



Annual Report
&
Financial Report
for the academic year
2017

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Rabbi Robert A. Levisson (1913-2001) was one of the great leaders within the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism. He was the son of the founder of the Progressive Jewish movement in The Netherlands. After the Second World War he revived the Progressive Jewish Congregation (LJG) in The Hague and became one of the prominent Progressive Jewish leaders in our country. He was a wise man, a talented speaker and author, and a great advocate for Israel.

Yehi zichro baruch - יהי זכרו ברוך - Blessed be his memory

Contents

Introduction	4
1. The Academic Year 2017	
A study afternoon about God in Judaism	5
Opening of the academic year 2017-2018	
Rabbinical training	6
Refresher course for shlichei tzibbur	
Rimon-Dutch Progressive Jewish Educational Center	
Refresher courses for teachers	7
Torah project	
Scholarly research	
Communication	8
Sidra of the Week	
Library	
Management Team	
Board, Management and Committees	9
Donors	10
Plans for 2018	
2. Finances	
Financial report for 2017	12
Balance at 31 December 2017	
Profit and loss account 2017	13

Introduction

Our rabbinical training program lies at the core of the Levisson Institute. Joram Rookmaaker, our only rabbinical student at the moment, was appointed army chaplain last year. Together with me, he also is part of the Rabbinate of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam. He is expected to receive his semicha in the next academic year.

The Levisson Institute also provides refresher courses for our rabbis, cantors, and teachers at our youth education program (Talmud Torah). The latter is done by Rimon.

Early 2018 we started a new course, Ba'al Tefillah, and at the moment of writing this report two weekends have been concluded. Fifteen enthusiastic members of different kehillot are being trained to perform the role of rabbi at services if a congregation does not have its own rabbi, or to substitute whenever the rabbi is not available for a service. Rabbi Marianne van Praag, Annette Böckler (a former teacher at the Leo Baeck College) and myself teach the classes. Our director Francine Püttmann organizes and coordinates the weekends. The last weekend will take place in December, after which we hope to have trained some people to lead services (but please note, not as cantors).

Recently the concept for the Gabbai Guide (Madrach haGabbai) was finished. Our director put a lot of work in it. A few others read it and provided additions, based on the traditions in their own kehillot. We hope to be able to present the final version at the opening of the new academic year of the Institute.

I am still worried about the succession of our current rabbis. A rabbi is not required to retire, but it is important for us to have successors for the spiritual leadership in our congregations. We hope to attract new students for the rabbinical training program. I especially call upon young people to consider if the training may be for them.

It goes without saying that it is important to have sufficient funding to keep our Institute running. To that end we will organize meetings this year in which we give information about our Institute and will ask committed members of our congregations for financial support. It is of the utmost importance for the future of Progressive Judaism in our country and the survival of Progressive Jewish congregations to secure the necessary funds to train people who grew up in our midst. We have to train rabbis in a changing world. We have to find contemporary answers to many questions: about mixed relationships, our attitude towards people with a Jewish father in the survival of small congregations in the so-called *mediene* (the Jewish world outside the big cities). What do young people want to do with their Judaism? Is there a new mission for rabbis, now that established institutions are becoming less relevant? What is our response to the increasing assimilation in our country? How do we respond to the aging of our congregations?

I repeat the quote I used last year: The Sayings of the Fathers (2:4) say: '*Al tifros min hatzibur*', 'Don't separate yourself from the community'. If we want to remain a Jewish community with traditions, knowledge and a vision for the future, we have to keep training Jewish leaders. I call on you to stay committed to this: financially of course, but maybe you also know someone who would like to become a rabbi.

With special thanks to everyone who has worked hard for our Institute again over the last year.

Rabbi Menno ten Brink, LL.M.
dean of the Levisson Institute

1. The Academic Year 2017

A study afternoon about God in Judaism

In Progressive Judaism we never speak about God. Because of this the Levisson Institute organized a study afternoon about God in Judaism, which was held in the building of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam. Two speakers gave their opinions about the question “What's God to me?”

Rabbi Albert Ringer: *God, close or distant?*

In his comment on the verse: “Climb up to the Eternal One, you and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and bow down at a distance” (Ex. 24:1), Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev distinguishes between worshipping God from a distance and experiencing God as nearby. There is a place for both in Judaism. The speaker also commented on our current relationship with God.

Yoram Stein: *Can you believe in Spinoza's God?*

Everything, according to Spinoza's Ethics, is in God. Also you – who says not to believe in God – you also are still in God, says Spinoza. For without God or Nature nothing can exist or even be thought. The highest goal for mankind is to know God, according to Spinoza in all his works.

Opening of the academic year 2017-2018

The beginning of the new academic year was celebrated October 15, 2017 at the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam.

President Ella Wijnschenk-Oesterman opened the meeting and spoke about the progress of the current rabbinical student, the new course for Ba'al Tefillah which the Institute will start in 2018, and about the two new coordinators for Rimon. Rabbi Menno ten Brink, dean of the Levisson Institute, also spoke a few words and introduced the guest speaker.

Historian Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld spoke about *Rich and poor in Jewish Amsterdam. The Portuguese-Jewish community and its care for the poor in the Golden Age of Amsterdam.*

She used different themes to show how the Portuguese community in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century organized its care for the poor. Preserved letters and notes by poor people gave an additional impression of what life was like in that period of time.



For Ella Wijnschenk's speech, see the report and photos of the opening of the academic year: www.levisson.nl > Fotos-Videos > Opening Academisch jaar 2017 (in Dutch).

Rabbinical training

Our rabbinical student Joram Rookmaaker has concluded another year of his studies and hopes to take his final exams by the end of 2018, early 2019. In addition to his studies, he works as assistant-rabbi at the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam and as army chaplain, the latter since March 1, 2017.

Refresher course for shlichei tzibbur

The refresher course in the reported year consisted of a one-day seminar, which took place on September 3, 2017. Its theme was the Kol Nidrei service. The location for the seminar was the building of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam. It was prepared in cooperation with the Project Group New LJG Machzor. The seminar was led by cantors Gilad Nezer and Bram Lagendijk.

The reason for this theme was the provisional machzor for the Kol Nidrei service which would be used for the first time for the High Holidays in that year.

The morning program offered an introduction by the leader of the project, clarification of the new chazzanut lyrics by both cantors and an explanation of the Aramaic text of Kol Nidrei by Rabbi Albert Ringer. The afternoon was dedicated to reading and singing the new texts. Attendance was high.

Rimon – Dutch Progressive Jewish Education Center



Rimon went through big changes in 2017. Matty van Eldik, who co-created and led Rimon, left on March 1. She was succeeded by two coordinators, Lea Abram and Anne-Maria van Hilst, who were also appointed as heads of the Talmud Torah at the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam. Lea Abram was already involved with Rimon as an educational

staff member for some years.

The new national teacher training program for Talmud Torah teachers, which began in the Fall of 2016, was continued in the Spring of 2017 with thirteen participants from three congregations. Teacher was Lea Abram. The focus of the program was on pedagogic and didactic skills, divided in three parts: preparation, execution and evaluation of classes.

In the Fall of 2017 the new coordinators produced a new mission document about the foundations and core mission. There was a preceding meeting in Utrecht in June, in which all heads of education and board members of congregations had the opportunity to offer their input and ideas. The document can be read on the Rimon website.

The new Rimon website was launched in November. It was built by Elias Poolman, student informatics en computer assistant for the Talmud Torah in Amsterdam. The contents of the old website were transferred to the new one, and will be adapted and complemented. Rimon, implemented several changes on the website.

The new website also has a new URL: www.rimononderwijs.nl.

Refresher courses for teachers

Also in 2017 Rimon organized two national refresher courses for teachers from all congregations. Like other years, the courses were held in the building of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam.

The first meeting was on March 26. Jaïr Stranders, who teaches Theater, conducted a workshop *How do I present myself in front of a group?* which included several exercises with the attending teachers. After lunch rabbinical student Joram Rookmaaker spoke about *Matzos with Easter egg-salad? Teaching children from mixed relationships*. The participants were also informed about the policy of the rabbinate towards children of parents in mixed marriages.



At the second refresher course meeting on November 19, Rabbi Albert Ringer spoke about *Mitsvot in the classroom* and teacher Zira Roozendaal explained didactic ways to keep the children's attention on the class.

After each installment of the refresher course there was a meeting of heads of Talmud Torah from the congregations. In March the main subject was the plans of the new coordinators and the changes in the leadership of the education department in a few congregations. During the meeting in November the new website and the mission document with foundations and core mission were discussed.

Torah project

The project to record the melodies for Torah cantillation with the traditional trope of the Progressive Jewish Congregations in The Netherlands, which started in 2015, will be concluded mid-2018.

This project includes the complete recording of all sidrot and parshiot, in accordance with the three-year cycle of Torah reading on Shabbat which is used the Dutch Progressive congregations. All Torah portions were cantillated by Amir Na'amani, and recorded and edited by Bram Lagendijk. Available on the website are so far: Bereshit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus) and Vayikra (Leviticus). The last two books will follow.

See www.levisson.nl > Muziek > Toralezingen voor Sjabbat

Scholarly research

The scholarly research project *From Adath Jeschurun to Adath Jesjoeroen* by Chaya Brasz (historian and writer), about the religious developments in Judaism in The Netherlands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, still remains a long-term endeavor. The goal of the research is to fill a gap that exists concerning this subject in the historiography of Dutch Jewry. The recent publication of the newest version of *De Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland* (History of the Jews in The Netherlands), which was very much anticipated by Chaya, did not change this.

So she keeps working on her book, which will be published in English. Meanwhile, publishing house Brill in Leiden published *The Religious Cultures of Dutch Jewry* by Yosef Kaplan and Dan Michman in the reported year. It includes a chapter by Chaya Brasz that mentions the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam, with a picture of the first bat mitsvah celebration during a Shabbat morning service.

Communication



Five newsletters were published in 2017. After a three-year interruption that ended in 2016, the newsletter is regularly being sent. It contains a variety of subjects concerning the Institute. The newsletter is distributed by email. Subscriptions via contact@levisson.nl.

See also: www.levisson.nl > Over ons > Nieuwsbrieven (in Dutch).

In 2016 a new brochure about the Institute was published. An English version was produced in 2017.

Sidra of the Week

Every week a Dutch comment on the Sidra of the Week (Parashat Hashavuah) is sent by email to people who subscribe to this service. Subscriptions are free and you can enlist on the Levisson Institute website. All comments are also published on the website: www.levisson.nl > Archief > Sidra van de week.

Library

In the year 2017, as in previous years, many people wanted to donate books from inheritances or from their own collections. Only books which fit in the collection and are a good addition were accepted.

The library is a joint library of the Levisson Institute and the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam and is placed in its building in Amsterdam.

See for the catalogue: www.levissonbibliotheek.nl and www.ljgbibliotheek.nl.

Management Team

Apart from their daily work of running the Institute, the Management Team was very busy during the reported year with the rabbinical training, the new Ba'al Tefillah course, refresher courses for cantors and Talmud Torah teachers, and the state of affairs of Rimon.

The Management Team meets once a month and in between keeps in touch by email and phone. The MT is also represented at board meetings. It stays in touch as well with the Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom (Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism) and the boards of the affiliated congregations.

The General Director is in the office three days a week in the Levisson Room in the building of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam and can be reached by email during the rest of the time.

Board, Management and Committees

There were no changes in the board in 2017. The board met every two months, in total six times, and concerned itself mainly with the examination and the future of the rabbinical student program, the Ba'al Tefillah course, Rimon, and finances.

Four board members were reappointed on August 23, 2017 by the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism. Starting the reported year, board members will from now on be appointed for two terms of three years.

The Academic Committee met once, in August. Other consultations were conducted by phone and email.

The Vocational Training Committee met five times and was mainly occupied with the rabbinical training program and the new Ba'al Tefillah course.

Board

Ella Wijnschenk-Oesterman, chair

Prof. dr. Juliette Walma van der Molen, vice-chair

Dr. Thijs ten Raa, treasurer

David Allick, LLM, secretary

Lena Herman-ten Cate, MA, member (on behalf of the Verbond/Dutch Union)

Schedule of resignation board

Ella Wijnschenk-Oesterman: October 2021

Juliette Walma van der Molen: August 2020

Thijs ten Raa: August 2020

David Allick: August 2020

Lena Herman-ten Cate: August 2018

Management Team

Rabbi Menno ten Brink, LLM, dean

Prof. dr. Reinier Munk, head Academic Program

Rabbi Marianne van Praag, head Vocational Program

Francine Püttmann, MA, director General Affairs

Academic Committee

Prof. dr. Irene Zwiep, chair

Prof. dr. Reinier Munk, secretary

Rabbi Tamarah Benima, member

Carolyn Levisson, MA, member

Ernst Numann, LLM, member

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, member

Rabbi Menno ten Brink, LLM, dean

Rabbi David Lilienthal, honorary dean

Ella Wijnschenk-Oesterman, chair of the board

Subcommittee Admissions

Prof. dr. Irene Zwiep, chair Academic Committee
Rabbi Menno ten Brink, LLM, dean
Carolyn Levisson, MA, chair Vocational Committee

Vocational Committee (CBV)

Carolyn Levisson, MA, chair
Rabbi Marianne van Praag, head Vocational Program
Jorien Tamse, member
Ella Wijnschenk-Oesterman, hearer

Rimon – Dutch Progressive Jewish Educational Center

Matty van Eldik, coordinator (till March 1, 2017)
Lea Abram, coordinator (from March 1, 2017)
Anne-Maria van Hilst, coordinator (from March 1, 2017)

Webmasters

Dick Hage
Bram Legendijk (music library)

Donors

The preceding shows that the Institute is working energetically. The financial situation remains cause for concern, with again a net loss in the reported year.

For the continuation of our work we remain dependent on the willingness of our loyal donors to keep supporting us. We owe them a great debt of gratitude, as well as the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism, Foundation Collectieve Maror-gelden, Fund Centraal Israëlietisch Wees- en Doorgangshuis ‘Machseh Lajesoumiem’ and the Mgr Dr. A.C. Ramselaar Fund.

The board and the management will have to keep looking for a structural solution for financing, to keep the Institute financially sound. The Robert A. Levisson Foundation, owner of the Institute, is a certified charity (ANBI). A great long-term solution would be for people to bequest us in their wills. Meanwhile, we still need your help to find more donors, foundations and funds who are willing to support us financially to maintain this center of knowledge of Progressive Judaism in The Netherlands and keep it active.

Fundraising is an issue that is high on the agenda of the Board. In the year 2018 there will be meetings in several places in The Netherlands to inform people about the Institute and ask for financial support.

Plans for 2018

Our plans for the year 2018 are a continuation of the current policies, in which the rabbinical training takes priority. Another focus of attention is on the new Ba'al Tefillah course – which teaches to lead services in absence of a rabbi. And of course there will be refresher courses for rabbis, cantors and teachers.

Rimon will continue with its newly adopted policy; it will meet with all heads of the Progressive Jewish Education departments twice a year to discuss forms of education for our youth, and

initiate projects. Rimon will also organize two refresher courses for teachers in 2018. The website will be expanded as well.

Mid 2018 the project of recording the whole Torah will be concluded and will be made available on the website completely.

In the Fall of 2018 the Gabbai Guide will be published by Sja'ar, the publishing department of the Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism. As soon as the guide is completed, the Institute hopes to initiate a new gabbai training course.

Also in the Fall, there will be a meeting in which more information about the Institute will be provided, in combination with lectures.

There is a plan to have a new website built to replace to current, outdated one.

2. Finances

Financial Report for 2017

The annual account 2017 was drawn up by the Board on April 23, 2018 and afterwards confirmed by accountant Kuhlman. What follows is a summary. If you would like to receive the complete annual account, please address your request to contact@levisson.nl.

Balance at 31 December 2017

<i>Assets</i>		<i>Liabilities</i>	
Receivables	€ 6,847	Foundation capital	€ 61,338
Liquid assets	€ 146,847	Earmarked reserves	€ 72,567
		Taxes	€ 1,018
		Debts/deferrals	€ 18,771
Total	€ 153,694		€ 153,694

The *earmarked reserves* comprise five funds:

Student Fund	€ 25,981
Israel Seminar Fund	€ 15,000
Academic Research Fund	€ 8,841
Training Fund	€ 14,969
Rimon	€ 7,776

The Student Fund is intended for allowances for students who need them on ground of personal circumstances to be used for expenses directly linked to their studies. The first finances were collected for the Student Fund as a farewell present for Dean Rabbi Lilienthal on the occasion of his retirement as rabbi of the Progressive Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam.

The Israel Seminar Fund was founded in 2005 with the goal of regularly organizing seminars for students in Israel.

In 2005 € 10,000 was reserved for academic research, mainly abroad; in 2008 a € 1,000 payment was made and in 2016 € 159.

A gift from the Kiwi-Tielens Foundation in 2007 was partly used to finance the training of shlichei tzibbur in the period 2007-2009. The remaining money, € 11,895 was donated to the appropriated reserves for the teacher training. In 2011 the Kiwi-Tielens Foundation donated an amount to cover the cost of a study trip for the teachers training to London in 2011. The remaining money, € 3,074 was added to the reserves. The board has allotted the reserves for all courses and training programs.

In the summer of 2013 the Robert A. Levisson Foundation took over the activities of Rimon, the Dutch Progressive Jewish Educational Center from the Sja'ar Foundation by request of the Verbond (Dutch Union for Progressive Judaism).

The deferrals in the balance include € 2,930 as a gift to the David Lilienthal Fund in honor of his retirement as dean. It will be used to finance a second David Lilienthal lecture.

Profit and loss account 2017

<i>Receipts</i>		<i>Expenditures</i>	
Donors and other gifts	€ 14,712	Salaries staff	€ 23,880
Subsidies	€ 16,643	Instructors and courses	€ 21,462
Tuition fees	€ 2,000	Board/MT/committees	€ 518
Interest	€ 488	Library and teaching materials	€ 85
Rimon	€ 13,850	Rimon	€ 10,793
		External communication	€ 1,626
		Accountant/bookkeeping	€ 3,077
Net loss	€ <u>14,790</u>	Miscellaneous	€ <u>1,042</u>
Total	€ 62,483		€ 62,483

The cost of staff and teachers have decreased a little. The contributions of donors and subsidizers have increased. The Board made efforts to inform (potential) donors and subsidizers about the many activities of the Institute, as mentioned in the annual report. The Board also had candid discussions with the Union for Progressive Judaism. This resulted in the restoration of the Union's dues to the old, agreed upon level, starting in 2017.

The Board has urged Maror to put its full focus on Jewish continuity, without demands for a minimum number of students. Maror responded positively.

Rimon is financially sound. The cost of administration has further decreased.

Board, Management Team en committees have reduced their costs to a minimum.

The loss was reduced by half to € 14,790. A fundraising effort was initiated in 2018. We hope sincerely that you – if you haven't done so yet – will help us turn the tide, by generously giving an extra donation, which by the way is fully tax deductible because of our ANBI status.

Thijs ten Raa
treasurer