

MIFGASH



CONTENTS – Issue #20

	<u>Page</u>
- <i>AJC Annual Meeting</i> by David Feingold	2-3
- <i>Pesach at B'nei Israel (Costa Rica)</i>	4
- <i>Pesach in Guadalajara, Mexico</i>	4-5
- <i>“G'd gave the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai”</i> by David C Henriquez	5-6
- <i>“TaMaR Panama – June 1-4, 2007”</i> by Richenella Wever	7-8
- <i>“TaMaR UJCL Encounter”</i> by Tati Schagas WUPJ	9
- <i>Commemoration of Yom Hashoa v'ehaGvura</i> <i>(Kol Shearith Israel, Panama)</i>	10
- <i>“Jews and Catholics”</i> by Claudio Epelman (CJL Director)	11-12
- <i>“Dinner as Usual”</i> by Martha E. Lichtenstein	13
- <i>Snoa Building's 275th Anniversary (<u>Curaçao</u>)</i>	14

MIFGASH



[AJC Annual Meeting](#)

by David Feingold

A few months ago, my friend Ricardo Freund wrote his “confessions” in which he expressed his earlier doubts about the purpose of the UJCL. I have just returned from the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in Washington, DC, and find it necessary to write my own confessions. Just as Ricardo came away with some important realizations after the UJCL conference in Costa Rica, I too have had an eye opening experience.

Over the last several years, the links between the UJCL and the AJC have been steadily growing. We have sent representatives to the AJC meetings, and AJC representatives have attended our conferences. However, I must confess that I was never clear about the purpose of this connection. Over the years, I had been told that the AJC was the State Department of the Jewish people, but I guess I didn’t really know what that was supposed to mean. I knew the AJC lobbied on behalf of Jewish interests, but I didn’t know what it all had to do with our local communities in our region.

I am happy to say that all changed during the first week of May, at the 101st Annual Meeting of the AJC in Washington, DC.

First of all, I realized just how big an organization is the AJC. The AJC has thousands of members and hundreds of staff located literally all around the world. While their main office is in New York City, there are 33 chapters across the United States. And though the name implies a focus on the United States, at the annual meeting there were representatives from over 50 countries. At the gala dinner, the more than 1400 people in attendance were treated to speeches by the president of Columbia, Álvaro Uribe, the president of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga and the first lady of Argentina, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

However, not only is the AJC a big organization, but it is involved in a wide array of interesting topics. Historically the AJC was a leader in supporting Jews in the Soviet Union and in the civil rights movement in the United States. The AJC continues to play an important role in its strong support of the State of Israel and the quest for stability in the Middle East. More recently, the AJC has taken a leading role in advocating for energy independence and security to find alternatives to buying oil from countries who seek our destruction. These are only the some of the issues that the AJC promotes on behalf of the Jewish people. At the annual meeting the quality of speakers ensured that after each presentation the audience was left wanting more about each topic.

So, what does the AJC actually do and what does it have to do with our small communities in Latin America? The answer, in short, is that the AJC builds long term relationships with decision makers and opinion shapers so that its point of view is given full consideration. Building these long term relationships is hard work that takes many years. The results of these alliances are too important to ignore. When an issue arises that is important to its members, the AJC is well connected and prepared to take action.

MIFGASH



At the heart of the AJC's strength are the local chapters which provide the broad base of support for its activities. Local chapters educate people and create bonds that can be built upon at the national and international level.

One interesting project with local, national, and international implications is Project Interchange, which since 1982 has sent over 4,000 U.S. leaders and over 350 international leaders on trips to Israel. These leaders might be politicians, journalists, academicians, clergy or anyone for whom it would be beneficial to gain first hand understanding of the situation in Israel. The trips on this program are not vacations; they are carefully designed so that participants return to their communities with an increased understanding of Israel and its challenges and are thus well positioned to advocate on Israel's behalf. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of such a program. The long term interests of the Jewish people and individual Jewish communities can only be assured when we strengthen the relationships between ourselves and the general populations in which we live.

I now know that for our communities in the UJCL there is much to be gained by our association with the AJC. We can learn how to get more engaged in the issues of the broader communities within which we live so as to ensure the wellbeing of our own small Jewish communities. We can learn how to advocate on our own behalf and how such advocacy can strengthen our communities. We can send participants to Israel through Project Interchange and thereby take advantage of a great resource for educating our local leaders.

Just as our involvement in the UJCL has served to strengthen our local communities through the discussion of ideas, challenges, and solutions on a regional level, our involvement with the AJC accomplishes this on a global scale. And just as our participation in UJCL conferences solidifies our bonds with the regional Jewish community, our participation in AJC events enhances these relations with the global Jewish community.

Now that I have confessed, I can tell you that next year Ricardo and I once again plan on attending the AJC annual meeting. We hope to count on still greater representation from the UJCL. In my opinion, the AJC and the UJCL complement each other in bringing greater strength to our wonderful local communities in Latin America.

MIFGASH



COMMUNITY PESAJ SEDER 5767 IN B'NEI ISRAEL

This year the community Pesaj Seder took place on the second night of Pesaj at the *Colegio de Medicos*. It was a very special evening as it always is on Pesaj.

The services were led by three youth of the community, Samantha Blen, Sara Brenes y Debora Laks together with Rabbis Daniela Szuster y Rami Pavolotzky. We also enjoyed the company of Diego Levinson, our *more* of rikudim who delighted us with his guitar. Almost 100 people attended the event counting members and visitors.

In addition to the traditional readings, there was a special activity for the children who through games helped us recall the history of Pesaj. As usual, the youngest had to find the Afikoman. This year it was a very important prize and the winner was Dorian Goldner. The adults couldn't relax too much either during this festive Kasher le Pesaj dinner since they had to answer a series of questions. Finally, since three tables answered all questions correctly, the winners decided to donate the prize (which consisted of a beautiful small bag to place the Afikoman) to the synagogue.

Thank you to all who collaborated and those who assisted for making this such a beautiful experience.

Rabbi Rami Pavolotzky

PESACH IN GUADALAJARA

The Hebrew Community of Guadalajara celebrated Pesach organizing, after a number of years, an interfaith Seder. About 150 people participated in it, among them the Cardinal, the Governor of the State and the Mayor of the city. Rabbis Marcelo Rittner and Leonel Levy from Beth El, Mexico, and Shmuel Sztainhendler were also in attendance. Rabbi Sztainhendler, who now lives in Santiago de Chile was a Rabbi in Guadalajara for 18 years.

This activity gave us the chance of a brotherly encounter, in which we were able to re-unite and re-cognize ourselves as children of the same G-d who from their individuality aspire to work for a better world. Inspired by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, we spoke about freedom and we agreed on the importance of our commitment as citizens, each giving the best of himself in order to be able to realize ourselves as a democratic and pluralistic society.

The Seder was characterized by the reading of several paragraphs from the Haggadah, the recitation of the pertinent blessings and a series of explanations about the central themes of the Maggid on the part of the different rabbis who were participating. We learned to sing the blessings after meals in Ladino, and we ended the evening embracing each other in a big circle, singing *Hine Ma Tov uMa Naim Shevet Achim Gam Yachad*. Thus we affirmed how important it is for brothers to be able to sit together at the same table.

MIFGASH



From now on the challenge will be to be able to continue to design spaces that allow us to advance in the task of building on Earth the kingdom of heaven. We must make of the geography that we live in a Jerusalem that is earthly and celestial at the same time, hoping to make: *LeShanah haBaah beYerushalaim*", the famous phrase with which we close the Seder, a reality.

God gave the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai

By David Cohen Henriquez

If it's true that Judaism proclaims to be a religion without dogmas, it is possibly in this phrase where a lot of Jews split ways in the contemporary world.

Many people argue that the Torah is the result of a composition that lasted many centuries by hand of diverse authors. Some prefer to define the giving not as a person to person dictate, rather like divine inspiration. Others challenge the historicity of having the people of Israel ever being at Sinai or if there was an exodus led by a man named Moses at all.

Many to the answers to the questions are matters of faith, and in order to be able to have a healthy spiritual life we should know how to differentiate between fact and metaphor, History and memory, science and spirituality.

However, this question is not a product of modernity. Even back to ancient times the sages and rabbis debated about what exactly did Moses receive on Mount Sinai. Obviously the answer is "The Torah". But, is it so obvious? After all, what do we understand by "Torah"?

If we read the biblical text in its most basic level we understand that what God gives to Moses are the Ten Words, ten emanations or proclamations that we better know as The Ten Commandments. This poses a problem: throughout the Pentateuch we find much more than ten commandments (613 is the exact account). Some heretic groups of the time of the Talmud proclaimed that only these commandments came from the word of God. So big was the battle of the rabbis against these groups that already in the Jerusalem Talmud it is explained why the custom of reading the Ten Commandments with the Shemah is removed. With time then the idea is born that Moses received not only the Ten Commandments but also all of the Torah, including the parts that talk about future events, and of his own death. To this thought a new layer is added, a new Torah: The Oral Torah. We have then two Torahs (Torot in Hebrew), one written and one oral.

MIFGASH



But the story does not end here. In order to fight erroneous interpretations of the text (i.e. non-rabbinical interpretations) it is added that every explanation that can be done over the Torah, written or oral, Moses already heard it from God's mouth. Hence Moses is the teacher of teachers, Moshe Rabeinu.

This encyclopedic reception also has its counterpart: the simplification of what is revealed at Sinai. Some commentators say that the people only heard the first two commandments, while others say that it was only the first one, since the text explains us that the people were very afraid of the thunderbolts and lightnings and of God's word, so they ask Moses to be their intermediary. Some midrashim tell us that when the people heard God's words, they all died, and God in His mercy revived them again, only to falter and die again with every word. Another midrash tell us that with every word the people stepped back enormous distances while some angels pushed them back again to the sides of the mountain. These *midrashim*, it seems to me, evoke a choreography that represents the beat of a heart, an ambivalence composed out of love and fear towards the sacred.

One last opinion that I want to mention is the one that says that the people of Israel only heard the first letter of the first word of the first commandment. The word is "Anochi" which means I (as in "I am the Lord Your God..."). This letter is the letter Aleph, a letter that by itself is silent. We find ourselves then in a Rabbinic Zen moment. The only thing they heard was the sound of silence, that silence full of significance that comes out of God's own Person. It is that sound that is not audible, but visible. "The people saw the thunderbolts and heard the lightnings" a juxtaposition of the senses that helps us in a poetic way to meditate on something that does not exist in the realm of the senses or in the world of reason.

With the arrival of Shavuot and the celebration of the giving of the Torah we should try to think not if the facts are real or not, or if we believe or discard the Oral Torah and her centuries of wisdom. The Holy-day is a call to open our hearts and minds and help us listen that silent Torah that is in our innermost core, that mute voice that is God's calling, to try to establish a pact with Him, to study, practice and even challenge in a respectful way His laws. We should challenge also ourselves, trying to understand that the period between Pesach and Shavuot teaches us that without the Torah, the internal and the external, the oral and the written, the silent and the perceptible, the personal freedom that was granted to us in the exodus of Egypt cannot exist. It does not matter what path we take, the silent voice or the collection of knowledge, both lead us to the other one, since both of them have the other one inside, in the same way that the Torah is found in our lives and our lives are found in the Torah.

The Torah was given by God. The real question we should ask is "Have I received it yet?"

MIFGASH



TaMaR PANAMA JUNE 1-4, 2007

by *Richenella Wever (Youth Representative, Aruba)*

“Come for the fun.... Stay for the Judaism” David Cohen Henriquez.

I think it is relevant to start with this slogan created by the rabbinical student David Cohen Henriquez because it is what best describes the TaMaR Encounters.

On this occasion the following countries were represented: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico (Guadalajara), Panama, Brazil (Porto Alegre) and Aruba.

This time the Encounter took place in Panama. The hosts? Young Adults from the Kol Shearit Congregation whom I thank for everything and at the same time congratulate them for a job well done.

The Aruba delegation included Xario Alberts, Jonathan Ruas and myself.

Upon our arrival to Panama we were very welcome. They gave us a tour of the new temple and also during the day we toured part of the city while the rest of the participants arrived.

On Thursday evening the planned activities started. The first one was a “*chiva parrandera*” where we got to know each other better, have a good time and get to know Panama City. We visited the Canal, certainly very beautiful.

Very early on Friday morning we met to start our 6-hour trip to Chiriqui. (This province is on the border with Costa Rica). Our destination was the ranch of the Motta brothers. Ernesto Motta was waiting there to welcome us upon our arrival. He was a very special host. The country estate in itself is lovely, the house gigantic, surrounded by 11,000 Hectares of natural beauty.

During the Encounter, on that same Friday, before we started preparing for the Kabbalat Shabbat, Ernesto Motta told us the history of the Motta family, who is very influential not only in the Kol Shearit Congregation but in Panama. Each part of the house, each corner has a history, or reminds them of someone in the family. Each room of the new house has a name and a meaning.

Something strange happened on this weekend: Ernesto Motta asked Rabbi Gustavo, taking advantage of the TaMaR Encounter taking place at the estate, to bless the *mezuzah* that was from the old house. Why do I say “strange”? On the back of the *mezuzah* it was written “Tamar”... Coincidence? May be, but it was an honor to be present for this.

The Encounter gave us an opportunity to see how the youth in Panama organize projects to keep Judaism alive. Likewise, during a talk with Tati (Tamara Schagas) we spoke about Israel, analyzing fragments of the Declaration of Independence: There is in it a very important sentence that, in my opinion, we must not allow ourselves to ignore:

“The survival of the State of Israel depends on the Diaspora communities”.

MIFGASH



What does this mean? All of us want to go to Israel but, if we all do, then Judaism will lose its essence in the other countries of the world. Please do not misinterpret me, I do not mean that going to Israel is not allowed but, we must follow our traditions even without being there, and this is a very big challenge.

Let me take the example of Aruba: the Beth Israel community is very small. Its young adults (18-30 years old) study overseas, the older people attend Shabbat and Shacharit services but not regularly. Not everyone is interested in attending at least once or twice a month the Shabbat services. Most of them are present only on the High Holidays. If there is no interest on the part of the adults in the congregation, how can they expect that the youth feel involved?

We want to organize a TaMaR in Aruba but, if we analyze this, we need help, not only financial but especially from the young members of the community who are not interested in attending regularly. We believe that the integration of these young people is required for us to reach the goal of organizing this Encounter in Aruba. As I said earlier, it is very important in order to preserve our traditions and principles. These conventions enable us to extend our circle of friends and have an opportunity to exchange ideas and realize that other young people have doubts that are similar to ours.

So what's the idea? We want you to ponder this: Do you want to preserve Eretz Israel? Then feel proud to be Jewish wherever you are, keep traditions and be more active.

I hope with all my heart that we can continue what our beloved Rabbi Marcelo started, bringing the community together and strengthening us. It will be a difficult task, but not impossible.

Rabbi Marcelo, Sonia, Gali and the new baby will be missed by all of us, and the new rabbi will not have a very easy task: he must be as special as Rabbi Marcelo and his family.

This is another reason why we must not stop being united. We have a duty to go on, be more active and proud of our rich Jewish heritage.

Todah Rabah

The representatives of TaMaR in Aruba

*Richenella Wever
Xario Alberts
Jonathan Ruas*

(Footnotes)

¹ an open tour bus where people sing and have fun

MIFGASH



TaMaR - UJCL ENCOUNTER (PANAMA)

Dear friends from the UJCL:

I would have liked to write sooner but, unfortunately, the return trip to Israel was pretty hectic. I want to thank you all for the support, the great attitude, the involvement. To the Rabbis and community leaders who helped make this event a reality, Todah Rabah! The first TaMaR - UJCL Regional Seminary was a wonderful experience. I would like to thank in particular our Panamanian hosts.

First, the youth of TaMaR Panama, also Milton and Moi for their commitment, hard work and dedication, for having believed in this project from the first day and transforming it from words into a reality. They knew how to transmit and infect with their enthusiasm other youth who today are part of this group.

Second, Gusti (Rabbi Gustavo) and Ruthy Kraselnik for guiding them, for their vision. Especially, we would like to thank Ernesto Motta, who opened the door of his home to us, for his generosity and hospitality. The possibility of having this first encounter at the estate of the Motta family was something very special.

I want to tell you about some of the accomplishments of this encounter:

- * The creation of a TaMaR UJCL committee integrated by representatives of the participating communities

- * The project of holding one additional encounter before the UJCL conference in Jamaica, once again with the support of World TaMaR (TaMaR Olami).

There are now young adults that have been designated to be in touch not only at the regional level but also with me in order to plan local activities, social action projects, trips to Israel, training, work with TaMaR in South America and any other ideas that they may have.

Once again, thanks so much.

A good week to you all,

Tati Schagas

WUPJ Youth and Young Adults Division

MIFGASH



COMMEMORATION OF YOM HASHOA vahaGVURAH **(KOL SHEARITH ISRAEL - PANAMA)**

The ceremony in commemoration of Yom haShoa vahaGvurah, Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and of Heroism, organized by the Panamanian Jewish Congress, took place last Sunday evening, April 15, at the Kol Shearith Israel Congregation.

This ceremony was attended by the Ambassadors of Israel, Germany and Poland, the Counselor of the United States Embassy, Mr. Milton Cohen Henriquez Sasso, president of the Panamanian Jewish Congress, Mr. Ramy Attie, president of Panama's Jewish Community Central Committee, members of the Ecumenical Committee, of the Interfaith Committee and other community authorities.

Young students from the Isaac Rabin school and of the Youth Movement NOAR read the names of the victims of the Shoa. After lighting six candles in memory of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust the participants read texts and sang songs that referred to this painful day.

Representing the Interfaith Committee Mr. Luis Ibrahim gave a speech. It was the first time in our country that a Muslim leader spoke in a synagogue. During his historic address Mr. Ibrahim criticized the Holocaust deniers and condemned "the fanatics that profess to be Muslims and explode themselves in popular markets killing innocent people".

The central moment of the ceremony was the address of Mrs. Marianne Granat, survivor of the Shoa who, together with her husband, Rabbi Alexandre Granat (z.Tz"l) arrived to Panama in the early eighties.

In her touching words, Mrs. Marianne gave a testimony of her own experience in the extermination camps:

"In reality, in Auschwitz, everything symbolized desolation and death. I never saw a bird fly: the passing clouds in heaven were the only reminders of nature... Everything else was hellish: the constant, merciless hunger, the electric wire that fenced in and at the same time separated each camp, the dirt, the eternal crematory flames, the strong smell of burned flesh that impregnated the whole place, the selections, the selected crying in despair, begging the executioners to let them live because they were still young, the dogs that were trained to push the victims to the showers that were only the prelude to the gas chambers, the horrible screams on that night in August 1944 when the gypsies refused to enter the gas chambers, the barracks where the rats ran freely at night on the beds where five or six of us were huddled..."

After the prayers of remembrance the ceremony ended with the commitment to keep the memory of the martyrs alive and the participants sang *HaTikvah*, the anthem of the State of Israel.

MIFGASH



Jews and Catholics

Together towards a better world

“Thanks for sharing this space of work that allows us to know each other better and will help to construct peace”. The dialogue with Benedict XVI started with these words.

The meeting took place during the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean that gathers the Latin American and Caribbean leaders of the Catholic Church. I had a chance to hear about them in the UJCL meetings and also had a chance to meet the Jewish community leaders.

The meeting that lasted three weeks in the Brazilian city Aparecida, started with the address of Pope Benedict XVI, whom I had the pleasure to meet personally afterwards.

I arrived in the conference as an observer on behalf of the Latin American Judaism, to work with the various countries' Catholic delegates in elaborating the lines of action to be followed in each of them.

The unusual and historical fact was that among the purple skullcaps of the cardinals and the violet ones of the bishops there was a black one with colors around the center, not called skullcap but Kipa, the one I wore and singled me out as a Jew.

This story started with the dialogue with Benedict XVI, proceeded with several days spent with all the attendants in Aparecida that served for mutual understanding, and as for the challenge, it undoubtedly lies ahead... what we, Jews and Catholics, will be ready to do in order for this world to become a better and fairer place, where the values shared by both faiths will turn us into brothers and partners in search of solving the problems that affect our region.

Claudio Epelman
Director of the Latin American Jewish Congress

MIFGASH



MIFGASH



DINNER AS USUAL

To the unsuspecting observer Alice was just getting dinner ready. Her thoughts carried her into distant places and friends she was no longer in contact with. There was a tightness in her throat, the realization that words, however revealing they might be to her, could not always bridge the gap that separated them.

They had been a happily married couple for years, the kind that was “so hard to find these days”, according to relieved relatives. When it mattered Daniel had been there for her. It was on the seemingly unimportant everyday matters that he failed to empathize. Particularly when it came to her latent wish to re-embrace the faith of her family.

Perhaps it was not Daniel’s nature to enjoy the art of conversation; at times the comment Alice had saved for him failed to find a response.

Their children, whom they both cared for so much, served as a safe topic although, occasionally, they caused some discord when the couple disagreed on what was essential for Dina and Jared to live happy lives. Discipline and loving support were hard to harmonize, especially when it came to their Jewish education. As a “newcomer” to Judaism her husband felt Alice was not qualified to give an informed opinion about Hebrew school philosophies nor observance of family traditions.

Alice wondered if loving him was enough. The thought of settling into a convenient routine from which she would be unable to break loose scared her.

A sudden noise interrupted her thoughts. A key had turned in the lock and Daniel walked in.

Alice gave him her brightest smile while she finished setting the table. Daniel asked her the customary “How was your day?”

She had to struggle to answer “As usual”.

The TV set was turned on and Alice was left with her precious memories and a heavy burden of conflicting feelings.

That was her world, perhaps it was better to leave it untouched. There were limits to what a “happily married couple” could safely share...

Martha E. Lichtenstein
June 2007

MIFGASH



Snoa Building's 275th Anniversary (Curaçao)

The Snoa building's 275th Anniversary commemoration is already a very fond memory. All those months of intense preparation were over in less than a week, but what a week that was!

The Commemorative Service held on Monday evening, April 16th, was truly something to remember and will re-live in the hearts of all who were present. Hazzan Tracht led the service magnificently and Rabbi Soetendorp's words, as the key-note speaker, were awesome.

The Art & Architectural Expos were officially opened by Jaime Saleh, Past Governor of the Netherlands Antilles and current President of the Monumentenzorg. The opening ceremony took place on the patio between the Maritiem Museum and Villa Maria on Tuesday evening, April 17th. Many exhibitors and other invitees were present to witness the opening and to listen to Lucille Berry recite her magnificent, Snoa inspired, poem.

"Sold out!" Standing room only" should tell the reader everything about the incredible Cantorial Concert presented by Hazzanim Faith Steinsnyder, David Perper and our own Avery Tracht on Wednesday evening, April 18th. Accompanying the Hazzanim were Wim Status Muller (on the piano) and Erich Menig (on the organ). What an evening and what surprises one after the other. Let us not forget among all the "kudos", was also Wim Status Muller's world premiere presentation of his "*Snoa Fantasy*".

The Architectural Forum (in the Maritiem Museum on Thursday afternoon, April 19th) provided a perfect ending to an unforgettable week. A panel of experts presented their views on the topic of "*How Synagogue architecture around the world, also inspired by our own Snoa building, influences the community in which they are located*". Ms. Adi Shamir (U.S.A) moderated the panel of three architectural experts: Dr. Bernard Buddingh' (Curaçao), Drs. Joel Cahen (The Netherlands), Dr. Samuel Gruber (U.S.A.). Rabbi Simeon Maslin (U.S.A.) put it all together with his inspirational presentation "The Living Snoa". This Architectural Forum, a true learning experience for all present, was indeed a memorable closing for our 275th Commemoration Week.

Last, but far from least, the special 275th Anniversary Bulletin, written and edited by René Levy Maduro, is a jewel and a learning experience that people will keep as a collector's item.

Kudos, congratulations and lots of praise go to Jaime de Sola, the 275th Anniversary Chair, and all the members of his committee. A well-deserved MAZALTOB and PABIEN to each and every one of you!