



# European Union for Progressive Judaism

June 2018 Newsletter

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## Receiving the Torah

When the Children of Israel stood at Mount Sinai waiting for Moses to return, they had no idea of what the future held or the impact it would have on their lives. Thousands of years later, on Shavuot, we celebrate the treasure that Moses received and we take the time to learn about it and share everything the Torah has brought to our lives as Jews and as human beings.

But Shavuot is about more than the day we were given the Ten Commandments. It's about the days it took for the ancient Israelites to travel from Egypt to the foot of Mount Sinai, the days between Pesach and Shavuot and the days of the harvest.

Shavuot is also one of the few holidays where the Torah reading focuses on the story of Jewish

women, namely Naomi and Ruth. We all know the words Ruth pledged to Naomi after refusing to abandon her: "Wherever you go, I will go... Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." (*Book of Ruth*, 1:16-17), making her the first "Jew by Choice" (unless you include the children of Israel when they chose to accept the Torah) and the ancestor of King David.

Shavuot has many nuances and many fitting stories on

which we build our narrative today. Our communities all celebrate this special holiday in their own ways, many through all-night learning and eating dairy, and some of them are mentioned here. – [Darryl Egnal](#)



## The Wandering Jew

**Chairman's Message:** Travel is great. Well, perhaps it's not always ideal, especially when you've been grounded, diverted and delayed – for days – over the course of three weeks by bad weather, strikes and some totally incomprehensible reasons. I am actually looking forward very much to a trip where all goes as planned!

Together with many of you, I am a fan of modern video and web conferencing technology, not least because it allows us to meet people without adding to our carbon footprint. But nothing surpasses actually coming together, meeting in one place, travelling there in the anticipation of meeting old friends and making new ones, of praying, learning, eating and laughing together.



The IMPJ Biennial, which you can read more about later in this newsletter, was a perfect and glorious time to do this. A fantastic opportunity to touch base with and be inspired and motivated by the vibrancy, the relevance and the diversity of the Progressive Movement in Israel.

For those not fluent in Hebrew, the international track is an ingenious addition that has made the wonderful IMPJ biennial atmosphere accessible to

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## Shavuot

### Torah, learning and fun

A very exciting Tikkun Leil Shavuot was organised at Beth Hillel Rome. One of the most popular events was the children's Hebrew calligraphy session, although this was not the only entertaining event for the youth.

After a tasty dairy community dinner, five speakers took the floor for the study session. Subjects included an interpretation of Shavuot according to Rabbi Elia Benamozegh, various Midrash accounts regarding the festival, and different perspectives on divine revelation, inheritance and social justice in the Torah.

It was a successful, well-attended celebration of Shavuot and everyone had a wonderful time. – **Fabio Benjamin Fantini**



### Shavuot, Torah and protests

"May 1968" was MJLF's theme for this year's Shavuot celebration, an all-night marathon ending with a *shaharit* service and French breakfast. After amusing recollections of what turned Paris upside down 50 years ago, some 250 participants enjoyed conference debates and quizzes that looked behind

the apparent contradictions between Torah Law and the 1968 revolutionary slogans, such as "It's forbidden to forbid" and "Live without pause and rejoice without constraint".

Four rabbis, two psychiatrists, a student rabbi and other speakers explored these questions from every angle, concluding that true freedom depends on a framework of rules and that Jewish laws calling for justice, fairness and fraternity are themselves revolutionary.

Daniel Sibony, psychoanalyst and author, spoke of the need for limits. Jean-Pierre Winter, psychoanalyst and author, joined Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur in exploring freedom and constraints. Juliette Wolf, philosophy graduate and Jewish studies student, led a Talmudic study session and Iris Ferreira, student rabbi at Leo Baeck College, explored freedom of belief within established institutions.

The evening included a press review and Israeli poetry of the period, a look back at Israel on its 20th birthday, and a study of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. – **Robert Ley**



(Clockwise from top left) Daniel Sibony, Jean-Pierre Winter, Iris Ferreira and Juliette Wolf



# Celebrating Shavuot and milestones

The Liberal Jewish Community of Hamburg (Liberale Jüdische Gemeinde Hamburg: LJGH) celebrated Shavuot this year with two other milestone events – the community's 13th year (a Bat Mitzvah!) and the 200th anniversary of the foundation of the Neue Israelitische



Templeverein (NIT).

Although NIT was actually formed on the last day of Chanukah in 1817, LJGH decided to make 2018 the 'Jubilee Year'. Since this was one of the pioneering efforts to establish Reform Judaism, the LJGH, established in 2004, sees itself as the direct successor and, in this indirect way, also one of the oldest Reform communities worldwide!

LJGH has more than 300 full members and some 200 members of the 'Supporters Circle'. It offers regular services, mostly led by Rabbi Dr Moshe Navon, who also speaks Russian and Hebrew, and a full programme of cultural and educational activities.

There is as yet no fixed home for the community, but many events take place in the restored former Jewish Girls School in Flora Neumann Strasse near Messe subway station. It is hoped soon to achieve greater stability in this respect. – **Rabbi Dr Walter Rothschild**

## Alyth members make Shavuot count

Every community has its own unique way of counting the Omer. Not in the blessing we recite, but in the way we show how many days and weeks have passed since Pesach, until we reach Shavuot.

Sitting in the congregation on a Friday night a number of years ago, Alyth member, Brenda Freedman, decided there was definitely a better way than putting sheaves of wheat in vase, which had been "the Alyth way" for the previous decade.

The result was a unique Omer Calendar, created by 40 community members of all ages, from rabbis to university students. Each person stitched a square or two with the Hebrew number for the relevant day on a background colour that showed the move from spring to summer, from Pesach to Shavuot.

The 49 squares were then sewn together and mounted on a moveable wooden frame. Beautiful as it was, there was still the question of how to count the days physically. David Baker, a co-creator of the calendar and a teacher of design and technology, came up with a 21st century solution. Using his newly-acquired laser printer, David created Perspex sheaves that attached to each day of the calendar magnetically.

From the end of Pesach until Shavuot, Alyth members gathered around their new calendar each day, grateful to members of the community who worked together to create such a unique and beautiful way for them to count the Omer.

– **Noeleen Cohen**



L-R: Ruth Weiner, Lynn Levy, Brenda Freedman, Ann Towse and Ros Black



Children of the community have fun counting the Omer

## Editor's Note

The theme for this year's IMPJ Biennial Conference, "Between Liberty and Social Responsibility", inspired some interesting and innovative sessions over the weekend. The International Track enabled representatives from all over the world to participate in meaningful discussion with Israelis around the chosen theme.

The weekend showed the strengths we share and the opportunities we create when Israel and rest of the Progressive Movement come together. This is one of the many positive outcomes of a Biennial.

Collaboration results in many new possibilities and one of the ideas discussed at the EUPJ Biennial in Prague has borne fruit and landed in the pages of our newsletter. Read the new column, *Rabbinical Ruminations*, to find out more.



### Please note:

As Europe basically shuts down in August, there will not be a newsletter during that month. If you want us to include your events or articles in the July issue, please send everything as soon as you can. The deadline is Monday July 16. The issue thereafter will be published just before Rosh Hashanah. The deadline for the September issue is Wednesday, August 22.

If anyone is interested in seeing more photos from the EUPJ Biennial Conference, or downloading some of the photos from the previous newsletter, please let me know via email.

Here's hoping that many more interesting and exciting concepts come alive due to our collaborations. – [Darryl Egnal \(newsletter@eupj.org\)](mailto:Darryl.Egnal@eupj.org)



## Chairman's Message cont...

everyone and has also allowed the IMPJ to include aspects of the ever-complex Israel-Diaspora relationship. In other words, see you in Israel on the first weekend in June 2020 at the next IMPJ Biennial.

On another subject, I would like to conclude by

thanking the EUPJ's rabbinic leadership for the important documents regarding recognised Batei Din and the conversion process, which you will also find included in this newsletter, and trust these clear guidelines will be of great help to our communities.

– [Sonja Guentner](#)

## Who's who at the EUPJ?

### Honorary Life Presidents

Leslie Bergman  
Ruth Cohen  
Jeffery Rose

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### Vice-President

Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein

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### European Beit Din

Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein, Chairman  
Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick, Convener

### EUPJ's European Union Office

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### Getting know your rabbis

We've introduced a new column to enable you to find out a little about the EUPJ rabbis who serve our communities. This is not a column for the *parsha* of the week or religious studies. It is a way to get to know the various rabbis across Europe.

The column was born in Prague in a discussion with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz, who felt it was time we all got to know our rabbinic leaders. As it was his idea, he has written the first column. If you have any new ideas, please feel free to share them with us.

### Rabbinic Ruminations

Among the informative and engaging conferences and workshops organised in Prague, the one that touched me the most was the Czech panel in which Rabbis Dr Andrew Goldstein and Dr Tom Kucera, Student Rabbi David Maxa and Jan Mülhstein presented. Their fascinating and moving personal testimonies demonstrated how the process of renewing Jewish tradition and creating new Progressive communities begins with our own particular Jewish journey.

During the Rabbinic Kallah, I had the opportunity to share my journey with colleague, Jeffrey Newman. He was curious to know how an American rabbi ended up working with Progressive Judaism in Europe.

Here is some of what I told him.

Of my 32 years in the rabbinate, 22 have been devoted to Progressive communities in France, Belgium and Spain. (I feel as though I also worked in Germany because I served the Hebrew Tabernacle in Manhattan, a Reform congregation largely composed of German refugees, for seven years.)

My first contact with the French Jewish community occurred in 1973, when I spent two weeks in Paris as the guest of a Jewish family. Upon entering the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, I decided to pursue graduate studies in French literature. One of the faculty members, Professor Robert Weiner, encouraged me to consider pursuing my rabbinic career in France. I graduated in 1986 and in 1989, I joined the MJLF in Paris as an Associate Rabbi.

Originally from New Rochelle, New York (a city established by Huguenot refugees from La Rochelle, France), I had always been attracted to Europe and often reflected on the fact that my ancestors lived many more centuries on the European Continent than on the North American one. I also believed that working to renew Jewish life in Europe after the Shoah was a sacred rabbinic task.

Working with European Jewry has been enriching. I have learned that there is more than one way (the American way) of being Jewish and practising



**“All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveller is unaware.” – Martin Buber**

Judaism. As an Ashkenazi Jew in France, I became fascinated with Sephardi Jewish culture and the manner in which Jews from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco were living out their Judaism within the context of a Reform synagogue.

Being an expatriate rabbi is a challenging and humbling experience. It allows us to maintain a critical distance with regard to our home culture and to that of our host country. Our learning curves are constantly changing as we adapt to new cultures, new languages and new Jewish community histories.

Today, I am currently working part time with three communities: since 2015, the Reform Community of Madrid and Bet Shalom of Catalonia, and since 2013, the Communauté Juive Libérale de Montpellier.

It is a great privilege to be participating in the renaissance of Jewish life in Spain and in the development of Progressive Judaism. – **Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz**, [stephenb110@aol.com](mailto:stephenb110@aol.com)



# Recognised Batei Din in Europe

The [European Rabbinic Assembly of the EUPJ](#) (ERA) is the voice of the Progressive rabbis in Europe. Its role is to support our rabbis and to hold them and our Batei Din to the highest professional and ethical standards.

In view of this role, we expect that the standards and processes for conversion throughout our synagogues will build on our shared trust and principles so that people converted in any of our synagogues will be acceptable in any other of our communities – and they will also be able to make Aliyah.

We are reaching out to you now in order to explain and clarify the European-wide standards so that conversion within our movement will be seen as welcoming, acceptable and accepted. The trust that works within the EUPJ communities is particularly valued in the work of our Batei Din and how we resolve issues of status. ERA now has oversight and authority to make sure this trust continues to be merited across the Batei Din.

We would like to remind you that there are national and regional Progressive Batei Din working across Europe, who are part of the EUPJ family. These are listed below.

Under the auspices of the ERA, the territories of each Beit Din have been defined currently as described below. The European Beit Din (EBD) may only step in where there is no recognised Beit Din as yet in the country, or where it is clear that a country's Beit Din is not functioning according to our agreed standards.

While the regional and national Batei Din are the responsibility of their constituent Rabbinic Assemblies, the EBD works on the authority of the ERA so as to have standing across Europe.

For the avoidance of any doubt, ERA and on their advice, the EUPJ, have agreed that the Progressive Batei Din listed at the foot of this letter are the only Batei Din of Progressive Judaism that we recognise in Europe.

We are aware of 'pop up' Batei Din calling themselves Progressive Batei Din, and that some people are being drawn to them – usually via the internet – and in good faith, are receiving certificates of conversion that are not able to be recognised according to our ERA/EUPJ standards. Hence, they are not acceptable for membership of our EUPJ communities.

Among the reasons are the following: these certificates are also not acceptable to the Israeli

authorities should the person want to make Aliyah and, frequently, there is very little connection with a community or with the Jewish people and often minimal learning.

We know that the individuals so "converted" might be sincere and not realise the consequences of seeking conversion outside of our recognised Batei

Din. Should such an individual approach your community for membership, you should make them aware of their situation and also inform them that the EBD is happy to talk to them and help them to validate their conversion, which will then have acceptance throughout the Progressive world.



If you have any queries, please [contact us](#).

**Rabbi Dr René Pferzel, Chairman of ERA and Rabbinic Adviser to the EUPJ; Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein, Chairman of European Beit Din and Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick, Convener of European Beit Din**

## Conversion to Judaism: Where to go?

If you know of anyone who is interested in converting to Judaism, this is the information they will need.

The first step is to talk to the local rabbi. A list of the various congregations, which are members of the European Union for Progressive in Judaism (EUPJ), can be found [here](#).

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that only conversions undertaken under the auspices of an EUPJ-recognised Rabbi and Beit Din (Rabbinic Court) will allow interested parties to apply for full membership to a EUPJ community and to make Aliyah to Israel.

### The Progressive European Batei Din currently recognised by ERA and the EUPJ

- The Beit Din of Liberal Judaism (UK, Denmark, Ireland, Beit HaChidush, NL)
- The Beit Din of Reform Judaism (UK)
- The Allgemeine Beit Din (Germany)
- The Beth Din of the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism (The Netherlands)
- Kerem, the Beit Din of the French and Francophone Communities (France, Luxembourg, Belgium and French-speaking Switzerland)
- The Beit Din of the Swiss-German and Austrian Progressive communities (German-speaking Switzerland and Austria)

For all other areas not covered above, only the European Beit Din has recognised jurisdiction.

# Between Liberty and Social Responsibility

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) held its 23rd biennial conference at the beginning of June at Shefayim Convention Center near Herzliya. This is the first time that, because the number of delegates on the International Track was so high, more than a few sessions in English were warranted.

In the words of Rabbi Gilad Kariv, IMPJ President and CEO, it was “an incredibly inspiring and successful *veida* (conference). With over 80 participants from Australia, South Africa, Germany, the Czech Republic, Brazil, Hungary, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, this was truly a level of representation, involvement and integration that surpassed all of our expectations,” he said.

A large part of the IMPJ's effort in the International Track was implemented in conjunction with the organisation's DOMIM programme. [DOMIM-aLike](#), the IMPJ's Israel-Diaspora relations project, which was established together with the Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. Its aim is to foster partnerships between Reform and Progressive congregations in Israel and around the world.

The International Track opened with a morning tour of Beit Hatfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. In the afternoon, the opening plenary could be enjoyed by all as an interpreter had been hired to translate all the speeches – and even the Hebrew songs.

Rabbi Lea Mühlstein, Rabbi of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue and Chairman of Arzenu, delivered the opening remarks during the plenary. You can read part of her speech below.

The Kabbalat Service took place outside in the beautiful garden setting and after dinner, a musical evening with dancing was enjoyed by everyone from the youngest to the oldest. Over the weekend, sessions in English included a musical journey with Israeli and American musicians; discussions about Tikkun Olam, an overview of Jewish-Arab co-existence through the lens of the Israeli health system, meetings with leaders in the Israeli Reform

Movement, a discussion on Israel-Diaspora relations with our own Sonja Guentner as one of the panellists, and much more.

The closing plenary ended two wonderful days of camaraderie, discussion, prayer and new relationships and the weekend came to a close with an enthusiastic, fun and vibrant Havdalah service run by the youth.



Part of the European delegation. L-R: Judith Bergmann and Student Rabbi David Maxa from Prague, Student Rabbi Anita Kantor from Budapest and Sonja Guentner from Germany

Rabbi Kariv acknowledged the delegations sent by Arzenu, ARZA, ARZA Canada, ARZA Australia, the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), and Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ),

“We are grateful to all who participated in our International Track, and we hope that you engage with your communities in what you have learned upon your return. This would not be possible without all of your dedication and commitment to Reform and Progressive Judaism in Israel. We look forward to seeing you at the 24th IMPJ Biennial *Veida* in June 2020!” Kariv said. – [Darryl Egnal](#)



Israel-Diaspora relations panel. L-R: Carole Sterling, Rabbi Nir Barkin, Rabbi Stacey Blank, Sonja Guentner, Rabbi Talia Avnon-Benveniste and Steve Denenberg



## From dreams to reality

In the past few weeks, I have often thought about my first veida – not just because I was preparing for my trip and have so many fond memories of a wonderful Shabbat here in Shefayim, but also as I was reflecting on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel.

The theme 10 years ago was taken from Psalm 126, which we recite before Birkat Hamazon on Shabbat: “We were like dreamers” or, as the ambivalence of the Biblical Hebrew tenses allows us to translate into English, “We shall be like dreamers”.

Theodor Herzl taught this to Zionists from the get go: we must be dreamers. If we stop dreaming, we will give up hope: hope for a pluralistic Israel where our way of being Jewish is accepted as equal alongside other expressions of Judaism, hope for an Israel where the values we believe in are defended by the government rather than threatened, hope for an Israel at peace with her neighbours, hope for an Israel that stands firm to the commitments expressed in the Declaration of Independence that “the State of Israel will promote the development of the country for all its inhabitants based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace as taught by the Hebrew prophets”, hope for an Israel that will truly be a light unto the nations. Indeed, we must be dreamers.

But as my teacher, Rabbi Michael Marmur pointed out a few years ago, a crucial aspect of a dream is that at the end we wake up. And so, as we celebrate 70 years of the State of Israel, as committed Zionists, we must do more than dream. It is thus most fitting that the theme of this year’s veida challenges us to reflect with greater maturity on that delicate balance of freedom and responsibility.

Our tradition teaches us that freedom and responsibility cannot be separated. The exodus from Egypt and our delivery from slavery to freedom is inseparable from the giving of Torah. Judaism teaches us that we gain ‘freedom to’ not ‘freedom from’. Being free does not mean we are freed from any responsibility; quite the opposite, as *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) reminds us, “It is not required of you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”



**Rabbi Lea Mühlstein**

I could not think of a better rallying call for the Reform Zionist of the 21st century. As the international chair of Arzenu, the political party that represents the interests of Reform Jews in the Zionist National Institutions, namely the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency and Keren Kayemet LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, my role is to remind Jews both in Israel and around the world that we all count as individuals.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel put this perfectly: “Israel is a personal challenge, a personal religious issue. It is a call to every one of us as an

individual, a call which one cannot answer vicariously... The ultimate meaning of the State of Israel must be seen in terms of the vision of the prophets: the redemption of all... The religious duty of the Jew is to participate in the process of continuous redemption, in seeing that justice prevails over power, that awareness of God penetrates human understanding.”

Friends, by living here, living Judaism not just in synagogue, but also in the way that you contribute to society, you have the power to shape the Israel we dream of, which can live up to the vision of our prophets.

It is a mighty task that still lies ahead of us, as Reform Jews and as human beings committed to values of justice and peace, but this is all part of the responsibility that goes hand-in-hand with the freedom of having our very own state. You are not



**WUPJ, EUPJ and IMPJ members. L-R: Reuven Marko, IMPJ Chair; Carole Sterling, WUPJ Chair; Sonja Guentner, EUPJ Chair; Yair Lootsteen, Kol Haneshama Board Member; Daniel Chinn, Kol Haneshama Chair; Suzanne Canon, Kol Haneshama; Rabbi Daniel Frelander, WUPJ President and Eyal Ronder, WUPJ Vice President: Operations (Photo: Darryl Egnal)**



# Hana Greenfield Memorial Swim

Over the past 40 years, Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue (NPLS) has developed close links with the town of Kolin, located 60km east of Prague. Before the Shoah, the town had a thriving Jewish population. NPLS has been using one of the Torah Scrolls from the town since receiving it on loan from Westminster Synagogue.



On Sunday August 26 this year, members of NPLS, along with Jews from other communities and residents of Kolin, will participate in the Hana Greenfield Memorial Swim in the Labe (Elbe) River, which runs through the town.

The residents of Kolín used to swim regularly in the river, but in the mid-1930s industrialisation and pollution put a stop to this. However, in the past 20 years, the river has undergone a transformation and it is again sufficiently clean for swans, fishermen and swimmers. The Memorial Swim will therefore be the first time that residents from the town will have swum in the river for more than 80 years.

When I went to do research for the swim last year, the library happened to have a series of photos on display in the window of people swimming in the river at Kolin. This is how we found out that this used to be a regular pastime for many people from the town.

The first photo is dated 1923 and was taken by Jan Kubrt. The second and most recent photo that the library had was from 1933. We believe (based on research done by the museum researchers in Kolin, who have also been amazing in all the work they have done researching the history of the Jewish community from the town) that 1933 was the last year that people from Kolin swam in the river.

The Memorial Swim is named after one of the few Holocaust survivors from the town. Hana Greenfield learned to swim in the river as a child along with her Jewish and non-Jewish friends and neighbours. In 1942, along with the other Jews from the town and its surrounding areas, she was deported to Terezin, then to Auschwitz and finally to Bergen-Belsen.

This swim is an opportunity for Jews and non-Jews to swim together again in Kolín.

For more information and to enter the swim, please go to [Hana Greenfield Memorial Swim](#). Discounted accommodation has been reserved at the Hotel Theresia in Kolín. To reserve a room, [send an email](#) to the hotel and mention you're with the Drapkin/Goldstein party.

The weekend's activities will start on the Friday evening with an Erev Shabbat Service in the Synagogue. For more details, please [contact me](#) before July 20. – Jane Drapkin. Photos courtesy of Kolin library.



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## An experience of a lifetime

*Shorashim-Israel with Israelis* allows all applicants to customise their Birthright Israel adventures and travel with Israelis for the entire experience. Spread the word so people [eligible](#) for Birthright Israel complete early [sign up](#) for a journey with [Shorashim!](#)

## EUPJ Newsletter Deadlines

Please note: These dates are subject to change.

MONTH	COPY/PHOTOS	PUBLISH
July/August	Mon 16/07/2018	Tue 31/07/2018
September	Wed 22/08/2018	Thu 06/09/2018
October	Mon 08/10/2018	Thu 18/10/2018
November	Wed 14/11/2018	Thu 29/11/2018
Dec/Jan	Wed 18/12/2018	Thu 27/03/2019

**Please Note:** While every effort is made to provide accurate information and correct spellings of names in this newsletter, sometimes gremlins step in and mistakes appear. This is not intentional and we apologise in advance if we have offended or upset anyone.

## France

### Arzenu partners with Israel Bonds

Israel Bonds hosted a conference with Arzenu France to a full house on July 4. The theme of the conference was "Israel in the world economy".

According to the two French-Israeli specialists, Dan Catarivas and Daniel Haber, Israel today finds itself strategically placed at the cutting edge of hi-tech research and development, attracting investments into a unique ecosystem from dynamic Asian countries large and small, and building vital relationships for the future.

They said while UN voting patterns show little change so far, politics should follow the economics, with the biggest challenge being to maintain the exceptional US relationship as sensitive business with China continues to grow. – [Robert Ley](#)



### Rabbi receives highest French honour



MJLF's Rabbi Yann Boissière has been awarded the National Order of Merit (*l'Ordre National du Mérite*) on the recommendation of France's Interior Minister.

Rabbi Boissière's award recognises 37 years of service at MJLF as a religious and cultural association, and his contribution to French society through "Voices of Peace" (*Les Voix de la Paix*).

He created "Voices of Peace" to promote inter-convictional dialogue and mutual understanding through conferences, human resource activities in companies and other activities, including prison visits. – [Robert Ley](#)



## Germany

### Figure of Reconciliation award

Rabbi Dr Walter Homolka, Rector of Abraham Geiger College in Potsdam, was honoured as "Figure of Reconciliation 2017" by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews on June 10. The ceremony took place in Warsaw, Poland.

Every two years, the honorary title is presented by the Council to individuals from abroad who have significantly contributed to Christian-Jewish dialogue and better mutual understanding of Christians and Jews, especially in Poland.

In their congratulatory letter, the EUPJ leadership recognised that Rabbi Homolka has had a "hugely positive impact in promoting Jewish-Christian understanding and harmony in Central Europe and this has reflected well on Progressive Judaism."

The Polish translation of Rabbi Homolka's book, *Jesus Reclaimed. Jewish Perspectives on the Nazarene*, (2015) will be launched later this summer. – [Hartmut Bomhoff](#). Photo: © Jona Olender



**Rabbi Dr Walter Homolka with the leadership of the Rada (L-R) Secretary General Marta Titaniec, Prof Stanislaw Krajewski, Barbara Sulek-Kowalska and Rabbi Stas Wojciechowicz**



## Germany

### Investiture of Cantor Svetlana Kundish

Svetlana Kundish was invested as a cantor by Cantor Professor Eliyahu Schleifer at Abraham Geiger College on June 14. She was presented to him by the new director of the College's cantorial programme, Cantor Isidoro Abramowicz.

The investiture took place at Berlin's Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue. Among the many guests of honour were Sonja Guentner, EUPJ



**Cantors Svetlana Kundish and Professor Eliyahu Schleifer**

Chairman, and Abraham Lehrer, Vice President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

Kundish was born in the Ukraine and later moving to Israel and Austria. She performs a variety of Jewish music and is proud of the fact that she's continuing her great-grandfather's legacy.

"A circle has closed", she said. "Just like my great-grandfather, I stand today on a bimah and lead prayers in the synagogue, and like my grandparents, I sing Yiddish songs."

The soprano serves as cantor of the Jewish Community of Braunschweig and is the first woman



**Cantors Isidoro Abramowicz and Svetlana Kundish**



**Cantors Isidoro Abramowicz and Svetlana Kundish with their colleagues**

in her profession to do so in the German state of Lower Saxony. – **Hartmut Bomhoff. Photo: © Tobias Barniske**

## The Netherlands

### Ambassador visits Jewish Twente



**L-R: Angelique Karnebeck, Bert Oude Engberink and Ambassador Dr Heidemaria Gürer**

The Austrian Ambassador to the Netherlands, Dr Heidemaria Gürer, visited the LJG Twente's synagogue on June 18. She was officially welcomed by Bert Oude Engberink, LJG Twente President, and Angelique Karnebeck, who represented the Mayor of Haaksbergen, the town in which the LJG synagogue is situated.

Also present were the President of the Orthodox community in Twente and the Chairman of the Synagogue Enschede Foundation. Gifts were exchanged and the Ambassador and her staff enjoyed dinner with the LJG Twente Board and cantors at a local restaurant. – **Wilhelmina Hein. Photos: Rob Waaker**

## Hungary

### Budapest's Judafest

Budapest's living Judaism and Jewish culture were on display during the *Judafest* (Jewish festival) from June 7 to 10.

There were open synagogues from Thursday to Sunday, Jewish film screenings and city walks through Jewish Budapest. On Sunday, a full-day street festival took place on the "very Jewish" Kazinczy Street.

*Judafest* has taken place every June for the past decade. It includes concerts, gourmet food and an open market.

"We rarely talk about Jewish joy, but in our music, celebrations and customs, we have a lot of positive, beautiful and uplifting moments," said Zsuzsa Fritz, Director of the festival and the Director of the Jewish



**Rabbis Ferenc Raj and Zoltan Radnoti at the Bet Orim booth**

cultural Bálint House. "We tend to forget about these moments, but I find it important to show them to those who seek cultural connections to their environment.

"That is why it is a great pleasure for us that this year, *Judafest* has not only welcomed a great



**Rabbi Ferenc Raj speaks about gourmet Jewish food**

number of representatives of Hungarian Jewry, but thousands of domestic and foreign visitors," she added.

The Bet Orim Reform Jewish Community was represented in a separate booth. *Judafest* organisers invited our community to organise an open Kabbalat Shabbat within the festival. Nearly 40 people participated with the members of Bet Orim.

The service was led by Rabbi Ferenc Raj and Cantor Flora Polnauer. Our renewed prayer book was presented, and our guests had the opportunity to learn about the traditional and innovative prayers and to sing with the egalitarian, open-minded community. – **Miklós Gárdos**

## Poland

### Beit Polska is moving

Beit Polska, founded in 1995 to provide communities throughout Poland to help Poles in their quest to learn about and practise Judaism, is moving to the centre of Warsaw, minutes away from the Warsaw central train station and all the major hotels and shopping areas.

Last month, Shavuot services were held at the new facility on Koszykowa 82B, a location that is very convenient for everyone. Volunteers are helping to prepare their new home by painting, doing maintenance and freshening the premises.

This momentous move was a long time coming and the excitement is plain to see. Notices about a formal dedication will be forthcoming as soon as we can catch our breath!

On the horizon, we are preparing to invite the first

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**Rabbi Dr Walter Rothschild leading services**



## Poland

### Beit Polska is moving cont...

Polish-born rabbis in over 70 years to lead our communities full-time. We are working with two rabbinical students, Dr Menachem Mirski, who writes a weekly Torah commentary, and Mati Kirschenbaum, who is in his fourth year at Leo Baeck College in London. This autumn, we hope to add a third rabbinic student to the mix, who will be studying at HUC in Jerusalem.

For now, we enjoy the strong and inspirational visits of Rabbi Dr Walter Rothschild, who travels from Berlin and offers tireless support to our communities. We are hoping to increase his visits from once a month to twice a month, if possible.

Our educational activities, Shabbat worship and community outreach programmes continue with renewed vigour despite the difficulties we face.

The project to translate Rabbi Rothschild's book, "The Honey and The Sting", has a new cover and about one-third of the book is complete.

Each week on [our blog](#), you can read two excellent commentaries in Polish and English by Menachem Mirski and Mati Kirschenbaum. This

year, there is an active use of video conferencing for various classes and meetings.

Beit Polska's flagship congregation, Beit Warszawa, was founded in 1995 by Holocaust survivor, Severyn Ashkenazy, and philanthropist, Princess Irina Sayn-Wittgenstein. Now, with the help of the WUPJ, EUPJ and Friends of Jewish Renewal in Poland, a vibrant and increasingly independent country-wide movement is developing. It really is a miracle! We are raising a new generation of Progressive Jews in Poland. Please feel free to visit at any time. – **Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak and Marek Jezowski**

**Dr Menachem Mirski teaching on Shavuot**



## Switzerland

### Swiss Jews award Dialogue Prize

The two national Jewish umbrella organisations, Platform of Liberal Jews Switzerland (PLJS) and the traditional/Orthodox Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) recently awarded the first "Dialogue Prize of the Swiss Jews" to honour four Swiss personalities for their longstanding commitment in interreligious dialogue.

Rabbi Noam Hertig of the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zurich (ICZ) and Imam Muris Begovic of the Bosnian Mosque at the outskirts of Zurich received this prize for the German part of Switzerland. Honourees for the French part were Eric Ackermann, Cantor at the Grande Beth Yaacov Synagogue Geneva and President of the Platform

for Interreligious Dialogue Geneva (PFIR Genève), and former Deacon Maurice Gardiol, Board Member of PFIR Genève.

The Dialogue Prize is an initiative conceived by the two Swiss Jewish umbrella organisations (SIG Orthodox and PLJS liberal) who decided to award a prize that emphasised not only our efforts in interreligious dialogue, but also to demonstrate our willingness to build

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L-R: Herbert Winter (SIG President), Rabbi Noam Hertig, Imam Muris Begovic, Sabine Simkhovitch-Dreyfus (SIG Vice-President), Eric Ackermann (PFIR Genève), Maurice Gardiol (PFIR Genève) and Jean-Marc Brunschwig (PLJS Joint President)

## Switzerland

### Swiss Jews award Dialogue Prize cont...

bridges between religions.

Swiss President Alain Berset attended the ceremony, which included dozens of national council representatives, many ambassadors and religious representatives.

In his speech, President Berset emphasised the importance of dialogue, stating that Switzerland is a country of minorities and continuous dialogue is our strength.

A short movie was shown during the event in order to focus on the leadership and dialogue project known as “[Likrat](#)”. In this project, Jewish youths are invited to school classes to speak about Judaism. Through dealing with another religion and being confronted with different values and practices, understanding and tolerance for Judaism and other minorities is achieved. Likrat is organised and co-ordinated by the SIG.

In her laudation, National Council Member, Lisa Mazzone, emphasised the importance of building bridges and getting to know the other.

In his closing speech, Jean-Marc Brunschwig, Joint President PLJS, pointed out that the prize given out at this first award event resembled an iceberg. He said it shows the awareness of an existing problem, but there is still much work to be done at the base, the hidden part.

The plan for the new Dialogue Prize is to present it twice or three times a year.

Since this event coincided with Ramadan and a large number of our guests were Muslim, a



Guests socialising before *Iftar* (breaking the fast) after the award ceremony

traditional *Iftar* (breaking the fast) was organised. After the meal, our guests used the occasion for... dialogue.

The Orthodox and Liberal umbrella organisations in Geneva have agreed to co-operate on a political level while staying independent within their streams of Judaism. Another example of the co-operation between the two is the biennial further education programme, “Auschwitz”, for school-teachers. This includes a day in Auschwitz itself and a day at the College of Education a week later where the participants exchange ideas about how to bring the topic of the Shoah into the classrooms. – [Susi Saitowitz](#)

## United Kingdom

### Alyth welcomes Muslim neighbours

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Alyth Synagogue members have, for the past five years, invited their Muslim neighbours to join them for *Iftar*, a fast-breaking meal with learning and prayers at the synagogue.

The first event was held under the leadership of Rabbi Maurice Michaels, who heads Alyth's Interfaith Group, and the *Big Iftar*, led by Julie Siddiqi. Most of the Muslim guests were involved in national efforts to build bridges between communities.

On May 30, leaders and members of the Islamic Centre at the Hippodrome, Golders Green, North Finchley Mosque, Cricklewood Mosque, Hendon Mosque, the Ismaili Jamat in East Finchley and the Albanian Muslim community who meet in Frognal, were among the 160 Jews and Muslims who came to Alyth for the *Iftar*.

Muslims and Jews learned together about heroes and heroines in the other's traditions and the values they represent. They learned in different groups, each headed by a Muslim and a Jewish educator: Rabbi Hannah Kingston and Remona Aly, Guardian



Journalist and BBC Broadcaster; Rabbi Mark Goldsmith and Sultan Ahmed, Leader of Islamic Relief; and Samantha Brunner, Alyth Youth and Education Head, and Ismaili youth leader and educator, Nadim Pabani.

Simultaneously, more than 30 Muslim guests attended an explanatory Ma'ariv evening Jewish prayer led by Michael Simon, Alyth Shaliach Tzibbur (prayer leader). [Read the full article and watch the video.](#)



## Gloucestershire community celebrates



Several local mayors and dignitaries including Liberal Judaism chair Simon Benscher, helped to celebrate 10 years of the Gloucestershire Liberal Jewish Community (GLJC) at a special anniversary service.

Led by Rabbi Anna Gerrard, almost the entire community attended the Shabbat service. The ceremony also honoured those who have been involved since the community's inception and who have contributed significantly to the growth and success of Liberal Judaism in the area.

Simon Benscher

## Peterborough joins Taste Ramadan

Members of Peterborough Liberal Jewish Community also shared an *Iftar* (breaking the fast) meal with local Muslims at the UKIM Masjid Khadijah Islamic Centre as part of the "Taste Ramadan" initiative.

Di Nicholas, Vivienne Fleet and Johnny Richardson took part in the meal, which is eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan – the religion's month-long period of fasting, prayer, reflection and good deeds.

"Taste Ramadan" is a national project to let people of other faiths and those who are secular to better understand the meaning of the Muslim holy period through experiencing it.

"This was a fantastic experience and opportunity to learn all about the Muslim faith in good company, and break the fast with delicious food provided by our friends at the mosque," Di said. "Events such as this are vital in creating dialogue between our communities."



## Kingston faith communities unite

Members of Kingston Liberal Synagogue are working with other local faith communities to sponsor refugee families as part of the Government's "Community Sponsorship" scheme.



The group has registered with the Charity Commission as Kingston Community Refugee Sponsorship (KCRS) and will shortly be seeking Home Office approval to bring a vulnerable refugee family to the area.

A launch event held by KCRS to publicise its work and invite others to take part was attended by the new Mayor of Kingston, Councillor Thay Thayalan, and his deputy, Councillor Olivia Boulton, with the Mayor pledging his personal support. [Read the full article.](#)

(L-R): Reverend Sandy Cragg, All Saints Church; Professor Vince Daly, Kingston Liberal Synagogue; Councillor Thay Thayalan, Mayor of Kingston; and Councillor Olivia Boulton, Deputy Mayor of Kingston

## Progressive women leading the way!

The second Wilkenfeld International Women's Leadership Seminar was held at the end of May at Beit Shmuel in Jerusalem.

The Wilkenfeld International Women's Leadership Seminar, led in partnership with the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), is a leadership training programme for women in Progressive/Reform congregations around the world who have been identified as potential emerging leaders.

This year, 21 participants from 15 countries, including four from Europe (the UK, Italy and Spain), representing a variety of the WUPJ regions, spent three days in the Holy City learning, sharing and growing together.



## WUPJ releases annual report

The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) recently launched its annual report for 2017. The report contains highlights of the WUPJ's work worldwide and all that was achieved over the past year.

The report's opening message from Carole Sterling, Chair, and Rabbi Daniel Freeland, President, states: "Around the world, we continue to advance and expand our impact, providing frameworks for meaningful Reform Jewish life wherever Jews choose to live. During 2017, we began a multi-year effort to expand and re-energise our youth, young adult, and camping programmes.

"When we come together to share and pray, from the smallest community to the largest, the strength of our voices is powerful.



We thank you for your support and partnership in this sacred work." [Read the full report](#) to find out the full impact of the WUPJ.



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