

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MAGEN AVOT COMMUNITY



HAMAGEN

#8

PESACH 2024/5784



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This year's AGM is planned to be on Sunday 9 June at 8pm.



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Magen Avot

From the Desk of the Editor Julian Pollard

This edition contains a special Supplement about the Gaza War and its effect on us and our families and friends in Israel. As a community we have been relentlessly engaged in support of the hostages and securing their freedom with a few members showing extraordinary efforts and devoting huge amounts of time to this cause.

The diverse and talented make-up of Magen Avot members is, I hope, reflected once again in this edition. My thanks as ever to you the shul members who contribute so wholeheartedly to this publication, our kind and generous supporters, and to the editorial and design and proof reading team without whom this edition would never have materialised. This edition is designed by Richard Herman whose professional touch should be self evident.

Finally the views expressed by authors are personal and do not necessarily reflect that of the Community as a whole or indeed its Rabbinical leadership but Magen Avot was and remains a diverse community where everyone is encouraged to become involved and where challenging ideas can be debated.

MAGEN AVOT'S ETHOS:

1. Modern, orthodox, inclusive community that is welcoming to all
2. Provision of opportunities for learning that are both intellectually and spiritually stimulating
3. Promotion of women's involvement and ways of making women feel included within halachic guidelines set out by the United Synagogue and Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
4. Promotion of good decorum in shul
5. Supportive of Israel and its national holidays
6. Involvement and encouragement of children and youth
7. To support and advocate for the interests of those in need including persecuted groups in the UK and abroad, consistent with Torah principles

HAMAGEN

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Design: Richard Herman

Proof: Cathy Fisher

With thanks to all our contributors

Please Note: All content has been checked and approved for publication by Rabbi Yoni Golker.

A PESACH MESSAGE FROM RABBI YONI GOLKER

Welcome to the HaMagen Magazine. First and foremost, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Julian Pollard, Julian Maurer, Richard Herman and those who contributed to make this publication such a success. You have played a pivotal role in crafting this outstanding publication. Countless hours of dedication have been poured into its creation, and the outcome is truly remarkable. Thank you all immensely for your invaluable contributions!

Pesach almost invariably coincides with the first half of Sefer Vayikra. At the beginning of the Sefer, Hashem calls to Moshe prior to their conversation recounted at the beginning of Parshat Vayikra. Rashi explains that whilst Hashem revealed Himself to the prophets of the Gentile nations abruptly and without warning, He called to Moshe prior to speaking with him as a token of personal affection. The Sfas Emes explains further that Hashem announced His meeting with Moshe beforehand so as to give Moshe time to prepare himself adequately for their encounter. Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin derives from here that in order for any spiritual experience to be meaningful and leave a lasting impact upon us, we must first ready ourselves sufficiently beforehand. Only if we make a concerted effort to appreciate the value and significance of what is about to occur can we internalise the message being conveyed.

Whenever we experience a moment of genuine spiritual inspiration, if we are unprepared for it in advance, its effectiveness will be muted and its ability to serve as a catalyst for real change will invariably be diminished. At the time of K'riyat Yam Suf, the people present pointed at Hashem, as it were, and unequivocally declared, "This is my G-d and I will glorify him" (Shemot 15:2). The Midrash Rabbah declares that even simple maidservants at K'riyat Yam Suf were vouchsafed a more intense Divine revelation than that experienced even by the prophet

Yechezkel. Yet despite this overwhelming event, the maidservants did not become prophetesses; they remained maidservants. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in Sichat Mussar suggests that this was because the maidservants entered into the moment unprepared – they had invested nothing in advance, and therefore received nothing in return. The degree to which a spiritual experience impacts upon us is directly dependent upon the amount of prior effort expended in preparing for it.

The Gemara (Gittin 77a) states that the three days prior to Shabbat, from Wednesday to Friday, are attributed to the following Shabbat, whilst the three days following Shabbat, from Sunday to Tuesday, are related to the previous Shabbat. The Shem Mi'Shmuel explains that the holiness of Shabbat continues for an additional three days precisely because we invested three days beforehand. Since we prepared for three days in advance of Shabbat, its impact can be felt for a further three days thereafter, corresponding exactly to the measure of effort we invested in advance. It is for the identical reason that the Gemara in Gittin maintains that the influence of a particular Yom Tov endures for a period of thirty days following its conclusion. This too is a function of the requirement mentioned in the Gemara (Pesachim 6a) to prepare for a period of thirty days prior to the Festival. As we prepared for a period of thirty days before the Yom Tov, its influence likewise continues for an additional thirty days.

However, according to some Rabbinic authorities, the obligation to prepare for thirty days in advance of Yom Tov is limited to Pesach. This is supported by the Gemara in Megillah 32a which implies that, whereas in regard to every other Yom Tov it suffices to review the laws of that particular Chag on the festival day itself, Pesach might demand extra preparation as it encompasses so many intricate and complex laws. However, we can perhaps suggest that Pesach requires a greater prior investment of time since its impact needs to



endure well beyond the conclusion of the Yom Tov. For it is specifically during Pesach that we must cultivate and re-assert our foundation of emunah and trust in Hashem that will sustain us throughout the coming year; accordingly, to create this effect, we must prepare for this unique Festival well in advance.

Due to the current tragic situation in Israel, Pesach this year will be very different in Jewish communities around the world. Communities and families have been changed forever and most profoundly affected by the atrocities of October 7th and the subsequent war into which the country was forced. Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah will never again be quite the same. What, therefore, should our response be in the run-up to Pesach this year? I would suggest, in light of the above analysis, that we invest in preparing for Pesach as never before, not in respect of cleaning, but rather in regard to the profound messages of the Chag, and as a result may these themes of Pesach define our homes and our lives throughout Pesach and the rest of the year. Hamas attacked us for being Jewish, so our response has to be, 'let's be more Jewish!' In achieving this lofty goal, may we merit security in the Holy Land, the healing of the injured and the ultimate redemption of our nation.

Dina joins me in wishing you all a Chag Kasher Vesameach. ■

A PESACH MESSAGE FROM CHIEF RABBI SIR EPHRAIM MIRVIS KBE

Among the most dramatic moments in all of Jewish history is the point at which the Children of Israel found themselves caught between their Egyptian pursuers and the deep blue sea.

After hundreds of years of bitter slavery, freedom finally seemed within reach. But, as our ancestors stood on the shoreline, with the Egyptian army bearing down upon them, their fate hung agonisingly in the balance. What followed was an astonishing exchange between Moses and the Almighty.

Moses characteristically prostrated himself upon the earth and cried out to Hashem for help. He could never have imagined what the response would be:

“Why are you crying to me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them travel!”

The message of this astonishing admonition is clear: There is a time for prayer and a time for action, and we must never rely upon one to the exclusion of the other. Rashi teaches that it was precisely this lesson which Moses had in mind when he restricted his prayer for the well-being of his sister, Miriam, to the shortest Biblical prayer on record: “G-d please, heal her please”. He knew that at that moment, his words needed to be accompanied by action.

This was one of the central lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic, when we recognised that our Bitachon – trust that Hashem will be there for us in our hour of need, must be accompanied by Hishtadlut – our own efforts towards achieving our goals.

Our sages capture this principle in the Rabbinic aphorism: ‘You should never rely on a miracle’.

Since the 7th October, we have been

united in prayer. Additional Psalms and special supplications continue to be recited in shuls around the world. We hold every single innocent victim of this awful conflict in our hearts and pray with every fibre of our being for peace, security and the return of all hostages.

Yet, we must also hear the echo of Hashem’s words to Moses: “Why are you crying to me?”

This is also a time for action.

Whenever it has seemed that our community’s capacity to stand against the torrent of hatred directed against Jews and the State of Israel might reach breaking point, I have been reminded by so many of you that in fact, our collective resolve knows no bounds.

From vigils to solidarity visits, media campaigns and local activism – British Jews have made clear that we will not rest while our people are under attack, whether at home or in Israel.

Sadly, our work is not yet done. And as we celebrate the festival of our freedom, we are reminded that throughout our history, with the help of Hashem, we have prevailed.

May we continue to be Hashem’s partners in bringing peace and security to all of His people.

Valerie and I wish you Chag Kasher Vesameach. ■

“May we continue to be Hashem’s partners in bringing peace and security to all of His people.”



Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

A PESACH MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN

Each Pesach around the Seder table, we sing Vehi She'amda, a song about G-d saving the Jewish people from the enemies who try to destroy us in each generation.

This year, the song feels particularly poignant. This is the first Pesach since the worst massacre the Jewish people have experienced since the Holocaust and I suspect as we sing these words this year, our thoughts will turn to the pain and suffering which our brothers and sisters in Israel have experienced since 7 October, the hostages who remain in Hamas captivity as I write this message, as well as the difficulties we have faced here with the alarming rise in antisemitism.

The first line, "Vehi she'amda la'avoteinu velanu", translates to "It is **this** which has stood by our ancestors and us". It is a line which connects our current suffering to the suffering of generations before us, but also to the survival of the Jewish people. This message of hope will feel especially pertinent this year – that the Jewish people will survive this too.

The Chief Rabbi explains that the word **this** refers to G-d, our traditions and our texts which have sustained us for more than 3,000 years. During Seder nights we move from telling the story of Jewish suffering to focus on the Exodus from Egypt and our redemption from slavery. Seder night is the most observed of all Jewish traditions. We therefore feel not only a deep connection with our ancestors, but with Jews all over the world who are recounting the same story.

Through all of the darkness, it can be difficult to remember the light that has

also shone through in these past few months. We have seen amazing unity amongst the Jewish community, both in Israel and here.

We have felt this unity deeply at the United Synagogue, with our communities running solidarity events, vigils, hearing testimonies from survivors and family members of those killed or captured, as well as many inspirational and moving talks. Many of our Rabbis, Rebbetzins and leaders have also been to Israel on solidarity missions in the past few months, where they have seen the aftermath of the worst form of evil, as well as the incredible way that the country has come together to support one another.

My message to you this Pesach is to look for the light within the darkness. The good amongst the evil. It is that hope and unity which has kept us going and has kept the Jewish people surviving.

We continue to pray for the release of the hostages and peace in Israel.

Wishing you and your families a Chag Kasher Vesameach. Have a wonderful Pesach. ■

**“ My message
to you this
Pesach is to look
for the light within
the darkness.
The good amongst
the evil.**



A PESACH MESSAGE FROM BoD PRESIDENT MARIE VAN DER ZYL

This coming Pesach, we will join together for the Seder, and the youngest among us will ask the traditional Four Questions.

But for many of us there will be another question, unspoken and unanswered.

How can we celebrate being redeemed from slavery, when Hamas still holds 130 men, women and children in the most vile captivity? How can we celebrate our freedom when our brothers and sisters are not free?

The horrors of 7 October, when terrorists from Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other groups engaged in a pogrom, murdering more than 1,200 people and dragging more than 200 into Gaza, remain etched on so many of our minds.

The Board of Deputies, alongside our communal partners, organised a vigil outside Downing Street just 48 hours after this pogrom, to pay tribute to the dead and to those held captive. So many people attended that Whitehall had to be closed to traffic. The following month, we held a rally in Trafalgar Square for the hostages. Some 15,000 people came to stand as one with the families of those held in Gaza. Many other events have been held, in London, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow.

Every week that Parliament is in session, we have been holding vigils outside Parliament, to ensure that those who walk in the corridors of power do not forget the ordeal of those taken captive. And we have initiated a campaign entitled Adopt a Hostage, where we invite synagogues and communities to “adopt” a named hostage, to publicise their plight and give support to their families. I want to thank all of the more than 90 communities which have joined so far; if your own community has not yet joined us, I hope you consider doing so.

There has been a sudden and alarming upturn in antisemitism in the UK following the 7 October massacres. We have received many reports of children and teachers being challenged in non-Jewish schools. That is why we have published advice for families, teachers and headteachers in such schools. We also held online talks, addressed by Government ministers for parents of Jewish children at non-Jewish schools and one for parents of students at university. Both were attended by thousands of concerned parents. We have also heard from many people who have been facing increased challenges in their workplaces, which is why we have also produced guidance for those who may be in such situations in their jobs.

Following the BBC’s refusal to label Hamas as terrorists we campaigned for the corporation to change its approach, and held a meeting with Director General Tim Davie which left him in no doubt as to the strength of feeling in the Jewish community. The BBC now refers to Hamas as being proscribed by the government as a terrorist group.

There is still, however, far more to be done. The Board of Deputies will continue this work on behalf of every Jew in the country, quietly and behind the scenes when appropriate, and more vocally when required.

On a personal note, this is the last Pesach message I will be writing to you, as I will soon be completing my second – and final term as President of the Board of Deputies. I would like to thank the many people who have helped me to represent British Jews over the past six years. It has been a privilege and an honour to serve our community.

Pesach Sameach to you and your families from everyone at the Board of Deputies. ■



GREETINGS FROM OUR CHAIRMAN SIMON BENTLEY

A big thank you to all the members of our Executive and Council for your dedicated commitment and hard work. We are grateful for the commitment and inspirational leadership we get from Rabbi Yoni and Rebbetzen Dina Golker and wish them a huge Mazal Tov on the birth of their son Moshe Yehuda Leib.

Mazal Tov to Sara Spizzichino on her being honoured on Shabbat parshat Beshalach as this year's Eshet Chayil. She spoke beautifully and inspirationally, highlighting the special role of women at Magen Avot. Her great-aunt Mala Tribich honoured us at a breakfast to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

This edition of our HaMagen magazine contains a Special Supplement focussing on the Gaza War and its devastating effect on all of us and our friends and families – both in Israel and here in London.

As part of a project led by the Board of Deputies, we have now adopted Agam bat Meirav and Naama bat Ayelet, two hostages who are amongst those who have not yet been released. Empty seats are in place for them every Shabbat in Shul with their photographs. We pray for their safe and immediate rescue and return.



Agam Berger



Naama Levy

Recently we were honoured to welcome Ayelet Razin Bet Or, an Israeli

human rights lawyer specialising in the field of combatting sexual violence and gender violence and women's rights. Ayelet spoke about the female hostages held by Hamas in Gaza and the lack of support and attention by women's rights organisations worldwide. Thanks to Chaya Langerman for being instrumental in arranging this.

At this time of rising antisemitism and hate crimes since 7 October, additional security is vital. I am extremely grateful to Alex Jacobs for taking the lead on this, and to those who have volunteered since the inception of our security rota following the raised threat level.

We have now launched our next initiative under the Chesed Tzedek and Mishpat Magen Avot programme which will be focused on local initiatives for the homeless including soup kitchens.

Children and youth education is an important focus for us. We are recruiting three experienced leaders for the Minis & Maxis age groups. We're hopeful that the relaunching of these services will attract more young families and young adults to Magen Avot.

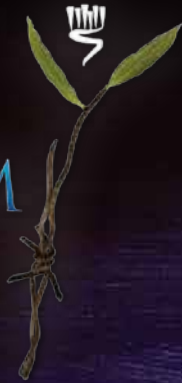
Our new Book Club organised by Julian Pollard, the editor of HaMagen, has so far had three book review events, the last being a discussion on 'Mr Wilder and Me' by Jonathan Coe led by Juliuan Pollard.

I'm writing with a real sense of pride in how much we have grown as a community. Membership is increasing and we continue to have a packed programme of well attended events and projects. I am sure that we will continue to grow from strength to strength in the coming year. We all pray for a lasting peace in Israel and the release of all the remaining hostages. ■



Magen Avot

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Yizkor, Remember



There were 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, murdered by shootings, starvation, slave labour and industrialised killings in death camps. Of these victims 1.5 million were innocent children who were guilty of one crime - they were born Jewish.

Yad Vashem aims to ensure that those victims are never forgotten. If you become a Guardian of the Memory you will become part of a worldwide network of people who cherish the memory of one of those 6 million victims. Guardians light a candle in memory of their victim every Holocaust Memorial Day and every Yom HaShoah.

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to become a Guardian of the Memory of one victim and ensure they will NEVER be FORGOTTEN nor their EXISTENCE DENIED.

Yizkor, Remember



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ECHOES OF REDEMPTION: UNRAVELING THE MEANING OF DAYEINU

By Rabbi Yoni Golker

One of the most widely known Seder songs is Dayeinu. When we examine this 15-line poem more closely, several questions come to mind. First, how can we genuinely declare, “Hashem, if you had split the sea but not taken us through it, that would have been enough!” Really? Then we would have ended up dead at the hands of the Egyptians! “If you had taken care of our needs in the desert but not provided us with manna, it would have been enough!” Again, without the food of the manna we would have died. So how can we say it would have been enough, when it seems that this was in reality not the case, as we would have perished?

If you analyse the structure of Dayeinu, you might observe that it is unique. Professor Meir Bar-Ilan points out Dayeinu is written as a concatenation, with the beginning of every line mirroring the end of the previous line (שרשור in Hebrew). He references several works of Aaron Mirsky, a noted researcher, of connections between Liturgy and Midrash, in trying to find precedents for concatenation in Tanach or in the rabbinic literature. While they might exhibit some allusions to this model, Dayeinu is virtually unique as one of the few early piyutim to fully employ this structure, as well as in the extent of its repetition. Not only the first couple of words, but the entire concluding statement of each stanza, is reiterated! Which leads on to our second question: Why was Dayeinu composed in such an unusual stylistic arrangement?

The Gemara (B'rachot 10a) asks what the verse “אין צור כאלוקינו” means. The Gemara replies: “אין צייר כאלו” – There is no artist like our G-d. Why does the Gemara take the word Tzur (rock) out of context and refer to Hashem as an artist? In a previous post (on Ha'azinu), we cited Rabbi Simcha Zisel Broida who suggests the Gemara wishes to convey the idea that Hashem's intervention in this world is like

a painting. When an artist starts to paint, we don't know what the painting is going to look like until it is finished. With each brush stroke along the way, we are likely to become more confused about the big picture. Similarly, we don't understand the ways of Hashem as the relevant events are actually taking place. Sometimes it takes many years to figure out the entire big picture.

Each stanza of Dayeinu might initially be perceived as an isolated act of G-d, and at that moment, it might seem perplexing to us, how only doing A, and not B, would have been good enough. But perhaps the inter-connectedness of Dayeinu, with its concatenation, teaches us that there is a bigger picture. Hashem is the Master Artist and knows why things have to happen in a certain way. We therefore thank Hashem at each step of the way to recognize – we might not understand, but we have faith in You. If it's good enough for You, then Dayeinu, it's good enough for us!

“
As we joyously
sing “Dayeinu”,
the resonance
of its words
echoes within us,
prompting heartfelt
prayers for a swift
resolution to the
conflict in Eretz
Yisrael.”

Perhaps that also explains why we reiterate the entire series of events in the very next paragraph in the Haggadah (על (אחת כמה וכמה טובה כפולה ומכופלת למקום עלינו). When we experienced all these blessings from Hashem the first time round, we couldn't see the inter-connectedness – they appeared to us as merely 15 individual, separate events. But now, looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, we can read it as one whole story as we can now see how its constituent elements are all connected.

In 1924, Rav Kook travelled to America on a fundraising tour for the struggling institutions of Torah learning in Europe and Israel. In his pocket, he carried little stones that he had picked up from the ground in Israel. He would regularly reach his hand into his pocket and grab hold of the pebbles taken from Israel's earth, as a constant reminder of the Land to which he yearned to return.

Seder night, with its family traditions, is like Rav Kook's Israeli rocks connecting us to one another as we continue to create our family narrative. It is a conjoining of generations old and young, traditional tunes and more modern melodies. It is this שרשרת דורות – inter-connected and overlapping chain of generations – which creates the woven tapestry of life and family that makes the Seder so special.

This Seder, as we commemorate our redemption, Dayeinu is a poignant reminder of our ongoing longing for redemption in Israel. As we joyously sing “Dayeinu”, the resonance of its words echoes within us, prompting heartfelt prayers for a swift resolution to the conflict in Eretz Yisrael. We beseech for the healing of all those injured, solace for the bereaved, the prompt release of hostages, and the safe return of our soldiers from the front lines. May our collective yearning for redemption be realized, and may the heavens heed the plea embedded within the melody of “Dayeinu.” ■

Chag Pesach Sameach from everyone at CST



This year marks the 30th anniversary of CST becoming a charity. We deeply regret that the need for our work has never been more obvious. Since October, the demands upon CST have been constant, but our volunteers, staff and trustees have met the challenge.

If there is a positive, it is perhaps that so many Jews are determined to lead their Jewish way of life. British Jewish life has not merely continued: it has intensified and grown. At CST, we will keep doing everything we can to ensure this remains the case.

In the first days and weeks of the war, many British Jews expressed grave concerns. They asked if it was safe for children to go to school, for families to go to synagogue, or to visit Jewish shops.

CST calmed fears by explaining that our community's CST-funded security infrastructure was built exactly for a crisis such as this. CST dispelled fake rumours about supposed Hamas plans to attack British Jews and advised our communities to continue leading their Jewish lives.

As the war continued, British Jews felt a growing desire to express their identity. Synagogue attendance increased, as did other communal activities, including public demonstrations. All of this needed security and CST delivered it.

CST's 2,000 security volunteers are essential to communal security. They embody CST's partnership

with communities and deliver the security, supported by staff from CST's London, Manchester or Leeds offices. Antisemitic incidents are immediately shared with police and this results in arrests and convictions, far more than most people would ever realise.

Since October, unprecedented responsibility has fallen upon CST's security volunteers, especially at shuls. Congregations have turned to their local security representatives for leadership, assurance and protection. This had always been the purpose of CST's shul security teams and they do everything within their power to deliver it.

Thousands of hours of additional security have been provided by CST's security teams, and also by guards from commercial companies. These guards are funded via a government grant from the Home Office which subsidises security costs at shuls, schools and community centres and is managed by CST.

CST's security teams are only as strong as the communities they serve. Where shul members volunteer to do security, we assist and train them, building them into effective local security teams. Every single one of those volunteers should be warmly thanked by their communities, but they should also be helped in their work.

Please, support your local CST security team.

Thank them for everything they do and ask them how you can help.

Report suspicious activity and antisemitism to CST at cst.org.uk/report

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SCAN TO SIGN UP

“AND SHE NAMED HIM MOSHE”

Shemot 2:10

By Rebbetzen Dina Golker

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you all for the overwhelming care and affection, and the generous gifts we received from you on the birth of our baby boy, Moshe Yehuda Leib. It is truly wonderful to be part of such a special and nurturing Kehillah. Our baby is named after my esteemed grandfather, Chazan Moshe Yehuda Leib Erblich ז"ל. Chazan Reb Moshe Yehuda Leib, who following in the footsteps of his namesake, Moshe Rabbeinu, served the Almighty faithfully throughout his life, even when faced with the most challenging circumstances.

Our baby's birth coincided with the approach of Pesach, as well as occurring just four days prior to the anniversary of Moshe Rabbeinu's birth. This alignment prompted me to reflect on the inner meaning of the various profound Midrashim relating to that event.

Likewise, the Yom Tov of

Pesach serves as a poignant reminder of the birth of the Jewish nation. It is fundamentally a narrative of individuals evolving into a family, and subsequently, a nation.

The Torah, when narrating the birth of Moses, highlights the significance of his name. After having been placed in a basket on the Nile and discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, he was raised as her son. She named him 'Moshe', meaning, in Hebrew, "to draw [others] from the water," symbolizing his miraculous rescue from certain death. The commentators offer us various interpretations of this event, shedding light on the deeper meaning behind the naming.

Some commentators suggest that Pharaoh's daughter gave Moshe an Egyptian name, while others propose that his Hebrew name was bestowed upon him by his own mother, Yocheved. But regardless of its actual origin, the name Moshe conveys a profound message of rescue and compassion.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch eloquently elaborates on this,

suggesting that the name Moshe signifies a lifelong commitment to empathy and rescue. His character was shaped by the intention behind his name, reminding him always of his humble origins and the imperative to aid those in need.

As we celebrate the festival of Pesach, the Haggadah serves as our national narrative, recounting our journey from slavery to liberation. More than a mere historical document, it encapsulates our values and ideals, shaping our national consciousness.

The essence of the Haggadah and of the Seder night lies in fostering dialogue between parents and children, encouraging inquiry and providing meaningful answers. In Judaism, wisdom and knowledge are not merely aspirations but essential components of our identity.

As we embark on this Pesach journey, let us all, especially in these challenging times for the Jewish people, embrace the spirit of inquiry and reflection. May our celebration be imbued with meaning, and may we continue to uphold the values that define us as a people.

Wishing you all a meaningful and joyous Pesach. ■

חג פסח ושמחה



As we embark on this Pesach journey, let us all, especially in these challenging times for the Jewish people, embrace the spirit of inquiry and reflection.



MIRACLE OR JUST THE WAY OF THINGS?



By Rabbi Michael Pollak

Albert Einstein once said, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” These words have come to life in a startling way on Israel’s attempts to eliminate Hamas. We have seen the strange sight of the Prime Minister of Israel appearing on television calling the blessedly low casualty figures as Miracle from G-d. Bibi was transformed into a Biblical prophet. He raised his hands heavenwards, gazed deeply through the studio ceiling to the skies above and intoned the words “With G-d’s help”. For many Israelis, soldiers and citizens, the course of the war is determined not by heavenly intervention but by the amazing skill and bravery of our army.

This is, of course, not a new debate. On the one hand the Talmud tells us that “we should not rely on miracles” (Kiddushin 39b) yet on the other the Torah has instance after instance of divine intervention to save some or all of humanity.

Of all the Festivals it is Pesach which has the most to say about miracles. Ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea are just two of the supernatural events which are enumerated in that wonderful family Seder favourite, Dayeinu. When we read the Haggadah we are seemingly entering into one of Einstein’s paradigms. We are sitting with Bibi gazing at the Heavens.

The Haggadah evolved over centuries according to a template initially laid down in the Talmud. We can find a large part of the material already formulated in the mishneh written in the second century CE. Then we find two third-century Rabbis disputing how we tell the story of the Exodus. Rav tells us it is a spiritual story charting our nation’s progress from serving idols to the acceptance of the One

G-d. Shmuel tells us it is a political story highlighting the emergence of a nation of slaves to become a free people. This contrast is highlighted by the Biblical verse “Let my people go” which is immediately followed by the spiritual demand “That they may serve me”. The anonymous author of the Haggadah living some time in late antiquity faces a dilemma – Rav or Shmuel – supernatural or natural – Einstein’s puzzle. The author makes a momentous decision. He uses both narratives. The story of slavery, historical antisemitism and freedom weaves around the description of the spiritual growth of the Jewish people.

Shaare Tzedek hospital in Jerusalem was founded in 1902 by the legendary German doctor Moshe Wallach. He raised the money, diagnosed, prescribed, operated. In fact he performed most of the functions of the hospital aided by the ever loyal Schwester Selma who lived and worked in the hospital for 68 years!! As patients succumbed to the slumber of anaesthesia, Wallach often asked the same question: “What is your mother’s name?” Some patients managed to challenge the need for such idiosyncratic information. It did little to allay the patient’s anxiety when Wallach explained that he wished to say Tehillim for him before he operated!! Spirituality and science hand in hand.

As we fight our way through this current tragedy some have abandoned spirituality wondering where is G-d in this crisis. For them only military skill can prevail. Others have believed that they can ignore the military and rely on divine providence to protect them. We need to fall in behind Moshe Wallach and the editor of the Haggadah. Miracles can only happen if we make them possible. It was true of Jewish history then and is true of Jewish history now. ■



The Haggadah evolved over centuries according to a template initially laid down in the Talmud. We can find a large part of the material already formulated in the mishneh written in the second century CE.

TEHILLIM IN TEFILLAH

By Simon Bentley

שיר המעלות

Rather than forge new prayers, the rabbis looked for precedents in the Tanach. For this reason, many of our most recited and most loved prayers are in fact the words of King David and the others who composed Tehillim.

Most of Pesukei d'Zimra, the introductory section of the morning davening, is taken from Tehillim, especially the extended version we read on Shabbat. In addition, we recite Ashrei, Psalm 145, three times daily. How do we prepare ourselves to accept Shabbat? Through the recitation of Tehillim 95 to 100, Kabbalat Shabbat. The Tachanun (prayer of supplication) we recite after the Amidah is none other than Psalm 6 and the paragraph of Lamenatzeiach we recite toward the end of the daily Tefillah is Psalm 20. Add to that the concluding song we recite each day, the shir shel yom, each of which is a psalm that was recited by the Leviim in the Beit Hamikdash on the appropriate day. During Aseret Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance),

we recite Shir Hama'alot (Song of Ascents, Psalm 126) in the middle of our prayers, as well as l'David (to David, Psalm 37) at the end. On special days in our calendar other Tehillim are recited; all of Hallel is derived from Psalms 113 to 118 and Barchi Nafshi is Psalm 107.

Prayer, specifically through the words of the psalmists, is an act which transcends time and space. It connects us with the heavens and at the same time it binds us to our history, our heritage, and our tradition. By using King David's words, we are able to feel his connection with G-d, emulate it and use it as a springboard to develop our own connection.

In the earliest siddur extant, that of Rav Amram Gaon, we find that a verse from Psalm 5 וְאֲנִי בְּרַב חֶסֶדְךָ, אֲבוֹא בֵיתְךָ 5 – “But I, in Your great loving-kindness, will come into your house,” is to be recited when a person enters a synagogue in the morning.

THE ASHREI CODE – A FORMULA FOR AN ENLIGHTENED LIFE

תְּהִלַּת יְהוָה יְדַבֵּר פִּי, וַיִּבְרֶךְ כָּל בֶּשָׂר שֵׁם קִדְשׁוֹ
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord; let all beings bless His holy name forever and ever.

Psalm 145, referred to as Ashrei, is one of the most renowned psalms. In verse 16 it says:

פִּתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ, וּמַשְׂבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי רָצוֹן

You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

A fundamental element in the prayer, the idea that G-d provides for all, is a prerequisite for praise and thanks. Ashrei has become a fundamental prayer in all communities. It originally consisted only of Psalm 145 and was called by its first words, Tehilah l'David. Within a few generations, verses were appended at the beginning and end. The three additional verses appended are:

Psalm 84:5 אֲשֶׁרֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ “fortunate are those who sit in your house”.

Psalm 154:15 אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂפָכָה לוֹ “fortunate is the nation for whom it is so” and Psalm 115:18 וְאֶנְחֲנוּ נִבְרַךְ יְהוָה “and we will praise G-d”.

The additional verses added to the mizmor by the rabbis, hint at their understanding of the connection between this psalm and the general body of Tehillim. The rabbis chose Ashrei as the first word of our psalm and Halleluyah as the last word.

Q. What else begins and ends with these words? A. The entire body of Tehillim!

Psalm 1 starts with the words אֲשֶׁרֵי הָאֵשׁ “Fortune is the one....” And Psalm 150 concludes with כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּיָהּ “let every soul praise the Lord. Halleluyah!”

Ashrei is described as a story; a tale of one individual on a quest to change the

world. This quest is not simply a personal matter; it is a fulfilment of his ancestral national destiny. This person is no simpleton, he is David, king of Israel, and he writes his story, his psalm, for all of Israel to hear, to study, to sing and to live. King David seeks to help Israel fulfil the mandate set out by G-d at Sinai centuries before, namely, to become G-d's "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation". To achieve this "chosen" status he must, like his forefather Abraham before him, begin his quest through solitary, personal praise. אֶרֹמְמֶךָ – "I will extol you".

- How does one simply and unabashedly praise G-d?
- What does one say?
- When does one stop?

In examining Psalm 145 we will begin to understand David's story and then apply it to our own lives.

David asks us to carefully consider our reading of Ashrei and experience the psalm not only as a song, but also as a story of man and G-d, of good and evil and of one individual's quest to teach the world around him about praising G-d.

PSALM 150

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה

LET EVERY SOUL PRAISE THE LORD.
HALLELUYAH!

As we heard on שבת שירה from our אשת חיל at Magen Avot, there is great significance for us in the importance and power of singing.

- What's in a song? Why sing? What is so great about singing a song to G-d?
- The finale of Tehillim is six short verses that speak of praising G-d in every way, with every type of instrument

What are the unique gifts of song?

- Song includes emotions and feelings unbounded by letters and words
- Song is timeless

- Song is an equaliser: all can participate, all can enjoy
- Song draws on many faculties at once: auditory, intellectual, emotional, spiritual
- Song resonates within people
- Prophets used song in order to raise their spiritual levels
- A song is inspirational, infinite and universal
- Finally, a song can unite disparate instruments or voices into a harmonious symphony of sound, melding unique individuality into an enhanced, sublime collective

Psalm 150 is a fitting conclusion to a book of praise, to the journey of one man, a nation and the universe to experiencing consciousness of G-d. Psalm 150 expresses the theme of harmony in both its content and its structure.

The Book of Psalms takes us through a process of praising and blessing, pleading and confessing, thanking and expressing frustration at not being answered. The conclusion of Tehillim must leave us with a completely coherent message: "Let every soul praise the Lord." There can be no alternative position, nor any room for nuances, double meanings and the like.

Praising G-d with the song, one without specific words, but with an abundance of instruments, drives home the point of the universal, homogenous act of praise.

This is the שיר חדש – the "new song". This



The Book of Psalms takes us through a process of praising and blessing, pleading and confessing, thanking and expressing frustration at not being answered.

is the final praise which He yearns to be sung by all creatures who possess breath.

This is the final song in Psalms, the final message of the philosopher King who wishes to impart to his people both the desire and the tools to acknowledge their Creator.

SHIREI HAMA'ALOT: SONGS THAT UPLIFT

Fifteen psalms begin with the title Shir Hama'alot – "A Song of Ascents". As far back as the 14th century, David ben Joseph Abudraham, a Spanish liturgical commentator, records the custom of reciting all 15 Shir Hama'alot psalms every Shabbat. Several individual Shirei Hama'alot play prominent roles in Jewish prayer. Psalm 126 is recited before Birkat Hamazon, the blessing after meals. Two psalms, Psalm 130 – מִמַּעַמְקִים קְרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה – "I call out from the depths to You", and Psalm 121 – אֶשָּׂא עֵינֵי אֶל-הָהָרִים – "I raise up my eyes to the mountains" are said when praying for a sick person or trying to overcome an impending or occurring tragedy, as we are doing now, praying for an end to the war and tragic losses taking place in Israel.

DEFINING A MA'ALAH

The title Shir Hama'alot – "A Song of Ascents" which begins each of the 15 psalms from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, is the subject of extensive debate among commentators and scholars.

What is the definition of these "ascents"? The earliest source, Mishna Sukkah 5:3, relates the number 15 to the number of stairs that joined the women's section to the men's section in the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple).

Others look to history for an understanding of the word "ascents". Rashi, Radak and other medieval commentators claim that this word is based on Ezra 7:9 יָסַד הַמַּעֲלָה מִבָּבֶל – "the ascent from Babylon began," dubbing those who returned from Babylon "Ma'alah". Nowadays, our use of the word aliyah to mean "ascending (moving) to Israel" comes from the same source.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch interprets the ascent as a spiritual one. From our low spiritual depths, we call, pray and sing to G-d to lift us up, or to give us the ability to lift ourselves up to the greatest heights.

Others defined the phrase musically. Saadiah Gaon and Meiri claim that the title, like other titles in Tehillim such as Lamenatzeiach – "To the conductor," is a musical instruction indicating that these

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songs are sung starting from a low note and ending on a high note.

There is no clear answer and perhaps this is part of the mystique. It is precisely their openness to interpretation that enables the Shirei Hama'alot to thrive. Their appeal to a wide audience renders these psalms significant in Jewish life.

שיר המעלות בשוב יקוק את שיבת ציון היינו כחלמים

We know the recitation of this psalm as the introduction to the Birkat Hamazon, the blessing after the meal. We know the song by heart, but:

- What do the words really mean?
- When were they written?
- For whom?
- Why is this psalm chosen as an introductory prayer to the Birkat Hamazon?

The psalm has two sections differentiated by a shift from the narrative mention of G-d in the third person (b'shuv Hashem) to the direct address to G-d in the second person (Shuva Hashem) at the beginning of verse 4. There is a great disparity between the two halves. Verses 1 to 3 indicate that the psalm is about a spiritual or historical event (the restoring of the Shivat Tzion) and they are written in the third person about G-d. Verses 4 to 6,

with their agricultural motifs, are written in the second person, to G-d, giving the impression that the psalm was written by farmers asking for their material needs – a good harvest!

Rashi and Malbim feel that the psalm focuses on a great historical event – the returning of Shivat Tzion to Israel.

On the destruction of the first temple in 586 BCE, the Jews were banished from Tzion, thinking they would never return. Nevertheless, they yearned, prayed and hoped for the day when they would finally return to Tzion. In 538 BCE their dream came true. King Cyrus allowed these



When sitting at our Shabbat table, reflecting on our week, we sing a psalm that in some way talks to all of us. A song of praise; a prayer; a wish for spirituality without losing sight of our physical needs.

“longers for Tzion” to return to their land. In 516 BCE, he gave them permission to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash. Led spiritually by Haggai and Zechariah and politically by Zerubavel, the first group of exiled Jews arrived back on the soil of their homeland, ready to begin life anew.

It is at this time, Efrati claims, that the psalm was written. The first section supports this theory perfectly: the author thanks G-d for returning Shivat Tzion (those who longed to return to Tzion) to Jerusalem – something they would have dreamed of a few years before.

Yechezkel Kaufman claims that this psalm has nothing to do with the Second-Temple period. In fact, it is not even referring to a historical event. The psalm is an agricultural allegory, focussing on the people witnessing a rebirth in the crops. We ask G-d for rain to rush down the mountains through the watercourses in the desert, to nourish the fields.

Psalm 126 reflects different aspects of praise and different approaches to future redemption. For some, redemption comes through kingship and the re-establishment of the Beit Hamikdash; for others, a re-establishment of agricultural self-sufficiency, in which every Jew “shall return with songs of joy carrying sheaves with him.”

Whether we accept the historical interpretation, or the agricultural one, this song has struck a chord in our hearts.

When sitting at our Shabbat table, reflecting on our week, we sing a psalm that in some way talks to all of us. A song of praise; a prayer; a wish for spirituality without losing sight of our physical needs. Ultimately, it is an acknowledgement of the great hand of G-d in history, yet at the same time a plea for the final redemption when all of us will indeed reap with joy. May it be the will of G-d to fulfil our song of praise and prayer.

מֵאֵין יָבֵא עֲזָרִי

From where will my help come? ■

PESACH GUEST SPEAKERS

While the Rabbi and Rebbetzen are away over Pesach, we are honoured to welcome several guest speakers who will be engaged to give the drashot and divrei Torah over Pesach.

RABBI JEREMY GOLKER

Rabbi Jeremy Golker is a graduate of Hasmonean High School. After leaving Hasmonean, Rabbi Golker learned in Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh and Mir. He then took a law degree at UCL, qualifying as a solicitor at a City law firm.

Rabbi Golker left law to pursue a career in teaching and has been a member of the Beis faculty for over twenty years. He was appointed Head of Kodesh at the Girls' school in 2010 and Menahel over both schools in 2014. Aside from his teaching commitments, Rabbi Golker oversees all matters of ethos and Kodesh at both sites. Rabbi Golker learned in Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh and Mir and has been the Menahel of Hasmonean High School for close to ten years.

Rabbi Golker is a popular lecturer, giving shiurim in the wider community and on TorahAnytime.com.

Rebbetzen Golker studied in Michlalah and is a family therapist, working for the NHS and in private practice and gives shiurim in the wider community. Rabbi and Rebbetzen Golker and their family live in Golders Green, London.



RABBI GLENN BEZALEL

Rabbi Glenn Bezalel is the Deputy Head (Academic) at the City of London School. He is a graduate of the Montefiore Semicha Programme, having studied at both Yeshivot Kerem B'Yavneh and Har Etzion. He is completing his PhD on conspiracy theories and controversy at the University of Cambridge.



DR LINDSAY SIMMONDS

Dr Lindsay Simmonds is a Researcher at the Religion and Global Society Unit at the London School of Economics (LSE), where she focuses on Women of Faith and Peacebuilding. Her PhD (Department of Gender, LSE) is entitled, 'Generating Piety: Agency in the Lives of British Orthodox Jewish Women.' Additionally, Lindsay



is a Fellow at the London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS) where she has lectured, written and convened courses for over 20 years, focussing on women in Biblical narrative, the Talmud and Jewish Law. She studied for several years at Nishmat, was a Bruria Scholar at Midreshet Lindenbaum, and she is a graduate of the LSJS Susi Bradfield Women Educators' Fellowships.

Lindsay is co-chair of her local Jewish-Moslem Women's Network Nisa-Nashim, Vice-Chair of trustees for the Abraham Initiatives UK and Jewish Scholar-in-Residence for the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) and she speaks regularly on peaceful shared society and conflict negotiation.

RABBI DR RAPHAEL ZARUM

Rabbi Dr Raphael Zarum is Dean of London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS) and the Rabbi Sacks Chair of Modern Jewish Thought, established by the Zandan family. He is an international lecturer, rabbinic leader, academic and author with a passion for teaching traditional Jewish texts and innovative educational programming.



RABBI COBI EBRAHIMOFF

Rabbi Cobi Ebrahimoff is UK Director of Education at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, where his primary focus is to bring the teachings of Rabbi Sacks zt"l into schools and spearhead the development of innovative educational resources.

Prior to this role, he enjoyed a highly successful tenure as the Headteacher at the Independent Jewish Day School and, most recently, as the Rabbi of Tribe



at the United Synagogue. Rabbi Ebrahimoff continues to serve as Executive Headteacher for King Solomon Schools (Israel).

Rabbi Ebrahimoff's educational background includes a BA in Education from Tel Aviv University, a Master's in Educational Management from the University of Leeds, and a National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership from UCL. He received his rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel while studying at Karnei Shomron Hesder Yeshiva. With over two decades of experience in the field of education in both the UK and Israel, Rabbi Ebrahimoff has been recognised for his outstanding contributions. Notably, he was awarded National Leader of Education by the Department for Education for promoting school improvement across England.

SHIRA JACKSON

Shira Jackson works as an educator in the United Synagogue's Education Department and is currently enrolled on the Mechina course for Nishmat's Yoetzet Halacha Programme. She has a degree in Physics with Medical Physics and is a graduate of the Chief Rabbi's Ma'ayan Programme. Shira lives in London with her husband Natan and their five children.



A YEAR OF ECO TIPS

By Julian Maurer



At the end of 2022 and throughout 2023 we provided the Shul with ECO Tips every week in the newsletter as part of our drive towards a higher ECO Synagogue status. EcoJudaism promotes the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment across the Jewish Community in accordance with the principles of the Jewish faith. With the recent fuel increases it is now also an urgent economic question as the cost of living hits new heights. Magen Avot is currently a Silver Award EcoSynagogue. Here is a selection of our most useful tips from that period:

A tip from the Shul Kiddush “cleanup” crew that could be adopted at home: when recycling any plastic bottles, rinse and screw the lids back on – they’re too small to be recycled loose (some fizzy drinks now hold on to their lids after opening). Labels can be left on if they don’t cover the whole bottle.

When searching the web try using Ecosia instead of your usual search engine. Ecosia uses the income they receive from advertising to plant trees in places they’re needed most. So far they’ve planted over 16 million trees.

Refill App – lets you know where you can fill up your water bottle for free in shops or at water fountains and reduce single-use plastic bottle usage. Find out more at www.refill.org.uk.

If you want to wrap presents but don’t like using plastic tape, check out www.babipur.co.uk who manufacture a plastic-free version that can be recycled along

with the paper.

If you have food or non-food items that you don’t need and you want to give away, you can list them on Olio. Local Kosher bakeries often list surplus challot and cakes on Thursday evenings that you can collect for free.

Tree App – you can plant one tree per day in different areas of the world that have gone through deforestation. This is paid for by sponsors advertising on the app.

“Use by” means you should not consume something after this date. “Best before” means that it is safe to consume after this date, but it might not be at its best. Tesco, Waitrose and Morrisons have all removed “Best before” dates from fresh products to reduce food waste.

Recycling one glass bottle saves enough energy to power a 100-watt light bulb for four hours.

Plant a tree in the US’s first communal grove. The trees, bought online, will be selected, planted and maintained by the Woodland Trust to maximise the ecological benefits.

Glass and aluminium are infinitely recyclable. Unlike plastic, they can be recycled over and over without losing quality

Deleting old emails reduces your carbon footprint! A normal email has a footprint of 4g of CO2 which accounts for the power that data centres and computers spend sending, filtering and reading messages.

Google released a new feature in Google Maps this year where you can now choose the “eco-friendly” route in settings (based on fuel usage from traffic, hills and

altitude).

Soap bars are making a comeback, with sales increasing faster than liquid soap and shower gel since 2019. You can even get shampoo bars to reduce plastic consumption – check out: tinyurl.com/mashowerbar.

Recycling batteries: Toxic chemicals can leak into the ground which can cause soil and water pollution. When batteries are recycled, we can recover many valuable materials that can be recycled and reused e.g.: zinc, aluminium, cobalt, nickel and copper.

Opt for loose-leaf tea – tea bags are made with plastic and have a whopping 10 times the carbon footprint of loose-leaf!

You can use pasta water to water your plants – it is full of starch and rich in

“
Copy what we do for Shul by buying refills for soap bottles instead of a new bottle every time they finish – this can reduce plastic waste to up to 85%!



THE SILVER ECOSYNAGOGUE AWARD

is presented to

Magen Avot United Synagogue

In recognition of completing the Environmental Audit
and achieving a Silver level score

minerals and vitamins (make sure it is not salted).

Turn off small lights as you leave rooms as well as big ones – these are often forgotten and turning them off can save electricity. Consider smart time switches for over Shabbat.

Copy what we do for Shul by buying refills for soap bottles instead of a new bottle every time they finish – this can reduce plastic waste up to 85%!

Getting ready to clean for Pesach? Then make your own natural cleaning product: ½ cup white vinegar plus ½ glass water and a few drops of essential oil. Put in a spray bottle for a multipurpose cleaning spray. Happy cleaning!

Say no to plastic straws. Instead, opt for a reusable glass or metal straw that you can use over and over again! You can even try using a collapsible straw for when you're on the go.

Buy a smart plug to use as a time switch for plugging in devices that can be programmed to be on when they are required. This is useful when you are home for one Shabbat meal, and you can program it to be on for that day and time instead of repeating the same time using a manual time switch. Smart plugs allow you to set a program each week before Shabbat directly from an app on your phone. Kasa is a commonly used brand of smart plugs but there are many on the market.

Following on from last week's tip: People have pointed out that using a smart plug for appliances over the Yom Tov

period is extremely useful when needing to heat food up over Chag and over the following or preceding Shabbat when timings are very different. So, buy a smart plug and use as a time switch for your hotplate and other appropriate devices. This is much more energy efficient than using a manual time switch that is the same for each day. Smart plugs allow you to set a program each week before Shabbat directly from an app on your phone. In addition, many in the community have used these smart plugs for their Shabbat lamps so they are automated to come on before Shabbat and switch off immediately after Shabbat. How many times have you got to the next Friday and realised your Shabbat lamp has been on all week! A cost saving for you and an environmental saving also. Kasa is a commonly used brand of smart plugs but there are many on the market.

With the ever increasing cost of members' electricity supply it is always worth looking into investing in a time switch attached directly to the "mains supply" that turns off specific lights when sleeping. Many households leave their lights on over the whole of Shabbat so a "mains" time switch could potentially save 8+ hours of electricity every Shabbat! Saving you money and the environment. Another win-win over Shabbat!

Beyond Shabbat time switches it is also worth switching to LEDs and compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) which can help with saving huge amounts of energy and

in turn cost. They are more efficient than defunct incandescent and halogen bulbs. CFLs use 60-80% less energy and LEDs use an astonishing 90% less. In a kitchen with 30 halogen downlights burning over Shabbat the LED equivalent would be to only pay for the cost of three of those bulbs if all 30 were LED! It's time to switch.

Cost-savings associated with light bulbs as demonstrated on previous newsletters can be realised through the use of Shabbat timers, or by purchasing more efficient bulbs. But as we are aware pure environmental benefits aren't always motivating enough though so let us get back to financials! 10%-13% of a home's electricity bill is determined by the flip of a switch, as people neglect to turn off electric power sources. Some suggestions could be to make sure that computers, monitors and many computer consumables could be easily turned off and not left on and charging over Shabbat.

The link below is a cookbook called "Love Your Leftovers", with contributions by Denise Phillips, which is a collaboration between Barnet Shul and Leket Israel. Reducing food waste is a shared aim for us all: <https://bit.ly/leftovers2023>.

Smart devices which can be switched to "do not disturb" could also be turned off and if you have smart bulbs consider dimming or turning off bulbs that are not required in certain areas. A good suggestion is if you have a downstairs toilet with an ante-room for washing consider leaving the toilet light on but not the ante-room which could be illuminated simply by opening the door to bring light from the attached room. Simple but effective changes that will save you money and the environment.

You may have noticed recently that the newsletter is being printed on slightly thinner recycled paper. It is also being printed using a new type of ECO printer from Epson that uses an ECO Ink Tank allowing the reduction of the overall ink used by up to 70%! This means it's not only better for the environment but also significantly cheaper for our print running costs!

To cap off our year of ECO tips we would like to bring to our membership's attention the opportunity for people to invest in eco-friendly solutions and let your own financial choices speak for themselves by making thoughtful investments. You can explore options at the following web address here: thegoodshoppingguide.com/subject/ethical-banks-building-societies/ ■

OUR ESHET CHAYIL

SARA

SPIZZICHINO

Introduction by Rebbetzen Dina Golker... “We are celebrating and honouring a truly exceptional woman among us for Women’s Shabbat. Sara is a shining light in our community, embodying the spirit of Sarah Imeinu. Like Sarah Imeinu, Sara radiates warmth and hospitality in all that she does. Her relaxed and inviting nature makes everyone feel not just welcome but cherished, turning her home into a haven for guests and friends alike. From hosting numerous gatherings to embarking on the weekly shopping adventure with her extremely close-knit family, Sara and the whole Spizzichino family exemplify the beauty of togetherness.

In her own unassuming way, Sara has been instrumental in the success of the Y@MA youth programme and the vibrant launch of the Bar Mitzvah program, infusing both with her passion and insight. During the challenging times of the pandemic, Sara played a pivotal role, providing invaluable medical advice to the shul, ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

But Sara’s contributions extend far beyond our shul walls. Her expertise in the academic world is really something to look up to. Sara is a clinical academic; both an NHS consultant and undertaking research and supervising Ph.D. students in the field

of diabetes. She also runs a Jewish WhatsApp group for female medical doctors which helps support and connect them.

As we just celebrated Tu B’Svat, the festival of trees and renewal, I want to highlight Sara’s dedication to growth, not just academically and professionally, but spiritually too. Her commitment to her Jewish learning is paramount to her. She participates in the Halacha course at LSJS reflecting her profound desire for personal growth and a deep connection to her yiddishkeit. Sara is also a big advocate for high level learning and speakers in the shul and consistently promotes women’s learning and education.

Rabbi Lord Sacks said, ‘The more we dedicate ourselves to our communities, the more we create a home for G-d in this world.’ Sara, through your dedication, you have indeed created a home for Hashem in our midst.

Sara, a big mazel tov for all your achievements in the shul and beyond and I would like to present you with this gift on behalf of the shul to express our appreciation and admiration for all your efforts on behalf of the community.”

Sara’s Dvar Torah was memorable and moving and very warmly received by a packed shul and we are happy to set it out here verbatim:

Shabbat Shalom everyone.

Some of you are well acquainted with the Spizzichino annual minhag of packing the car up to the nines and driving to Rome for our summer holidays. I love this minhag – we take everything bar the kitchen sink and set off for the Eurotunnel at dawn, with the wonder of a few weeks of sunshine and family ahead of us. The journey is special for two things – firstly, I have Marco’s undivided attention for near on 24 hours – you love it don’t you Marco?? – and secondly, the car is alive with the kids’ playlists. Yes, songs on repeat... and music fills the car. Each year is punctuated by a playlist – individual to that particular summer – that accompanies us each time we get into the car. I suspect I am not the only one here who can identify a location or a summer by the beginning of a particular

track – 2022: ‘Arabella’ by the Arctic Monkeys, 2023: ‘Beggin’ by Maneskin... A song that defines a place, marks an event and forms a collective memory...

And song, of course, is the central tenet of this Shabbat – Shabbat Shira, dominating both the Parasha of Beshalach and our Haftarah.

The Midrash Tanchuma on Beshalach¹ brings the idea of the 10 Shirot – the 10 songs of praise in our history – of which Shirat-Hayam, the Song of the Sea, sung in our Parasha first by Moshe and the children of Israel and then repeated by Miriam with the womenfolk and their instruments – is the second Shira, and Shirat Devorah – the song sung by Devorah and Barak, from our Haftarah, is the sixth identified Shira.

Shirat-Hayam is the first song within the written Torah text – clearly differentiated

from preceding and subsequent writing both by the spacing of the words on the written scroll – the ‘half bricks arranged upon whole bricks’ and ‘whole bricks arranged upon half bricks’ pattern² which, it is explained, symbolises stability and the enduring truth of the song’s message³ – and by the special cantillation or Ta-amim sung so skilfully by Dan when leining. This is clearly a passage of huge significance. Something incredible has just happened, and until this point in our story there had been no reason for song.

The text explains why Moshe and the People of Israel sang:

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְיָ הַגְדֹּלָהּ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם
וַיִּרְאוּ הָעָם אֶת־ה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּה' וּבְמֹשֶׁה עֲבָדוּ:

And when Israel saw the wondrous power which Hashem had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared Hashem; they

¹ Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 10, 3: https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Tanchuma%2C_Beshalach.10.3?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

² Talmud Bavli, Megilla 16b: <https://www.sefaria.org/Megillah.16b.11?lang=bi>

³ Shoftim 5: The Song of Devora, Rav Michael Hattin, Yeshiva Har Etzion: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/neviim/sefer-shoftim/shoftim-5-song-devora>

Sara and Marco Spizzichino
with the Eshet Chayil Award



*had faith in Hashem and in his servant Moses.*⁴

אֶזְכֹּר מֹשֶׁה וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה
*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Hashem*⁵

The incredible event of the redemption from slavery, through numerous miracles culminating in the splitting of the Red Sea and the defeat of the Egyptians, fills them with such faith and awe that Moshe and the Israelites, followed by Miriam, break into song.

This makes sense to me. I understand the context, the precipitant... But my question is: Why did they choose the medium of song? What is it that song provided for them that shouting/chanting/poetry/clapping their hands or stamping their feet couldn't?

Put simply: Why did they, and by extension perhaps, why do we Jews, sing? In fact, why do humans sing at all? I'm not sure about you, but I had never really thought about this before.

Based on archaeological anatomical evidence, humans have probably always been able to sing; it appears to be an instinctive action – we sing tunefully or tunelessly from a very early age, and it likely has survival advantages, which is presumably why we still sing. There is also ample evidence of the physiological benefits of song, and it is known that the feel-good factor associated with singing is induced by the release of endorphins and the reduction in the stress hormone cortisol.⁶

⁴ Shemot, Parshat Beshalach 14.31

⁵ Shemot, Parshat Beshalach 15.1

⁶ Kang J, Scholp A, Jiang JJ. A Review of the Physiological Effects and Mechanisms of Singing. *J Voice*. 2018 Jul;32(4):390-395. doi: 10.1016/j.jvoice.2017.07.008.

⁷ <https://optimalbreathing.com/blogs/singing-speaking-and-voice/why-we-sing>

⁸ Clift SM, Hancox G. The perceived benefits of singing: findings from preliminary surveys of a university college choral society. *J R Soc Promot Health*. 2001 Dec;121(4):248-56. doi: 10.1177/146642400112100409.

John Lennon, not the Beatle, but emeritus professor of vocal performance at Emporia State University, in an article entitled 'Why do we sing, and why doesn't everyone?' says:

"Singing happens in those moments when no other means but sustained resonant expression can provide complete emotional release. It satisfies (the) a need (for a unified psychosomatic release) not possible by any other biological means."⁷

So, one of Professor Lennon's primary hypotheses suggests that we sing to express and release emotion – instinctively it seems. This fits with the spontaneous reaction of Moshe, Miriam and the Israelites, to their G-d-driven historic and miraculous escape.

And it was no doubt not just an expression of relief, but equally of joy at their newfound liberation.

So, number 1: We sing to express and release emotion.

Why else do we sing?

I would venture that we use religious song as a spiritual elevator – think Kabbalat Shabbat, Kol Nidrei; think Hallel, think the Kedusha in the Amidah – and I suspect that this was high up on the list of functions in the desert, too. In fact, for an academic study of the 'perceived benefits of singing' published in 2001, Clift and Hancox undertook two preliminary studies of UK choral singers.⁸ There were numerous reported benefits including social, emotional and physical aspects, but what struck me was the just on 50% of the 84 members who reported a spiritual benefit from singing – and this was reportedly much higher in the proportion of individuals who professed to actually having religious beliefs. But we don't really need an academic study for this; I think many of us would agree – singing or being part of a community of song lifts our spirits and makes us feel closer to G-d.

So, number 2: We sing as a spiritual elevator – to increase our connection to prayer and to Hashem.

Are there other reasons?

Let's look briefly at the other Shirot in the Torah – the song of Moshe in Haazinu, the penultimate parsha of Devarim and the fourth song of the 10 Shirot of Tanakh. This song serves a completely different purpose

– Moshe sings alone to the Israelites to deliver his prophetic message just prior to his death, and it is a song of recounted history, instruction, and a promise of redemption. Moshe uses the medium of song as a form of education – he formulates his message so that it can be more easily understood, absorbed and remembered by his audience. In fact, we often use song for this purpose. Take the example of Seder night – we recount much of the Haggadah, the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim in song, in a form that is easier to digest and to learn and remember, particularly for our children. Song makes text accessible to all, regardless of our level of observance or learning.

So, number 3: Song can act as a powerful educational tool.

Have you ever thought how song connects us to previous and future generations? I have already given the example of Seder night, but it is also true for the nusach of our tefilla in shul. Although we don't know how old some of our melodies are, there is evidence that some tunes used regularly in our tefilla date back to the Middle Ages, and quite possibly prior to that – in fact there are clear discussions from the Talmud in Megilla 32a in the name of Rabbi Yochanan (so almost 2,000 years ago) that warn against reading the Torah without a melody or studying the Mishna without song.⁹ Seeing as this has gone from teacher to student through the ages, it is feasible that it has been handed down relatively intact. I would however note that as a clever contrast, each generation adds new tunes to keep our tefilla fresh and contemporary – how many of you know that today's most popular melody for Eshet Chayil dates back only to 1953?¹⁰ But isn't it astonishing to think that our parents, grandparents and beyond were singing the same words, perhaps to the same tunes, experiencing the same uplifting emotions as we do? In fact, this amazing passing on of Mesorah to the next generation goes way beyond the practical halacha of the everyday, to the very heart and soul of what it feels like to be a Jew.

So, number 4: Song binds generations of the past with those of the present through to those of the future to create continuity.

And I have just one further suggestion, although I suspect, now that we are thinking about it, that there are many more that you could suggest:

I think we use song to create communal unity – whether you are a singer or a

listener – think Magen Avot TGI Friday night, our women's Kabbalat Shabbat, our Shabbatot or Yomim Tovim together, and of course very much part of our communal response to Oct 7 – with singing at rallies, singing together for recordings, and weekly Tehillim, and beautiful or poignant videos set to song – we come together regularly, and probably without even thinking about it, we sing, or we listen to song, and it binds us together as a local, national and global community.

So, number 5: Song, and forgive me for this, puts the "Unity" in Community.

Song punctuates our cycle of religious life: our daily prayers, our weekly prayers, the reading of the Parasha and the Haftarah with their particular cantillation, each Chag, our Smachot, and even times of mourning. Jewish song is everywhere, and stretches right back to Shirat-Hayam, the very first song in Tanakh approximately 3,300 years ago. Different shuls and different nusachim each have different melodies – but all have song. Some of us sing and some of us listen, but we all, in our own way, experience the multi-layered effects of this collective ritual. So next time we find ourselves singing together, perhaps you will take a moment to reflect on the potential power of song: to enable us to release or express emotion, to enhance and elevate our tefilla, as an educational tool, to link us to past and future generations, or perhaps most powerful of all, to connect us together as a community.

And, on the subject of community, I was very touched to be asked to be Eshet Chayil of this special Kehilla. Thank you to Chaya, and the rest of the wonderful executive – Simon, Patti, Elkan, Daniel and Baruch. To Rabbi Yoni and Rebbetzen Dina. And to the whole fabulous harmonious council, for making this Kehilla such a special place. And thank you to my lovely family – Marco – our kids – and my parents for being ever present and ever supportive.

But a special thank you goes to you all – members and friends of Magen Avot. I don't think it is just me, but if there is a week that we are away or at a Simcha at another shul, the subsequent weekdays don't quite feel the same.

My family and I have been coming to this shul, in its various guises since its first or second month, more than eight years ago, when davening was at the Hendon Hall Hotel. Our kids were aged just 9, 7 and 4... and on our rather tentative entry into the

Hotel lobby, Shira whisked all three of them off to children's service – and just like that, we were hooked!

Being US Women's Shabbat, I just want to very quickly take the opportunity to say a final few words about the particular pride that I have as a woman at Magen Avot. As Fiona so beautifully described to us last year, we women at Magen Avot are remarkable. We are a diverse group; and we are thoughtful, supportive, kind, spiritual, successful, proud, productive and cohesive. I know that this shul was founded partly on the premise of providing a thriving and supportive space for the nurturing and education of our girls and women. There is always more to do, but I look around us and see many carefully thought-out details, that we perhaps take for granted, but that are designed to do just that – we sit in one open space, our mechtiza is designed for maximum inclusion, the shtender is positioned right in the middle for speakers, and we sit side by side.

Our Rebbetzen is a powerhouse in her own right, as are many others, but there is much humility. We have a women's officer who not only speaks for us, but also fights for women across the world. Our executive and board are made up of as many women as men. We purposefully seek out and promote women speakers, and we provide a supportive environment for our Bat Mitzva girls to stand up in front of the community and speak with poise and pride. We are constantly trying to enhance the experience for the people on this side of the mechtiza.

But I would take a step even further; unlike the Red Sea, there is a clear wish for our community not to be split in two. Our programming is designed for maximum inclusion of both sexes, at every feasible opportunity. And we purposefully choose to learn and socialise together.

This equipoise has been reached through a tremendous amount of hard work by many people over many years. I salute those people. There is more to do, but we have come so very far.

To go back to our song analogy – I perceive our Kehilla as a choir that successfully sings in harmony, both figuratively and practically. And long may it continue. Please G-d we will soon be singing, as Moshe, Miriam and the Israelites did, in spontaneous joy, at the release of all the hostages, and the restitution of peace amongst our friends and family in Israel and across the whole region. ■

⁹ Talmud Bavli, Megilla 32a, 12: <https://www.sefaria.org/Megillah.32a.12?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

¹⁰ Ben Zion Shenker: <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/people/ben-zion-shenker-unsung-composer-songs-sing>

AN UPDATE FROM HIAS+JCORE'S JUMP

Rabbi Mason from JUMP joined us in November for one of our Sunday breakfasts to talk to us about refugees and the work his organisation does to support this vulnerable population. He has provided us with this update.

What is JUMP?

Inspired by the Kindertransport, JUMP pairs unaccompanied young asylum seekers and refugees with a trained adult volunteer befriender. Now in its 16th year, we've worked with more than 250 unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK – and in 2024, JUMP continues to be a safe place where young people can be themselves, explore their interests and relax and have fun.

Pairs on the project commit to meeting every fortnight for an hour (and sometimes more!) for at least 12 months. What they do depends on both people's interests: some meet regularly for a coffee and chat; others may help with more practical issues like registering with a GP or filling in asylum support forms. Above all, JUMP is about building a sincere and supportive friendship.

What've we been up to since last autumn?

2023 was a big year for JUMP! For the first time in the project's history, we introduced a second staff member, doubling our capacity. And throughout the year, we made some big changes to how we engage with the wider community – helping ensure we can better support even more young people.

Most significantly, we introduced the JUMP Community – a new initiative bringing together all our project participants for group events every three months. We enjoyed some amazing activities together in 2023, including a bake along, summer picnic at Primrose Hill and a trip and tour of London Zoo.

In 2024, we've got big plans for the community, who've already had a great evening out at the phenomenal new

JUMP
Jewish Council for Racial Equality (unaccompanied) Project

Information for potential befrienders

Do you want to **befriend** an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person?

Can you commit to 1 hour every 2 weeks?

What is a befriender?
Being a befriender means being paired with an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person, who is often isolated and looking to meet a dependable adult.

What will you do together?
You and your young person might decide to meet regularly for a chat, practise English, go to a concert, film or exhibition, visit new places in London, or anything else!

If you could be a befriender, contact:
jump@hiasjcore.org
07760967751

More information:
www.hiasjcore.org/jump/

HIAS + JCORE
The UK Jewish Voice on Refugees and Racial Justice @HIASJCORE

production of 'The Boy at the Back of the Class' (do catch it on tour if you have the chance!) Plans are well underway for our next trip, a lunch at Imad's Syrian Kitchen in April.

Developing our practical support

Although primarily a befriending service, JUMP's impact and work have broadened in recent years. And with hostile policy presenting serious challenges to the young people we support, providing a level of targeted and bespoke casework and advocacy has become an important part of JUMP's output.

It's been great working with the community to secure support for our young people – and on Mitzvah Day last year, we were proud to partner with South Hampstead Synagogue to collect much needed clothing donations.

More recently, our team has helped

multiple young people facing homelessness to access emergency accommodation, before working together to secure permanent housing.

In doing so we've discovered a need for many basic housing items: bed sheets, duvets, pillows, crockery, cutlery, and heaters. We're still collecting many of these items – so if you're able to help out, please email jump@hiasjcore.org.

Our advocacy in action

This work has been an integral part of our developed casework offering, and in 2023, we worked to help connect our young people with solicitors, GPs, and tutors. We also address urgent practical support needs, providing a Hardship Fund which offers young people grants for travel, food vouchers, and phone contracts.

We're excited to be continuing this work in 2024, and are delighted to have launched a new partnership with ScreenShare, an amazing organisation that tackles digital exclusion by providing asylum seekers and refugees with refurbished laptops and phones.

Get involved with JUMP!

JUMP is always growing, going from 12 to 38 befriending pairs last year! We're always on the lookout for new volunteer befrienders. Our befrienders are both empathetic and approachable, and of all ages and backgrounds – so, if you're looking to give something back this year, and want to take action to support people seeking asylum today, email jump@hiasjcore.org or speak to Sara Spizzichino (Magen Avot's point person for JUMP) and to get involved. ■

CHESED, MISHPAT & TZEDAKAH

We in Magen Avot remain inspired by the words of the Neveim encouraging us to do good in society by pursuing kindness, justice and righteousness as the ways of Hashem (see Yirmiyahu Chap. 9 verses 22-23) both within our Community and outwardly to the world.

As an update to Magen Avot's ongoing spotlight on the Uyghur tragedy, below is a bulletin circulated by Mia from Rene Cassin:

Earlier this month, new evidence provided by Dr Adrian Zens, allegedly directly implicates Volkswagen directly in Uyghur forced labour: The SAIC1-Volkswagen test track in Turpan, Uyghur Region, was reportedly built using transferred "Uyghur labourers" in military drill uniforms, where they were subjected to indoctrination, biometric data collection, assimilation and surveillance.

This is not the first time Volkswagen is alleged to be profiting from Uyghur forced labour. In 2012, Volkswagen reportedly set up a plant in Urumqi, the heart of the Uyghur Region of Xinjiang. According to the Chinese Automotive Associations, contracts demand "patriotic education" and "military training" for the employees. You can read the full briefing on Volkswagen here: <https://renecassin.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Volkswagen-Nazi-and-Xinjiang-connections-briefing-February-2024.pdf>

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP END UYGHUR FORCED LABOUR

As a Jewish organisation, Rene Cassin is asking Volkswagen, a company with historical links to Nazi Germany, to ensure it is on 'the right side of history' by ensuring its production and supply chains are not tainted by the stain of

forced Uyghur labour.

Write to the CEO of Volkswagen Group China, Mr. Stephen Wöllenstein, and demand a public announcement it will end all its operations in the Uyghur Xinjian region immediately. You can use this template (tinyurl.com/maUyghurTemplate). Let us know if you receive a reply from him (info@renecassin.org).

Ask your MP to call on the Government to ban the import of products made with Uyghur forced labour.

When shopping for a car, consider avoiding Volkswagen, and any other brands known to be complicit in the exploitation of Uyghur forced labour – visit the Jewish World Watch Uyghur Forced Labour Database (<https://jww.org/site/uyghur-china-forced-labor-database/>) to find out which companies have links to Xinjiang. ■



Ask your MP to call on the Government to ban the import of products made with Uyghur forced labour.



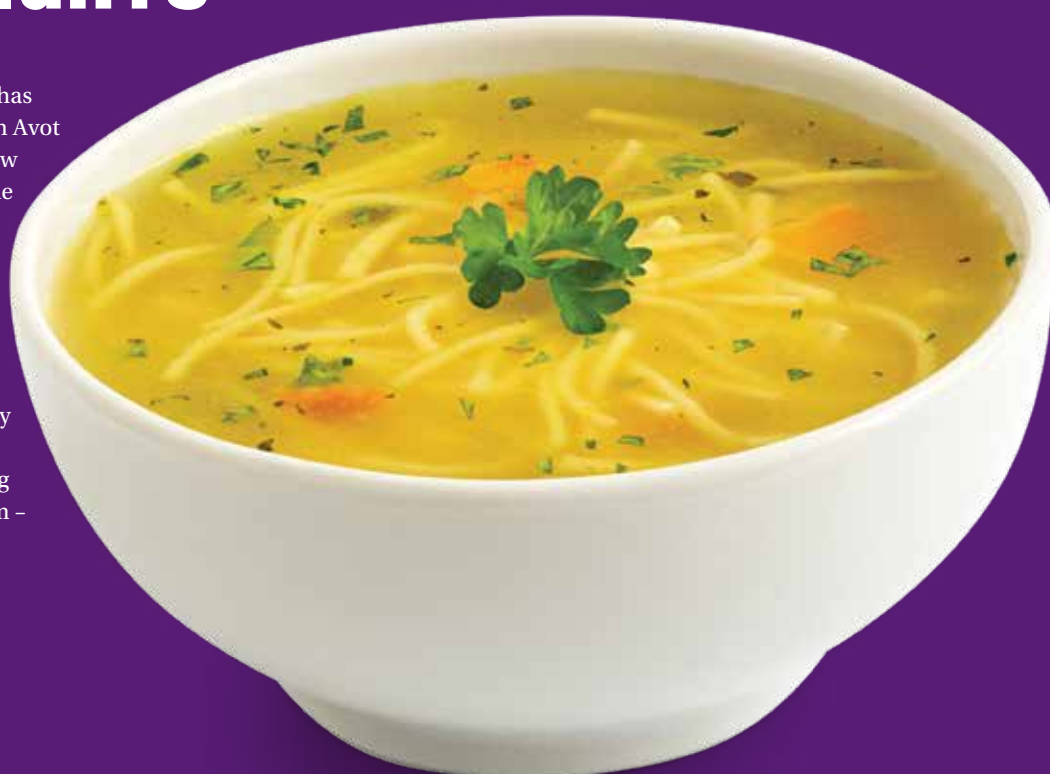
HOMELESS COLLECTION

Many of our community answered the call to collect food, clothes and hygiene products for distribution to London's homeless. On Sunday 17th March about 20 of us (young and old) met in the Shul hall to pack these supplies into Magen Avot branded bags for distribution. 70 bags were created and handed to homeless people by community members. A special initiative helping those in need with chesed whilst creating a wonderful kiddush Hashem – a real "light unto the nations".



FRIDAY NIGHTS

Being grateful for Fridays has taken on a special Magen Avot meaning over the past few months as the walls of the Shul have been echoing and dancing to the sound of heartfelt Friday night song with the special Friday Night Alives and TGIF Kabbalat Shabbat initiatives focussed on raising spirits and voices to create a really special ruach. It's all about the tremendous experience of singing and davening together to Hashem – and the soup of course...



JEWS IN CRICKET

A SPECIAL EXHIBITION AT LORDS

By Julian Pollard



Curators Zaki Cooper (left) and Daniel Lightman

In his Rosh Hashanah Drasha last year, Chief Rabbi Mirvis touched upon the exhibition at Lords about Jews in Cricket. Modestly he omitted his own mention in the display. While few Jews have competed at the very highest Test levels nonetheless this exhibition merits a visit.

The exhibition features items about antisemitism. Percy Fender was one of the most famous cricketers of his day in the inter-war years and played 13 Test matches and while not a prolific record breaker Fender was a powerful hitter. He once hit a ball straight out of The Oval (the stadium, not merely the boundary ropes). He typically scored at a breakneck pace, and still holds the record for the fastest First-Class hundred – in a mere 35 minutes. His appearance was described as “unmistakable on the field, lanky, bespectacled, curly-haired, slouching along, hands deep in pockets and wearing a grotesquely long sweater”. He had some physical characteristics of a stereotypical Jew and suffered much discrimination on

that account. His behaviour was unusual, if not eccentric; he was an unusually adept leader, which made him a darling of Surrey County Cricket Club but in an era when cricket was still dominated by the nobility, Fender ran into a public tussle against Lord Harris, no less, which effectively ended his Test career. He should have captained England but MCC members referred to him as “that Jew Boy”.

The only trouble was – he wasn’t Jewish!

Stephen Fry (who is Jewish) is the present President of the MCC. Famous England bowler “Firey” Freddy Truman claimed he might belatedly have discovered that he had Jewish antecedents; almost certainly he did not.

Dr Ali (Aron) Bacher captained South Africa and was one of the most successful Jewish Test batsmen. He took over the national captaincy in 1970 when he was lucky enough to inherit what was probably South Africa’s greatest side, including Barry Richards, Mike Procter and Eddie Barlow.



Percy Fender exhibit

Bacher skippered in only four Tests – and apartheid ensured they would be South Africa’s last for 22 years. He won the toss each time, and completed a whitewash 4-0 victory over Australia. Bacher was at the forefront of campaigns to bring cricket to developing areas of the country and help the nation’s disadvantaged people. He helped provide new opportunities and a new lease of life for those who had no previous relationship with the sport and ushered it out of the dark ages. South Africa’s readmittance by the ICC owed much to the tireless work of Bacher.



Dr Ali (Aron) Bacher

He greatly assisted the writer's cousin in founding the Israeli Cricket Association
And finally... Let them eat cake...

Mrs Aileen Cohen – a local from St Johns Wood it is rumoured – baked the very first cake enjoyed by the BBC Test Match Special commentary team. This became a recurring favourite across the decades. ■



The Chief Rabbi in action...



MAGEN AVOT BOOK CLUB



Magen Avot Book Club was set up late last year. We hold meetings every six weeks or so and everyone of all ages is invited to participate and will be most welcome. The books we discussed so far have been : *All The Light We Cannot See*, *Commonwealth* and *Mr Wilder and Me*. New reading suggestions will be welcome and if you are interested to join the Group please contact Cathy Fisher at: cathyfisherpr@gmail.com

Book Club meets next on Thursday 16th May 2024 at 8 pm online and we shall be reading "J" by Howard Jacobson.

NATIVE ISRAELI WINE GRAPES



Josh London is a published writer on wine and whisky and writes articles that explore kosher wine as a religious and cultural artifact as well as a commercial beverage – one which has the capacity to enrich Jewish life and enhance Jewish living.

An interesting trend in Israeli wine over the past decade has been the search for, and release to market of, wines made from native or indigenous grape varieties. Consider, for example, such wines as the Jezreel Valley Single Vineyard Argaman, the Barkan Argaman wines, the Segal Native Marawi, or the Recanati Reserve Bittuni and Reserve Marawi.

These local variety driven wines are not only examples of Israeli innovation and the commercial desire to offer something new or different to increase brand awareness and, ultimately, push higher sales, but are also expressions of a very real yearning for authenticity and identity.

“In the Israeli wine industry,” Yehuda Nahar, CEO and co-founder of the Jezreel Valley Winery, once explained, “we are all more and more understanding that we... need to find the answer to ‘what is Israeli wine?’ Some wineries, like Jezreel are approaching this through our focus on varietal selection, locally appropriate varietals that make wines that are more fresh and easy drinking, wines that fit our hot, Mediterranean climate.”

“Israeli wine is not really defined yet,” as

Gil Shatsberg, the Recanati Winery’s then Executive VP and head winemaker put it to me a few years back. Rather, he explained, Israeli wine “is like a fusion [stylistically] from all over the world,” especially since



Dr Elyashiv “Shivi” Drori, winemaker of the Gva’ot Winery and an agronomist and researcher at Ariel University

so many of Israel’s winemakers train in Europe, America, and Australia Shatsberg himself trained in California.

The world over, many winemakers – especially smaller, artisanal producers – produce wines that others recognize and laud as an authentic representation of the winemaking traditions and local geographic regions from which these wines emerge. Many other winemakers aim to produce wines that might be so recognized and, hopefully also, prized for such localized attributes. In Israel, however, winemakers have no solid history or significant winemaking traditions of any great age from which to draw upon for inspiration, much less guidance.

For unlike in such countries as France or Italy, where wine traditions are purportedly rooted in a rich winemaking history stretching back through centuries of near constant, uninterrupted production from vintage to vintage, the Israeli wine industry is still in its relative infancy. Owing to centuries of Muslim occupation under the Ottoman Empire starting in the early 16th century, Israel’s wine traditions – whatever they might have

been – were effectively lost. The sands of time swept through, and the desert encroached and overwhelmed as foreign rulers came and went. The historic record of wine production in what is today the modern State of Israel is surmised only through archaeology.

When the commercial wine industry was restarted in the very late 19th century, it began with a clean slate. Thus, the Israeli wine industry began by producing European or international styled wines from European-origin grape varieties. Over the last decade, however, there has been significant interest in finding more native, more indigenous, more “authentic” Israeli grape varieties.

In terms of the historic legacy varieties, as Israeli wine writer and industry insider Adam Montefiore recently put it, “a decade ago, we knew there were local grape varieties, grown for centuries in the vineyards of the Holy Land, but we never thought of them as being wine grapes” even though “the wineries that were founded by Jewish families like Shor and Teperberg in the 19th century” used these same grape varieties, “purchased from Arab-owned vineyards mainly in the Hebron area,” such as Bittuni and

Baladi for red wine, and Dabouki, Marawi (known as Hamdani around Bethlehem and Jerusalem), Jandali, and Zeini for white wine. As Montefiore put it, these “varieties survived the Ottoman Empire because they were sweet and tasty” so they “were used as table grapes, to make raisins” and the like. “Local Jews and Christians,” notes Montefiore, “always made wine, but it was a domestic affair, not an industry.”

Since these grapes varieties were cultivated in the pre-modern, pre-industrial planning era, the vineyards were often a haphazard affair, offering a higgledy-piggledy field blend of whatever happened to survive and thrive. Vineyard identification, such as it was, was not much concerned with variety type. Indeed, it is only in the last decade or so that such grape varieties have undergone serious study with an eye towards advancing Israeli viticulture.

In 2011, Dr. Elyashiv “Shivi” Drori and a team of researchers funded in large part by a grant from the Jewish National Fund began groundbreaking research at Ariel University in search of the native grapes of Israel. Drori is also the winemaker at the Gva’ot Winery, which produces typically wonderful commercial quality wines, so

the industry has been carefully following his research. Using cuttings collected from wild grapevines found all over Israel, carefully comparing their DNA to the large grape DNA database at the University of Milan, Drori and his team have discovered 120 unique varieties, some 12-20 of which are potentially suitable for making wine. Drori is actively cultivating these varieties to test-drive them, producing experimental wines at a micro-winery through Ariel University.

In 2014, the Recanati Winery partnered with Drori to start producing wine from the Marawi grape. The grape was sourced from a Palestinian Arab owned vineyard near Bethlehem where it is cultivated as a table-grape rather than a wine-grape. These are 30-year-old, dry-farmed vines grown at an altitude of 2,600 feet above sea level. The vines are pergola-trained in the traditional trellising method known as the “Hebron Overhead Arbor,” which protects the grapes from direct sunlight. Shatsberg said he and the Recanati folks tasted several small-scale experimental wines from Drori’s research team and Marawi really “stood out as worthy for commercial production.”

The vineyard’s owner remains anonymous, as does the name of his vineyard, out of fear of boycott or reprisal for working with the Israelis. Since the vineyard was planted far too densely for tractors Recanati’s team harvested the vineyard using donkeys.

Recanati produced just 2,480 bottles of this first vintage, but the release attracted significant international attention as it was thought to be the sort of wine that King David or Jesus might have drunk. Shatsberg noted that the initial reaction was “really amazing” and that it seemed “as if the market was waiting for something unique and authentic.” The wine received positive reviews from critics, and has continued to do so with subsequent vintages (including a 90-point score from Robert Parker for the ‘16 vintage’).

Working with the same Palestinian farmer, Recanati started in 2016 to produce a red wine made from the native Bittuni grape. That same year, two other kosher Israeli wineries – Drori’s Gvaot Winery and Nahar’s Jezreel Valley Winery – also started to produce wine made from native grapes. Before too long, the Barkan Winery began doing so as well.

Another interesting development, particularly in terms of an authentic grape variety, is the seriousness with which Israeli winemakers increasingly approach the Argaman grape. ■

ARGAMAN GRAPES

Arguably the most authentic Israeli red wine variety, Argaman which means “deep purple” or crimson in Aramaic was created in 1972 by the Israeli agronomist Professor Roy Spiegel at the Volcani Institute of Agriculture, in collaboration with Dr. Shlomo Cohen of the Israeli Wine Institute and was eventually planted commercially in the 1990s. Winemaker Avi Feldstein, then of Segal Wines, began planting Argaman in the Upper Galilee at the Dovev vineyard, over 700 metres above sea level and came up with much higher quality fruit.

The commercially released wines made from the various “ancient” grape varieties have been a critical success, but they are not—and cannot be—expected to overtake or crowd out more familiar, mainstream grape varieties.

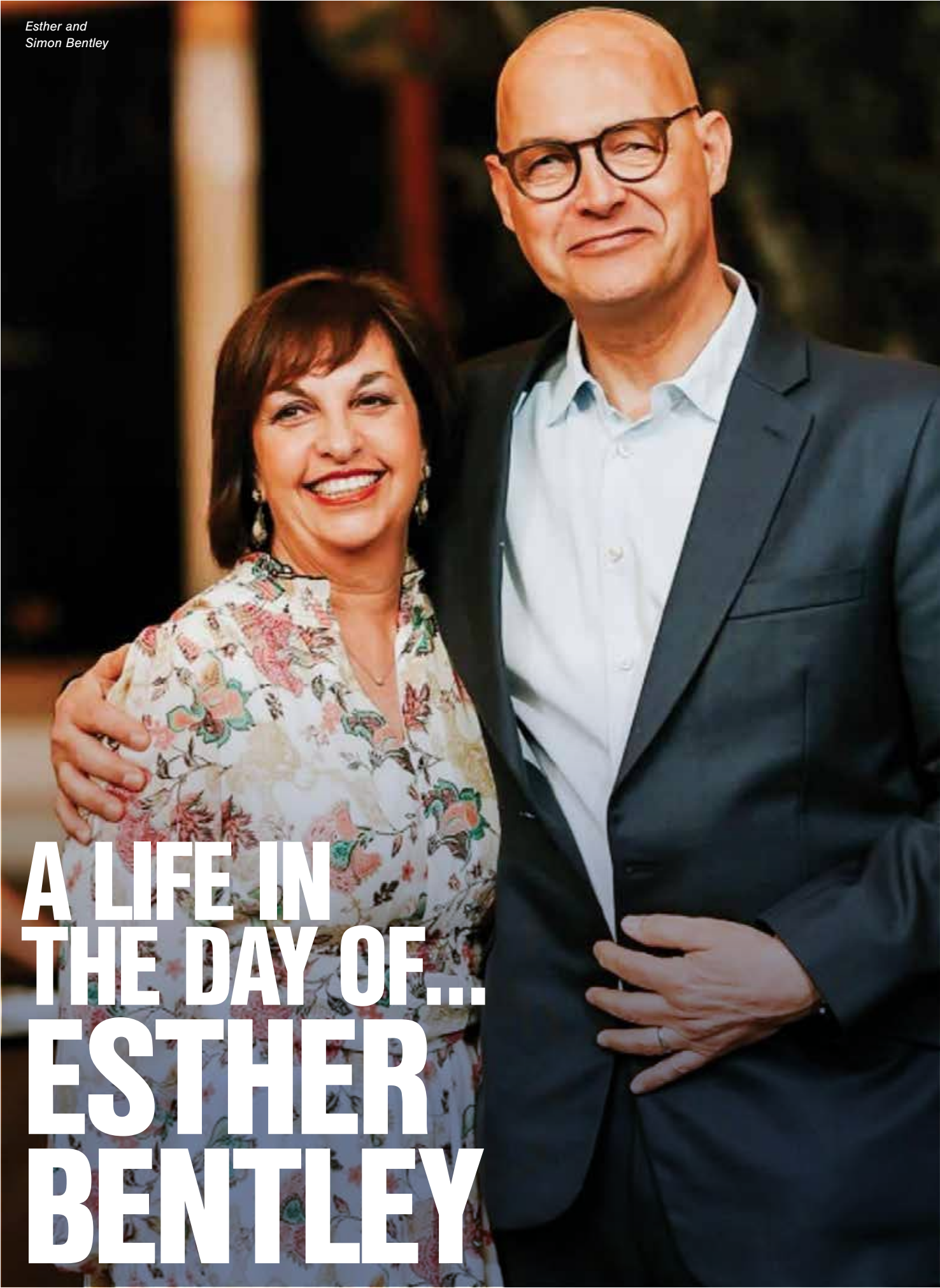
Gil Shatsberg, [then] head winemaker of the Recanati Winery, agrees that these ancient varieties are more about philosophic Israeli identity than pure commerce. He noted, for example, that the Recanati winery’s efforts with the “Marawi [grape] are not ever going to replace Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc, but it is something unique that Israel can produce, something to be proud of, and that Israel can show for its heritage, and which is naturally adapted to its climate and soil.”

Flavour-wise, the Bittuni grape tends to produce a relatively light, fruity and spicy red wine that tastes something like a cross between Grenache and Pinot Noir, almost Gamay-like. The Marawi tends to produce white wines that are slightly savory and saline, even a little fat, but still reasonably fresh and engaging with delicate peach or apricot aromas, and a little melon and citrus on the palate.

Argaman tends to produce wines with cherry fruit notes, good acidity, and a slightly peppery quality, with the style of the wine ranging from light and fruity—best served slightly chilled—to plush, deep-bodied, oak aged wines that are a bit more character-driven.

Exploring such wines may not fully answer the riddle of Israeli wine identity, but the journey is likely to be educational, rewarding, and deeply satisfying.

L’chaim!



*Esther and
Simon Bentley*

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF... ESTHER BENTLEY

Behind every successful man... We all know this adage, but this is never more appropriate in the case of Esther Bentley, the wife of our Chairman Simon.

Hugely accomplished in her own right she has provided the support without which Simon could not have been so effective as our chairman. Julian Pollard met up with Esther recently.

Q: Esther let's go back to your family childhood.

A: My grandparents were Polish refugees who came to London between the Wars. My maternal grandfather Pinchas Shebson was the 'infamous' firebrand Rabbi at Southend and Westcliff shul, and my paternal grandfather was a renowned Chazan from pre-war Rowne, Poland, Rev Aryeh Garbacz who officiated in the same shul. I was born in Westcliff and my parents Bernard and Vera Garbacz moved to Kingsbury in London when I was 18 months old, and then to Finchley when I was 14. After attending North West London Jewish Day School, I went on to South Hampstead School for Girls, and then took a BSc Economics degree at the LSE – specialising in International Relations.

Q: And then you met Simon?

A: No we met when I was 15 – he used to pick me up on his motor bike from school. I suppose we were childhood sweethearts – I was not even 20 when we married, and he was just 21.

Q: And you embarked on a career in education?

A: Yes. Firstly I taught Economics and History at private colleges, in between having four children, and I also taught Economics at Hasmonean High School for Boys for two years. Once the children were grown, I decided then to become involved in further education. I took a master's degree in Holocaust Studies at UCL between 1998 and 1999, and for 20 years I was actively involved in Holocaust Education at the Imperial War Museum and the Jewish Museum – teaching Secondary School groups about the dangers of antisemitism, the value of hearing witness testimonies and the lessons of the Holocaust – which are so relevant today. I now work on a voluntary basis for Yad Vashem UK Foundation – at which Simon is Chairman, and for the 'My Voice' project run by the Fed based in Manchester. I am currently working on a book about Mala Tribich, an inspirational Holocaust survivor and the sister of the late Sir Ben Helfgott.

Q: Your father Bernard Garbacz was an energetic and effective communal activist, and I recall myself his work for JIA, the University Jewish Chaplaincy Board, Jews College and Bnai Brith First Lodge, as well as him being the Chairman of the Trustees of the Hasmonean Schools when they fell into financial difficulties, and also the Chairman at Hendon United Synagogue – as well as his involvement in many Israel related charities. Was it his example which led you into communal endeavour?

A: His efforts in many areas of communal endeavour have clearly rubbed off on me and my three siblings. He almost single-handedly saved the Hasmonean schools when they got into deep financial trouble due to financial mismanagement between 1979 and 1982, and the stress of administering the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement with the backing of the High Court, almost certainly contributed to his first heart attack at the young age of 49. My mother was also involved in many charities and became Vice Chair of British Emunah for many years.

Q: I prefaced this article by stating that you are the family rock on which Simon and the children rely so heavily. This was brought into the sharpest relief when Simon was badly injured while ski lugging some years ago. What gave you strength and energy in those difficult months?

A: In January 2000 Simon had gone on an annual skiing trip with work colleagues to Verbiers. I had just completed my master's degree at UCL. Then news came through that he had been ski lugging at night with other colleagues, and he had crashed on an icy nursery slope and hit a tree. His head injuries were life threatening. Friends and family took over, and I immediately flew out to Switzerland with three of the children, and for a few days he was on life support and his life was in the balance. His skull was badly fractured, he broke his left arm, and he lost sight in his left eye. 10 days later he was flown back with me and my eldest daughter Debbie by private air ambulance to London for brain surgery. His recovery took many months and was a huge strain on myself and our four children who were deeply shocked to see their father, a very fit and active man, laid low. His single-minded mental perseverance and general physical fitness enabled him to recover slowly over two years. Our close family cohesion and strength got us through this deeply traumatic time, and we have always



I was actively involved in Holocaust Education at the Imperial War Museum and the Jewish Museum – teaching Secondary School groups about the dangers of antisemitism, the value of hearing witness testimonies and the lessons of the Holocaust – which are so relevant today.



remained tight knit and supportive of each other whenever there have been challenges since then.

Q: What was he doing before the accident?

A: Simon was Chairman and Chief Executive of Blacks Leisure PLC and after nine months medical leave of absence he rejoined the Board, but after some time he decided to move on, and has held several interesting senior management positions since then.

Q: You have four children – all are talented and successful. Can you tell us about them?

A: We have four talented and individualistic children-(that's the Jewish mother in me talking!) Our eldest Debbie is 43 and lives in Ra'anana with her husband David, and four gorgeous children – Maya, Orli, Asher and Eitan – she qualified as a lawyer, but is now a successful Events organiser in Israel and runs her own business, whilst juggling a crazy busy family life. Josh (41) was in an Events linked business with Simon for a long time, but is now a successful entrepreneur using his experience and skills learnt from their previous business, and is also a talented Maccabi footballer. He lives in Mill Hill with his wife Carly and their three lively and lovely children – Lily, Jayden and Eva. Pauly (38) is perhaps the highest profile. He is an accomplished and highly regarded Investigative Journalist and Author. He has won several prestigious Journalism awards

and is currently Head of Investigations at The Times in London and specialises in in-depth reporting and undercover work. His recent book "The Equal Parent" was received with critical acclaim and explores myths around gendered parenting roles and advocates for men to share caring responsibility for their children. He and Robin have a 4-year-old 'lobbus' surrogate son Solly.

Q: Tell us about Tanya.

A: Tanya is our youngest and is married to Eli Wachsmann. They have two small, gorgeous girls, Edie and Lyla. She is a Contemporary Curator at the National Portrait Gallery. In 2021 she was awarded a 2021 Paper Project grant from Getty to curate an exhibition of Lucian Freud's drawings for the new permanent galleries of the National Portrait Gallery. She has worked at various Museums and Arts Institutions including the London Jewish Cultural Centre, Ben Uri Gallery & Museum, the Barber Institute of Fine Art and Yad Vashem Holocaust Art Museum in Jerusalem.

Q: How do you help Simon in his shul endeavours?

A: I don't think he needs my help! When the position of Chairman arose he was not initially particularly enthused about standing, but as a Council member at the time, I knew that he could be persuaded as his organisational talents and experience were very suited to the job; so I urged him to take the position,

not knowing he would still be there four years later!! He is very focussed on the job in hand and has made quite an impact on the Community. Coupled with excellent people skills and team leadership he sets an example which inspires others. He has increasingly relished the special environment of Magen Avot and the diversity and talent of its membership. If anything, he has become more committed religiously also. I am only too happy to support him in his role as best I can, but all the hard work is down to him. He occasionally asks for my help in writing something descriptive for the shul magazine as he always says my writing skills are better than his, and I modestly can agree with that.

Q: How do you relax after the pressures of work, shul and family?

A: Our family is everything to us. We love regularly seeing our children and grandchildren. Simon and I enjoy going to the theatre, watching films (though we don't always have the same taste), bingeing on boxsets, loved The Traitors – and I love all types of contemporary music – from the Beatles to Adele, Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Ed Sheeran, Miley Cyrus, Paulo Nutini and P!nk, Leonard Cohen, country rock – and even Dolly Parton! If there is good music on in the background, I am happy. I also have written articles for some magazines, and perhaps in another life I would have loved to have been a journalist; my son Pauly is definitely living my dream. ■

HOPE FOR JUSTICE

On 16 July last year, Magen Avot hosted a bagel breakfast with Andrew Williams MBE from Hope for Justice and Mia Hasenson-Gross from Rene Cassin as part of Magen Avot's ongoing Chessed, Tzedakah and Mishpat initiative. We asked Andrew for an update. Andrew has been in touch a couple of times since 7 October to say we are in his thoughts and prayers.

Hope for Justice's objectives are to end human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

It is active in the United Kingdom, United States, Cambodia, Norway, Australia, Ethiopia and Uganda and has its headquarters in Manchester, England.

Hope for Justice seeks to investigate and rescue trafficking victims, assist in aftercare, hold traffickers accountable, and campaign on a wider level to improve awareness and legislation. In the financial year 2021-22, Hope for Justice says it reached

199,894 people over 12 months through its outreach, prevention and aftercare projects.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Hope for Justice published a rapid assessment report covering the risks of modern slavery for those displaced by the conflict. The charity also produced informational resources for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK and collaborated with other charities to launch a website called UkrainiansWelcome.org for

those arriving in the UK from Ukraine to warn of the risks of trafficking. It led a coalition of more than 50 human rights

and anti-trafficking charities globally to sign an open letter condemning the invasion and its impact on human trafficking risks for the most vulnerable and contributed to an evidence-gathering project led by the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner on the same subject.

In the six months to last November the charity has supported 338 survivors of

human trafficking in the US. Norway and UK and given shelter, trauma informed care, food, medicine and education to 662 children. It was named Charity of the Year at the .ORG Impact Awards last November.

Last October Trustee Andy Williams and his wife visited Uganda to witness how Hope for Justice has "broken the cycle of exploitation" in that country, but closer to home the problems persist.

A Vietnamese teenager desperately seeking work abroad to fund an urgent operation for his mother was instead trafficked to the UK for forced labour and criminal exploitation to cultivate cannabis. After a year he managed to escape his imprisonment and after reaching 18 he was referred to Hope for Justice and supported in his quest for refugee status – finally granted last summer. After five years he can apply to stay in the UK if it is still too dangerous to return to Vietnam. ■

Full information (including how to spot signs of modern-day slavery in our society) can be found at; www.hopeforjustice.org



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ARMISTICE DAY

SHABBOS 11 NOVEMBER 2023

Reflection by Daniel Greenberg CB

Last October when our thoughts were focussed on the Gaza War and the senseless deaths we were mourning, Daniel Greenberg delivered a memorable address which we reproduce here:

"The message of today's Armistice Day really speaks to the mood of the Jewish people around the world this year. It is a matter of enormous pride to me as a British Jew that after the First World War the United Kingdom did not build a victory memorial. We built a Cenotaph of remembrance, where year after year human beings would come to reflect on the senseless destruction of the First World War and mourn the annihilation of a whole generation of youth and vigour in a pointless war.

There were no winners in war then and there are no winners in war now. Wars sometimes have to be fought. World War Two had to be fought by the allies of the free world against an authoritarian threat that if left unchecked would have extinguished freedom in every corner of the globe.

Today, Israel is fighting a war for its survival, against a merciless enemy that has committed atrocities that will haunt our collective memory forever. So we have to fight – but even as we fight we mourn. Every child's cry pierces to our heart. Every sob of the dispossessed, the bereft, the dying and the disabled fills our hearts and our prayers. And we hear the cries of the hostages of all ages held by Hamas in Gaza and they pierce our hearts until we hardly know how to carry on.

Avrohom Ovinu cried for Soroh in this week's parashah with a small chaf, one reason for which was because she lived such a full and wonderful life and there was so little to mourn and so much to celebrate. What can we say today of young lives extinguished at their very outset in unimaginably inhuman conditions? What can we say of young men full of vigour and promise cut down in the service of their country and defence

of their people? What can we say of young mothers left widowed, young children left orphans?

All the thousands and thousands of innocent lives destroyed or damaged in a war not of their making and due to a hatred they never felt or fomented. So we stand in silence because there is simply nothing to be said. We resolve to fight evil, but never to feel triumph in our hearts.

When the Mishneh in Pirkei Ovos counsels us not to rejoice in the downfall of our enemy it speaks not only to the

need to show human compassion even to those whose ways and choices have forced us to do battle against them, but also to the stark reality that the defeat of evil rarely leaves us much if anything to be happy about, and its bequests are usually – as today – human misery, suffering, death and disability.

With the help of the Ribono Shel Oilom the Defence Forces of Israel will be successful in restoring peace and security to the land that we dreamed about inhabiting through thousands of years of exile. And when once more b'ezras Hashem we are all able to walk in calm and comfort through our land, we will stand, as we stand today on Armistice Day, hand in hand with all humanity – with all who know how to shed a tear for the victims of senseless violence.

And we will whisper the words of the poet Robert Binyon in 1914 that have become the essence of remembrance the whole world over as we remember the victims:

***"They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old:***

***Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.***

***At the going down of the sun
and in the morning,
We will remember them."***

And we will pray for a time when in the words of the Novi "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation", a time when the whole world is receptive to the description of the Torah we give every time we return the sefer to the Oron HaKoidesh: "Her ways are the ways of pleasantness and her every path is peace". A time when sense and decency will have prevailed, and we will have played our full part in reawakening the ruchniyus of our people, and through our people the whole world, *ad sheyovo Melech, Goel u'Moishia, bimheiro b'yomeinu omein v'omein.* ■



Happy Pesach!

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MALA TRIBICH AT MAGEN AVOT

To mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 Magen Avot were honoured to host Mala Tribich as our guest speaker at a breakfast on Sunday 21 January. Mala is a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor whose courageous story of resilience and strength in wartime occupied Poland and Nazi Germany was both inspirational and moving.

Speaking first about her childhood in Piotrkow, Poland, and then about

the outbreak of World War 2 and the subsequent lightening Nazi occupation of Poland, we learnt about her life as a child in hiding to escape the deportations, her life in the horrendous conditions in the ghetto after the deportations, her life as a slave labourer and then her brutal experiences in Ravensbruck and Bergen Belsen where she was finally liberated. This gave us all a valuable insight into the horrors of the

Holocaust, and the lessons that need to be learned about the dehumanisation, separation of families and tragedies that occurred.

In her words: "My wartime experiences have made me aware of human frailty and of how quickly a civilised society can break down under the rule of a despot, but it has also taught me never to give up hope, and to strive and work hard for a better world". ■

**Dor Skop
Tour Guide**

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ISRAEL AT WAR



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VIEW FROM ISRAEL

By Joy Kay

To be honest, I was scared. Scared, bewildered and shocked. Succot had been wonderful, with glorious weather, beautiful davening and enjoyable meals in our new succah, lovingly constructed by Melvin. Perched on our roof, it offered a refreshing breeze and glorious views over Ra'anana.

And so we went into Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah with full hearts and spiritually renewed, ready to celebrate with our lovely new kehilla.

The siren on that Shabbat morning rudely awoke us at 6.30am. We looked at one another, and then walked briskly to the stairwell, as we don't have a safe room in our apartment. There the other residents of our floor were sleepily gathering, and the general consensus was: "It's a mistake, a computer glitch". After a few minutes, we all returned to our apartments.

Shortly afterwards we went to shul. No one could shed any light on what had caused the siren to sound; davening proceeded.

Hakafot – the kehillah went to the downstairs hall where there was more space. Suddenly, a couple of men dashed into the hall and spoke to some of the women there. One woman then announced, in a very sombre tone, that instead of dancing with simcha, we all needed to say Tehillim – NOW. She said there had been an "incident with casualties" in the south and that it was serious. No one at that point realised just how serious. Most of the men seemed unaware of the news and had carried on

dancing and singing. We then saw a flurry of movement in the men's section. A gabai was on a phone. Men were coming into shul, and more men were going out. It was announced that the service would be ending, and we all went home, still with little clue as to what was happening.

Our Canadian granddaughter was staying with us over chag, and her phone had been buzzing and buzzing for hours. Eventually she answered it as she saw there had been dozens of missed calls from Ilana, our daughter, and we learned that they had had many rockets in the Modiin area, but that thankfully, they were ok.

After chag and Shabbat ended, a picture began to emerge of the "incident". And that's when the fear really hit, as we were told that many terrorists were still inside Israel, that the army had, that morning, been caught completely unawares, and that unimaginable numbers of soldiers and civilians had been slaughtered.

This fear only began to recede when the army confirmed several days later that they had mopped up the last of the terrorists inside Israel, but slowly we began to learn of the full horror of that shocking, disastrous day. Israel declared war on Hamas and we tried to prepare ourselves for what could lie ahead. I became obsessed with tuning in to every news bulletin, even in the middle of the night, but soon realised this was a very unhealthy pursuit.

We prepared basic supplies in the event of needing to shelter in our miklat for two to three days (as ordered by the

town council) and we kept our phones on loud, day and night, in case the sirens went off (Actually, there's NO chance of sleeping through those sirens!). We learned to shower in no more than a minute or two, and always made sure our clothes were next to us for easy access! We familiarised ourselves with easily accessible bomb shelters close to the shops, and we quickly became aware of how few young men were around on the streets. We began to recognise the reassuring boom of Kipat Barzel, our amazing Iron Dome system, and on many occasions we rushed up to our roof to watch the rocket interceptions over neighbouring towns and areas.

And then the serious volunteering began! We are both totally flabbergasted at the quantity of volunteering opportunities that sprung up in the wake of the war. You can fill your entire week with volunteering. Melvin has become a seasoned fruit picker, and is now quite expert in identifying different kinds of citrus (red grapefruit being his favourite!). We actually have a kind of a "shuk" going on in our building, as many of our neighbours go fruit picking too, and so we all swap the produce that we've brought home from the fields and orchards.

I've also been doing Sar-El, which is a programme for volunteers at army bases. The programme runs year-round, and people can volunteer for a day, a week, or several weeks at a time. The volunteers are in great demand on the logistical bases, and the work usually involves sorting and packing anything from food, uniforms, ceramic vests, medical supplies etc. I've joined the daily groups and go about once a week, for seven to eight hours. The work can be quite physically demanding, and is also tedious, but the "Sarelniks" are a lovely bunch of people, motivated and willing to work hard, and the day passes very quickly.

Once a month, I help at Leket, which is a charity providing fresh fruit and vegetables to poorer families in Israel. And I also do laundry once a week for the "mefunim" – the evacuees from the South who are currently staying in the Prima hotel in Ra'anana.

Melvin and I have been barbecuing with a group of volunteers once a week on army bases all over the country. Generally, the men don't allow the women volunteers anywhere near their barbecues and we are delegated the vegetable prep and clearing up tasks, but nobody minds, as the soldiers enjoy the food so much and are so appreciative of the steaks, burgers and sausages that we provide, especially

as many of them have barely been home since October.

And so, life continues in a strange, new normality here, with us and everyone else adapting to this new “normal”. There is a tremendous sense of “achdut” here, a feeling of unity which we feared had disappeared from our beloved land. There is, however, nothing “normal” about the

agonising plight of the hostages in Gaza, which occupies the thoughts of everyone in the country day and night. We all worry constantly about the outcome of this war, and whether the situation in the North will evolve in to a full-blown conflict. But we also worry about the Jewish communities in London, and in Toronto, where Avital lives. Both places seem to have become so

very different in just a few months – hostile, intimidatory places – and we fear for the future of our grandchildren, for both of these communities, and indeed for all of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. For as difficult, heartbreaking and uncertain as life is here, we do (now) feel safe and protected, in what is, after all, our homeland and home. ■

ISRAEL – FROM THE INSIDE LOOKING OUT

By Mel Kay



Having lived in the UK up until two and a half years ago, and seen so many wars and actions from afar involving Israel, actually being here during a serious and redefining conflict brings out emotions and feelings that I could not have imagined.

As I am sure was the case in much of the world and certainly in Jewish Communities, the shock and disbelief of what happened on October 7th, coupled by sorrow and eventual anger took hold of Joy and myself.

I would certainly not want to give any impression whatsoever of sounding brave (that would be foolhardy and does not come into it), but after the initial fears subsided, Joy and I experienced the warmth and comfort of being in our own country, surrounded by caring, helping and unified people, wanting to express empathy and provide emotional support wherever possible. How sad it is that it takes something as awful and dramatic as this to

bring about the achdut that you can see is so longed for and is so powerful.

Having got through the initial trauma, it was “batten down the hatches” and find ways of helping the cause and doing anything and everything possible to support our country, together with everyone else here.

Soldiers walking in the streets going to join their units were literally hugged by anyone who could get hold of them and were blessed for a safe return. Shop keepers would not allow them to pay for anything they needed, and a feeling of love and concern for the young by the old was clearly reciprocated and brought people to tears.

There was of course relief at the outset when much of the Western world seemed to stand up to be counted in recognising good from bad, and supporting Israel in a just cause against evil and hatred. Unfortunately however people had experienced this support before and knew that it would only be a matter of time until the worm turned.

The news became a central part of virtually everyone’s life and the strained faces of parents, grandparents, wives, friends, all concerned for the soldiers in the IDF, became the default appearance. I found it difficult to know how to address people on seeing them. A normal smile and asking how they were was certainly not the go-to greeting.

Everything mattered and every bit of news, every injury, every funeral felt as it should, that it was a part of our wider family and deeply affected us.

After a while however, and as events began to unfold, life for most people seems to have struggled back to some sort of normality. I have been assured by older

Israelis, that soldiers on the front lines would want this to happen, and is part of their objective in fighting and defending the way of life in Israel. Nevertheless at the back of your mind there is always the concern as to what is happening to the boys and girls, men and women who are fighting for the country. In addition, for the families of the hostages, those bereft, and the relatives and friends of the wounded, as well as the displaced, who have had to live as families with few facilities and no home comforts in one room in a hotel, the ever present agony continues.

I would just say that it seems to me that life in Israel anyway is just full of stories, experiences and coincidences that can make you laugh till you cry, cry until you can scream, feel enormously proud or very embarrassed, and brings with it the realisation of how small the Jewish world is. Whatever the various backgrounds and traditions of the population, we are very clearly one related family. During this difficult time these feelings are all the more accentuated.

There is also great concern expressed everywhere here for families and fellow Jews throughout the world who are facing such horrendous antisemitism, and a hope that increased aliyah will be a result of this awful episode.

Having experienced a situation that as Joy mentioned, we never thought could be so powerful from an emotional point of view, both personally and nationally, I can still honestly say that being on the inside looking out for me is much more favourable than the other way around, and I can’t think that I would want to be anywhere else but in Israel, especially at such a time. ■



IN SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL

No one in our community has devoted more time and effort to highlight the plight of our hostages in Gaza – especially the women – than **CHAYA LANGERMAN**. Her tireless campaigning – whether on the streets of London or hosting speakers in her own home has been truly extraordinary and here over the next five pages, in her own words are her thoughts...

The events of October 7th had a profound impact on my life, marking a significant turning point that altered my perspective drastically. The initial shock and uncertainty, coupled with the relentless stream of horrifying news, kept me intensely focused on the situation in Israel. I found myself constantly checking on the well-being of family members who had been called to serve in the army.

In those first days, I received heartbreaking news of losses within my own circle – a school friend who lost her daughter in the Nova festival, another who lost her brother, a doctor killed while tending to the wounded in Sderot, and yet another friend who lost her second son, following the tragic death of her husband in a previous terror attack. The toll on my ability to function was immense, and I found solace in constantly tuning in to Israel's TV channel to stay updated.

The pivotal moment came with the first rally in Trafalgar Square. Attending with my family, I was moved to tears listening to the families of hostages speaking there. From that point on, I threw myself into attending every rally and event, feeling a deep sense of duty to contribute in any way I could.

This commitment led me to connect with Noam and Michal Sagi, the son of Ada Sagi who was a hostage in Gaza and returned in one of final exchanges. We felt a collective responsibility to assist in whatever capacity possible. Our first endeavour was hosting a Hafrashat Challah event at my home, in aid of AWIS, featuring speakers from GIFT discussing their efforts in the current situation, as well as Tal Witkon, a mother of an IDF soldier in Gaza, sharing her experiences.

We then joined forces with the "Your Silence is Loud" team, a group of women dedicated to advocating for

women hostages, organising the first rally to amplify the silence of UN women regarding the crimes against women in captivity. This led to the production of short videos as part of the "UN for all Women" campaign, which gained traction on social media. After initiating discussions with parliamentary assistants, I was invited to participate in a panel held in the House of Lords, where Members of Parliament and media representatives gathered to address the atrocities against women. The panel featured testimonies from experts, including those who handled the victims' bodies, law enforcement officials, and relatives of the hostages. Being present at the hearings proved to be emotionally taxing, far more so than simply watching online. The solemn atmosphere emphasised the urgency of addressing gender-based violence and ensuring justice for the victims. This experience strengthened my resolve to advocate for women's rights and continue raising awareness about these critical issues.

Continuing our activism, we staged several protests outside the Red Cross, demanding action to ensure hostages received necessary medical treatment and support. Through these collective efforts, we aimed to make a tangible difference in the lives of those affected by the



conflict, providing support, advocacy, and amplifying voices that might otherwise go unheard.

A particular event that I was involved with and remained fresh in my mind is the “Your Silence is Loud” installation and rally, held on December 3rd opposite Downing Street, resonated with power and purpose, drawing a crowd of approximately 1,500 impassioned individuals. Spearheaded by Israeli women volunteers, this event formed a vital component of a global movement, echoing across major cities such as New York.

The stark visual of women clad in black, their mouths silenced by orange tape, served as a haunting reminder of the deafening silence of UN Women in the face of gender-based violence in Israel. Their signs, bearing the faces of those kidnapped by Hamas and the rallying cry “UN Women Your Silence is Loud” alongside #speakup, pierced through the air with a demand for action.

Prominent speakers, including Dame Maureen Lipman, Nimco Ali, and Laura Marks, took to the stage, their words igniting flames of indignation and urgency. Nimco Ali’s impassioned plea to believe survivors and hold perpetrators accountable echoed with unwavering resolve. Meanwhile, Laura Marks delivered a searing indictment of sexual violence, declaring it a weapon of war and a crime against humanity that demands immediate condemnation and action.

My deep connection with Nir Oz

stands out as one of the most profound experiences. This small kibbutz, deeply affected on the 7th of October, faced complete destruction with many of its members either taken hostage or killed. Recognising the need to support the community’s children, especially while they are relocated to Karmei Gat, we initiated a fundraising effort to establish a youth centre, aimed to maintain the constant interaction among the youth, an aspect disrupted by the relocation. Together with my friend Tali (Zemach Productions), we organised an event featuring Eylon Levy, interviewed by Justin Cohen at St. John’s Wood Shul. Despite the challenges, including Eylon’s need to flee the UK due to significant risks after his speech at Trafalgar Square, we persisted with a Zoom interview. The event proved to be one of our most well-attended and successful endeavours, enabling us to raise the necessary funds for the youth centre.

In January, I travelled to Israel and had the privilege of meeting with families of hostages, as well as connecting with the headquarters dedicated to their release. Among the remarkable individuals I encountered were ordinary people whose extraordinary dedication to freeing hostages and supporting their families left a lasting impression on me. Building personal relationships with individuals such as Merav Berger, the mother of Agam, and Ayelet Stavitzky, whose brother is a hostage and mother was released after over 50 days, deeply touched me.





**“
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Upon returning to London, I felt a profound sense of mission to support these families in any way possible. I actively engaged on social media, sharing their stories and distributing their materials to raise awareness and garner support. It was heartening to discover the growing involvement of US communities in solidarity activities for Israel, as well as initiatives like the Board of Deputies’ “Adopt a Hostage” programme. This collective effort reinforced my determination to stand in solidarity with Israel and provide unwavering support to those affected by the ongoing crisis.

This event was more than just a gathering; it was a resounding call to arms, a demand for justice, and a beacon of hope for those silenced and oppressed. It stood as a testament to the power of collective action and the unyielding spirit of those who refuse to remain silent in the face of injustice.

Throughout my involvement in numerous rallies, fundraising endeavours, and collaborative efforts, I found myself

forging connections with individuals whom I might not have otherwise encountered or befriended due to differing political affiliations, religious beliefs, values, and life circumstances. Yet, the recent months have imparted upon me a vital lesson in unity, mutual destiny, and shared priorities.

Since the 7th of October, a candle has been lit in my home as a constant vigil for the hostages. Additionally, I wear a necklace around my neck bearing two messages close to my heart. The first message reads, “My heart is captive in Gaza (Bring them home now)”, serving as a solemn reminder of the ongoing plight of those held captive and the pressing need for their safe return. The second message simply states, “We will win”, symbolising hope, resilience, and unwavering determination in the face of adversity. These symbols serve as daily reminders of my commitment to standing in solidarity with the hostages and their families until justice is served.

AM ISRAEL CHAI! ■



CAMPAINING TO BRING THEM HOME

Sasha Tropanov, held captive in Gaza, served as an employee of Amazon. Amazon has kept silent and did not show support or solidarity with their own employee. Teaming up with Yosef Haddad, we embarked on a significant endeavour: covering the Amazon building near Liverpool Street Station with hostage posters. Witnessing Yosef in action, engaging in debates with passers-by who found it hard to believe he was an Israeli Arab supportive of Israel, was enlightening. Many were unaware such a combination was possible. We then proceeded to Brick Lane to remove anti-Israel graffiti, replacing it with Magen Davids where feasible and messages of love over hate where appropriate. This experience was both memorable and profound.

Later that evening, over drinks, I asked Yosef what drove him to become such a vital voice for Israel. He explained, "I was raised in a home that fostered tolerance and love for others. Serving in an elite unit in the army, I've always been proud of my Israeli identity." Yosef and his partner, Emily (known as @Emilyintelaviv on Instagram) are dedicated to promoting solidarity for Israel worldwide. ■





Amit Levy
Photographed by Blake Ezra

Here is the back of a hostages poster with a dedicated message from Amit Levy to the Magen Avot community

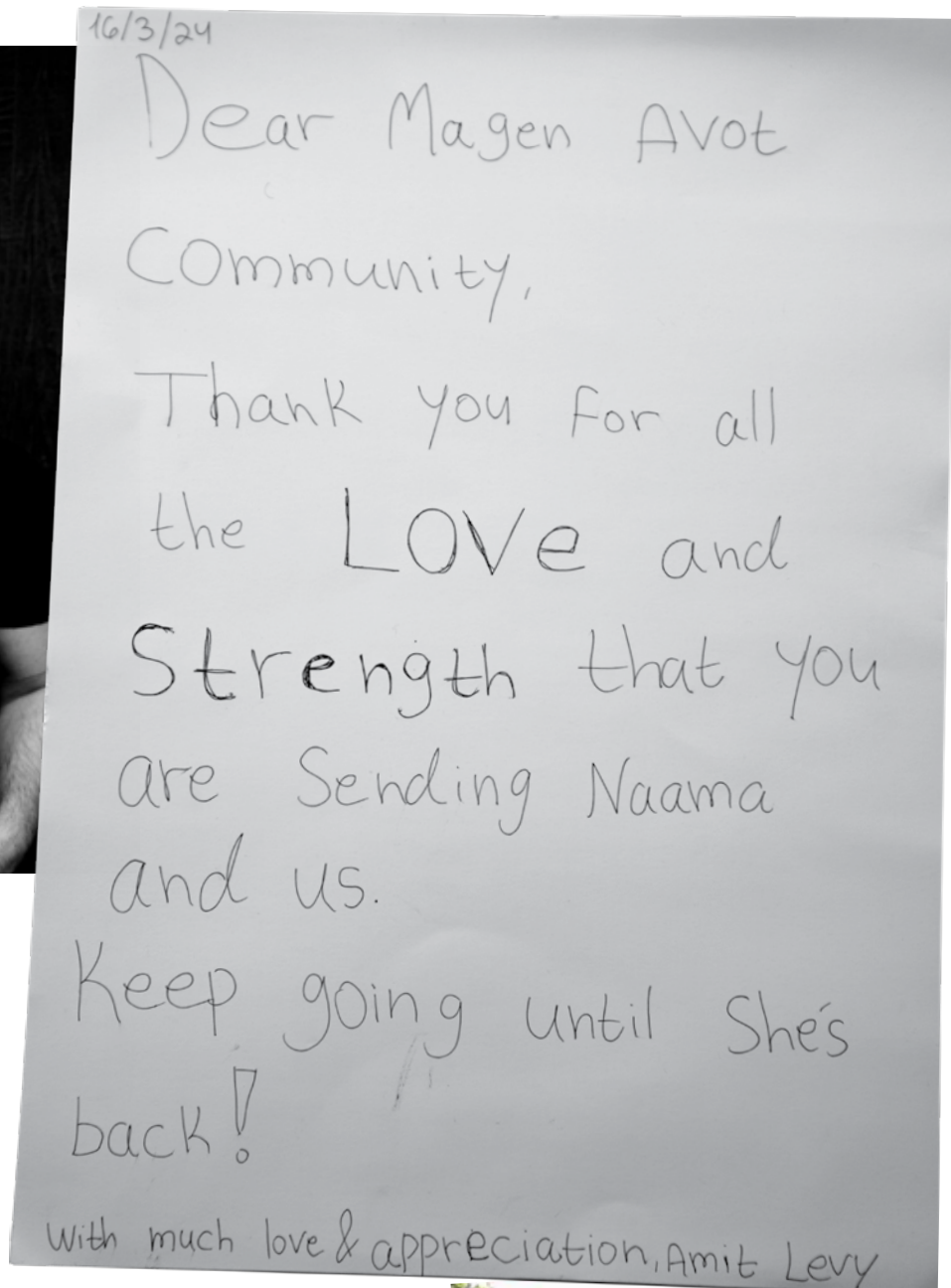


Amit joined us on Shabbat morning, delivering a brief speech expressing his gratitude and reciting a special prayer for the IDF soldiers and the hostages.

During March, we organised a delegation of youth from Shaar Hanegev school who came for full days of engagement with their age groups around Jewish schools in London, including Immanuel College, Hasmonean, JFS, and JCoS. Ofir, Talia, Agam, Nevo, Dekel, and Aner, accompanied by their teachers Rotem and Gal, offered valuable insights into the resilience of communities affected by the war in Gaza. They met with our

Y@MA group on Shabbat Pekudei and shared their experiences of the past five months, during which they have been evacuees from their homes since the 7th of October. This provided an emotional opportunity for cultural exchange and solidarity, deepening our understanding of the challenges faced by communities affected by conflict.

On that Shabbat, we were also privileged to host Amit Levy, whose sister Naama is still being held hostage in Gaza and has been adopted by the Magen Avot community. Amit joined us on Shabbat morning, delivering a brief speech expressing his gratitude and reciting a special prayer for the IDF soldiers and the hostages. During this same shabbat, in Israel, the Berger family celebrated Ilay's Bar Mitzvah. However, their joyous celebration was tinged with sadness as Agam, Ilay's sister, is still being held hostage in Gaza. ■



Agam Berger's family at her brother's Bar Mitzvah with her photo.



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MY BROTHER THE DJ, WHO DIED DEFENDING DEMOCRACY



“

It is up to the
British public
to marry the
values deeply
embedded in
our DNA – of
tolerance,
equality,
respect for
others.



Yael Ehreich brings us the following article which was written a few weeks after Nathaniel Young, 20, was killed on 7 October by Hamas on the Gaza border while serving with the IDF. Nathanel was a former pupil at JFS and student of Rabbi Golker. Yael was lucky enough to work closely with Gaby (Nathanel's sister) at Norwood when she started working there 14 years ago. Yael also met Nathanel at the Junior Bike Ride in Aldenham in 2010 and he participated in this again in 2011, 2012 and 2015, and she got to know his family who always came to cheer him on. Yael spent a few summers in Israel with Gaby and remembers a few times being well fed by her family! Yael turned her phone on after Simchat Torah to a message, 'Just heard about Gaby's brother'. She had a feeling she would know someone.

Burying my brother Nathanel just over a month ago was the single most difficult experience of my life. Nathanel was a happy 20-year-old, a practical joker with a sensitive soul and an incredible uncle to my daughters; his untimely death will leave a hole in all of our lives.

In a twisted sense, just being able to bury Nathanel is something to be grateful for. Many victims of the 7 October massacre were so badly burned and disfigured that their bodies were beyond identification, denying the families the chance to say goodbye with dignity. Hundreds more are in limbo, not knowing if their loved ones are even alive or dead, as Hamas refuses the Red Cross access to the hostages in Gaza. Nathanel felt a call to serve in the Israel Defense Forces in order to protect the vulnerable, and he died fulfilling that mission to the letter – defending the families of Kibbutz Zikim near the border with Gaza against the horrors wrought by Hamas terrorists. We are proud he was able to live the life of his choosing, while distraught at how short it turned out to be.

Nathanel reminds me of our grandfather, Emanuel, a World War II veteran who served as a captain alongside the Gurkhas in the Battle for Rome. Both felt a strong desire to protect and uphold humanity, both had a compelling sense of community and a connection to their identity – Jewish and British. Both naturally kind and warm-hearted, with a zest for life that made others comfortable in their presence. They also shared a talent for music; Nathanel had recently begun DJing in Tel Aviv clubs, while Emanuel was a conductor of the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House. Nathanel, nicknamed 'DJ' by his friends, Emmanuel was given the title 'Maestro'. Both channelled their enthusiasm for life into service for others and I have no doubt that had Britain been once again under mortal threat, as Israel is today, Nathanel would have answered the call of duty to serve just like his grandfather.

What makes liberal democracies truly stand out is their tolerance of all peoples, of ensuring every citizen has a voice. To those seeking refuge, bestowing on them the freedoms and rights withheld from them in the countries they departed. This is what our

grandfather was fighting for, and what drove Nathanel in equal measure.

As more lives are lost in the conflict in Israel and Gaza, it quite rightly agitates the spirit of Britons and others who abhor the unnecessary deaths that war carries. Yet, I have seen the pro-Palestinian protests in London, Manchester and other British cities with a rising trepidation. Coupled with a 1350% surge in antisemitic incidents in the UK, the Jewish community has been shaken to its core. This is not what Britain stands for.

It is up to the British public to marry the values deeply embedded in our DNA – of tolerance, equality, respect for others. To say unequivocally that no civilian should be torn from their homes, beaten, dragged and abducted. Those who made the ultimate sacrifice defending Britons' unassailable rights to live freely, in a democratic, respectful society, would stand against terror and facism in whatever form it presented. This is what millions of Britons have fought for. This is what our grandfather fought for. This is what my brother fought for. This is what we as a society should be fighting for. Hamas is terror and fascism. Their doctrine is of hate and destruction, their methods are brutal and merciless. That is what they stand for. It is up to all of us to stand against it. There are still 239 Israeli hostages in Gaza, their families are experiencing unimaginable hell, their lives are in complete perpetual despair – the not knowing, the anxiety of what has befallen their loved ones.

I implore you to pick up the fight for freedom and decency and do whatever you can to help bring the hostages home in Israel, and fight antisemitism in Britain. Keep the stories of the hostages alive and in the public consciousness, write to your MPs and local leaders, promote the cause on social media, and be loud in your opposition to tyranny and hate. Observe every 'kidnapped' poster with the respect a human life deserves – and if you see someone tearing a poster down, say something, ask them why they think that particular human life is not worthy of our consideration. Help return the hostages, not just in Nathanel's memory, not due to your political persuasions, but because it is the essence of what Britain is about, because it is humane, because it is right. ■



REMEMBERING SGT. BINYAMIN AIRLEY Z'L

Sgt. Binyamin Meir Airley, 21, of the Paratroopers Brigade's 101st Battalion, was killed fighting Hamas terrorists in the northern Gaza Strip on November 18, 2023. He is survived by his parents, Jennifer and Robert, and siblings Sarah, Yehuda, Akiva, Yakov and Chana. He was laid to rest in the Mount Herzl military cemetery on November 19.

His father, Rob, is a long standing friend of Julian Maurer when they grew up in Manchester and they lived close to each other from 2009-2012 in Ramat Beit Shemesh. Rob generously shared with HaMagen his feelings at this time of loss and grief:

"Binyamin was born in New York and as a family we moved to Ramat Beit Shemesh in 2006. My wife, Jennifer, described him as 'always sporty and social' growing up, with a keen interest in Israeli history and Jewish law, along with hiking, breakdancing and long-distance running. 'He had a deep love affair with Israel's natural beauty, especially the natural springs,' she wrote on

the website of "Binyamin's BBQ Brigade," a volunteer group supporting IDF soldiers that was founded in our son's name.

'His life mission was to protect the Land [of Israel] and keep it safe and thriving so all Jews could live anywhere in Israel peacefully,' she wrote. 'Binyamin lived and died with that mission.'

"Later, Jennifer wrote, 'When people ask how I'm holding up I pretty much have one answer: Complete and broken all at once. A full heart of pride, love, commitment, fortitude, strength and gratitude,' she said. 'There's also the heart that's shattered. The brokenness. The loss. The longing. The oceans of tears. My boy... My rock... It's painful.'

"Dozens of members of the Ramat Beit Shemesh community lined the streets in a flag escort to support and pay their respects to our family on the way to the funeral. Their support to us since then has been tremendous.

"At the funeral, I said: 'Binyamin personified modesty. He wouldn't have liked all the attention; he didn't want

his name mentioned. He was loved and respected by everyone who met him. A leader. His smile – shines up the room. He hated smartphones – gave it up for a Nokia. He raised money to encourage his friends to drop their smartphones for a simple Nokia.

"He was a 'gibor' [hero]. He always wanted to be at the front. Wouldn't have it any other way,' He was voted the best soldier in his battalion. He was fearless -yet sensitive- in equal measure.

"Binyamin was extremely happy to fight and protect, there was no question that he wasn't going to go in [to Gaza]... He died how he lived, he was always the first one in. He was the one that would motivate all the other soldiers in his unit, and he was the one who would push them."

"He had a really magnetic personality and people were really attracted to him, and he was able to have friends from all different sectors of a very wide Israeli society, religious people and non-religious, Arabs," He set himself goals and even at 16 had listed the things he wanted to achieve. He found his niche studying outside Eilat on



a rocky hilltop settlement where he grazed sheep and cows. He continued doing this while in on home leave from the army.

“He was an incredible son, who gave a lot of honour to us his parents, he was very humble, he never spoke negatively about anybody. He really inspired a lot of people.”

The family acquired a house in Tzefat a year or so ago and as a legacy in Binyamin's name they are going to use this as a retreat for soldiers who can engage in study or

therapy and relax in a calm and peaceful environment. A charity is being set up and members wishing to support this cause can contribute via www.airley.org.

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- Learning Torah with Binyamin in mind
- Paying a toll for the driver behind you
- Pray/Tehilim/Psalms with strong kavana/intention for (soldiers, sick, families, Israel) take on a name at www.shmiraproject.com
- Checking in on somebody who might be lonely, sick, special needs or elderly

- Starting an organisation to help people in need
- Participating or volunteering in an organisation that helps people in need
- Organising a class on Lashon Harah or Torah
- Giving tzedakah (charity) to somebody
- Helping pay for a senior citizen to have corrective eye surgery (Watch One Girl Miracle)
- Volunteering to read at a school

What a fitting legacy to a young man sadly missed but whose example lives on in tangible form.

Binyamin leaves heartbroken parents and five siblings. But they try and continue with their lives as best they can during this time of grief. His mother (a Floridian by birth) has been addressing meetings in the US recently and in the coming weeks as they are planning speaking missions to the UK. We hope to have the chance to hear them in London and to thank them in person for Binyamin's service and sacrifice. ■

“
**His life mission
was to protect
the Land [of
Israel] and
keep it safe...**

FROM THE FRONT LINE GAZA & RAMALLAH

By Zak Daulby interviewed by Julian Pollard

Julian and Esther Maurer's nephew Zak Daulby served very recently in the IDF playing an active combat role in the current war. During a short period of respite from active service he has shared with HaMagen his experiences on the front line – in Gaza and Ramallah.

Zak was born in Manchester and made Aliyah aged 11. Now aged 28 he married Avigail last May and they live in Jerusalem.

After completing his army service with the Givati Brigade and becoming a company commander in 2018 he graduated with an BA and MA in Political Science (it was at University in Jerusalem that he met Avigail). They had planned to get married in the south of Israel but a rocket barrage forced them to change plans at the last minute and were married in Ra'anana.

Zak became involved in politics working initially as a political adviser to Danny Danon and at the Ministry for Social Equality and more recently he is a political adviser to MK Ohad Tal within the Religious Zionist Party. Tal chairs the Public Enterprises Committee and Zak is involved in drafting legislation, drafting speeches, and has recently toured the US meeting Congressmen, Senators, and White House officials. Discussions focus on the 'two state solution' and the Israel Government stance is that this discussion is premature while hostilities continue but may be brought forward when the time is right. Different views within the Israeli Government are self evident.

On the morning of 7th October he was woken by a telephone call (it was Shabbat and Simchat Torah so something was up!) by his sister-in-law – herself a police



officer. He and Avigail immediately went to the safe room in the sister-in-law's nearby home as sirens began. He contacted his army group and knew he would be called up immediately.

Like most infantry soldiers he keeps a bag packed ready for immediate action. By 6.30 pm his Commander ordered him to come immediately to the South and by 10 pm he arrived at the huge army base close to Ofakim. He was told not to stop at any checkpoints as it was not

known if terrorists had taken these over and he had no rifle issued to him yet. The main roads were silent but at each army base hundreds of cars used by the troops travelling to join their units, covered the access roads. This base accommodates up to 100,000 troops and is a huge ammunitions storage facility.

After two weeks training Zak and his men began active service. He was deployed to Kibbutz Niram – which was turned into a forward army base, all



kibbutz members having been evacuated. His platoon operates a missile battery firing targeted munitions into Gaza from a tank like vehicle. They achieve accuracy within a target area of 50 x 70 metres from up to 7 kilometres distance.

They kept up a constant artillery barrage until ground troops went in to Gaza on 28th October and his battalion went in on foot after his team had launched about 100 rockets. For the first time there was complete radio co-ordination between infantry soldiers on the ground, pilots in the air and artillery commanders – all were in direct real time communication.

Zak went into Beit Hanoun and remarked that the noise from shelling and aerial bombardment continued unabated 24/7- the noise was constant and deafening.

LAST DAY IN GAZA...

During his three month tour of duty he had four one-day passes when he returned home for just 24 hours. During that time his team fired 850 rockets and is certain that at least 25 terrorists were killed. Sadly three of his company were killed in action but like most soldiers he put the grieving process on hold until after the fighting stopped.

After his first tour of duty he was given a week break at a hotel in Ashkelon where counselling was offered to traumatised soldiers. He was then assigned to the Erez Crossing point which was so close to Gaza that the incoming bombs fell before the sirens went off. In December 2023 he was told he would not be called up for a few months but in January he was recalled



and assigned to serve in Ramallah where his group captured many terrorists or Hamas supporters.

He was at pains to stress that the divisions in Israeli politics before October 7th vanished immediately as hostilities started and the country was and remains united. 350,000 reservists joined up then and would do so again unquestioningly if required. Those voicing criticism of the



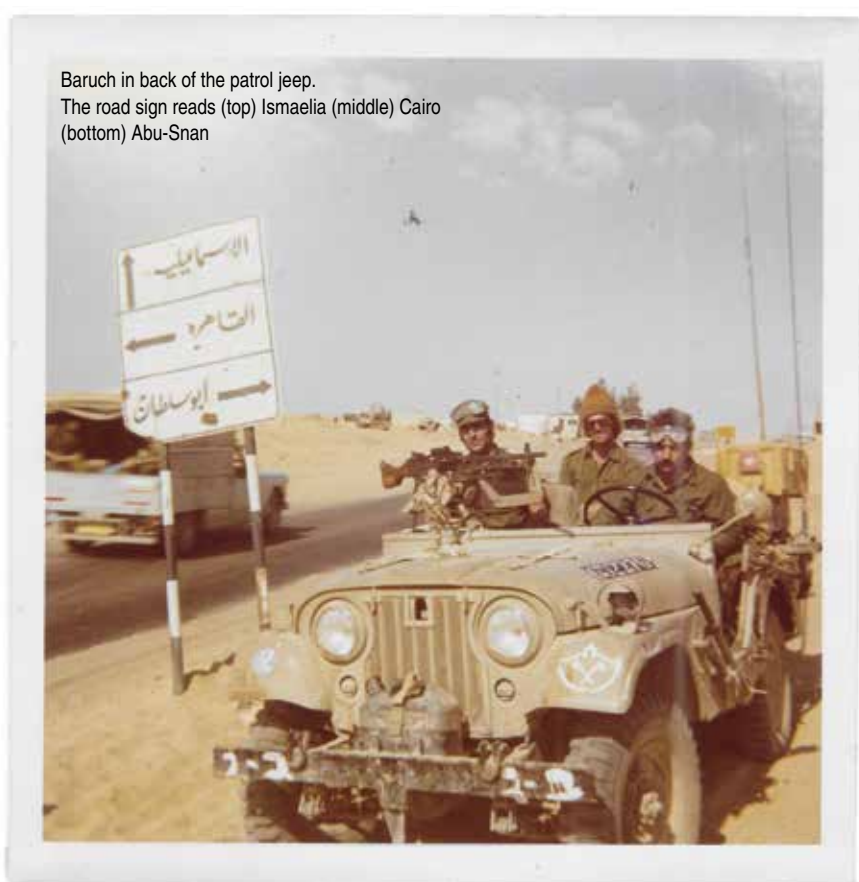
Netanyahu Government policies and who had threatened not to serve, did join up without reservation.

We are truly grateful to Zak and the countless others like him in the IDF for their service and sacrifice. ■

THE WAR OF OCTOBER 2023 VS OCTOBER 1973

A Personal Perspective by Baruch Zekaria

On the morning of October 6th 1973 I was woken up by my uncle in Coronado, San Diego, where I was staying while on vacation from my studies at Tel Aviv University. "War has broken out in Israel" he said, "you should call your parents". When my mother picked up the phone she was crying. "We've been attacked by both the Egyptians and Syrians, and your father has been called up". My father, a native Arabic speaker, was a reservist officer in the Military Intelligence Corps and by then had already served in three wars – in 1948, 1956 and 1967. "I'll come home as soon as possible" I said. And so I did. I managed to book myself on a flight to London via New York and, after many hours at Heathrow Airport together with hundreds of Israelis who flew in from all over the world, I got on an El Al flight to Lod airport (as it was called then). I stayed at home in Tel Aviv overnight and the next morning went on a search for my reservist unit, which I only joined a year earlier. I can't remember how, but a day later I found them in the Sinai Desert. The unit was a Patrol Company within the Division commanded by Arik Sharon. Mounted on light jeeps, our role was to identify location of enemy units for the advancing tank mounted regiments. Fortunately, we managed to do so without being spotted throughout the few days until the night of October 15th when the Division crossed the Suez Canal and so I had the 'honour' of being in four different continents within a period of two weeks... Our unit continued with the patrol missions as the Division surrounded the Egyptian 3rd Division – a manoeuvre which eventually led to an agreed ceasefire on October 25th. We then just "settled" in a makeshift tent



Baruch in back of the patrol jeep.
The road sign reads (top) Ismaelia (middle) Cairo
(bottom) Abu-Snan

encampment for four months while the negotiations for disengagement and exchange of prisoners were concluded.

Who would have believed that, exactly 50 years on, Israel would find itself under a surprise attack of a magnitude which way exceeded anyone's worst nightmares? And while these are very different wars, there are many similarities between the Yom Kippur war and the "7th of October" war.

Probably the most incredible similarity is the INTELLIGENCE FAILURE – an inexplicable "פשל" (fashla – Hebrew slang for an embarrassing failure) for a country that prides itself on its

intelligence gathering capabilities. Yet, it is clear that the problem in both cases was not in gathering intel, but in interpreting it. Before the Yom Kippur war, there were clear warnings by Mossad operatives of the impending attack. However, the Head of the Military Intelligence convinced Moshe Dayan, the Defence Minister, and Golda Meir, the Prime Minister, that it was unlikely that the Egyptians would start a war. The issue, then, was really whether or not to call up the reservists which was a major and costly operation. Apparently it was done a couple of times before, based on information that had proved to be wrong.

So, on this occasion, a couple of days before October 6th 1973, it was decided not to call up the reservists. Even in the morning of October 6th, the Military Intelligence thought that the war would only commence that evening.

It is already known that prior to October 7th 2023, there were ample indications of an impending attack by Hamas. A few months earlier, Intelligence Officers produced a detailed document that described a scenario similar to the events that unfolded on October 7th. Then, a few days before the attack, Israel's look-out soldiers on the border were alerted to very unusual drills and activities across the border. And on the night of October 6th, the highly sophisticated electronic system used by Unit 8200, Israel's Elite Military Intelligence unit, identified unusual cellular phone activity in Gaza which was the result of hundreds of Israeli sim-cards being activated by Hamas terrorists. When the Chief of Staff, Herzi Halevy, was called at about 3.00 am on October 7th, following these signs of unusual activity in Gaza, the conclusion of the consultation with his 'top brass' was that it is merely an exercise of Hamas – similar to ones that were carried out a number of times in the previous months. They concluded that, even if there was a likely infiltration by Hamas operatives, it would be limited to one or two targets across the border. So the head of the Southern Command instructed that two helicopters would be sent from their Northern Base to a base in the Negev. At 6.30 am, when the Hamas attack started, the helicopters had still not arrived as instructed!

The SURPRISE element in both wars was thus another similarity. It meant that the army was caught completely off guard and unable to quickly respond to both attacks. Army units had to gather, collect their gear and be transported tens, if not hundreds, of kilometres. On Yom Kippur it took hours for help to reach the strongholds on the Suez Canal. On 7th October, some of the kibbutzim had to wait up to 12 hours before army units arrived, whereas it took Hamas a mere 20 minutes to reach the gates of those kibbutzim. Furthermore, both attacks took place on a Shabbat and Yom Tov, when many army personnel are at home or in "Shabbat/Chag mode" in their bases. On the weekend of October 6th-7th 2023 the head of the Southern Command was on vacation in the North of Israel and the head of the Military Intelligence was on a vacation in Eilat.

In both cases, there was not enough equipment and essential protective

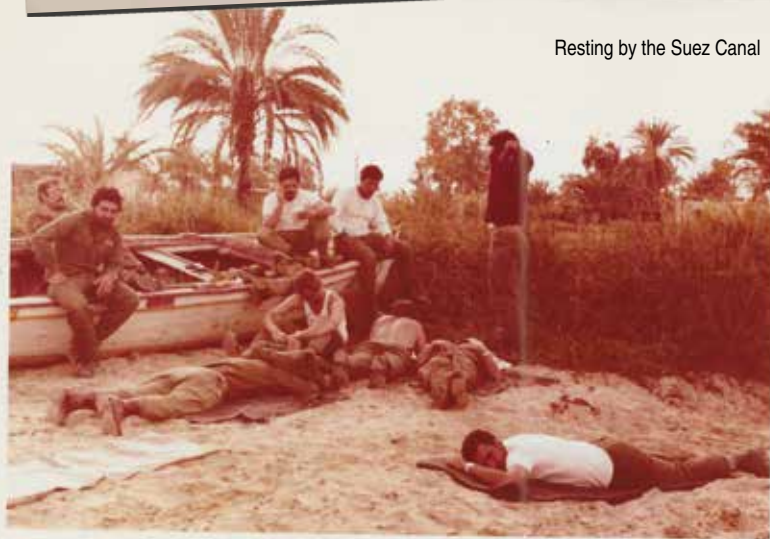
Our base in Egypt from November 1973 to February 1974



Eating breakfast



Resting by the Suez Canal



clothing. In the first few days, soldiers had to rely on civilians to organise the collection and distribution of basic supplies.

Another similarity is that in both cases, the Israeli military relied on a defence

that proved to be penetrable. On Yom Kippur it was the fortified military posts on the Suez Canal (called קו בר לב – Bar Lev Line), which were supposed to block any attempt to cross the canal by the Egyptian army. In 2023, it was a fence with very

sophisticated sensors, that was erected on the border with Gaza, which was supposed to alert any attempt to breach it. Both these defences were breached within a short time – in 1973 the Egyptians managed to cross the Suez Canal in multiple points using the cover of heavy bombardment. The Hamas terrorists succeeded in disabling the sensors and breaking through the fence at 30 different spots while hundreds of rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel.

MISTAKEN “CONCEPT”

Still basking under the halo of success of the Six-Day War, Israeli military commanders underestimated the capabilities of the Egyptian and Syrian armies. The politicians bought into the military’s opinion. It is now known that President Sadat had attempted to negotiate a peace agreement with Israel a couple of years before 1973, but his efforts were rebuffed.

Hamas were not offering any peace settlement with Israel, however the Israeli governments in the last 12 years were under the false belief that Hamas are not keen on starting a war and would prefer to build up their power base in Gaza. Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, Israel’s Prime Minister during most of this period, believed that supporting Hamas would weaken the Palestinian movement and prevent their quest for a ‘two-state solution’. This false belief was so entrenched that Israel implicitly agreed and facilitated transfer of money from Qatar to Hamas. Hamas, as we know today, were using most of this money on buying weapons, building an army and a network of sophisticated underground tunnels in the Gaza Strip.

SOLDIERS’ MOTIVATION AND UNITY WITHIN ISRAEL

Prior to October 7th, Israel was a divided nation: weekly demonstrations of tens of thousands of Israelis for and against the judicial reforms were taking place and Israeli society was really torn apart. Reserve soldiers and air force pilots declared that they would refuse to show up when called for reserve duty. Yet, when disaster struck, all the reservists needed no persuasion whatsoever and rushed to their units. Like in the Yom Kippur War, they got on the first plane home from holidays abroad.

The slogan which could be seen



On an Egyptian Tank by the Suez Canal

everywhere in Israel these days is ביחד ננצח “Together we will win”.

The unity and solidarity shown by Israelis from all walks of life, both to support the army, as well as each other, is incredible.

Most impressively, the leaders of the demonstrations against the government were those who swiftly formed the most impressive operation of collecting food, clothes and supplies for the soldiers and for the displaced families from the borders of Gaza and southern Lebanon.

Israeli society was not as divided in October 1973, but the national spirit and unity in the face of war was as strong.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES

While there were many similarities between the two wars the differences between the two are significant:

First, in 1973 we fought against armies: it was a fierce battle, but it was a ‘conventional’ war.

The October 7th war is against a terrorist organisation – organised as an army, but fighting a guerilla war.

Second, The Yom Kippur war was on two fronts, but away from the ‘mainland’ – in the Sinai and Golan heights that were not inhabited by civilians at that time. The October 2023 war is “at home” – it started with destruction to kibbutzim, moshavim and towns close to the border with Gaza. Eventually their inhabitants, as well as many living close to the border with Lebanon, had to leave their homes because of the risk of missile attacks.

The Israeli army is much better equipped today and has complete air superiority. This wasn’t the case in 1973 – Israel’s air force suffered heavy losses

and many Israeli tanks were destroyed by “Sager” Russian missiles (small missiles launched by ground forces). Yet, once the Egyptian Third Division was surrounded and the Syrian army was pushed back, the war ended. At the time of writing this article, the 7th of October war has been going on for six months and there doesn’t seem to be an end on the horizon. There may be another temporary cease fire, but no end until Hamas put down its weapons and gives up the fight. And while President Sadat did genuinely intend to make peace with Israel and used his success in the Yom Kippur war to “force” the Israelis to eventually agree to sign a Peace Agreement with

Egypt in March 1979, exactly 45 years ago, Hamas has not changed its declared objective: to demolish the State of Israel and bring an end to the so-called Zionist Occupation, “from the River to the Sea”.

WAR PRISONERS vs HOSTAGES

314 IDF soldiers were captured in the Yom Kippur war – 242 by the Egyptians, 68 by the Syrians and four by the Lebanese. The soldiers captured by Egypt were released in an exchange between 15-22 November 1973. The prisoners exchange with Syria (and Lebanon) took place only six months later, at the beginning of June 1974.

On October 7th 2023, 252 hostages – soldiers, young and elderly men and women, children and babies were taken into Gaza by Hamas and other terrorist groups. Capturing soldiers at war is a very different story to kidnapping innocent civilians. The atrocities committed by Hamas were beyond barbaric and shook Israeli society, and the civilised world, to the core.

Only 112 hostages were released by Hamas in the temporary Ceasefire Agreement in February 2024. Like the Syrians in 1973, Hamas have not allowed the International Red Cross to visit the remaining hostages and the number still alive is not known.

GLOBAL POWERS INVOLVEMENT

The key Global players in the Yom Kippur war were the USA and the former USSR. USA were, and still are, great supporters of Israel. President Nixon responded to Golda Meir’s plea for weapons and equipment within days of the start of the war. The Egyptian and Syrian armies and air forces were mainly armed by the

On a patrol by the "Bitter Lake" in Egypt



Morning wake up at our camp.

USSR. Thus, these two super powers were closely involved with reaching a ceasefire agreement and in the negotiations for prisoner exchange.

While the USA are closely involved at present in the negotiations for a ceasefire and return of hostages, Russia (which still has presence in Syria) is no longer a 'player' in these negotiations. Their

place has been taken by Qatar, Egypt and – to a lesser extent – Britain, France and Germany. The United Nations, then and now, play a minor role – essentially ratifying what is being agreed in the negotiations.

ISRAEL'S STRENGTH AS A NATION

Israel in 2024 is much stronger than in

1973. Its population has tripled, from 3.3 million to almost 9.9 million. Its GDP has multiplied by 50 times (!) – from \$11.4 bn to \$564 bn, so GDP per capita increased from \$3,500 to \$58,000. It is 13th highest in world ranking and 20% higher than the UK. This exceptional growth is likely to continue in the next 30 years, fuelled – as in the past – by high birth rate and immigration of Jews from all over the world.

Before October 7th 2023, Israel also seemed to be in a very strong geo-political situation: it had reached peace agreements with Egypt in 1979, with Jordan in 1994, and with UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan in 2020. However, the most recent war highlights the threat presented by Iran and its proxies – Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah. This war is already proving to be the longest and costliest – in terms of lives lost – in Israel's history since its independence. The sad conclusion is that, in the foreseeable future, Israel will continue to "live on its sword". It has no choice but to continue to protect itself, hopefully avoiding shocking surprise attacks similar to October 1973 and October 2023. ■



YOUR Y@MA

By Sophie Harris and Shira Neville

Hil It's Sophie and Shira here (youth directors of Magen Avot). We are delighted to have this space to speak about some of the incredible events that have taken place this year, and the progress we are making as a community. We love our job, and are so privileged to be able to lead such an intelligent, kind, passionate, unified, religiously motivated group of young people, whom we are able to learn from each week.

Since the beginning of this year, we have run a Sukkah crawl, a Friday Night Dinner at the Golkers, a movie night, a mitzvah day volunteering opportunity, and have taken part in the communal packing project for the homeless before Purim (run by the shul). Most importantly, we have also run three trips to Wohl Court assisted living home on Rosh Hashana, Chanukah, and a recent Shabbat morning. Whilst we were there, we discussed ideas related to the Parasha and lives of the residents. For example, when clothing and objects were discussed regarding the mishkan, we asked our youth to discuss memories of special objects and clothing items from the residents' pasts.

We received kind feedback from them, truly showcasing how special our youth are. Here is a message the organiser sent us after coming from a visitor whose mother lives in the block:

"I met the youth yesterday at kiddush at Wohl Cout. I must tell you what a wonderful warm group they were. They exemplified what all young people should be like... polite, interesting, intelligent and respectful. My mum loved the conversation and just being in the

company of young people made her feel young again... Their input meant so much to the older generation."

In recent times, we have gained several regular youth members who do not usually attend the shul with their family, but are drawn in by the warmth and fun of the crowd involved. We have succeeded in fostering a group who, despite being different ages, genuinely come together and enjoy being in the company of everyone; friendly to all.

On a weekly basis, we attempt to merge chinuch with games and activities, focussing on the Parasha or Chag that week and bringing it into the forefront of the minds of our youth. We facilitate discussions, debates and more in order that they understand the relevance of our Torah to their lives nowadays, and feel confident developing their own voices and opinions (after all, this is not a classroom!). The values of Magen Avot are particularly important to us. To be able to create a space of thriving modern orthodox, inclusive values which promote Israel at the forefront of everything really show through our youth.

Not to forget, we have our Sushi kiddushim – a chance for our teens to eat and socialise at the end of shul!

Thank you to everyone in the



community for being so supportive, and for encouraging your children to join Y@MA. We look forward to the rest of the year, and to continue growing our programming.
CHAG SAMEACH! ■

HIGHLIGHT OF THE BAR AND BAT MITZVAH PROGRAMMES 5784!

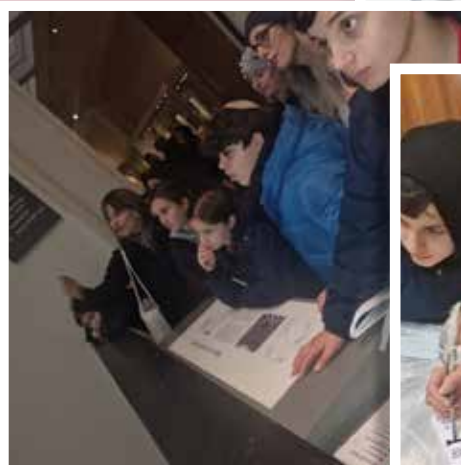
This year's Bar and Bat Mitzvah programmes have been unforgettable, with nearly 20 enthusiastic participants on both fronts. Led by Rabbi Yoni and Rebbetzen Dina, the program saw a plethora of engaging and educational sessions.

One standout highlight was

undoubtedly the Chanukah Trip to the British Museum. Led by the knowledgeable Shoshana Tugenhaf, participants embarked on a captivating tour delving into the rich tapestry of Jewish history. This immersive experience not only provided valuable insights but also reinforced a great deal of the messages learnt throughout the course.

Overall, the programme's diverse offerings and memorable experiences have left a lasting impact, enriching the journey of our younger members as they embrace this significant milestone in their lives.

Mazal Tov to all those celebrating their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs this year! ■





PARENTS, PIZZA AND POT LUCK: HORIM V'YELADIM

By Muriel and Josh Abeles

It was great to see numerous parents, grandparents and children enthusiastically participating in our Horim V'Yeladim programme this year.

Starting after the October clock change, and running for 12 weeks through the cold winter months, families once again convened 45 minutes after Shabbat to deepen their bonds with one another, sit together and learn Torah, anim zemirot, Bar Mitzvah parshiot, or even get through some kodesh homework from school.

The sessions culminate each week in the children bonding with each other over pizza, a story from nach and trying to answer preposterously challenging questions in order to select a raffle ticket so that one of the Golker children can win a prize.

This year Rabbi G introduced a lucky dip full of wonderful fidget toys for the children to take home and leave around the house.

A highlight was the Chanukah musical



havdallah and doughnut extravaganza and we ended the season with a special session featuring Rabbi Dr. Daniel Rose, Arsenal fan, but also the Director of Education at Koren Jerusalem and the Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust, who delved into the profound nexus between Parashat Vayikra and Purim through the insightful lens of the late Rabbi Sacks.

A huge thank you to all our generous sponsors. ■



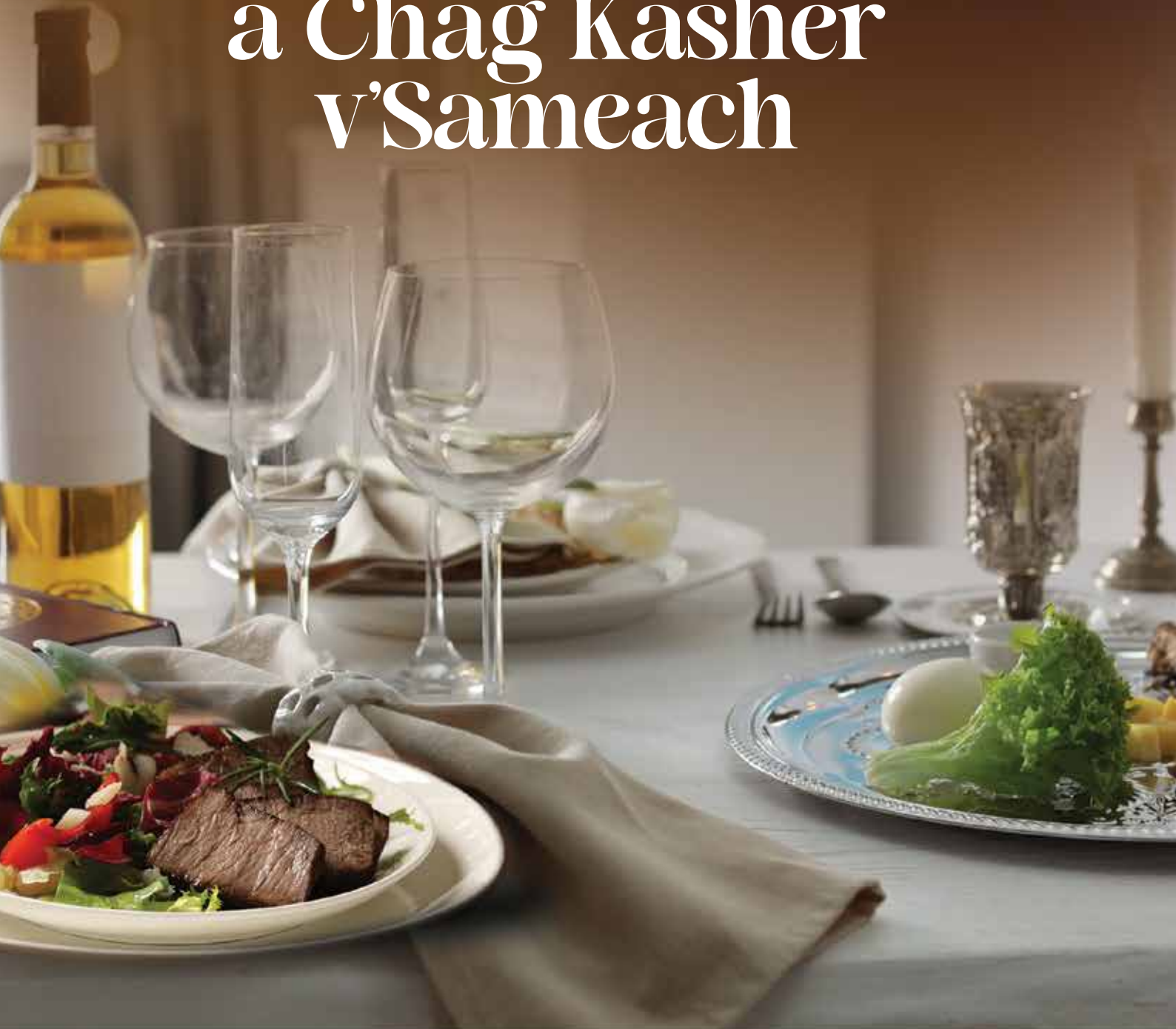
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