

JEWISH REALITY

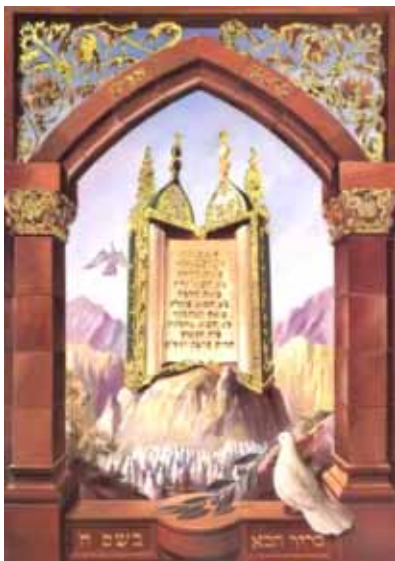
Great Rabbi
MENACHEM
HACHOEN

THE DAY OF THE GIVING OF THE TORAH

The sixth of Sivan is the festival of Shavu'ot, after forty nine days of the counting of the Omer. In older times the festival was called "the First Wheat Harvest", and at the time of the Temple, people would come to Jerusalem from all over Eretz Israel and would bring their first grain and fruit as gifts to God. With the bringing of the first fruits, a long period of uncertainty comes to an end. The fate of the winter crop has been decided: the barley has been harvested and gathered in and the wheat harvest is about to begin. All the different vegetables are also ready to be picked. "At four periods the world is judged: on Pessach the wheat..." (*Mishna Rosh Hashana* 1:2). By now, the verdict is already apparent. The hot winds which might shrivel the crop have already passed, and any unexpected rain has already done its damage. The tension is over. While the forty nine days of the Omer parallel this season, they are not a season in themselves, but rather a bridge between spring and summer, and this period ends on Shavu'ot.

Another anticipated event comes to culmination, at the beginning of Sivan, another peak is reached. Paralleling the process in nature, this, too, begins on Pessach and continues for fifty days until it concluded on Shavu'ot. The redemption from Egypt. If the exodus from Egypt was the beginning of the redemption from Egypt, the festival of Shavu'ot is the completion of that process. After all, the exodus from Egypt was the

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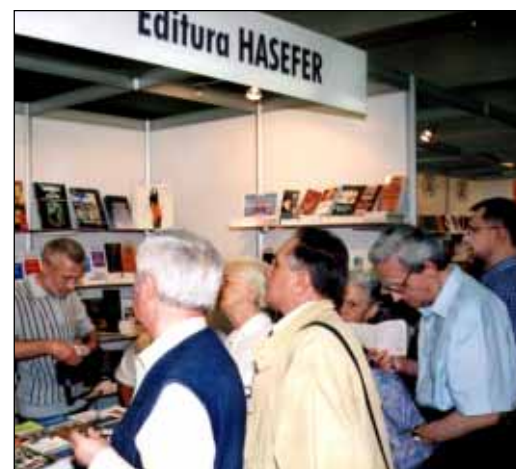


physical redemption of the Jewish people and its political and economical liberation, whereas the giving of the Torah at Sinai was the liberation of the Jewish soul and its elevation, which imparted significance to the entire process. Indeed, if the exodus from Egypt was meant to liberate the Jewish people and to make them feel free, we are told, "Do not state that the word (describing the tablets brought down by Moses) is charut ("engraved"), but rather cherut ("freedom"). One should not understand the Torah verse as meaning that the tablets contained "engraving", but rather that they contained "freedom". "Only one who studies Torah is truly free, and whoever studies the Torah is elevated." The giving of the Torah at the conclusion of the exodus from Egypt, therefore comes to teach us that freedom in itself is trivial unless man has meaning in his life. And just as nature is tense as the end of the harvest approaches, for the harvest is the goal of the previous plowing, sowing and other labor in the fields, so the counting of the Omer expresses the longing - from the exodus from Egypt up to the giving of the Torah - for the completion of the exodus, which is the receiving of the Torah. Thus, Maimonide writes in his Guide for the perplexed (III:43).

"The Torah tends to assimilate itself to nature, and it perfects nature... The festival of Shavu'ot is the festival of the giving of the Torah, and this day is exalted and its glory told in the days from the beginning of Pessach until it comes, like one who awaits the arrival of the one he truly loves, for he counts the days. And that is the reason for the counting of the Omer from the day they left Egypt until the day of giving the Torah, which was the plan and the purpose of their exodus".

THE BUCHAREST INTERNATIONAL BOOKFAIR The 13th edition

More than 200 exhibitors from Romania and about 20 from other countries (Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, etc) participated to the 13th edition of the International Bookfair in Bucharest, on June 1st - 5th. More than 150 book releases took place, between them we mention: "The Contribution of the Romanian Jews to Culture and Civilization" ("Hasefer" Publishing House), "Stalinism for Eternity", by Vladimir Tismaneanu ("Polirom" Publishing House), "The Esthetics Theory" by Th. Adorno ("Paralela 45" Publishing House), books signed by Mircea Cartarescu and Anca Manolescu, "The Holocaust Problem", by V. Achim and C. Iordachi ("Curtea Veche" Publishing House).



The 7th International Conference of the Jewish Community from Debrecen and of the Jewish Communities from the neighbouring countries

The 7th International Conference of the Jewish Community from Debrecen and of the Jewish Communities from the neighbouring countries took place in Debrecen, providing an opportunity for an exchange of experiences and of ideas of the participants. For three days there were presented topics of the religious and spiritual Jewish life, aspects of the Hungarian Jews' life, problems of the actuality - the Holocaust and the preservation of the Jewish communities from Eastern and Central Europe, the

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role of Israel, the state of the regional communities due to their continuous numerical decrease. Romania was represented by a F.J.C.R. delegation and by the presidents of the communities from Timisoara, Arad, Brasov and Satu Mare. Dorel Dorian, writer and chief editor of the "Jewish Reality" review, received a prize for his life activity. Our representatives actively took part in the conference. Thus, Dr. Lya Benjamin, historian, and Tiberiu Roth, president of the Jewish Community from Brasov, held lectures on the Romanian Holocaust, and on the future of the Jewish community. Dorel Dorian, Ionel Schlesinger, president of the Jewish Community from Arad, Octavian Fülöp, member of the delegation and Paul Dancu from Satu Mare, presented different aspects of F.J.C.R. life and of their respective communities.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM "LIFE - DIVINE GIFT AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS"

After the impact of the meeting organized in Durau in the summer of 1998, the Bishopric of Moldavia and Bukovina, with the blessing of the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchy, in cooperation with the Federation of the Jewish Communities from Romania, and with the blessing and the participation of the Romanian Rabbinate, organized the 2nd International Inter-Religious Symposium in Iassy, on June 16th - 19th, 2005, with the support of the State Secretariat for Religions from Romania and the Embassy of the State of Israel in Romania. The theme of the Symposium was "Life - Divine Gift and Human Responsibility in the Jewish and Christian Traditions"; distinguished guests, local and foreign personalities participated to the opening ceremony. The addresses and the debates took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere, focused on the religious and ethical principles regarding the sacredness of life in the Jewish and Christian traditions, principles originating in the common inheritance of the Hebrew Bible. The participants declared their solidarity in the commitment inspired by the religious traditions, to bring their contribution to the



promotion of the respect for the sacredness of life and expressed their disapproval to any action dishonoring or degrading the human life and the environment. In this perspective the abusive use of religion for the legitimization of the violent terrorist attacks, especially the suicidal bombing that brings death and devastation, are degrading the name of God and the religion.

The participants expressed their gratitude to the sponsors and the organizers of the symposium, for the outstanding preparation and hospitality and to "Saphir" Centre and the Jewish Committee of United States for their additional support. They expressed their hope for a third similar symposium in Jerusalem next year.



WE DO NOT FORGET OUR MARTYRS

Every year our community holds the commemorative ceremony, Izkor, in the memory of our brothers and sisters deported in June 1944 to Auschwitz-Birkenau from North Transylvania. In this edition we publish the report from the commemoration at the Jewish Community from Cluj. We will continue with the commemorations from Satu Mare and Oradea. We publish also an evocation of the pogrom of Dorohoi, that commemorates 65 years on July 1st.



A valuable bibliographical reference work

"THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ROMANIAN JEWS TO CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION"



One of the most important book releases of "Hasefer" Publishing House at the present edition of the International Bookfair in Bucharest is represented by the new up-dated edition of "The Contribution of the Romanian Jews to Culture and Civilization". The volume, published eight years ago, was coordinated by academician Nicolae Cajal z.I. and by his collaborator, Harry Kuller, sociologist. The present version appears enriched by new names and data, the fruit of the assiduous research efforts of the latter. The work, an authentic Jewish-Romanian encyclopedia, includes the names of 4,000 personalities from various fields who had or have an important role in the development of the Romanian and universal culture and civilization. The book mentions scientists, writers and poets, playwrights and critics, musicians and painters, actors and directors, journalists and politicians, businessmen and managers, engineers and physicians, teachers and lawyers. And if some of the names are notorious, in this edition found their place even those who brought a contribution to the Romanian social and political life, but are less known and not yet included in encyclopedias and dictionaries.

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