

## CREATING CONNECTIONS WITH MASORTI SISTERS IN EUROPE

Good news to report: Though there might be reason for concern for Conservative Judaism's "piece of the pie" in North America, our affiliate, Masorti Judaism, is alive and growing in Europe. My husband and I were privileged to be part of the Gladstein Fellowship/Masorti European Mission 2015 which recently visited Masorti communities in Budapest, Hungary, Paris, France and London, England.

The Gladstein Fellowship is a group of young men and women, both ordained Rabbis and current Rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary, who are part of the entrepreneurial program set up by Ned and Jane Gladstein to service and assist small Conservative congregations in North America. The students are mentored by senior Rabbis and work in their community as well as work in emerging congregations throughout the US. Upon graduation, the newly ordained Rabbis are required to work in small congregations and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired through the program. The trip was designed to expose the Gladstein fellows and other participants to some of the many flourishing Masorti communities in Europe and introduce them to the leaders of Marom, the Masorti young adult program. Marom leaders from Brussels, Berlin, Madrid, Valencia, Paris, Prague, and Budapest joined the mission for Shabbat at the New North London synagogue which allowed for much discussion and exchange of ideas

The group of forty four people consisted of ten Gladstein fellows (women and men) and spouses, one adorable baby, Jane and Ned Gladstein, congregants from the Rabbis' shuls and interested lay members. We were joined by Rabbi Tzvi Graetz, Tehilla Reuben from Jerusalem, Rabbi Randy Brown of Washington, DC and Rabbi Mauricio Balter from Beer Sheva, Israel. Rabbi Chaim Weiner, head of the European Masorti Bet Din, from the UK was both the scholar-in-residence and tour guide. He provided a wealth of historical information and current insight into each community visited.

Prior to our departure, it occurred to me, as both a regional Torah Fund chair Sisterhood Torah Fund chair, a plethora of beautiful, never worn Torah Fund pins from previous years' campaigns that might be appropriate for some of the women we would meet in our travels. Jewish communities in other countries are not blessed with decorative, attractive Jewish themed jewelry as we are here in the US. I was confident that some of these pins would resonate with women whom we would encounter. While women in the US often become Torah Fund benefactors with an annual contribution of \$180 but may not wear the pins, many women in the Masorti communities visited do not have the financial resource to make this type of charitable donation nor the exposure to this type of jewelry. I thought that they may actually welcome the opportunity to have a piece of jewelry that speaks to their Jewish being. How right I was!

Allow me to share a few reactions of the women to whom I gave the pin, most of whom will remain nameless. I gave the pin "*Limmud, study*" to Chazgan Jaclyn Chernett who studied to be a Cantor in her late 50s and flew back –and- forth from London to NYC for two- and –a- half years in preparation for Cantorial ordination. She has now set up a virtual European Academy for Jewish Liturgy geared to smaller communities throughout both Eastern and Western Europe where she helps train lay leaders in *nusach* and the appropriate tunes for weekday, Shabbat and holiday prayers. Immediately, she put on the pin and then proceeded to lead the *Mincha* Shabbat service at the New North London Synagogue. She was so proud to wear the pin and was so deeply moved. A wife of a Conservative Rabbi who lives in Jerusalem, but currently resides in Berlin with her husband who is teaching at the new Masorti rabbinical school in Potsdam, wrote in response to receiving the 2013- 2014 *Mishpacha* pin: "Thank you for the lovely pin from Torah Fund. It will remind me of how my mother worked for years for Torah Fund, well before I went to NYC to study at the Seminary." She, her husband, brother and brother-in-law all received degrees from one or more schools at JTS. Another woman leader of Masorti Olami wrote about her *Mishpacha* pin. "Thank you for the Torah Fund pin...I feel very much a part of the Women's League family and this pin is part of that and my whole Jewish world family." The wife of a prominent British Masorti Rabbi, and a scholar in her own right, wrote in response to receiving the 2011-2012 pin "*Hiddur Mitzvah, Beautifying a Mitzvah,*" "I wanted to write to thank you for the beautiful brooch you gave me when ...the group visited from America. It is truly exquisite. I have been wearing it a lot and have had many admiring comments."

The responses can best be summed up by sharing an email I received a few days after I gave my own *Mishpacha* pin to the president of a synagogue for his wife. His shul was so impressed with the pin that he said they wanted to use the idea as a fundraiser for his shul's significant anniversary and could I give him more information about the artist. I quickly told him that this was designed and commissioned exclusively for and by Torah Fund and therefore they could not copy it but I was happy to give him the name of the artist whom he should contact. The emotional, spiritual, personal and physical responses that the Torah Fund pin evoked in the women who received them renewed my dedication and support of Torah Fund and its mission of educating future generations of Conservative/ Masorti Jewish leaders, teachers and scholars in North America and throughout the world.

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