

# NEWSLETTER

Amsterdam, August 2012 – Menachem-Av 5772

Dear Friends and Supporters of the Levisson Institute,

In this Newsletter we report on the following topics:

1. Our first 10 years and a couple of milestones
2. The 'Levisson Rabbis' and our rabbinic students
3. Closing ceremony of the Teacher Training Course
4. Changes in the Board
5. Far-reaching changes in the leadership of the Institute
6. A pre-publication from our research project
7. Finances and the years to come

## 1. 10 years Levisson Institute and a couple of milestones

In August 2012 it will be 10 years since the Foundation and the Institute were founded. This meant that it is a time for a quick look back. The main reason for establishing the Institute was that we badly needed to train people who can help ensure that our Liberal congregations and organisations would be able to meet their two main tasks in the coming years: first to ensure that there will be ample opportunity for Dutch Jewry to actively participate in Jewish religious and cultural life, and second, that our spiritual heritage can be promoted and passed on to future generations.

We decided that the primary task would be the training of rabbis, who could then take responsibility for the core tasks of the congregations. This goal was met for the first time in August 2008 with the ordination of five Rabbis. In the meantime our second goal was set to start a training program for chazzanim, or *shelichay tzibbur*. This two-year course was completed when the first group of 15 graduated in May 2009. On 1 July 2012 the third task, that of training teachers for our children and their parents, was also completed when 12 new teachers graduated from the Teacher Training Program.



## 2. The 'Levisson Rabbis' and our rabbinic students

On 24 June Marianne van Praag was installed as Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Congregation in The Hague in a beautiful and lively service. She is now the permanent successor of Rabbi Avraham Soetendorp. Rabbi Soetendorp held an emotional speech in which he recalled Marianne whom he first knew as one of the children, and later as a young woman and active member of the congregation.

Marianne responded with an equally emotional sermon about her own personal journey to this moment and her feelings now that she has this great responsibility to care for her own beloved congregation. May the Eternal One bless Marianne and help her to successfully fulfil her tasks.

This past May the Annual General Meeting of the Amsterdam Liberal congregation endorsed the appointment of our student Ira Goldberg as second rabbi in Amsterdam. He will receive his Semicha from the Institute on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September and, directly following this, will be installed in his new position. An open invitation can be found on our website:

<http://www.levisson.nl/images/stories/020912%20Semicha/Uitnodiging%20breed.jpg>

We also take this opportunity to congratulate Ira and his wife Max on the birth of their third child, a son and "Shabbat child" called Saraf, on 30 June last, and to wish the whole family well.



With this appointment, we can now look with satisfaction at the Dutch Liberal Jewish situation and see that Rabbis, with semicha from our Institute are now at work in all our congregations.

Likewise the *shalichay tzibbur* and the teachers we have trained are active in almost all LJGs in our Dutch Union.

As the academic year 2012-2013 starts, we have two rabbinic students who are now in their final year. Both will start work on their theses. Clary Rooda will complete her training with her last internship under the supervision of Rabbi Marianne van Praag and David Snuijf will take over the internship of LJG Brabant from Ira Goldberg under guidance of Rabbi Tamarah Benima.

All other rabbinic positions remain as they have been in the past year. For a full listing, see our website: [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > Archives > Board of Rabbis.

## 3. Closing ceremony of the Teacher Training Course



On 1 July 2012, at the end of their two-year training, 12 new teachers received their diplomas in a sparkling ceremony. They will work in almost all LJGs in the Netherlands, from the north to the south and west to east, not just in Amsterdam and The Hague.

The old Hague Portuguese Synagogue was filled with interested people from our various congregations. The festive atmosphere and beautiful presentations demonstrated clearly that this is a group of graduates of whom the Levisson Institute can be proud.

We owe a special thank you to the leadership of Rimon, the National Educational Centre of the Union, and to Matty van Eldik and Liesbeth Aussen who joined us in organizing and conducting the training and maintaining the contact with the Department of Jewish Education of the Leo Baeck College in London.

The photographs and the videos of the closing ceremony can be seen on our website.

On the Dutch side there is an overview of what they have studied, see:

[www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > Study programs > Teacher Training program > Program days of study.

Under the heading Archive > The Lectures, Dutch speakers can follow the video recordings of the special course on Jewish History Philosophy designed and given by dr. Bart Wallet of the University of Amsterdam.

#### 4. Changes in the board

In November 2011, we said farewell to Wilma Stein, who had been the Secretary of the Board since its inception. She was the last board member that had helped build the Institute from scratch; we will miss her steady hand and wise words.

The position of Secretary is now filled by Simone Haller. Thijs ten Raa who joined the board in November 2011 took her place as treasurer. Shortly afterwards, the last vacant position on the board was filled when David Allick joined, who as a lawyer has an important role to fill in the work of the board.



The latest change took place on 27 June. Marja Hene, who was the liaison with the Executive Board of our Dutch Union said farewell after eight intensive years on the board. She was succeeded by Harry Polak, who also followed her in the Union board. We know Harry as an excellent board member and are delighted in his joining the board, but we will still certainly miss Marja.



More information about the board members can be found on our website: [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > All about us > Who is who in the organisation > The Board.

#### 5. Far-reaching changes in the management of the Institute

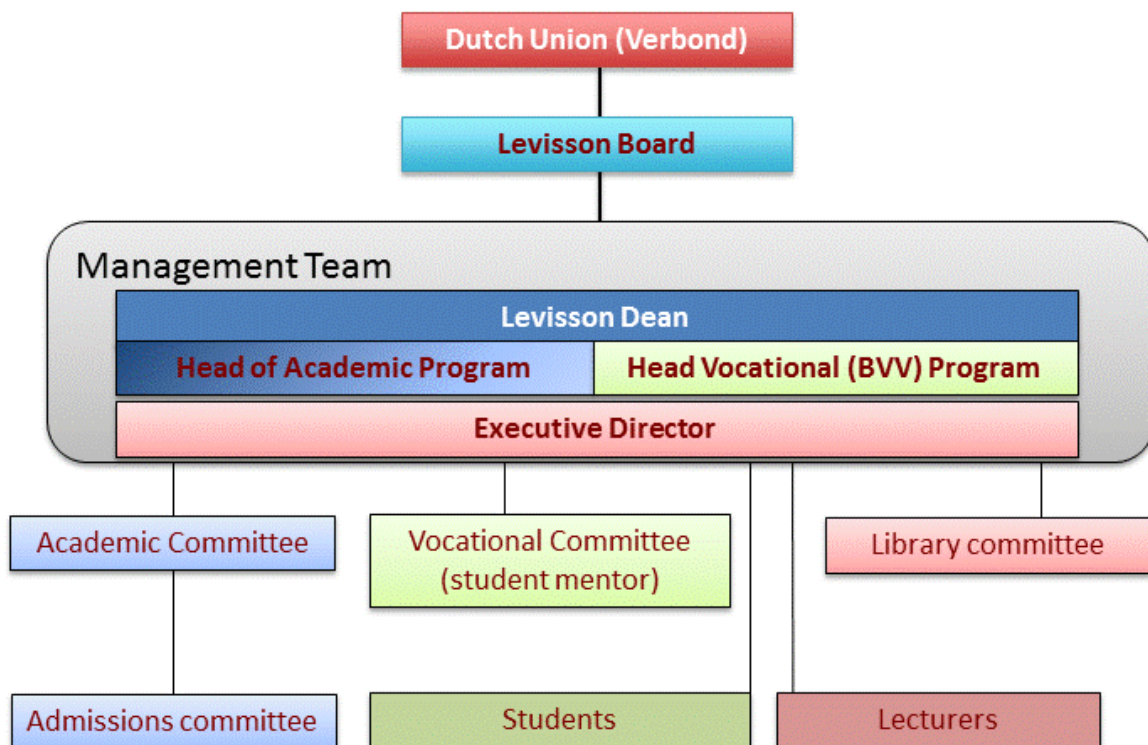
As reported in the last two annual reports, the Dean, Rabbi David Lilienthal planned to leave his post at the time when the second group of students were to receive their semicha. Now two of them, for reasons beyond their control, have incurred a one-year delay.

Since Rabbi Lilienthal intends to go on aliyah to join his children and grandchildren in Israel, he has decided to keep to the planned time schedule. Late in 2011 the board started the procedure to ensure a proper transfer of his tasks to others. The plan described below will go into effect at the beginning of the new academic year on Monday, 3 September 2012.

Below is the chart with the main features of the new management structure and a brief, job description of the duties of the members of the management team (MT).

## Levisson Organogram English

as of 3 September 2012



**Levisson Dean** – Rabbi; responsible for the overall running of the Institute ; primus inter pares in the management team; representation with a wide network in and outside the Netherlands; long experience in working in the Jewish world and in congregations; fundraising.

**Executive Director** – Administrative background; general secretariat, extensive knowledge of the Dutch Jewish community, able to communicate well in English and Hebrew; responsible for the finances, making time schedules, travel arrangements, correspondence, reports and annual reports, publicity, support for the fundraising, etc. Authority for independent decision making within set limits.

**Head of Academic Program** – University background; responsible for developing the curriculum, lecturers, educational materials, etc.; works in close co-operation with the Academic Committee.

**Head of the Vocational (BVV) Program** – Rabbi with professional experience; responsible for the professional training, pastoral trainings, internships, etc.; works in close co-operation with the Vocational Committee (a sub-committee of the Academic Committee).

The management team (MT) will consist of four persons, assisted by two main committees and a few smaller committees that are appointed by the Board. The committees are composed of experts who help the MT to prepare the policies and content of the educational and training programs. For example, the curriculum of the academic program as a whole and the planning per year is done by the Head of Academic Programs in consultation with the Academic Committee and the lecturers. The final decisions are taken by the Academic Committee. The Head and the Executive Director together then put the plan into action. This requires coordination with other plans and this is done in the MT and by the Executive Director.

The Management Team appointed by the Board consists of the following individuals:

1. The Dean: **Rabbi Menno ten Brink**, first rabbi of Amsterdam LJJ. First and foremost Rabbi ten Brink will represent the Levisson Institute at the national and international level to Jewish and rabbinical organizations. Rabbi Ten Brink has the longest rabbinical experience among his active Dutch colleagues and this will play an important role in planning the content of the educational programs. Within the MT he will be the *primus inter pares*.
2. The Head of the Academic program: **Professor Reinier Munk**, professor of Modern Jewish Philosophy at the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam. Prof. Munk has been a member of the Academic Committee since 2007 and is both at home and abroad greatly respected in the academic world of Jewish studies. He and Prof. Irene Zwiep, chair of the Academic Committee, together guarantee the solid academic foundations of both the rabbinic training and that of our other programs. Prof. Zwiep is a member of the Board of the Faculty of Humanities and the Chair of the Department for Hebrew, Aramaic and Jewish Studies at the University of Amsterdam.
3. The Head of the Vocational Program: **Rabbi Marianne van Praag**, rabbi of the LJJ The Hague. Her experience of being active in the pastoral work of Jewish congregations goes back more than a generation, albeit at that time not as a rabbi. Together with the student psychologist Carolyn Levisson, chairman of the Vocational Committee and a member of the Academic Committee, Ella Oesterman and Joost Levy, they will ensure a thorough professional training so that rabbis well trained in academics will also be effective congregational rabbis.
4. The Executive Director: **Francine Püttmann**, will be the person responsible for the bulk of the practical work, "the spider in the web". Ms. Püttmann will work half time from the Levisson office in the LJJ Amsterdam building. She will also continue her current work as our librarian but in a more limited role. Francine has a relevant, versatile training and because of her many previous activities in a variety of the major Jewish institutions in The Netherlands, she is particularly suitable for this all-encompassing, coordinating and responsible position.

The board and the present Dean will in the coming months coordinate the transfer of responsibilities. All are confident that, with this construction and staffing, the Levisson Institute will continue to grow as the knowledge centre for our Dutch movement. The current Dean will almost certainly advise the Institute from a distance but will not be burdened with daily affairs.

More details on everyone involved in the Institute can also be found on the website: [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl)> All about us> Who is who in the organisation?

## 6. A pre-publication from our research project

Chaya Brasz, who is performing our first research project, attended in 2009 an international conference in Germany on "The German Rabbinate Abroad", the influence of German emigrant and refugee rabbis in Jewish communities worldwide. There she held a lecture on the contribution of German rabbis to Jewish life in The Netherlands. This is one of the issues that are being addressed in her research project. The results of the conference as a whole will be published in the next Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, due to appear in October 2012.

In the meantime Oxford University Press has published Chaya's article for the Yearbook online. The links both to the website of Oxford Journals as to the PDF version of the article follow below. Please note that these links are not intended for further distribution without consulting us or directly with Oxford Journals.

The article gives a foretaste of the project on which she works.

Webversion:

<http://leobaeck.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/ybs008?ijkey=pxvidKw7CNNzwKh&keytype=ref>

PDF versie:

<http://leobaeck.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/ybs008?ijkey=pxvidKw7CNNzwKh&keytype=ref>

A brief but more detailed English description of this project can be found in an appendix to the Annual Report 2008-2009. This can be read on our website:

[www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > All about us > Annual Reports. Click on Annual Report 2008-2009 and go to page 22.

## 7. The finances and the years to come

We are pleased with what has been achieved in the first 10 years of the Institute. Our rabbis now work in all the liberal congregations in the Netherlands and several other places in the community, and our *shelichay tzibbur* (chazzanim) and teachers work throughout the country. So, what remains now for the Institute to do?

Quite a lot, actually!

The present situation within the Dutch Union is such that there is only one full-time position for a rabbi. The Hague offers a 75% position, Amsterdam will employ a second rabbi for 60%, and the positions in the other eight congregations are, with respect to rabbinic salaries, significantly less. For the *shelichay tzibbur* and the teachers, the situation is similar. In many respects we train "professional volunteers", *but that makes their work no less essential to Jewish life today and in the future*. There may not be many paid positions, but there is certainly no lack of work!

In fact, we are already short of rabbis. In Utrecht, Rabbi Navah-Tehila will soon leave her position since she wants to return to her family in Israel. In two other congregations rabbinic interns are active as 'interim rabbis', Rabbi Benima and Rabbi Van Praag each serve three congregations, and Rabbi Ringer two.

We do not see this situation changing substantially anytime soon. This means that almost all our graduates will have to find other sources of income. This was known when we started the

Institute, all students know it from the outset, and this is the reason why we find our students among people who are older and already established in their professions. This certainly is also an advantage, since they bring more life experience than younger students. This is very noticeable both during the training phase and later in their congregational work.

A logical consequence is that they will not work for 40 years as rabbis; they will reach retirement age in about half that period. The Board has therefore calculated that we will need more rabbis sometime around 2018-2020, and consequently a new group of rabbinic students should start their training in September 2013. This has been publicized and we are in the fortunate position that the first candidates for this new group have already submitted their applications.

As far as teachers are concerned, there still are a good number of vacancies and we need to have a new group starting their training right away. We have not yet, however, found the means to finance it. With the *shelichay tzibbur* we can afford to wait a few years with a new class. Our graduates employ their knowledge well and are themselves now teaching lay people in their communities the basic knowledge they need to function in regular services and life cycle events.

So what is stopping us? We have the organization, the students are coming, the need is there, and the curricula and the experience have been developed. It is just that everything costs money and with the ongoing economic crisis it is becoming increasingly difficult to find the funds we need.

We therefore appeal for help to all who wish Dutch Jewry and us well. Our circle of Friends, who donate a fixed annual amount of between €250 and €1000 for at least five years is of great importance but needs to grow. We are also looking for foundations and funds that would be prepared to support us with somewhat larger amounts. Inheritances and legacies that could form the basis for an endowment fund would mean a "life insurance" for the Levisson Institute for the long term. Would you be prepared to help us yourself by contributing and if possible by showing us the way to find others who appreciate our work and would be willing to support it?

Further information on this matter is also available on our website. Go to [www.levisson.nl](http://www.levisson.nl) > Support us, or get in touch with the Dean or one of the board members via the website > Contact.

With kind regards and best wishes,  
and on behalf of the Board,



Rabbi David Lilienthal  
Dean