The Shofar

May, 1991

UJC Members Seek Jewish Club Seats; Support Moves to Unite Community

Following encouraging discussions with trustees and Jewish Club leaders over the past two months, UJC members Robert Meyer and Bob Green have decided to run for the J.C.'s General Committee in the hope that their participation will strengthen cooperation within the Community. It is also expected that UJC member Charles Monat, presently serving on the J.C.'s General Committee, will run for re-election. All are longtime members of Ohel Leah Synagogue and the Jewish Club, in addition to being UJC founder-members.

The platform adopted by the three supports moves to make The Jewish Club an independent Jewish Community Center structured and managed to accommodate the religious, educational, social, cultural, intellectual and recreation needs of all major Jewish groupings or congregations in Hong Kong. They believe that Club policies and operations should be guided by a democratically-elected board chosen from its members. They also support increased involvement in community affairs by the Ohel Leah trustees. Another key plank in the platform is their support for the continuation of kosher facilities in the Club under qualified rabbinic supervision. Recognizing and respecting Orthodox concerns about the need to preserve the *kashrut* nature of the eating area, they pledge their support for a religiously *halachic* formula or approach that satisfies all or at least the large majority of members.

They believe they can be helpful in attracting more UJC members to The Club, reduce the "we— they" distinction among its members, and, by drawing on the resources and talents of the Jewish community as a whole, achieve an economy of scale that enables The Club to operate on a more cost-effective basis. The candidates are therefore seeking the support of not only those sympathetic to Reform interests but all voting members who believe a strengthened, reinvigorated, well-administered Jewish Club is the key to comprehensively serving the broad-based needs of the entire community. As Robert Meyer has pointed out, "We need to look at the situation with some vision, to see Hong Kong's potentially important role in world Jewry as possibly the biggest Jewish Community between San Francisco and Jerusalem, and realize that as the Community grows, our potential is greatly enlarged to serve as a focal point for Jewish cultural, religious, and educational exchanges. That's why we need The Club to truly function as a Jewish *Community* Center."

Marans's Host Home Shabbat May 31

Visiting Rabbi/Academic to Conduct Service

Eugene and Anne-Marie Marans open their doors to members of The UJC and friends on May 31 for what promises to be a most interesting and enjoyable Friday evening. It will combine the opportunity to attend a Shabbat service conducted by a distinguished visitor and have a delicious Shabbat dinner afterwards. **To assist the Marans's in their planning, please call Susanna at 463-8156 if you plan to attend.**

Our visitor, Rabbi David Davis, brings a varied and fascinating personal history to Hong Kong that includes work as a chaplain in San Quentin Prison, experience as a congregational rabbi, and professional service as a marriage and family therapist. Since 1987, he has been Associate Vice President for University Relations at University of San Francisco.

Among his notable achievements are the establishment of the first chair in Judaic Studies at a Catholic University in the U.S. As such, he enjoys the distinction of being the first rabbi to occupy a full-time position in the theology department of an American university.

His congregational posts include Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts and Congregation Rodef Sholom in San Rafael, California. He was also Associate Director of the National Federation of Temple Youth for three years. Rabbi Davis received a B.A. in sociology from American University, graduate degrees from Hebrew Union College including Honorary Doctor of Divinity, and a doctorate from the California Graduate School of Marriage and Family Therapy.

When: May 31, 8 p.m.
What: Shabbat service, followed by dinner
Where: 27B Kennedy Heights, 10 Kennedy Road (next to Video Livery)
Parking: Limited guest parking available in garage; there is additional public parking across Kennedy Rd. (accessible from the Kennedy Rd. turnoff at Cotton Tree Drive)

The next UJC Shabbat service will be June 21, 8 p.m. at the home of Joseph and Martha Josephson, 15 Peak Gardens, 18 Mt. Austin Road, The Peak. Services have also been scheduled for July 19 and August 23, details to be announced.

Interpreting the Law: Three Views on Mixed Seating

Background: In the April issue of The Shofar, UJC chairman Bob Green questioned the ruling that that prevents Reform services from being held in The Jewish Club, arguing that he was not aware of any prohibitions on such in Jewish code *(halacha)*. In response to his statement "I seek enlightenment," Rabbi B. Lapian of Ohel Leah Synagogue submitted the following. Rabbi Sam Joseph, professor at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati has responded to Rabbi Lapian's remarks while a third perspective comes from Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz, founder and editor of *Sh'ma, a Journal of Jewish Responsibility* and professor of Jewish Religious Thought at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.

Rabbi Lapian's Response

The separation of the sexes at services is not a"mere custom reflecting the mores of a bygone age." It is a law, a *Halacha*, and according to our outstanding Talmudic scholars — an extremely important one. It's origin is in the Talmud (*Sukkah*, 51B) where we are told that at certain festive occasions, which took place at the Temple in Jerusalem, great crowds gathered to witness the service. The Sages were concerned lest there occur a mingling of the sexes, for the solemnity and sanctity of the services could not be maintained in such an environment; hence, although the sexes were originally separated, and despite the reluctance to add to the structure of the Temple, it was ruled that a special balcony be built for the women in that section called the '*Ezrat Nashim*" (Womens' Court) — in order to reduce the possibility of frivolousness at these occasions. The same principle which applied to the sanctuary in Jerusalem applies to the Synagogue, the *Mikdash Me'At* (miniture sanctuary) and the mixing of the sexes is therefore proscribed. Thus Jewish Law clearly forbids what has become known as mixed seating or mixed pews.

We do not know historically of any Synagogue before the modern era where mixed seating existed. No documents and no excavations can support the notion that this breach of Jewish Law was ever accepted by Jews. Philo and Josephus who never saw the Talmud both mention separate seating in the days of the second Commonwealth. (*Philo D. Vita Contemplativa 32-32; Josephus Antiquities 1662).*

> "... those who have favoured family pews have unwittingly advanced the cause of paganization and Christianization of our Synagogues. Understanding that it is wrong to assimilate Jews, we are witnessing the attempt to assimilate Judaism. . ."

The principle was upheld as law in the last generation by the most eminent authorities. There's a lot more to continue with on this particular point but I would like to proceed with the history of separate seating.

In its very earliest history, while still under the influence of classical Judaism, Christianity maintained a traditional Jewish attitude towards women's participation in religious services, and already found a strong Pagan undercurrent making itself felt in opposition. It was Paul who found it necessary to admonish the Corinthian Christians to prevent their women from preaching in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:34,35). The early church was against allowing its women from taking part audibly in public worship and included a prohibition on praying in mixed company (Charles Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church* — New York, McMillan 1958, pgs. 78-80).

The Pauline Position was clearly "a rule taken over from the Synagogue and maintained in the primitive Church". The Corinthian Church proved however to be a channel for the introduction of pagan elements into Christianity; foreign elements which were later to become organic parts of the Religion.

Corinth itself was a city of pleasure noted for its immorality which usually had religious sanction. This pagan environment with its moral laxity had a profound effect upon the Corinthian Church. The effort to introduce mixed seating and women preaching is thus part of the pagan heritage of Christianity, just as Paul's initial efforts to resist these reforms were part of Christianity's Jewish heritage. The pagan influence ultimately dominated and today mixed seating is a typically Christian institution. When Jews agitate for mixed seating they are guilty therefore of religious mimicry. In this case, as stated, it is a borrowing from paganism. (This point was considered by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, the Talmud expert of the Conservative movement, in a letter quoted on Conservative Judaism (Volume 11, page 39), transmitted to the modern world by way of Christianity.

Mixed seating thus represents a desire by Jews to Christianize their Synagogues by imitating the practices of contemporary Christian Churches and this kind of mimicry is, as was pointed out, a violation of not only a specific law of the Torah but an offence of the whole spirit of Torah. If someone might remain sceptical of what we have said that mixed seating represents a pagan Christianization of the Synagogue, he ought to consider the origin of mixed seating in the Synagogue itself.

Reform in Europe did not know of mixed seating. It was first introduced in American by Issac Meyer Wise in about 1825 when he borrowed a Baptist Church for the Reform services in Albany, New York, and found the mixed pews of the Church so much to his liking that he decided to retain this feature for his Temple (Samuel S. Cohen, *Reform Judaism in Jewish Life in America,* page 86). I think there is only one conclusion as far as this is concerned, that those who have favoured family pews have unwittingly advanced the cause of paganization and Christianization of our Synagogues. Understanding that it is wrong to assimilate Jews, we are witnessing the attempt to assimilate Judaism and when a congregation finds itself working to submit to their pressure of mixed seating, it must consider this amongst other things.

Are we to remain a Jewish Synagogue or a semi-pagan house of worship? Are we to incorporate th separate seating of the Holy Temple or the family pew of the Baptist Church? Are we to carry on in the spirit of Jerusalem or of Corinth? Are we to follow the teachings of Hillel and Rabbi Akiva and Maimonides or of Issac Meyer Wise and his ministerial colleagues?

A Response to Rabbi Lapian's Response

It seems that the never ending exchange of words between members of the Hong Kong Jewish community continues. We mainly share in a collegial manner though these words actually cover over some deep feelings of pain on both sides. Both the liberal and the orthodox factions of the community want unity; both factions want understanding; both factions crave acceptance of their point of view; both factions believe that they are correct!

But we are people of words. We have argued for generations about the nuances of our words and I think that we will continue to do that for generations to come. For are we not a community that has encouraged and studied commentaries on commentaries on commentaries on the commentaries? We today have as much legitimate right to try to understand the text as did our ancestors. We do try to obey and lead a full and meaningful Jewish life.

Rabbi Lapian's reply to a recent essay in The Shofar talks about the history and a legal interpretation concerning mixed seating. Though I disagree with some of his facts, in the main Rabbi Lapian shares a view about mixed seating that is generally held in the world of Orthodox Judaism. In fact, the issue of mixed seating has become symbolic (at least in America) with the debate on whether a synagogue is truly orthodox or not.

But Rabbi Lapian really misses the point of The Shofar essay. This debate is not over mixed seating, though it is related to the vitality of the Hong Kong Jewish community. From the start the members of the Hong Kong Jewish community who, for deep, sincere, and personal reasons, do not practice Orthodox Judaism, have tried to find means that would allow them to keep their Jewish identity, maintain their Jewish practice, and at the same time not divide the Hong Kong Jewish community. Road blocks have been put in the way of this goal since the very beginning.

What the members of The UJC would like to do is to be able to worship in a building that is owned by the Jewish community of Hong Kong thereby fully demonstrating their membership in that community. The UJC is not looking to worship in the same room as the members of the Orthodox community because they do not want to offend that segment of the community.

But of course this is the crux of the matter. Non-Orthodox Judaism wholly offends some Orthodox Jews. They will do anything that they can in order to prevent the liberal community from taking part in the Hong Kong Jewish community. I am fully certain that they could locate some Jewish text to prove that by Jewish law the members of The UJC cannot worship in the same building as members of Ohel Leah.

In reality, the only thing that makes an entire building impure is when there is a death in the building. There is no logical Jewish legal position that would disallow an Orthodox *minyan* occurring in one part of a building — with separate seating — and a liberal *minyan* with mixed seating occurring in another part of the building. But for elements of the Orthodox Jewish community a Reform *minyan* may be like a death has occurred which thereby renders the entire building impure. (Of course I am stating that metaphorically.)

So let us be fully forthcoming with our opinions because both sides continue to have a "dual" [sic] using various pieces of Jewish text and Jewish law. Unless the members of Ohel Leah want to keep the entire community united both factions will continue to quote their own true understanding of the texts and nothing will ever change.

■ Rabbi Samuel K. Joseph

The following is excerpted from *Liberal Judaism* by Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, NY, 1984)

"Let us consider, for a moment, the most visible single practice which distinguishes liberal from Orthodox Jews, mixed seating at services. Liberal Jews clearly learned this from gentile practice. Should we now go back to the traditional segregation of sexes at services? The legal grounds for a women's section are most flimsy, stemming from a report of 'levity' during a special Sukot celebration in the Temple. (Suk. 51b) To the modern Jewish conscience, awakened by the Emancipation, the practice says more about ancient Near Eastern sexism than about God's will. To seat women separately from men, preferably with a curtain between them, so that they will not sexually distract the men who alone are commanded to pray, is demeaning. To seat families together at worship enhances the experience of prayer and may then set a standard for the relationship outside the synagogue. Liberals broke with Jewish tradition in this instance to create a practice which would keep Judaism more vital than it could be merely by following precedent. To liberals the challenge of modernity will best be met not by changing as grudgingly as possible but by responsibly determining which innovations might improve Jewish life today.

. . . "At this juncture, the argument between the groups focuses on the proper methods for introducing and controlling change. At their most fearful the Orthodox agonize that once radical departures are allowed there will be no way of stopping them until all of Judaism has been sacrificed — and they then point to the evidence of gross assimilation in the liberal Jewish community. In that spirit, only the most minimal deviation from inherited practice would be allowed, and some Orthodox groups live by this strategy.

. . . "No contemporary Judaism can consider itself authentic if it does not remain faithful to this central institution of Jewish life. Were Orthodox decisors willing to interpret the law today in terms of the flexibility allowed them, there might be no need for Conservative Judaism. But an unfortunate rigidity has crept into the way they now read and apply the *halachah*. Significantly, scholarship clearly demonstrates that the great teachers of other eras met social discontinuity by significantly altering Jewish practice. Responsible Jews will do so today to meet the special threats of modernity to Judaism.

. . "As a matter of conscience, Reform Jews have long been committed to the equality of women in Jewish religious life. They early found the courage to express this in their synagogue seating, music, and education. . . The Reform movement exists because other Jews insist that moral imperatives must take precedence over outmoded institutional forms. Their determination to respond to the immediate spiritual needs of contemporary Jewry makes them willing to take great Jewish risks, by traditional standards. They then pioneer the ethical and esthetic forms which the rest of the community may sense it needs but cannot bring itself to act upon."

"To the modern Jewish conscience, awakened by the Emancipation, the practice says more about ancient Near Eastern sexism than about God's will. To seat women separately from men, preferably with a curtain between them, so that they will not sexually distract the men who alone are commanded to pray, is demeaning."

Heritage Course Suffers Glitch; Crash Hebrew Course to Start in Fall

Despite a valiant effort by Professor Michel Millidot at the May 14 gathering, those attending the Heritage telecourse were unable to view the seventh segment due to a technical problem with the videotape. In the expectation that the tape can be repaired or a replacement found in time, it is planned to show this portion immediately following the completion of the eighth meeting on May 28 for those who care to stay. The ninth and last meeting of this popular series is on June 25 The Jewish Club.

Although interest continues to be strong, it has been decided due to scheduling problems to start the new crash Hebrew course in the fall, possibly in cooperation with other Jewish groups and congregations in Hong Kong. Course materials have already been received from the U.S., thanks to the efforts of Martha Josephson during her brief visit to New York last month. Several other adult education courses are being reviewed by the education subcommittee as well with the hope that they can also be offered in the fall.

The Shofar

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Community Coalition Establishes Jewish Preschool, Enrolment Underway

In response to a need felt for quality facilities and programs for preschool children, a number of members of the Jewish community have established the Carmel Preschool, Hong Kong. The school is also intended to provide children with "the proper foundation to appreciate our cultural and religious heritage," according to an announcement mailed to parents.

The organizers and steering committee are endorsed by and include representatives from all the major Jewish groups and congregations in Hong Kong including Ohel Leah Synagogue, The UJC, and Chabad. Some of those involved have had the experience of setting up "PIPS" in Parkview and other preschools in the U.S.A. According to the announcement, "It is intended that the school will incorporate the very best of facilities and learning materials and have highly qualified teachers to give our young children the best possible education."

Classes for children 2-5 will begin in September. With just a few vacancies remaining, parents are urged to submit applications without delay. An effort is underway to obtain an appropriate school site with attention now focused on properties in Shouson Hill and Mid-Levels. Regardless of the choice, school administrators plan to provide transportation for the children.

Any of the following committee members may be contacted for more information: Eli Schwartz, 817-5824; Goldie Atzvon, 523-9770; Veronica Frankenberg, 813-0173; Marlene Rubin, 524-1549; Avi Nagar, 521-4336; Nurit Malachji, 572-4683; Ivan Greenstein, 834-0708; Bob Kroonenberg, 578-7233.

Mail or fax (834-1056) to: Carmel Preschool (HK), c/o 1301 East Point Centre, 555 Hennessy Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

Yes, we are interested in enrolling our child (children) in Carmel Preschool for 1991/2:

Family name _____

Child's (children's) name(s) _____

Date(s) of birth _____

Address _____

_____

Telephone _____ Fax _____

Case of the Missing Hagaddahs

In the event one or more of The UJC's Hagaddahs inadvertently found its (their) way to your home following the Passover seder at The American Club, please either drop it (them) in the mail (GPO Box 6083, HK) or send a check for $30 each.

Feinberg Duo to Perform at Jewish Club

The popular Jewish singing team, Cantor Sheldon Feinberg and his wife Selma, will celebrate "80 Years of Hava Nagila" at a Jewish Club performance May 25th. It is part of an 80-stop world tour.

The theme of their performance is related largely to the fact that one of Feinberg's teachers was the composer of Hava Nagila, the Hebrew song of joy written 80 years ago.

"My wife plays the guitar and we sing in English, French, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, and Yiddish. It helps give people an understanding of related feelings and emotions of all people," Feinberg was quoted as saying recently in Newsday.

The duo has played to wide acclaim in the U.S. and abroad. Their current tour takes them to Florida, California, Israel, and Japan. Feinberg is cantor at Tamarack Lodge, a resort in Greenfield Park, New York during the High Holidays and Passover.

Seating is limited to 100 members and guests. The cost, including a buffet dinner starting at 6:30 p.m., is $275 per person. The performance is expected to begin around 8:30 p.m. Please call 801-5440 to book.

Volunteers Sought for High Holidays Music

The search is on for UJC members and others in the community who are interested in singing or can provide piano accompaniment during HIgh Holiday services this fall. Because the Holidays start relatively early this year, planning and practice must begin soon. If interested, please call Susanna at 463-8156.

Jewish Project in China Seeks Help

To be Jewish means sooner or later you'll be asking people for money to support Jewish interests. The article in the March issue of the Chronicle (publication of Ohel Leah Synagogue and The Jewish Club), "The Jewish Agenda in China," raised a call which you may have overlooked.

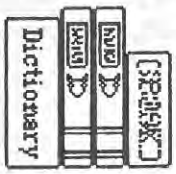
Professor Xu Xin, president of the China Judaic Studies Association in Nanjing, is heading a major translation project which will produce the first Chinese language *Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Publishing costs will amount to US$23,000. The publisher has agreed to put up $13,000 and another $3,000 has been raised from contributions including $1,000 from Professor Xu's savings. A balance of $7,000 is still needed before work can get underway.

Contributors of $100 and over will be acknowledged by name in the E.J. and receive one free copy. If funding is obtained, Professor Xu and his team plan to complete the translation in time for publication next year. The project is endorsed by The Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong and The Sino-Judaic Institute.

As China-coast Jews, we here in Hong Kong have a vital interest in helping to spread accurate knowledge about Jews, Judaism, and Zionism to the people of China, most of whom are abysmally ignorant on this subject. This project is a basic and important first step in the right direction.

Those who would like to contribute to this most worthwhile endeavor should send their check, ,made payable to "Prof. Xu Xin," to Dennis A. Leventhal, Chairman, JHS at 3B Cliffview Mansions, 25 Conduit Road, Hong Kong. For further information, call 559-2890 (home) or 334-1186 (office).

■ Dennis A. Leventhal



Jews by Choice to Meet May 30

UJC members, spouses and friends who are interested in converting are invited to join a newly-formed discussion group which plans to meet monthly.

The first meeting will be Thursday, May 30 from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Martha Josephson's apartment. Please call 849-8567 or 865-0118 for further details.

Community members interested in advising the group and/or moderating sessions are welcome to join as well. Please call Martha for more information.

Torah Fund

The UJC is happy to acknowledge receipt of donations for the Torah Fund during the past month from the following members:

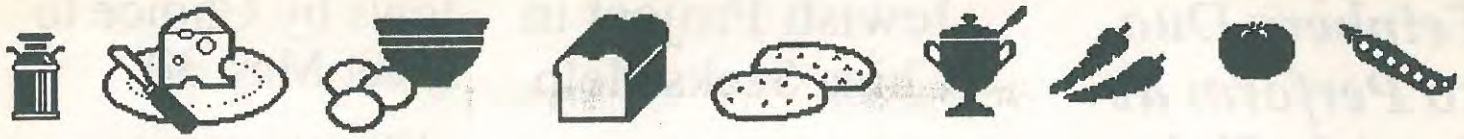
Paul and Cindy Thiel
Albert and Sharon Fine
Prof. & Mrs. Michel Millodot

Donations sent in earlier or subsequently will be acknowledged in next month's issue of The Shofar. Confirmation that a Torah has been obtained will be announced in the same issue, along with relevant details.

Those who wish to share in the honor of this significant acquisition for our Congregation are urged to send in their donations without delay.

UJC to Note *Yahrzeits*

If you would like the anniversary of the death of a loved one (the *yahrzeit*) noted at a Friday evening service, please submit the information by letter or fax to The UJC. In accordance with practice, the name will be read at the Friday service following the event. It's also customary on this date every year to light a memorial candle or lamp to burn from sunset to sunset.



Jewish Women's Association To Publish Hong Kong's First International/Jewish/Vegetarian

Cookbook

We need your Family Favorities for inclusion in our published cookbook to be sold to the Hong Kong community at large.

My favorite recipe for _____

From (name and phone number)_____

_____

Country of origin _____

Ingredients _____

_____

_____

_____

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Method: _____

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Please send to: Paula Tahler, 8B Monterey Court, 47 Perkins Road, Jardines Lookout, Hong Kong
or Jewish Women's Association, 4/f Melbourne Plaza, 33 Queens Road, Central, Hong Kong

Recipe for Challah

(SABBATH TWIST)

2 envelopes dry yeast (or 2 cakes compressed yeast)
1/2 cup lukewarm water
2 cups hot water
pinch of saffron (brew in a little hot water and strain)
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
2 eggs, beaten
8 cups all-purpose flour

Note: The amount of yeast given here is for quick rising, generally desired in modern kitchens; if bread dough is set to rise overnight, use just half the amount of yeast. All other ingredients remain the same.

Soften the yeast in the lukewarm water.

To the boiling hot water, add the saffron (brew), oil, salt, and sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved. Cool and when lukewarm, not before, add the softened yeast. Reserve about 2 tablespoons of the egg for brushing loaves later, and add the remainder to the liquid. Turn into a large mixing bowl; add about three cups of flour.

Stir and beat to a smooth, thick batter. Set aside for 10 minutes; add flour to make dough that can be handled.

Turn out on a floured board and knead until smooth and elastic. Shape into a ball and grease the whole surface well.

Place in well-greased mixing bowl; cover with a clean cloth. Let rise in a warm, never hot, place to double in bulk — 2 to 3 hours.

Knead again until dough is fine-grained. Divide dough to make two loaves.

Cut each portion into three pieces, with a small extra piece that can be braided for the top of the loaf.

Roll each of the three pieces into long strips; fasten ends together; braid into a twisted loaf.

Divide and braid the small portion for a braid on top of loaf.

Prepare the second loaf in the same manner.

Place loaves on a greased baking sheet. Cover; let rise to double in bulk in a warm, not hot, place.

Add a spoonful of cold water to the egg; then brush the surface of both loaves; sprinkle with poppy seed.

Bake in a hot oven (400 degrees F.) for about 15 minutes. Then reduce temperature to moderate (350 degrees F.) and bake for 45 minutes. Makes 2 *challah*.