



# Where Shabbos touches Midnight



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**In the land of Ikea and Volvo, Jews are a rapidly vanishing minority. But some still persist, despite the anti-Semitism, to live in a community with its own hidden treasures**

A few hours after we arrived in Sweden, we were browsing the Jewish book collection of our guide, David, when there was a knock on his front door. A heated exchange quickly ensued between David and the man standing at the threshold. It was all in Swedish, so we didn't understand a word, but it was easy to see David repeatedly pointing at the mezuzah on his front door for emphasis. At one point, he bolted into the living room, grabbed a Chumash off his shelf, and started animatedly pointing out various *pesukim*.

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When the “visitor” left, David explained that the man was a missionary for the J Witnesses, for whom he had very little patience. David told us that he explained to his visitor that he was Jewish, that the Jewish People possessed the authentic scriptures, and that there was nothing more to discuss.

Welcome to Sweden.

We had come to Göteborg [or Gothenburg], a seaside city in Sweden’s west coast, to perform a Shabbos bris for a friend; Ari G. had officiated at the bris of the friend’s first son in Yerushalayim a decade ago. As our most recent trips have been to parts of Africa, we naturally started preparing for the trip by looking up immunization requirements and sharpening our *shechitah* knives. But those were unnecessary for this trip: Sweden is not an incubator of exotic diseases and is one of the few countries that ban all kosher slaughtering.

David has a family history typical of a “wandering Jew.” He was raised in South Africa but is pretty sure that his grandfather was a famous rabbi in Lithuania. In the 1970s he made his way to Israel, where he served in the army, and then he moved with his *bashert* to her native city of Göteborg, one of a handful of Jewish population centers in Sweden, where Jews number about 18,000 souls. (About 14,000 of Sweden’s Jews live in Stockholm.) David’s *baalas teshuvah* daughter lives with her growing family in Yerushalayim and he is quite proud of her, as well as of his son, who makes his living as a leading Swedish chess player.

The Göteborg Jewish community is relatively small and not overly observant, but as became evident during our visit, they are very proud of their Jewish heritage.

**Surprise in the Attic** The first stop on our sojourn was the magnificent, 160-year-old Great Synagogue, one of the few European shuls to survive World War II unscathed — the result of Sweden’s neutrality during the war. The building was completed in 1855 and has periodically been refurbished, but stands essentially as it did

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160 years ago — an impressive Byzantine and Moorish design with high ceilings, large stained-glass windows, and a splendid hand-carved and richly decorated *aron kodesh*, all evoking a regal and awe-inspiring feeling.

When we arrived, we headed straight for the attic. Because of our interest in matzah history, we were familiar with the story of the Göteborg synagogue attic and its

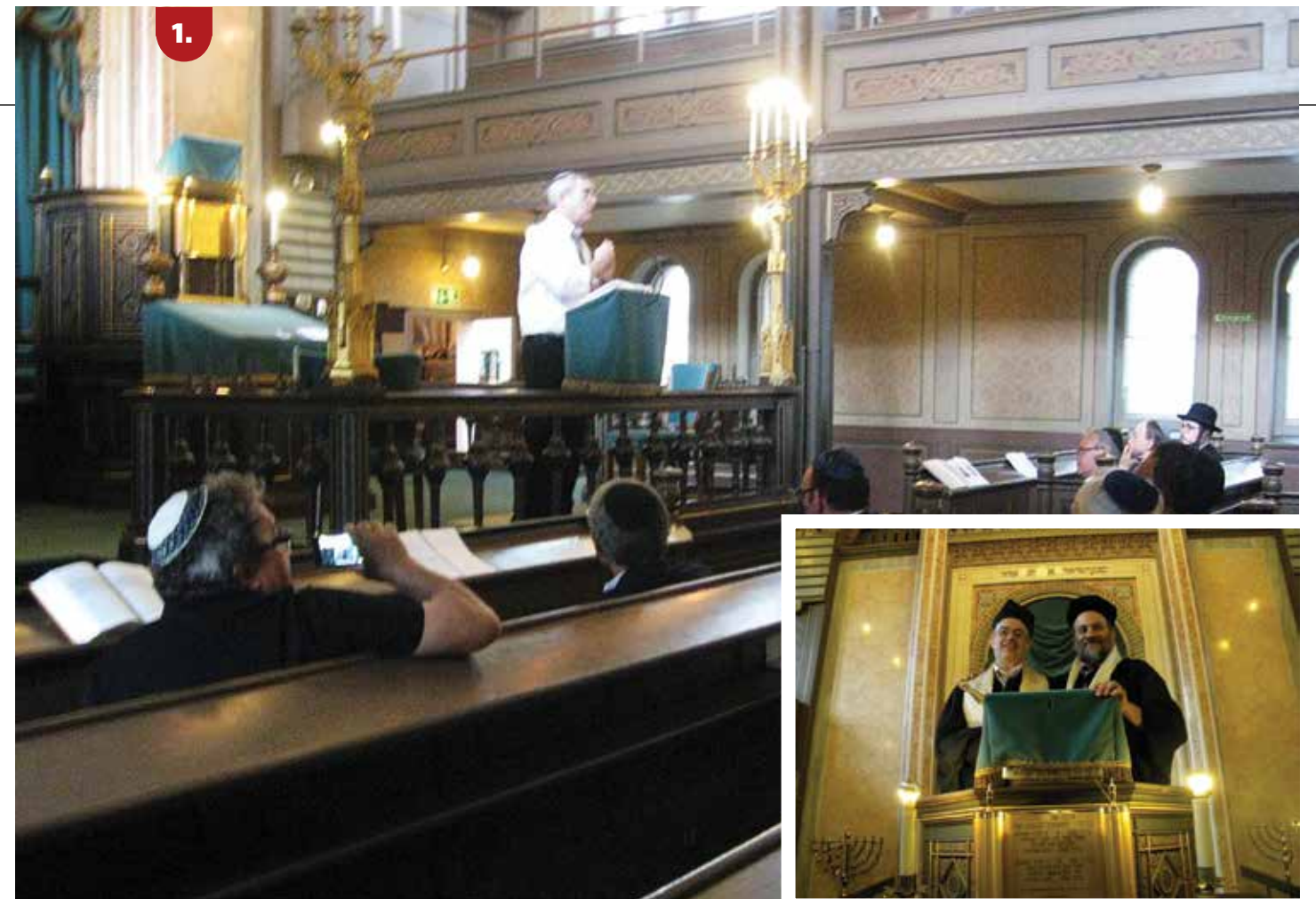
matzah-baking equipment. We had always dreamed of being able to see it, and, as our luck would have it, now we had been invited to Göteborg.

Many of the community members were not even aware of the tale. In 1975, when the community was inventorying its possessions, somebody went up to the attic and found all sorts of what looked like old junk. The local Swedish-born Jews had no idea what the funny guitar-shaped table and metal items were; very few of them actually ate *kosher l’Pesach* matzah. The strange table went unidentified until someone took a look at old Haggados, such as the Venice Haggadah of 1609, which contained engravings of the matzah-baking process, and realized that a historical treasure trove had been found.

The guitar-shaped table was a “smasher” used for kneading the dough, and was an exact match to the ones shown in the Haggadah. (The same type of table is also found in the Touro Synagogue in Rhode Island.) The one from Göteborg appears to be from the late 19th century. Eastern European immigrants recognized the other metal items as *reddlers* (hole-making equipment) and rolling pins. So important was the find that many of the items today reside in the permanent exhibition of Judaica at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Hoping to find something more, we opened the squeaky old doors to the attic, but nothing else was hiding.

Speaking of matzoh, there is a Swedish type of bread known as *knäckebröd* or *hårt bröd* that very much resembles matzoh in its flatness and dryness. It was first made in Sweden over 1,000 years ago and is traditionally made from only rye flour, salt, and water. In order to slightly inflate this unleavened bread, bubbles were traditionally

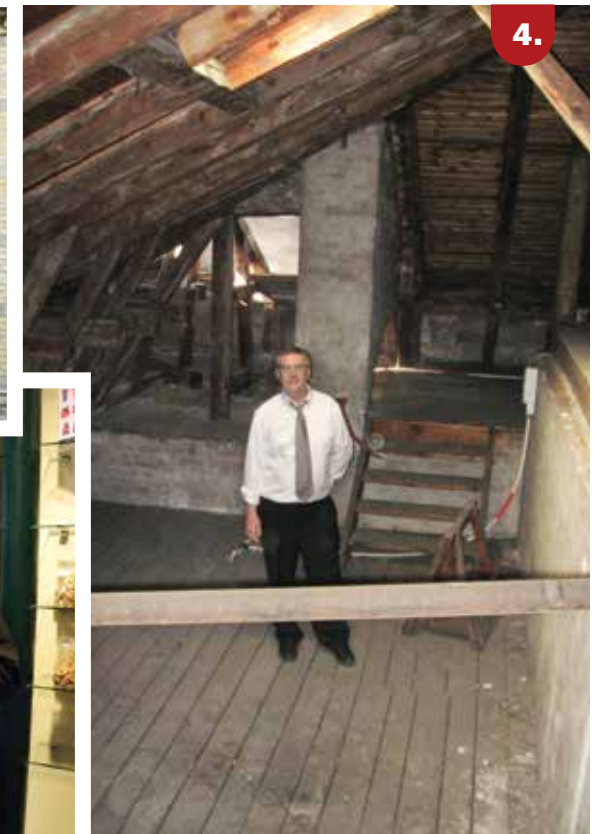


**1. ALMOST SHABBOS** With sunset so late, Ari G. attracted a pre-Shabbos crowd for Minchah in the Great Synagogue

**2. GATES TO HISTORY** The 160-year-old synagogue remained unscathed due to Sweden’s neutrality during WWII. The Jews of Göteborg aren’t exactly religious, but they’re proud of their history

**3. THAT’S NO CHALLAH** This Swedish bread was everywhere, and Ari and Ari decided to snack

**4. INTO THE ATTIC** We thought we’d find more treasures under the rafters, but the space was totally empty. The relics had been cleaned out



## The Rebbe’s SUITE

The last hotel in Göteborg to have manual door locks, Eggers hotel, is located across the street from the main train station and a one-minute walk over the moat to the main shul. It sits atop remnants of the city’s 17<sup>th</sup>-century wall and the current building dates to the late 19th century. A large spiral staircase takes people to the upper floors, and the rooms, while small, have the feel of a previous time.

But what excited us about staying there was that we found out that in 1940 the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, stayed with his family in that hotel as their last stop on their harrowing journey from war-torn Europe to safety in America. We were unable to verify which rooms they stayed in, but it is not a large hotel, with only 69 rooms. In our own minds, we are sure ... we shared the Rebbe’s room.

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added by mixing in snow or powdered ice. We saw them in every bakery we passed and they were always very large and looked delicious.

**Entry Allowed** Swedish Jewish history is actually quite brief: Until 1774, when Aaron Isaac legally settled in the country, Jews were barred from living in all of Sweden. Nonetheless, it seems that a few had been there earlier. In 1645 Queen Christina had enough common sense to avail herself of the services of a non-Swedish Jewish physician, Baruch Nehemias, and permitted him to set foot on Swedish soil. Other Jews must have also arrived, based on the fact that a Stockholm church has a huge painting of the 1681 baptism of four adult and eight Jewish children. Following the arrival of Aaron Isaac, others followed and within a few years there were congregations in Stockholm, Marstrand, Göteborg, Norrköping, and Karlskrona.

In 1815, all of Sweden had about 800 Jews; by 1880, it was up to 3,000, and due to the migration of Eastern European Jews, mainly from Russia fleeing pogroms, the number grew to 6,500 in 1930. In 1942 about half of Norwegian Jewry escaped to Sweden and in 1943, in the weeks following Rosh Hashanah, almost all of the 8,000 Danish Jews were smuggled into Sweden on fishing boats and other small vessels across the narrow strait of Öresund.

The Jewish story in Göteborg parallels that of Jews in Sweden in general. On August 10, 1775, the island of Marstrand outside Göteborg was opened to foreigners, thus paving the way for Jews to settle there. Within ten years, the island community peaked at 60 members, and they were granted royal permission to use space in the Carlsten fortress as a shul.

The privilege to settle on the island was revoked in 1794, and the local Jews made their way to Göteborg, which had welcomed its first Jewish merchant in 1780. Slowly, Danish and German Jews started to build a strongly traditional community in Göteborg. Several shuls were constructed along the way, with the current main shul inaugurated in 1855. This shul soon adopted many Reform practices, although it was constructed with two levels of balconies for the *ezras nashim*.

While no famous rabbis are known to have lived in the city, a famous *chazzan* did. In 1857, Abraham Baer, a German-born, 22-year-old cantor from Amsterdam was hired as a *chazzan*, and held that position until his death in 1894. He wrote one of the most famous works on Jewish *chazzanus*, a book of 1,505 melodies that has seen many reprints.

The community still *sheps nachas* from Baer's legacy and is very attached to *chazzanus*. One of the attics of the shul has been transformed into a studio in which we saw



**5. DEAD END** The cemetery is well cared for, but what were those small graves — children or ashes?

**6. HUMANE DECREES** Brissen are monitored and *shechitah* is banned, but Jews are resilient. The *ner tamid* will always give off light

**7. AND PROUD OF IT** “Why argue with them? We’re authentic.” Ari Z. and David, outside the funeral chapel

**8. SCROLL DOWN** Two special Torah scrolls, one with unusual crowns and another with drawings on top. Does anyone do that today?



no fewer than four old-fashioned record players that are being used in the effort to digitize a huge collection of *chazzanus* records.

The late 19th-century influx of Eastern European Jews formed a small, second shul known colloquially as the “minyan,” which continues to meet today. Throughout this period, Jews played a major role in the local economy and founded many businesses that are still active.

The local community was augmented in the 1930s by refugees fleeing the Nazis, in 1945 by Holocaust survivors, in 1956 by Hungarian refugees, in 1969-70 by Polish Jews, and in recent decades by Israelis and Jews from the former Soviet Union. Today, the Göteborg Jewish community numbers about 1,800 people, although due to assimilation and a significant aliyah rate, the population is declining.

It is not known where the earliest Jewish burials took place; the assumption is that initially the Jews of Marstrand and Göteborg buried their dead in Copenhagen. But early on, the Jews were given a small piece of land to use as a cemetery near the old city with one of the ancient guard towers overlooking it. The oldest tombstone in that first cemetery, which we visited, dates to 1793.

That cemetery is well cared for and includes a section with many small plots. Similar to what we have seen in other countries, we suspect that that area of the cemetery was designated for children who had died from disease in that era. Locally, the legend is that those plots are from people who were cremated, from a time when the city was heavily influenced by the Reform movement.

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**A Party for the Newcomer** On the Shabbos we visited, we were extremely fortunate that there was to be a *hachnassas sefer Torah*, the first to take place in the city in many, many years. The relatively new rabbi of the main shul had decided to inspect the approximately dozen *sifrei Torah* that he had found in the *aron*, and was disappointed in their state of disrepair. At the same time, he was exhilarated at their age and unique styles. Before Shabbos, we had an opportunity to examine some of the *sifrei Torah*.

One of the *sifrei Torah* seems to have been written by a sofer with many ancient and interesting traditions regarding unusually shaped

letters. There were curly *peis*, flat-roofed *ches*'s, unusual crowns (*tagin*) on the letters and paragraph breaks unlike the standard. He applied halachos that are rarely used today owing to the standardization of *sifrei Torah*, such as continuing letters into the column break, columns of varying width, and "hanging" forgotten words between lines. Another Torah contained unusual artistic designs at the top of many of the columns. And then there were two super-miniature Torahs. All of these Torahs were getting ready to welcome a newly refurbished Torah, which had been sent to Yerushalayim for major repairs sponsored by one of the local families.

In recognition of the unifying nature of the Shabbos event, every effort was made to include the entire city. There are normally three services held Shabbos mornings: a right-wing Conservative in the main shul; a small Orthodox in the "minyan," and a small Chabad *tefillah*. But to greet the new Torah, community members decided to have the big shul hold a fully halachic davening for the event. It turned out that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts: The crowd was far larger than what all three services usually attract. After Ari G.'s beautiful Shacharis Shabbos morning, all of the *sifrei Torah* were removed from the *aron* to greet the new arrival as it entered the shul

to song and dancing. As part of the unity, the Chabad rabbi spoke and read the *haftarah*.

The unified Shabbos morning davening was followed by a communal *kiddush* and *divrei Torah*. We were asked to speak (in English — it seems that all Swedes are fluent) and chose to talk about *techeiles* and the *parshah*.

But by far the most well-received *shiur* was during the *kiddush* about the humane nature of *shechitah* and the 80-year-old Swedish ban on halachic slaughter. Because of this government edict all kosher meat must be imported and is thus quite expensive. Nonetheless, the

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Application deadline: 22nd of Teves - December 25, 2013

For more information or to receive an application, email Mrs. Tzivia Jesmer at [apply@c4kd.org](mailto:apply@c4kd.org)

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ב"ה שזכינו להרבה קהלות המתחזקות ורוצות ללכת בדרך התורה והיראה המסורה לנו מרבתינו ג"ע. אך דא עקא, שאין הקומץ משביע את הארץ, ויש צורך גדול בעוד רבנים אנשי מעלה המסוגלים להשפיע על צאן מרעיתם להלהיבם ביר"ש טהורה, ללמדם תורה באופן שיתדבקו אליה, וגם להורות להם דבר ה' זו הלכה.

והנה נדבה רוחם הני תרי צנתרי דדהבא שאר כשרי הגאון הרב יוסף קמנצקי שליט"א והרה"צ ר' לייב מיכאל קעלעמען שליט"א להקים בית מדרש מיוחד בשביל אברכים מצוינים שימלאו כריסם בש"ס ובפוסקים וישתלמו במוסר ויר"ש במשך חמש שנים כאשר יהיו שקועים כל כולם בעלייה בתורה ובמוסר מבלי עול פרנסה להתכונן כראוי שבבוא העת יקבלו על עצמם את העבודה של הרמת הקרן של קהלות קודש שיהי' לתפארת כרם בית ישראל.

וכיון דכידועי ובמכירי עסקינן בטוחני שבעז"ה יצליחו להכשיר אברכים יר"ש וגדולים בתורה כדבעי שימלאו תפקידם בנאמנות. אנא, חושו לעזרת ה' בגבורים. על ידי המלצת המצוינים שבתלמידיכם שהם בני חמש ועשרים שנה, בעלי מדות טובות הזוכרים תלמודם, אהובים ונעימים ומסוגלים הם להיות מנהיגים מוכשרים, מלמדי תורה, פוסקים ומשפיעים בעלי כשר דיבור. זו היא הזדמנות נדירה לתלמידים המצוינים הללו.

ואמינא לפעלם כי טוב הוא וחפץ ה' בידם יצליח כי צורך גדול הוא לעשות לה' בנאמנות נפיקים לארצות הארץ וישראל ובעז"ה יצליחו לה' וע"ז באעה"ה

שמואל קמנצקי  
לוי קמנצקי

# Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic

Rabbi Alexander and Leah Namder, the Chabad *shluchim*, are well known because of their battle with the Swedish government over homeschooling. The Namders have been serving the country's Jewish community for more than 20 years. They did not want to send their children to public school, which is mandatory under Swedish law, but the government argued that religion is not enough reason to exclude a child from public school. Eighteen months ago, the courts ruled in favor of the government and

imposed heavy fines for every day the Namder kids were not in school. At the beginning of this academic year, the appellate court unanimously reversed that decision, citing the need to protect the religious freedoms of its citizens. The court also complimented the Namders on the education they were providing, which includes English, Swedish, mathematics, geography, science, music, art, and gymnastics. They are also fluent in four languages.

community's old age home, elementary school, and communal kitchen are all kosher, and there are individuals who buy kosher meat sold at the community-run "kosher store." Even those who do not keep kosher find the law to be offensive and were quite vocal in pointing out some of the inconsistencies, like the fact that native groups in Sweden's north are permitted to kill reindeer and hunting is allowed. Many of the locals half-jokingly asked if Jews would be able to *shecht* reindeer for the native people.

Sweden has a reputation for anti-Semitism, which hasn't been helped by the large influx of Muslims to the country. The Jews of the southern Swedish city of Malmo have been leaving in droves due to pervasive and public anti-Semitism, fueled by the local mayor. Only 500 Jews remain in a city that had 2,000 in the 1970s.

In line with this anti-Semitic environment is the law on *milah*. In 2001, the Swedish parliament enacted a law "allowing only persons certified by the National Board of Health to circumcise infants." It requires a medical doctor or an anesthesia nurse to accompany the circumciser, and for anesthetic to be applied beforehand. The World Jewish Congress called it "the first legal restriction on Jewish religious practice in Europe since the Nazi era."

We are neither certified in Sweden nor do either of us qualify as anesthetic nurses. The father who invited us, however, was concerned about the legal ramifications and made sure to have a local doctor present at the bris. Thus, both halachah and local law were observed, and on that Shabbos of unity, another Jewish boy was happily initiated into the bris of Avraham Avinu.

**The Longest Shabbos** We had the luck of being in Göteborg for the longest Shabbos of the year. Being located so far north raises many interesting halachic questions and this topic has been extensively discussed by the *poskim*.

Some, such as Rav Simcha Halevi Bamberger (*Shu"t Zecher Simcha*) suggested avoiding the question altogether. In 1866 he wrote to his son asking, "Why should a person, even during the weekdays, place himself in a state of doubt with regard to reading the Shema and prayer? At the minimum, do not remain in that country [Norway] on Shabbos." Others gave specific halachic advice, such as Rav Yaakov Emden in the 18th century, whose surprising ruling could have two polar travelers observing Shabbos on different days, or the eminently practical suggestion of the Tiferes Yisrael that one should follow the clock of the place from which he departed.

We did not face that concern because in Göteborg that Shabbos there would be a sunset, albeit at 10:30 p.m. The sun never reaches the 16.1 degrees below the horizon of Rabbeinu Tam's position, but we were told that Shabbos would be out at 11:50 p.m. That meant that even if we took a very long nap during the day and woke up at 7 p.m, we *still* had five hours before Havdalah. Considering we had to be up by 4:30 a.m. Sunday (when we could daven because the sun would already be up) for our flight home, we contemplated going to sleep before Havdalah and making it in the morning, as Havdalah can be made until Tuesday. However, that is considered *bedieved* by most authorities and although permanent residents of such places, such as northern Germany, often have kids make Havdalah Sunday morning, there was no need for us to forgo Havdalah at its proper time.

In the end, we decided to do a little learning, read some old *Mishpachas*, eat a late Seudah Shlishis of the gefilte fish we had brought, and then go for a *shpatzir* to the port at 10:00 p.m. and ... presto, it was time for Havdalah.

It was so strange, for even at that hour, it was disconcerting to see a slight glow in the western sky. One thing is for sure: The Torah did not expect or want Jews to be living in such a place, and we were more certain than ever that Eretz Yisrael is where we're meant to be. ●