

Where every Jew is family and Judaism with a smile — these are mottoes of the Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong in Shanghai. It welcomes all Jews and holds religious observances, celebrations and social activities. Nie Xin reports.



Children play drums at a party organized by Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong. — Photos by Laura Imkamp

Jewish home away from home

Many Jewish families gathered at the Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong on May 22 to celebrate Lag Baomer, a day of festivities and traditional activities including a bonfire and a barbecue.

Lag Baomer is a festive day on the Jewish calendar, celebrating the legacy of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the “Zohar,” the landmark text of Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism. One of the main themes of the holiday is the Jewish tradition that one should love and respect others as they do themselves.

There was lots of food and drink, singing and dancing and special activities for children.

American Glenn Leibowitz, who arrived in Shanghai five years ago, works for a management consulting firm. He went to the party with his wife and two young children. Mrs Leibowitz, a cellist who graduated from the Juilliard School in New York, performed Jewish melodies at the party.

The party is one of many activities organized by the Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong.

The center holds weekly services every Friday night and a monthly dinner on the first Friday of each month, when participants enjoy typical Jewish fare.

The Chabad Pudong, which opened in 2005, is led by Rabbi Avraham Greenberg and his wife Nechamie Greenberg. Around 120 families are regular members.

The center provides a Jewish home away from home, for all Jews in Pudong (and elsewhere).

“The Chabad helps to ensure Jewish identity and continuity through a variety of educational and social services that increase Jewish pride, knowledge and commitment,” says Rabbi Greenberg. He says the Chabad mottoes are: A home away from home for all Jews regardless of background or level of observance; Here every Jew is family.

Greenberg was born in Israel and pursued rabbinical studies in the United States. He moved to Shanghai around six years ago, seeking an opportunity to contribute to the global Jewish community.

There are now two Jewish centers in Shanghai. The other, and the first, was founded in the Hongqiao area in 1998 by Greenberg’s brother, Rabbi Shalom Greenberg. It has around 500 families as regular members. Both brothers are from Israel.

“With more and more expatriates moving or settling in Pudong, we found it necessary to found another

center here,” says Rabbi Avraham Greenberg.

The Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong welcomes all Jews, whether they are from reform, conservative, or orthodox backgrounds, and regardless of nationality. Most members are from Israel, the United States, Europe, South America and South Africa.

In addition, several hundred businessmen, students, artists and others from around the world take part in the center’s activities throughout the year.

Non-Jewish family members, such as Leibowitz’s wife, are welcome.

The community only accepts members who are foreign passport holders.

Both centers organize festivities and observances for all Jewish holidays, including Hanukkah, Passover and Rosh Hoshana.

They offer clubs and programs such as the Women’s Circle, Power Breakfast, Lunch and Learn, Men’s Night Out and Teen Club for teenage girls, among others.

The Jewish community has deep bonds with Shanghai, dating back to the 19th century. It offered shelter to Jewish refugees escaping persecuting during World War II. Unlike almost every other country, it waived visa requirements. Jewish businessmen also helped build the city and some of

its most important buildings. Shanghai’s Jewish community at its peak numbered more than 30,000.

“Many thousands of Jews were saved thanks to the kindness of the Chinese people,” says Leibowitz, “Jews feel they share a lot in common with the Chinese people, and admire the culture and long history of China.”

He says both Jews and Chinese have a language that has been in use for thousands of years, both cultures place a very high value on education and each is rooted in family values.

As the Jewish community has grown and flourished in Shanghai, the Chinese government and people have been welcoming and supportive.

The Jewish community has contributed to the city through business and trade, providing job opportunities, purchasing goods and services and volunteering to various activities that benefit Chinese society in general.

“To hold parties, the most difficult thing is to prepare typical Jewish foods,” says Rabbi Avraham Greenberg. Almost all the kosher foods, like cheese, meat and milk products are imported.

Members make donations to cover the costs of events and parties; the amount depends on members.



A boy is eager for Jewish food during a celebration at the Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong.



Rabbi Avraham Greenberg hosts a party on May 22 to celebrate the Jewish festival of Lag Baomer.

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