

DINNER WITH THE RABBI IN BEIJING

Robert W. Case

While doing some "research" on the Jewish Communities in China, I started correspondence with the Rabbi from the Chabad house in Beijing, and was delightfully surprised when we received a dinner invitation!

When we arrived in Beijing, I phoned the Rabbi, and set up time for the dinner. Since the cab drivers in China speak no English, the Rabbi e-mailed me directions to his house. When we arrived at his residence, we were flabbergasted! The house is in a private compound, and protecting the area was a large "arm Gate", similar to the ones you see at border crossings. The guard was a Chinese Federal police officer, and after providing identification, he allowed us to proceed.... about 100 yards when we were met by another Officer. He then passed us to still another officer, who escorted us to the house. (The house was a large, stately mansion, surrounded by other rather impressive homes. I learned later that most of the residents were ambassadorial officials from other countries-Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Japan, etc. The Chinese are very protective of foreigners) The compound is so safe that they do not even lock their doors!

When we rang the doorbell, we were greeted by a charming six year old named "Michka", who told us about living in China, and her five-year old sister, "Dvorah". Michka entertained us for about 20 minutes, and then the "rebbitzen", Dini, came in. She apologized, and stated that her husband, Shimon, would be a "little late" as he had to fly to Shanghai to perform a "bris"

Dini is from Johannesburg, South Africa, and the Rabbi, Shimon, is from London. I would estimate that they are both in their early thirties. They met in Hong Kong, where Dini was a teacher. Both children are "home schooled". The only room we saw in the house was the rather large dining room, with a table that would seat 20, but was pre-set for eight. In this room, there was also a library and the altar with the Torah, etc. which apparently acts as a "shul" on the Sabbath and the holidays. As soon as Shimon arrived, we immediately sat down to dinner. He brought two young "Chabadniks" - one, Dini's brother, and the other, a young man from New York. I was somewhat surprised when we immediately started eating, with no "brochas" recited first! Dinner was excellent, consisting of homemade mushroom soup,

a lovely green salad, homemade potato knishes (The dough came from Israel), Chicken with barbeque sauce, Chinese rice, tea, and soft drinks.-no bread or dessert. During the dinner, The Rabbi received a call from Israel wishing an accommodation next week for 90 people! The Rabbi said he would accommodate 20-25 people for dinner, but that was the best he could do! Dini kills her own chickens. She imports most of the kosher food from Israel, Japan, and Australia. There is, a kosher bagel bakery in Beijing. She pays her one domestic \$150.00 a month for a 6-day week, 10 hours a day! She said " If they were Chinese, they would only have to pay \$100.00 a month" The rabbi does not own a car, because taxis in Beijing are so inexpensive, It does not make sense to own one!

In conclusion, we spent a delightful time, and had a very lively discussion about our different viewpoints regarding Judaism. I just wish we had more time to spend!

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Cele Case, Bob Case, Rabbi and Mrs. Freundlich, Michka, & Dvora

