

Far From Oak Park

Lubavitch Yeshiva grad makes a life for his family in Pudong, China.



Rabbi Avrohom Greenberg, right, held the first public menorah lighting in China.

According to Rabbi Avrohom Greenberg, “It’s one of the nicest and most welcoming places in the world for Jews. Jews are liked here more than just about anywhere.”

Greenberg is talking about Pudong, a district of Shanghai, China.

Although born in Israel, Greenberg received his formal rabbinical training in Oak Park at the world-known Lubavitch Yeshiva International School for Chabad Leadership, which now operates from its new location on 10 Mile Road. Greenberg arrived at the yeshivah in 1996, and was ordained in 1999. Now 33, he has been married for nine years to wife, Nechamel; they have six children.

Greenberg and his family moved to Pudong in 2006 and, since their arrival, have been working to strengthen Jewish identity through education and social services that also increase Jewish pride, knowledge and commitment. The Chabad emissaries live in the Pudong Chabad House, a four-floor house that is also the only synagogue in Pudong.

Surprisingly, there are more than 15,000 Jews in China; about 3,000 of them live in Pudong. Greenberg says there are no Chinese Jews — unless they convert.

“We live on donations of money, food, cars, everything — you name it,” Greenberg said. “We get no subsidies whatsoever. What we do get is remarkable community support from Jews and non-Jews alike.”

While Judaism is not an “official religion” in China, the religion is

accepted; Jews are allowed to practice their faith with no problem. It should be noted that Shanghai welcomed and protected more than 30,000 Jews during the Holocaust, saving them from certain death.

“There is no anti-Semitism here; it’s simply nonexistent,” Greenberg said. “As Jews, we live amongst Christian and Islamic people, but everyone gets along.”

On a recent visit to the United States, Greenberg described one of the first times he and his family built a sukkah using bamboo and other materials native to China. The police arrived on the scene thinking there was a dead body in the sukkah because the structure resembled something the Chinese use as a holding area before the deceased are buried.

The rabbi and his family love living in Pudong.

“The respect we get as a religion is unparalleled,” he said. “The Chinese people think that most of us Jews are very smart; they often say ‘like Albert Einstein.’”

He compares Shanghai to New York, with lots of skyscrapers, very cosmopolitan and ultra-modern. He does admit that food can sometimes be a challenge because the Chinese people tend to consume pork with virtually everything they eat. So, often, the family does eat Chinese food, but only if it is kosher.

It’s a long way from the Lubavitch Yeshiva School for International Leadership in Oak Park to Pudong, China, but still the Greenbergs call it home. □

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