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Invocation and Tribute to Past Rabbis — Rabbi Moshe Grussgott

Unfortunately due to a last-minute commitment, Albert Aflalo, the President of the Consistoire Israelite de Luxembourg wasn't able to attend tonight. He sends his best wishes.

Rabbi Francus once told me a delightful anecdote. A long time CRO member, he's also a long-time member of the faculty at JTS. An ultra-Orthodox friend of his was very fond of Rabbi Francus, but not of JTS, and they would regularly trade good-natured barbs, about the Conservative movement on the one hand and about the Charedi world on the other. When JTS was celebrating their 100th anniversary, Rabbi Francus's friend sent him a bracha: May it last ad meah v'esrim, until 120. What constitutes a blessing for an individual is not always the case for an institution. Tonight we are not celebrating our 100th anniversary quite yet, but rather 75 years. However, this building actually IS approaching 100 years in age. And it's only because of the success of the capital campaign, and the courageous lay leaders on our board who masterminded it, in particular Jane, Ann, and Dan, that we can say now with confidence that this building and this community will last well past meah v'esrim, 120, and beyond

But it's another anniversary milestone that I'd like to call attention to, one that could very well be described as the prologue moment of our shul's history; not from 75 years ago, but from 77 years ago. On June 21st 1941, when a boat called the S.S. Mouzhuino, carrying a few dozen Jews from Luxembourg via Libson, Portugal, arrived at Ellis Island with their chief Rabbi and rebbetzin, Rabbi Robert and Julia Serebrenik. The Hebrew date on which they arrived was the 26th of Sivan. And that date, amazingly, is tomorrow night. We didn't plan the date of this dinner around that; I only realized it a couple of weeks ago. So it's really just an amazing coincidence, or, perhaps, Providence.

We have precedent in our religion for beginning to mark an anniversary of redemption on the night before that date. The law of Bedikat Chametz, of formally preparing the home for Passover, which must take place on the night before the holiday begins; 24 hours in advance, we take stock of our home, and make sure that it's properly in order.

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In my first year here, before Pesach, Rabbi Friedman told me that before performing the search for leaven at our respective homes, we must first perform it at the shul as well. Because the shul is also considered a bayit, he told me. The shul is also a home for this purpose, according to Jewish law. And the Torah commands us to check every bayit, every home, before Pesach. How fitting, then, that 24 hours before the anniversary of our founders' liberation, we stop to take stock of our home; of this historic and special building, and of our special and dear community. Rabbi and Mrs. Serebrenik never had children. This shul and this building are their legacy. And about them we can invoke the verse from the prophet Isaiah 56:5

And to them will I give in My house and within My walls a monument and a memorial better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall never be cut off

And with that in mind, I'd like to read the names of all of our former Rabbis as a way to pay tribute to them all:

Rabbi Dr. Robert Serebrenik z"l

Rabbi Julius Novak z"l

Rabbi Jacob Haberman, Assistant Rabbi

Rabbi Moshe Morduchowitz z"l

Rabbi Jehoseph Haim Ralbag z"l

Rabbi Akiva Stolper

Rabbi Jonathan Feldman

Rabbi Jeffrey Kobrin

Rabbi Yair Silverman, Assistant Rabbi

Rabbi Etan Tokayer, Associate Rabbi, who is here with us today. Rabbi Tokayer spent many hours with me when I first started here, carefully helping to prepare me to succeed him as the assistant Rabbi. And I continue to be grateful for that guidance that helped to get me started here.

And finally, acharon acharon chaviv, our Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Stephen Friedman, who is here today. Rabbi Friedman's mentorship and guidance over the course of many years helped to make me the Rabbi that I am today, and I remain eternally grateful for that. A Mazal Tov to us all on this special 75th anniversary milestone.