



ZACHARIAS FRANKEL
COLLEGE

NEWSLETTER

DEAR FRIENDS,

I'm still flying high from my recent visit to the Zacharias Frankel College at the University of Potsdam, and an extraordinary gathering of international scholars to honor the 80th anniversary of the rabbinic ordination of the first woman as Rabbi, Regina Jonas, followed by a delightful and constructive visit with the Masorti community of Great Britain. Each of these tells a bit of the magical story of our new rabbinical school. Let me elucidate:

I arrived in Berlin to meet with the rest of the School Administration, our students, and the illustrious faculty. The school has now enrolled its second class, a talented and promising cohort of 3 rabbinic scholars eager to serve the Jewish people. They come from London, England, Bogota, Columbia and Sydney, Australia (by way of Tel Aviv). This international contingent joins our upperclass student, Nizan Stein Kokin, who is on track to be ordained in the first Masorti/Conservative ordination ceremony in Europe since the Shoah. Both in our one-on-one meetings and our group shiur, I was impressed by their intelligence, text skills, love of mitzvot and humanity. Later I enjoyed the opportunity to dine with some of our fine faculty, Rabbi Dr Joel Rembaum, Professor Shani Tzoref, and Professor Jonathan Schorsch, as well as our Beit Midrash coordinator, Rabbi Nils Ederberg. Their commitment to our students was inspiring.

The two day conference honoring Rabbi Regina Jonas partook of multiple miracles: celebrating a woman ahead of her time, rejoicing that the times are catching up with her vision of a rabbinate open to any talented and ethical Jew, regardless of gender or orientation, a room full of superb scholars from Europe, Israel and the USA, and lively conversations among colleagues and friends, old and new. Potsdam has created a vibrant and fertile academic culture which will continue to shine a light that benefits us all.



Rabbi Brad Artson, Rabbi Gesa Ederberg, guest student Nicolas Reck from Argentina, student Josh Weiner and student Nizan Stein Kokin
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And my week was made complete by sharing a wonderful Shabbat and weekend with the Masorti communities of England. I had the pleasure of teaching at New North London Synagogue, whose Senior Rabbi, Jonathan Wittenberg inspires an open, traditional, and welcoming Judaism for all ages. On Friday night I had the chance to teach some young leaders in his lovely home, and on Shabbat afternoon met in the home of Masorti Olami President Gillian Kaplan's home with the leadership of Masorti. Saturday evening we held a second session with another group of Masorti leaders, and then on Sunday morning, Rabbi Oliver Joseph escorted me to teach the NOAM leadership. What a dynamic and engaged group of young Jews — I know that our future is in good hands.

And I flew home to Los Angeles marveling that the miracle has been launched: a rabbinical school in Europe, training Masorti/Conservative rabbis for the European Jewish resurgence that we all await, and to which we can all contribute. Surely this is the hand of the Holy One, and we all have cause to rejoice.

Happy Hanukkah!

NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ZACHARIAS FRANKEL COLLEGE

We opened the semester the day after Simchat Torah with intensive Welcome Days full of learning, davening and eating. Our director of congregational proficiency, Rabbi Gesa Ederberg, started a conversation with the students about the different roles of a rabbi envisioning the

journey for each student towards a unique and fulfilling rabbinate.

We are very grateful to Dr. Anne Brenker, Chancellor of the Abraham Geiger Kolleg and Martin Kujawa, Office Manager Rabbinic Program, for navigating us and the students through academic and administrative procedures.

The students also met representatives of Masorti

Germany in order to learn more about the place of ZFC in the German-Jewish landscape.

During Shabbat Bereshit we were joined by faculty members who gave engaging Shiurim about different aspects of "beginnings". Halfway into the semester we are happy to see the commitment and enthusiasm unfolding in our Rabbinical School!



MEET OUR NEW STUDENTS: JOSH WEINER, ANDRÉS BRUCKNER AND SHMUEL SLATER



Josh Weiner © Tobias Barniske



Andrés Bruckner © Tobias Barniske



Shmuel Slater © Tobias Barniske

SOCIAL ACTION AND TALMUD TORAH

I was born in Jerusalem and grew up in London. After high school, I came back to Israel, lived in Kibbutz Ketura and served in the army, combining combat service in an infantry unit and community work in a homeless kids' shelter in Haifa. I studied Social Work at Hebrew University, helped run a Refugee Rights Center in Jerusalem, ran Parshat Shavua sessions for the mentally ill, did rehabilitation work with male human trafficking victims, and travelled to Ethiopia, Bulgaria, Egypt, Iceland and Kosovo. I've always loved learning and teaching Torah, and think that the world needs more rabbis. I'm excited to be in the first year of a new institution, and hope to combine in-depth study with useful community work. *By Josh Weiner*

COME TO STUDY WITH US IN BERLIN

I come from Bogotá, Colombia. After looking in the US, France and Israel, the moment I discovered the newly founded Zacharias Frankel College I knew, I wanted to be in. The important element of being a Frankel Student is that it gives you the opportunity to be in the amazing city of Berlin, to enjoy a whole range of Jewish European experiences, while acquiring the necessary skills to become a rabbi. Besides, studying is tuition-free and there is a chance of getting a scholarship that helps you with your life expenses. If you want to become a Masorti Rabbi, greatly versed in Jewish texts, to have a profound Jewish European experience and the chance to learn German, this is, without doubt the place for you. *By Andrés Bruckner*

A PERSONAL JOURNEY FROM DOWN UNDER

I was born and raised in Melbourne, Australia to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. When I was a teenager, getting to know my father's family in the US connected me to my roots. I quickly began teaching myself Hebrew, customs and traditions. After joining a community and a youth movement, I spent my first year in Israel and drenched myself in deeper Jewish learning and quickly recognized that Israel was a place I wanted to call home. During that year, I also helped lead a children's summer camp in Germany where another love began to fester. After returning to Australia, alongside politics and philosophy, I began studying German and German culture. Two days after completing my degree I made Aliyah, began life on Kibbutz and joined the IDF. During one of my many visits to Berlin, I went to the Oranienburger Straße synagogue for Rosh HaShanah where I learned about the new Masorti rabbinical school starting in Berlin. The idea of being able to make Judaism such an intense, lifelong pursuit and to mix it with my attraction towards German culture brought me to a significant turning point in my life. Frankel drew me in strongly as I was becoming more and more involved in the Masorti world – a movement that valued Jewish life and took its values very seriously whilst enjoying the struggle to face modernity and fearlessly take Judaism into the modern period. I see being part of Frankel as an opportunity to delve into the culture I love and dedicate my life to helping sustain and nurture it. *By Shmuel Slater*



Dr. Shani Tzoref is currently Professor of Bible and Biblical Exegesis at the School of Jewish Theology at the University of Potsdam. She is an acclaimed specialist in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Dr. Tzoref's academic awards include a Fulbright Fellowship (1994), and a Rothschild Fellowship (2006) at Hebrew University.

WHAT IS (MY) CHANUKA – מאי חנוכה – (BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SHABBAT 21B)

The Talmud's question reverberates over the centuries, with a vast range of responses. The Festival of Light(s) has alternately been an occasion to celebrate military prowess or the power of the spirit over physical might; to call for ecumenical religious freedom or for religious or nationalist triumphalism; to stand for individualism or conformity.

For me at this juncture, in my first year on the faculty of the School of Jewish Theology, My Chanuka seems to be about the very enterprise of the construction of religious meaning. In the context of our commitment to the re-dedication of Jewish intellectual and spiritual institutions and communities in Europe, I have been thinking especially about the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel as reflected in Chanuka narratives and practice.

The earliest extant textual sources for Chanuka come from the Books of the Maccabees, written during the Second Temple era. The First Book of Maccabees reads as an official state-sponsored account of the heroism of the Maccabees, glorifying the founding figures of the Hasmonean dynasty. Second Maccabees tells the same story, but with a different emphasis.

A product of the Diaspora, repackaged in Judea for redistribution in the Diaspora, this dramatic work focuses on the nation rather than the Maccabees, and emphasizes divine retribution and salvation rather than Hasmonean achievement. The two books also differ in their respective portrayal of Gentiles. First Maccabees tends to vilify all Gentiles, and highlights Gentile defilement, both ritual and symbolic, from which the Temple had to be purified: "Now that the Jews had removed the shame which the Gentiles had brought, they held a great celebration." (1 Macc 5:58). Second Maccabees tends to blame the conflict on wicked individuals or factions; there is a greater sense of the significance of personal responsibility, choice, and action, beyond simple national-religious-ethnic loyalty.

It is striking that the religious and spiritual significance of reclaiming the Temple becomes muted in the nationalist narrative of First Maccabees, and amplified in the account that is addressed to a Diaspora audience. This presents a model of Israel and Diaspora self-understanding and interaction with resonances for today.

Neither First nor Second Maccabees promote the holiday of Chanuka, neither of them offer a clear description of the rituals to be observed. The practice of lighting Chanuka lamps in one's home is known only from much later sources.

How do we account for the move from the celebration of the military triumph and rededication of the altar to the ritual detailed in the Babylonian Talmud of lighting candles at home during the eight days of Chanuka? Why is there no mention of the miracle of the cruse of oil until this late source? It has been suggested that the Sages downplayed the political themes due to discomfort about the increasing Hellenization of the Hasmoneans. Recently, Dr. Geoffrey Herman has demonstrated that it is more likely that the elaborate halakhot concerning Chanuka lights in the Babylonian Talmud reflect an adoption of Zoroastrian fire veneration. He points to other evidence of such cultural influence, such as an enumeration in the Babylonian Talmud of types of spiritual fire that parallels Zoroastrian beliefs.



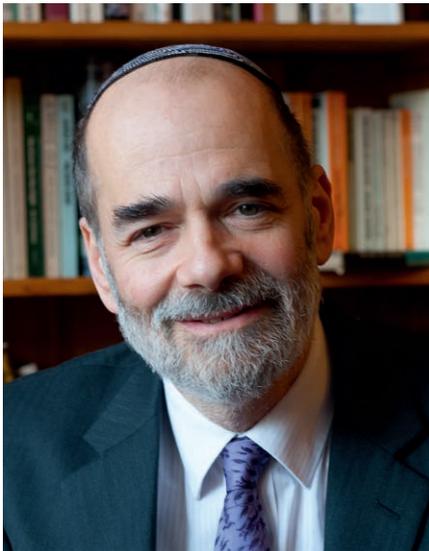
If his suggestion is correct, then it offers a parallel development to the shift seen in the Second Temple era. In both cases, the nationalist roots of the holiday will have been imbued with more spiritual significance by Diaspora communities, and an anti-Gentile message will have been softened to a more cooperative stance.

Where are we today?

There are troubling tensions over definitions and implementation of such core values as democracy and Jewishness, with geography as one factor in the divisions. At the same time, geographic mobility and communication technology, as well as geo-political realities, foster a form of Jewish unity and inter-connectedness above the diversity and differences.

Several midrashim describe studying and transmitting Torah as passing on light from teacher to student. Rabbi Akiva compares it also to an etrog, such that “one who smells it enjoys, but the etrog is not diminished.” (Avot de Rabbi Natan 25).

As we celebrate Chanuka, it is my hope that each of us may find meaning and inspiration in our commitments to Torah, and that we may fruitfully share the energies and sweet fragrances of our studies, to increase Light among the Nations.



JONATHAN WITTENBERG: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO HAVE A MASORTI RABBINICAL SCHOOL IN EUROPE, ESPECIALLY IN GERMANY?

I’m moved in so many ways to be teaching at the Zacharias Frankel College in Berlin. My grandfather on my mother’s side, Dr. Georg Salzberger, studied at the Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums, completing his rabbinical training in 1909 before being called to Frankfurt am Main where he served as rabbi for 30 years, except for four years as Feldrabbiner on the western front at Verdun. After imprisonment in Dachau following Kristallnacht he fled with his family to Britain on 9 April 1939. I was very close to him and loved him dearly. He retained his deep love for German culture and always taught me to separate it in my thoughts from the evil of Nazism.

My great grandfather on my father’s side, Dr. Jacob Freimann, studied at the Hildesheimer Rabbinerseminar in the 1880s, returning to Berlin late in his career, in 1928, to become rabbi of the synagogue in the Heiderreuterstraße and Av Bet Din of the orthodox community. He died in 1937 and is buried in Holesov in Moravia, where he had earlier served as rabbi for twenty years. I recently visited his grave, and the old Shach synagogue in the town, which survived the occupation. His wife Regina perished in Auschwitz. I have spent much of the last 3 years writing about this side of the family.

I feel sadness and joy, love of Torah and tears, at the thought of coming on a regular basis to learn and teach Torah in Berlin.

Ledor vador: from generation to generation our shared and treasured heritage of Torah must be cherished and learnt.

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg is Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism in the UK and Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue. This semester he taught a class on Pastoral Care at the Zacharias Frankel College. © Marion Davies