

Machzorim For Lund

BY Cantor Thom King

A cantorial odyssey

I've never been to Sweden. To be truthful, I've never given much thought to Sweden at all. When someone mentions Sweden, I usually think of three things:

- Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.
- The Swedish chef from "The Muppet Show."
- Bob Hope and Frankie Avalon in the 1965 film "I'll Take Sweden."

And I must confess, not necessarily in that order.

But when a call went out on the Cantors Assembly email list requesting High Holiday machzorim for a small congregation in Lund, Sweden, I offered to send as many of our unused prayer books as they could use. And there my Swedish odyssey began.

It was a confluence of events that began this journey. After agreeing to donate the books, I began to make arrangement for their delivery. Wanting to be certain that the books were appropriate for their needs, I made contact with the cantorial student who would be leading the services. Leah Frey-Rabine is a student in the Aleph Seminary program, affiliated with the Jewish Renewal movement, and she lives near Frankfurt, Germany.

I was surprised and delighted to learn that not only was she born in Minnesota and graduated from Indiana University's opera program, but she has also been making her living as a dramatic soprano and voice teacher in Europe for many years. We immediately fell into the familiar singer's conversation — "Who did you study with?" "Which roles did you perform and where?"

As we talked, I realized here was a person who, later in life, discovered a need within herself to nurture precious Jewish souls in a place where it can be challenging (even dangerous) to be openly Jewish.

Frey-Rabine's use of her successful performing career and experiences as a lens through which to focus and share her deep love of Judaism struck a resonant chord within me; and it was then that the idea of personally delivering the machzorim to Lund began to germinate.

I eagerly started to research the history of Sweden's Jewish population from medieval times to the present and also read of the many challenges facing the community today. Shechita (kosher slaughter of animals) has been illegal in Sweden since 1937. Circumcision is highly regulated and strongly discouraged. After consulting with my



wife and with Beth El's leadership, I decided to fly to Copenhagen and from there to make the short trip to Lund with my precious cargo. During my stay I will also visit Malmo, the site of some of the most virulent anti-Jewish behavior in Sweden, and will lead Shabbat services at the Great Synagogue in Stockholm.

Frey-Rabine is just one of the fascinating and courageous personalities I have encountered, as I prepare for this journey, and in the coming weeks you will hear more about them. In the next few issues you'll read about:

- The Stockholm mohel, whose main occupation is circumcising Muslim boys.
- The activist who established “kippa walks” in defiance of anti-Jewish incidents.
- The young Muslim who courageously established an organization to educate Muslims about anti-Jewish bigotry and the Holocaust.

This is an odyssey. I hope to gain a deeper appreciation for the Jews of Sweden. I also hope to experience firsthand the unique challenges faced by a tiny minority in a country, where Jews do not enjoy the freedoms that we in the U.S. take for granted.

Related Posts via Categories