

**Report on visit of Rabbi Danny Rich.
Educational Weekend, 9th – 12th June
Herefordshire.**

Co-ordinating an educational weekend for so many busy people is a serious undertaking, which should not be entered into lightly! However, this was a resounding success, Rabbi Danny Rich making meaningful verbal and visual contact with audiences at all levels and all ages from 7 to 70.

Rabbis are busy people, as are most religious leaders, however, Rabbi Danny Rich is the Chief Executive of *Liberal Judaism* and is responsible for 36 Liberal Jewish communities in the UK. In addition to all this, he has very many associated interests, such as being a Justice of the Peace, a Jewish Chaplain to HM Prisons, Richmond and a Chaplain to Kingston Hospital.

Teachers are also very busy people, as most of us know. Almost every minute of the working day is fully utilised. In some cases, e-mail systems are not always working or messages get mislaid. So communications are not always effective, and each school may have to be dealt with in a different way to be sure that the message arrives safely.

Herefordshire Jewish Community.

Herefordshire has a total of only 132 Jewish residents according to the last Census, but despite (or because of) its small size, Rabbi Danny makes a point of seeing its Jewish community at least once per year. Each Community is important to him, and he makes every one feel special. On the Friday evening, Rabbi Danny led the Sabbath service for the Herefordshire Jewish Community, held at the Parish Room of the Church of Our Lady, Belmont Road. After the service he outlined the many advances taking place in *Liberal Judaism*.

Why have an Educational Weekend in Herefordshire?

We all live in a multi-racial society where it is increasingly important to be able to understand 'the other' as the globe shrinks. The Herefordshire **SACRE*** has just completed its Agreed Syllabus for RE. This provides information for teachers in this area, to enable them to help children to understand the different religions of people they will encounter now and throughout their lives. Rabbi Danny's visit was therefore timely and he spoke to a group of Primary teachers about the Jewish concepts outlined in the syllabus. Joyce Mackley, the RE Advisor to SACRE took part at the meeting, which was well attended and well received.

In Herefordshire there are few people from the minority religions such as Judaism and Islam so that children are unlikely to have any contact with them, and even if they do, they may not know it. So, as a Jew, Maurice Rollnick makes a point of visiting Herefordshire schools, to tell them about Judaism. He says that he will often show some artefacts to demonstrate Jewish festivals etc, but he says that the most meaningful one is the human artefact – himself. How much more interesting and special, then, is a Rabbi?

Rabbi Danny Rich's Teaching Programme.

During the weekend of the 9th to 12th June this year, Rabbi Danny visited one primary school, and several secondary schools in Herefordshire. Here he gave six talks to students of 13/14yrs, answering the big and ultimate questions, with particular emphasis on suffering and Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Audience sizes ranged from 25 to 200 students.

Visual impact and involvement are the essence of Rabbi Danny's teaching methods. In one case, at Wigmore High School, he demonstrated the horrors of the Nazi regime, by

showing how the individuals in the class would have been progressively eliminated. Having asked all the students to stand, he rejected those with Jewish grandparents, then those with eye colour other than blue, then those who were not blond. Every eliminated person was 'ordered' to sit down. Then only two remained standing, and they were identical twins. The first was asked if she would produce one child every year for 11 years for the 'Fatherland'. When she said 'no' she was rejected. Her sister was then asked if she would have the 11 children to save her sister. This decision took longer than any others and the impact was astounding.

Visual Impact at Primary schools was possibly even more vivid.

At Broadlands Primary School, Hereford, there was a class of 60 children of the age of about 7 years. Rabbi Danny was asked to explain about special people, special books and the Exodus. Mrs Watkins the RE teacher, only had 30 minutes available for this exercise, which was to take place in the Gymnasium. There was considerable improvisation!

The children were allocated the role of slaves, and the boys were 'set to work' on the building of one pyramid (a vaulting horse). The girls were working on building another. They were told to feel hot and tired, and they played their part superbly and looked exhausted! (It was also particularly humid on that afternoon!).

Moses (Rabbi Danny) had a long robe (a decorator's smock with authentic splashes of dried paint) and carried a stout stick.

After the tenth plague 'Moses' led the escape from Pharaoh's grasp, each 'slave' carrying a small piece of unleavened bread (*matzah*) to help them on their long 50-day journey to Sinai (two circuits around the gymnasium). On the way, the freed 'slaves' encountered the Sea of Reeds (five, blue gymnasium mats), which they had to cross. 'Moses' gave the order, and the seas parted (assistants lifting two mats) to enable the 'crossing'.

On arriving at mount 'Sinai', (a third, even larger vaulting horse), 'Moses' climbed the mountain and collected the ten laws or commandments, but there were some problems and he had to climb again to collect the laws. The children and attending adults enjoyed the whole very memorable and vivid experience.

The Marches Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews meets monthly except during August. Meetings are varied and speakers from virtually all religious persuasions are invited to talk and discuss religious and practical subjects, with a view to developing a better world with a better understanding of our neighbour. For this event, Rabbi Danny was invited to talk about the 'Derivation and Modern relevance of Judaic Liturgy'. At first sight, this may sound a very dry subject, but because Judaism was one of the earliest religions, it has influenced the development of others. The development of the liturgy over the centuries was explained clearly and showed its influence on the present day order of service. This meeting was also well attended, particularly by Christians.

It is hoped that Rabbi Danny Rich will return to present another Educational Weekend sometime next year. Meanwhile if anyone wishes to discuss any of the items referred to above, Mr Rollnick will be delighted to hear from you by e-mail. My address is mprollnick@tiscali.co.uk

Maurice Rollnick 16th June 2006

***NB SACRE is the Standing Advisory Conference in Religious Education.**

Thank you Note to SACRE members. The above event would not have been possible, (I would have given up long ago!) without the support, particularly of the following: Jonathan Rendall, Joyce Mackley, Peter Bowen, Bridget Knight, the Secretary to the Bishop of Hereford and last but not least, Rabbi Danny Rich and his partner, Laura. Schools visited were Aylestone High, Wigmore High, Hereford Cathedral, Bishop of Hereford Bluecoat and Broadlands Primary.