period as the Soviet Union came to an end, the now 47-year-old from Kiev discovered her Jewishness. She found her religious home in the liberal community of the Ukrainian capital, although she initially did not understand the Hebrew texts and prayers. She married the future Chief Rabbi of the liberal Jewish communities in Russia, Alexander Lyskovoy, and accompanied him to Saint Petersburg, where she taught Jewish religion. Both will now move to Cologne.

In liberal Judaism, Verzhbovska sees „a way to connect life in a modern society with faith.“ For the Jewish communities in Germany, of which many have suffered from internal conflicts, the newly ordained Rabbi wishes „more Shalom“. She would like to contribute to their reconciliation and win more young people for community work. Young people should search for „Wise people, like those I found at Abraham Geiger College, who will give them advice and support“. For her, the most important element of learning and personal growth was „to ask

more questions and give fewer answers“.

Rabbi Walter Jacob, President of the College, called Judaism a kaleidoscope: „You can shake it again and again, look into it, and sometimes get „an entirely new, beautiful picture“.

In this sense, for his investiture Cantor Amnon Seelig chose the saying „Turn it and turn it always anew, because everything is included in it.“ (Pirkei Avot 5.22). This includes ways of life which find little sympathy in some communities. Newly ordained Rabbi Alexander Grodinsky married his life partner this year. „In liberal communities, that is no problem,“ says the tall young man with a clear, direct gaze, who grew up in St. Petersburg. In 2006, he went to study to Vienna, where he met his partner, Isak Schneider. Schneider converted to Judaism before they were married under a Chupa. Grodinsky will lead the liberal Jewish community in Esch, Luxembourg, a city of 35,000. Both praise the positive atmosphere there. „The people in the community like each other,“ observed Grodinsky. A handful of members of the 70-family community came to Bielefeld to receive their new Rabbi. Luxembourg's only liberal community chose him from seven applicants, Husband Isak Schneider is looking forward to the move to the neighboring country. „I'll be the Rabbi's husband from Esch,“ he says, laughing.

For Abraham Lehrer, Vice President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, a rabbi can only be successful in his job if he has „a great love for people.“

Senior Rabbi Henry G. Brandt reminded the graduates of the „great responsibility“ which they will now take on. Not only many community members but also „the world out there“ expect „spiritual leadership“ from the rabbis: „It's not about you, but rather about the communities,



their people and the Jewish people as a whole". „Kol Israel Chaverim“, added Brandt, and left no doubt about his love for the land of the fathers. „But we are concerned when things happen there that are reminiscent of our own fate“, he said, making reference to attacks such as the recent arson attack on a Palestinian family in Samaria. Religious fanaticism has nothing to do with the Torah, „but you Rabbis will be asked about that over and over again.“

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New appearance of the Union

Awarding the status of a corporation of public law to the Union progressive Juden in Germany manifests itself also in the design of our new official writing paper and business cards while keeping our logo unchanged.

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**Seminar for Lay Cantors in Bad Sobernheim
November 06. – 08. 2015**

For the first time we could lead a seminar in Bad Sobernheim, in a house that belongs to the ZWSt (Zentrale Wohlfahrtsstelle). It was our first seminar for lay cantors.

For two days Michael Lawton and Deborah Tal-Ruettger tutored a group of about 30 participants who came from all over Germany, from Kiel in the north to Freiburg in the south. Most of the participants were acquainted with leading a Kabbalat Shabbat service so we concentrated on Shacharit leShabbat. The beginners group studied mainly the technical aspects of leading a Shacharit Shabbat service. The advanced group went deeper into the philosophical and theological questions. Our services during the weekend were also study sessions and so our questions and answers accompanied our prayers. We had time for conversations and sharing our experience in our congregations. On Friday evening we gathered after dinner and sang Zmirot leShabbat together. The house hired an excellent Israeli cook and the



food was very tasty – an important issue when you study hard! The participants and the organizers are looking forward to our next seminar in Bad Sobernheim – Learn to Leyn – February 26 -28 2016.



Deborah Tal-Rüttger

Mitzvah Day in Bielefeld

The Jewish congregation of Bielefeld has participated in Mitzvah Day for the second time. The idea of Mitzvah Day is that everyone – really each and everyone – can influence our world in a positive way. The concept of Mitzvah Day is based on central Jewish values, such as: Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), Tzedek (justice) and Gmilit Chasadim (charity). Jews should follow these values and live with them daily.

That's why children and parents of the Jewish congregation of Bielefeld baked cookies together with 29 refugee children and their parents in the large kitchen "Emilio" and had a great time together. After a communal lunch, everybody boarded the rented bus, heavily laden with bags of cookies, and were driven back to the center in Bielefeld.

Irith Michelsohn



Chanukah:

is the festival commemorating the rededication of the temple. It begins on the 25th day of Kislev and ends on the 2nd day of Tevet. On each of the 8 evenings of the festival candles are lit in the synagogue and in members' homes using a special candlestick called Chanukiah. Each evening has one light more than the previous one.

The story:

Chanukah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucids, who formed part of the Greek empire. The Maccabees cleansed the temple in Jerusalem from the idols placed there by the Seleucids and then rededicated it. Since during this time the festival of Sukkot could not be celebrated, they celebrated Chanukah instead and made it an 8 day long festival. The books of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha, as well as the writings of Josephus testify to the battle and the victory of the Jews.

In the Talmud we find the story of the miracle of the Oil. The Maccabees found one single container of oil to light the temple while they were cleaning it, which should have lasted for only one night. A miracle happened and the oil lasted for 8 nights, until the work of cleaning the temple was completed and fresh oil could be brought from the neighboring villages.

We are told to commemorate this miracle for all times. The Chanukiah is to be placed in the window or near a door, so that every passerby will remember the great miracle.

Chanukka ist das Tempelweihfest. Es dauert vom 25. Kislew bis zum 2. Tevet. Während der acht Abende von Chanukka werden in der Synagoge und in jeder Familie Kerzen

am achtarmigen Menorah, der Chanukkia, entzündet. Jeder Abend kommt noch ein Licht hinzu.

Customs and prayers:

In the calendar of Jewish festivals Chanukah is regarded as an unimportant minor festival. The candles are lit for 8 nights, with each night having one additional light.

It was on purpose that the Rabbis did not stress the military nature of the festival and the victory of the Maccabees. There is no special service for Chanukah, merely an additional prayer inserted into the daily service.

Foods for the festival include dairy foods, because additional stories for Chanukah include the bravery of Ya'el, who killed Sisera, and that of Judith and Holoferenes. In both cases the brave women gave their victims milk to drink. Also consumed are foods cooked in oil (sufganiot, or doughnuts and latkes, or potato pancakes) to remind us of the miracle of the oil.



**Ivrit for Everybody****Maoz Tzur מעוז צור**

All of us sing the first stanza of Maoz Tzur. This song has six stanzas. Seder haTefilot has four stanzas. In my congregation we sing the first and the fifth stanzas (In Seder Hatefilot it is the fourth).

The first stanza tells us of the dedication of the temple – chaunkat hamizbeach.

הַנִּכְתּוּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

The second stanza tells us story of the exodus out of Egypt.

The third stanza tells us about the exile in Babylo.

The fourth stanza tells us of Hamman in Persia.

The fifth is about the oil wonder in Chanukka

The sixth is about hoping for the Messiah to come.

The song was written in the 13th century. Who wrote it? Maybe a certain Mordechai מרדכי, as the acrostic of the first letter in each stanza shows.

מעוז צור ישועתי לך נאה לשבח
תכון בית תפילתי ושם תודה נזבח
לעת תכין מטבח מצר המנבח
אז אגמור בשיר מזמור חנכת המזבח

Some of the words in this stanza are familiar to us from the Siddur:

rock – tzur צור
your – lecha לך
to praise – leshabeach לשבח
thanks - toda תודה
with a song – beschir בשיר
song – mismor מזמור

Other words are also not entirely foreign to us:

- My salvation – jeshu'ati ישועתי sounds almost like 'my redemption' – jeshu'ah ישועה
- The house of my prayers (= Tempel) – bet tefilati בית תפילתי reminds us of the 'house of God' – bet Adonai בית אדוני and 'the prayer' – tefila תפילה
- In the time of – le'et לעת we see in Sim Shalom before: lechol et ulechol sha'a – any time and any hour.

The rest of the words we have to look up in a dictionary – or enjoy the wonderful translation of Maoz Tzur in Seder haTefilot. Deborah

Deborah Tal-Rüttger

Ivrit for the Curious**MAKKABI with kaf or with kuf?**

מכבי או מקבי ?

In Ivrit one usually spells Makkabi with kaf מכבי. Spelled like this, Makkabi is an abbreviation of mi kamocho beElim Adonai?

מי כמוכה באלים ?

Who is like you among the gods?

This name describes the Maccabees as a tool in the hand of God. In the name of God they redeemed the Jewish people from the Greek empire and purified the temple in Jerusalem.

However, tradition also has the name Makkabi spelled with kuf מקבי. Spelled like this the name suggests that the Maccabees were courageous and mighty fighters. It is due to their fighting abilities that the Greek were defeated and the temple in Jerusalem purified.

We know from the Talmud that our sages didn't like the idea of Chanukkah being a festival celebrating conquest and victory. They rather added the story of the wonder tales about the oil instead of stories about the Maccabees, the Hasmonean or Hannah and her seven sons. We know of these stories not from the Talmud but from the books of the Maccabees, which aren't included in the canon of the Hebrew Bible and from Josephus Flavius' books.

These is the reason why the spelling with kaf - מכבי - is the more common one in our tradition. Even the sport organization, which represents power and courage, hasn't adapted the spelling with kuf.

Deborah Tal-Rüttger





From the Congregations



Die jüdische Kindertagesstätte Tamar in Hannover der Liberalen Jüdischen Gemeinde Hannover K.d.ö.R. sucht zur Verstärkung Ihres Teams

E-Mail an: Kitatamar@t-online.de oder per Post an: Jüdische Kita Tamar, z.Hd. Frau Grossmann, Fuhsestr. 6a, 30419 Hannover.

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Wir freuen uns auf Ihre Bewerbung!

Sukkot and Thanksgiving at Sukkat Schalom

Sukkot and the Christian harvest festival thanksgiving coincided in this calendar year. The protestant congregation of Lietzensee invited us to share their service for thanksgiving. The service was led by our rabbi Dr. Nachma and cantor Esther Hirsch. Many people, including several of our congregation, came to the service on that bright Sunday morning. On Sunday evening we celebrated Erev Sukkot in our synagogue.

This service was also well attended. Our synagogue choir served as a musical setting to the Sukkot service. Our rabbi repeated his sermon given in the morning stating that the fruits of the fields and of the trees can only grow thanks to God's blessing. No matter how long one pulls a blade of grass, nothing happens if God doesn't want it to grow. The story of the old man, who planted a carob tree, stresses this point once again. A king, who happened to come along, asked the old man: "What are you doing? Don't you

know that this tree will bear fruit in seven years only? You won't live to enjoy them!" The old man answered: "When I grew up, I ate fruits from trees that generations before me had planted. And so it is: even if I won't be there to enjoy the fruits, people of the next generation will." The king returned home from a war seven years later. The war was lost; the state hadn't expanded but had grown smaller, the sovereign impoverished.

The carob tree has just given its first fruits and everyone could enjoy them. In the same way our prayers and songs for Sukkot are carried on, from generation to generation - ledor vador. As tradition goes, we spent the second part of the service in the Sukka, where the blessings over bread, wine and fruits of the fields and the trees were spoken and the congregation sat for quite a while, singing and talking.

Reinhard Liam Rickertsen

The Synagogue in Bielefeld - A Book of Photographs

The process of the conversion of a decommissioned church into the synagogue Beit Tikva in Bielefeld is documented in this collection of more than 190 pages of photographs. The book is published by the Juedische Verlagsanstalt Berlin. Matthias Hauke, who contributed his artistic ideas to the building project, has also created and edited this book.

The book costs 49.90 Euros plus shipping, ISBN 978-3-934658-74-5, and can be ordered at the geschaefsstelle@juedische-verlagsanstalt.de, in a bookshop or by paying in cash at the Juedische Kultusgemeinde Bielefeld, Detmolder Str. 107, 33604 Bielefeld. For an appointment at the congregation call 0521-12 30 83.



Irith Michelsohn



Mini-Machane

Following the summer machane, Netzer had two major activities on which we'd like to report. After a 2½ year gap, and as a result of the magnificent support of our madrichim in the south of the country together with Gabriela Falk and Rabbi Tom Kucera, we were able to hold a mini-machane from 2nd-4th October.

Over 50 Jews had the chance to breathe „machane air“ in the beautiful city of Regensburg, and to have a really good time together. The weekend was full of activities, pe'ulot and evening events. Naturally, we had bread-on-a-stick, campfire and night-time rambles, as well as a treasure hunt through the city. Everyone enjoyed it so much that in future we will try to have a mini-machane two or three times a year. So keep your eyes and ears open – and there will soon be a mini-machane in your area.

Trip to Prague

Netzer took 13 madrichim on an educational visit to Prague from 18th-25th October. We met in the offices of the Union of Progressive Jews where we cooked together and had a session to decide what we wanted to achieve with the trip. Very early the following morning, we took the bus to Prague, where we stayed in an apartment, which allowed us to be on our own and, over the week, repeatedly cook together.

The whole group was very enthusiastic about Prague. The „golden city“ put on its sunniest face for the whole of our visit, which was really useful for the large variety of cultural activities we enjoyed. A guided city tour ending in an exploration of Prague castle brought Czech history closer to us. With this knowledge behind us, the following day we explored the former Jewish quarter, where the Spanish synagogue, the Jerusalem synagogue and the old Jewish cemetery, weathered but defying the passing of time, made a particular impression.

The madrichim spent a long time in the Pinkas synagogue, with the names of all the Czech Jews who were murdered written on the walls.

Another important part of the trip was our excursion to Terezin, where we were moved by our visit to the work camp and the information we received about the „special“ treatment which Jews were subjected to in the camp. We ended our visit by saying kaddish at the Jewish graves there. We also went to the ghetto and the crematoria. It was a comfort to experience all this as a group of Jews.

The emotions which were called forth by the visit were dealt with through workshops and other methods. We were invited for Kabbalat Shabbat by the Beit Simcha community, which was a lovely experience, especially since we made contact there with Dutch Netzer, and we were able to deepen our contacts with them.

Of course, we also had some fun activities. What people most liked were simply the walks through the old city and the embassy district – although the go-karting was a special group experience. Unfortunately, the trip was over far too soon, but we are already looking forward to our trip to Israel in spring.

Assepha

Now a bit of advertising for ourselves: We'll be starting our year of madrichim-training again in November – this time with nine new young people who have decided they want to be madrichim. Together with those who are in the second year of their training, they'll learn how to run and lead machanot. And ideally they'll become an important part of the youth leadership in the communities. The general meeting of Netzer madrichim always takes place in November at the same time as the training. At this meeting, the madrichim decide on their own rules and vote on how things should be run in the coming year. We are pleased to be able to report that, for the first time, over 40 people have registered for the seminar.

We're expecting an exciting time, and are already keenly looking forward to the winter machane in the rolling hills of the Bergisches Land near Cologne.

Konstantin Seidler
UpJ/Netzer





Tu bi'Shvat

The Talmud asks us: "Why does the tree have a New Year?" Rabbi Elazar answers in the name of Rabbi Oshaja: " Because at this point in time most of the rain has already fallen." And Rashi adds this and explains: "When most of the rain has fallen, then the trees bloom. The sap rises and the buds form to fruit." The Tosefta (addition to the Mishnah) adds and defines that every tree whose buds develop to fruit before Tu bi'Shvat are meant for the "tenth" of the previous year. The buds that develop after are meant for the "tenth" of the coming year. (Babylonian Talmud, section Rosh Hashanah 14a, Tosefta Shvi'it 7,2)

Before the Temple was destroyed, it was decided on Tu bi'Shvat which "tenth" and which first offerings were meant for the Cohanim and Levites as well as for Israel's army. Since the destruction of the Temple, it is traditional to eat fruit from Israel, to remind us that Israel is the land of the "seven fruits". And it is written, "The Eternal, your God, brings you to a beautiful land, a land with waterfalls and springs, which come from the plains and the mountains, a land with wheat and oats, with wine , figs and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey." (5. Moses 8, 7-8)

Deborah Tal-Rüttger



Dates | Thanks| Imprint

Dates:

Leynen-Seminar in Bad Sobernheim 26.02. – 28.02.2016
Michael Lawton und Debbie Tal-Rüttger offer anyone who is interested in reading from the Torah scroll, the possibility to learn to leyn.

We'll learn the Te'amim of the old German tradition.

Ability in reading Hebrew is required.

The number of participants is limited to 20.

Registration until January 1st 2016 address:

Debbie ivrit@gmx.net.

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