



HAMAGEN

#9

ROSH HASHANA 2024/5785



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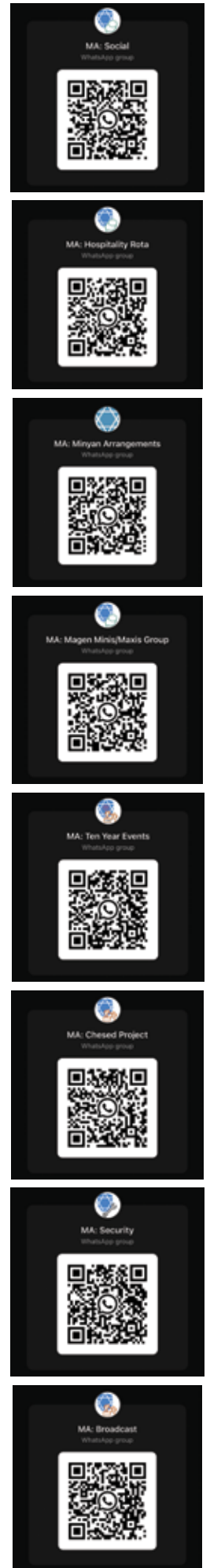
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Magen Avot

From the Desk of the Editor Julian Pollard

This edition of HaMagen again demonstrates the amazing diversity and commitment of you, the community. Our supplement theme is: - *Past, Present and Future*, and I hope the articles reflect these ideas effectively and entertainingly. We can certainly learn lessons from the past while enduring the stress of the present but also looking forward positively to a future which is bright for Magen Avot

Thank you to all who have contributed some brilliant articles now and to those for whom we could not find space this time; we value your efforts and hope to find space in the next edition. We continue to look for contributions from across the community regardless of age or prior journalistic experience. It is rewarding for author and reader alike.

Rabbi Golker has kindly reviewed the content but the personal views expressed by some authors are just that.

My personal thanks to our dedicated and hard-working editorial team - Richard Herman for layout and design, Cathy Fisher for proof reading and Julian Maurer for securing the vital advertising support which makes HaMagen self-sustaining. We strive for accuracy and to provide a true reflection of the content provided, but any editing changes dictated by space constraints or inadvertent errors are my responsibility alone.

Wishing you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

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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

Editor: Julian Pollard

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With thanks to all our contributors

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

A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM RABBI YONI GOLKER

As we approach the Yamim Nora'im, these days of awe and reflection, we find ourselves looking back on a profoundly challenging year for Israel. כלל. The war in ארץ ישראל has left us with heavy hearts, and we cannot help but feel that the words of ותנה תוקף came alive before our eyes on October 7th. The stark reality of "מי יהיה ומי ימות" unfolded in a way that none of us could have imagined. On יום כיפור, we use these moments to remember those who were tragically lost, and we take this as an opportunity to reflect, to improve, and to draw closer to ה'.

The אגמרא in (ברכות נט ע"א) teaches: "אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, לא נבראו רעמים אלא לפשט עקמומיות שבלב, שנאמר והאלקים עשה שראו — מלפניו" —

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Thunder was created solely in order to straighten the crookedness in the heart, as it says: "והאלקים עשה שייראו מלפניו" (Kohelet 3:14).

When we experience something terrifying or unnatural — when we witness cruelty and suffering beyond comprehension — it is a call from ה', an awakening to straighten our hearts and return to Him. The horrors we saw this past year were an alarm bell for us all, calling us to increase our תפילה and to strengthen our אחדות as a people.

During a visit to Hospital, תל השומר, HaRav Yisroel Meir Lau recounted meeting a wounded young man who had come from עזה. His body was covered with bandages, his hands immobilized, and his foot badly injured. Despite his pain, he spoke with Rav Lau about his connection to the תפילה. Each year, he would make sure to attend shul for at least part of the day, depending on his responsibilities at סעד. When Rav Lau asked him which תפילה or song he found most meaningful, the young man, in his weakened state and without a Kippah

on his head, responded with the words of "חמול על מעשיך כי מקדישך קידשת" "Have mercy on Your creations, for You have sanctified those who sanctify Your name."

Moved by this, Rav Lau began to sing, and the injured man, with his head bandaged, began to sway gently in deep concentration. Despite his physical condition, he connected with the תפילה, asking ה' to have mercy on His creations, with pure דבקות to ה'. Rav Lau, deeply moved, exclaimed: "Hashem, here is a young man asking for mercy and requesting that You enable us to be מקדש תהילים." He quoted the פסוק from (פ"ג:ט), "וידעו כי אתה שמך ה' לבדך עליון על כל הארץ" — "Let them know that You, whose name is ה', are alone, Most High over all the earth." Rav Lau called out to ה', "See who is asking to be more קדוש, more connected to You!"

This incredible moment reminds us that even in the face of overwhelming pain and darkness, we can draw closer to ה' and sanctify His name. When we come together as one people, ביחד, and proclaim the words of "כתר יתנו לך ה' אלוקינו, מלאכים" המוני מעלה עם עמך ישראל קבוצי מטה, יחד כולם קדושה לך ישלשו כדבר האמור על ידי נביאך וקרא מקדש שם שמים — "זה אל זה ואמר. (This is the text of Kedushah al pi nusach sefarad.)

As we reflect on the past year and look forward to the new one, we must remember the power of our תפילות during these Yamim Nora'im. The ותנה prayer, which emphasizes life's fragility, reminds us that even in our most vulnerable moments, תפילה וצדקה, can avert harsh decrees. Let us strengthen these pillars in our lives and take this opportunity to bring merit to ourselves and to all of ישראל.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the HaMagen Committee, Julian Pollard,



Richard Herman, Julian Maurer and Cathy Fisher for their dedication and hard work in preparing for this beautiful publication.

Thanks too to our Chairman, executive and council for their continued commitment that allows us, week in week out, gather for meaningful תפילה and for all their dedication to our community, we are ALL truly grateful.

May this new year bring only good news for ישראל. עם. May we merit to see peace in ישראל, the safe return of our hostages, comfort for the bereaved, healing for the sick, and the ultimate גאולה, speedily in our days.

Wishing you all a שנה טובה ומתוקה — a sweet, healthy, and peaceful year.

With warmest regards

Rabbi Yoni and Dina Golker. ■



Magen Avot

A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM CHIEF RABBI SIR EPHRAIM MIRVIS KBE

During this most painful year, in addition to the trauma of the terrorist atrocities, the capture of hostages and the tragic war, we have been subjected to a constant barrage of falsehoods. Of these, none has been so insidious as the morally inverted claim of genocide, the modern-day blood libel.

On Yom Kippur, we will chant Kol Nidrei, a prayer steeped in history and emotion. Fascinatingly, historians differ on its precise origin. Many believe that it was composed as a remedy for Jews who had been forced to make oaths of conversion to Christianity. While Kol Nidre declares 'all vows' made to God null and void, it was used as a pretext by medieval antisemites to portray Jews as untrustworthy in business and other civil matters. Despite assurances that Kol Nidrei did not apply to vows between people, the lie persisted, causing deep-seated hatred.

According to an old adage, a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still lacing up its boots. Sadly, in the era of social media, this is truer than ever, particularly where Israel is concerned.

In just one such example, in July, a well-known medical journal published a letter on its website. The authors estimated that the total number of casualties in Gaza attributable to Israel might eventually reach 186,000, if one were to factor in the impact of secondary causes, such as lack of housing and poor healthcare infrastructure. No attempt was made to assign any responsibility to Hamas, nor to differentiate between the deaths of combatants and non-combatants, nor identify the 'Gaza Health Ministry,' on whose data its conjecture was based, as Hamas-run. Nevertheless, campaigners attributed

this 'new data' to the journal itself, rather than to a letter it had received. Some claimed that the journal had 'released a study,' while others stated that the estimate was 'peer reviewed.' Before long, millions had read it and it was cited by activists, British Parliamentarians, and a UN Special Rapporteur.

Kol Nidrei is chanted during our deepest moments of personal and communal introspection. In our confession of the High Holy Days, we call out to Hashem in candour: "You know the hidden secrets of every living soul. You search the innermost chambers of the conscience and the heart. Nothing escapes You. Nothing is hidden from Your sight." This is a moment of the purest honesty.

The Torah instructs us, "Distance yourself from falsehood," because it is not enough to be truthful; we must create an environment intolerant of falsehood.

Indeed, despite the centuries of lies and hatred, Kol Nidrei has endured because we have always found solace in moments of perfect truth between ourselves and Hashem.

When we know in the deepest recesses of our souls where truth ends and falsehood begins, no lie can diminish us.

The truth will prevail.
Am Yisrael Chai! ■



Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

“ Indeed, despite the centuries of lies and hatred, Kol Nidrei has endured because we have always found solace in moments of perfect truth between ourselves and Hashem. ”

A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN

Generally, the only dates which matter in Judaism are those in the Hebrew calendar. Although we use the Gregorian calendar to arrange meetings and know when bank holidays are, Pesach always falls on 15th Nisan and Yom Kippur on 10th Tishrei.

There is, though, a secular date which will sadly be seared in our minds forever more: 7th October. Last

7th October, on Shemini Atzeret, terrorists murdered some 1,200 people in Israel. Hundreds of Israeli soldiers – mostly young men and women – as well as civilians have since been killed, whilst tens of thousands have been displaced from their homes.

It has been a year of horror and pain. Just three weeks after we said in shul last year, “On Rosh Hashana it is written... who will live and who will die, who in their due time and who before...” , our people suffered the largest loss of life since the Holocaust. As I write this, more than 100 hostages are still being held in the most unimaginable conditions in Gaza. I pray their captivity will end soon.

And as if all this was not bad enough, it took just a few days for world opinion and media to turn against Israel. The Jewish state, which wants nothing more than to live in peace among its neighbours, was doubly victimised: first, by suffering the atrocities of 7th October, and then for having the temerity to fight back against those who wish to destroy it, whilst simultaneously trying to bring the hostages home.

The subsequent rise in antisemitism has left many of us feeling uncomfortable

being publicly identified as Jewish. But we cannot let our lives be dictated by those who hate us. We can change the course of history by standing up for what is right and living our lives as proud Jews.

The message of the Untaneh token prayer, recited during Musaf on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and which I quoted from above, is not that Judaism is a fatalistic faith. It is not. Events are not predetermined and therefore inevitable. While God may know our thoughts, it is left to us to decide our actions.

Although we cannot change what happened on 7th October, we can choose how to respond to it. The answer is given at the end of Untaneh token: ‘repentance, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree’.

By fasting on Yom Kippur, by coming together in shul to daven, or raising our voices at home, by giving generously to the Kol Nidre appeal and resolving to bring more Judaism into our lives and the lives of those around us, the Jewish people can, with God’s help, be inscribed in the Book of Life.

May we and all of Am Yisrael merit such a verdict and may we see the hostages returned home soon to their families.

This is my eighth and final Rosh Hashana message as United Synagogue President. I will step down next summer and hand the reins of this wonderful charity to a new leader who will help to write the next chapter in our illustrious history, which began in 1870.

It has been a tremendous honour to lead such an important charity and I want to thank you for being part of the



United Synagogue, and to thank all our volunteers, fellow Trustees, Rabbinic teams and professional staff who give so much to enable us to do what we do. Wishing you a shana tova u’metuka – a happy and sweet New Year to you all. ■





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A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM BoD PRESIDENT PHIL ROSENBERG

In June 2024, aged 38, I was elected as the youngest-ever President in the Board of Deputies' 264-year history. While it is certainly a challenging time to have taken up the role, my team and I have hit the ground running with pace and energy, and set five key priorities for our three-year term:

- Fight antisemitism;
- Stand up for peace and security in Israel and the Middle East;
- Defend our religious freedoms;
- Make our community more united, inclusive, and outward looking; and
- Celebrate our faith, heritage, and culture as British Jews.

Understandably, combatting antisemitism is the number one priority for most in our community right now. We will be conducting a comprehensive review of hate crime legislation, policing, and prosecution, to keep our community safe. We will conduct a sector-by-sector inquiry into the media, social media, universities, workplaces, arts and sports, to secure our wellbeing. We will tackle extremism in all its guises, whether it be from Islamists, the far-right or the far-left, to ensure our society remains cohesive. And we will expand education, training, and interfaith outreach to inoculate people against the virus of hatred.

Nearly a year on from the horrific events of 7th October, our hearts go out to the people of Israel. People who have lost loved ones, suffered a life-changing injury, or who have spent too many hours waiting to hear the fate of a kidnapped relative.

Much is made of division in our own community, particularly regarding Israel. But on so much we have been united over the last year, whether campaigning

“ We will tackle extremism in all its guises, whether it be from Islamists, the far-right or the far-left, to ensure our society remains cohesive. ”

to release the hostages, pushing back against Iran and its proxies, or working and praying to bring a lasting resolution to the conflict, speedily and in our days.

Despite the challenges we must be proud to express our unique history and culture.

A key mission must be to make our community more inclusive, and we will launch a Commission on Disability Inclusion in the Jewish Community to better engage a wider range of people. The Board of Deputies' 200 member organisations run from Cornwall to Aberdeen, and we will celebrate our regional communities and heritage. As the Board's youngest-ever President, I want to connect with our next generation to ensure it is active and engaged.

We have been through some hard times in Jewish history and emerged from them with ingenuity and resilience. This last year has been uniquely challenging, but I am determined that we will come back stronger.

With your help, I know we will.

Wishing you all a Shanah Tovah
uMetukah! ■



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A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM CST CHIEF EXECUTIVE MARK GARDNER

Protecting the British Jewish community from antisemitism, extremism and terrorism is central to our work at CST. For decades, Jewish communities throughout the world, including in Britain, have been targeted by terrorists of various ideologies, including from far-right and Islamist extremism, as well as Iran and its terrorist proxies.

Our analysts and security staff constantly assess the threat landscape and track the ideologies, target selections, evidence of hostile reconnaissance, types of weaponry and attack methodologies used by diverse threat actors. The level of anti-Jewish threat, along with the amount of security needed from CST, often depends on the overall UK terrorist threat, as well as global threats to Jews. CST's security training, planning, operations and advice are all designed to best counter the current terrorist methodologies.

The 7 October Hamas attacks and the ensuing war have brought an even higher level of danger to Jews, unleashing global surges in anti-Jewish hate crimes. In the UK, CST recorded an unprecedented 4,103 anti-Jewish hate incidents in 2023, of which 66% occurred between 7 October and 31 December. Additionally, in the first six months of 2024, CST also recorded 1,978 instances of anti-Jewish hate across the UK, with discourse relating to Israel/Palestine and the Hamas terror attack alarmingly evident in 1,026 incidents (52% of the total).

Since October 2023, British and other Western security authorities have repeatedly warned that extremist reactions to the current conflict have increased the potential for terrorists to carry out attacks. This was evident within days of the 7 October attacks when an Islamist extremist fatally stabbed a pedestrian at random in Hartlepool on 15 October in

a terrorist attack explicitly carried out in revenge for the war in Gaza.

Over the last 10 months, our analysts have tracked numerous instances of violent incitement, attacks and plots against Jewish, Israeli and other targets worldwide. We maintain this evidence base to map out the key trends and patterns, using this information in our regular consultations with our partners across UK police services, government and civil service to ensure they are constantly aware of the potential threats to Jewish communities.

Another significant challenge in countering contemporary antisemitism is the sheer volume of dangerous online content. CST has long employed experts and sophisticated technologies to help identify and thwart the most important threats amongst a near countless array of antisemitic and extremist content. While this work certainly predates the 7 October attacks, CST has since recorded a surge in online radicalisation and extremism. Online users continue posting terrorist content and violent incitement against Jews in breach of UK law.

CST's open source intelligence analysts continually assess which are thought to be the most threatening. In the last 10 months, CST has made a significant number of referrals to UK Counter-Terrorism Policing and other key stakeholders, some of which have resulted in police action.

In early August this year, for example, a 24-year-old far-right extremist from Weston-Super-Mare, was convicted of multiple terrorism offences. CST first became aware of him in September 2022 when he was operating anonymously in extreme right-wing channels online. His deeply antisemitic views and access to weapons sparked an investigation lasting more than a year, during which CST's



open source intelligence team identified, tracked and located his whereabouts, making several referrals to Counter-Terrorism Policing that ultimately led to his conviction. The digital space contains an array of lone actors, violent extremist groups and state-sponsored antisemitism. It is therefore vital that CST keeps adapting to meet these threats.

The last year has been challenging for the UK Jewish community, but British Jews have once again demonstrated their physical and emotional resilience. CST staff and volunteers remain steadfast in our mission to helping protect Jewish life and the Jewish way of life, by continuing to secure shuls and community events, monitoring threats discreetly and assessing risks soberly and robustly. ■





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A ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN SIMON BENTLEY

On behalf of all our members and regular visitors I commend the inspirational leadership of Rabbi Yoni and Rebbetzen Dina Golker. This has been more important during a year of unprecedented stress on our community and on Jews generally in the UK as we approach the anniversary of the murderous attacks on Israel. This October will mark the first Simchat Torah since the horrific events of 7th October. Magen Avot will join the worldwide commemoration of this tragic event by participating in the **'Dancing Through Tears'** programme and along with 1500 synagogues around the world we will be adopting a Sefer Torah mantle inscribed with the name of **Coporal Shirat Yam Amar a'h**, who fell on 7th October 2023. Her precious life is described on page 62 and we will have this dedicated mantle on prominent display during our Yamim Nora'im services.



Agam bat Meirav and Naama bat Ayelet are the two 'adopted' hostages who we remember and highlight every week, as part of a project led by the Board of Deputies. A large poster of them is on display, and seats with their posters on are in place every Shabbat in Shul so they remain in our thoughts. We pray for their immediate rescue and return. I pay public tribute to Dr Chaya Langerman for her tireless and passionate efforts in continuously bringing the plight of the hostages to public awareness.

Likewise, I thank the members of our Executive and Council for their dedicated

commitment and hard work for Magen Avot. Thanks also to our Gabbaim, Daniel Ehreich and Elkan Adler who quietly and very competently organise our services, to Julian Maurer who produces our newsletter every week, to Alex Jacobs, assisted by Tony Newgrosh, who organise and supervise our security arrangements with those who volunteer each week, and to the members who don't sit on the Executive or Council but nonetheless work diligently behind-the-scenes. I welcome to the Council new members Liz Kliman, Tali Diamant (our new US Council Representative) and Adam Kay. Their enthusiasm and wise advice will be valued.

Our Magen Avot Chesed, Tzedek, and Mishpat programme led by Elkan Adler has been focused recently on local initiatives for the homeless, and care and attention being given to the elderly in our local old age home in Church Road. Magen Avot branded food and essential product bags will be handed out again to homeless people all over London ahead of the Yamim Nora'im.

We continue to have a busy programme, with a variety of well attended events and projects and inspirational speakers. Our Sunday morning breakfasts feature a variety of interesting, diverse speakers and our Book Club, under the direction of Julian Pollard, is well established, and we have held successful book review events.

Our children's and youth education are a vital part of our future which is why we place such importance on the Magen Minis, Magen Maxis, and Y@MA services. In Ariella Ovits and Rafi Kleiman, we have new energetic and experienced leaders for the Minis and Maxis age groups.



The recent relaunch of these services is now attracting more young families and young adults to Magen Avot. We are continuing to promote the Horim VeYeladim programme (learning, for parents and children), the Bat Mitzvah course, for which thanks in particular to our Vice Chair Patti Adler and our Bar Mitzvah programme led by Rabbi Golker.

Finally, I extend my warmest congratulations to Marc Ovits who will be our Chatan Torah, and Jonathan Sacks who will be our Chatan Bereishit.

Ketiva ve'Chatima Tova. ■



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This is the first Kol Nidre since the October 7 massacres. Israel is still on the precipice. We continue to face unprecedented levels of antisemitism. In response, this year each of us needs to **give more**.

GIVE MORE, because we must do everything possible to support Israel.

GIVE MORE, because our own British charities must be able to carry out their vital work.

GIVE MORE, because Magen Avot shul must be a supportive and inspiring haven for our community, today more than ever.

So please, **GIVE MORE** to help tens of thousands of people in our community, in Israel and around the world.

Thank you.



KOL NIDRE APPEAL 2024/5785: THIS YEAR, GIVE MORE

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- Keren Shabbos
- Peace of Mind
- Hostages and Missing Families Forum
- United Synagogue central projects

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SOME NOVELTIES REGARDING YESHIVAS SUCCAH AND THE ARBA'AH MINIM

By Dr David Cohen, MA PHD

As the festival of Succos is fast approaching, I would like to draw attention to certain highly unusual situations in which G-d-fearing Jews in former times sadly found themselves regarding their performance of the two specific Mitzvos associated with this chag – mitzvas succah and mitzvas arba'ah minim. As will become clear from the content of the teshuvos covering such situations, they are highly unlikely to occur nowadays as k'lal yisrael has, by and large, thankfully become far more affluent and less subject to persecution than was the case in years gone by.

The Priority of Mitzvos

The first issue I wish to mention relates to a poor man who can only afford to defray either the costs of a succah or of the arba'ah minim, but not both. Which mitzvah should he choose in such unfortunate circumstances?

There are several teshuvos extant, each dealing with different aspects of this question, and it will therefore be convenient to provide an overall summary of the various matters of relevance raised in this regard. At first sight, mitzvas succah should receive priority, for several reasons. First, the Torah itself calls the festival 'chag ha-succos', thereby intimating that the succah is to be regarded as its predominant feature. Second, the mitzvah of succah is applicable for seven days, whereas that of the arba'ah minim applies, biblically at any

rate, on the first day of Yom Tov only, since the Torah states: 'u'lekachtem lachem bayom ha-rishon'.

Third, whilst mitzvas succah applies by both day and night, the arba'ah minim may be taken only by day. Finally, mitzvas succah envelops a person's entire body, whereas mitzvas arba'ah minim involves just the use of one hand for its fulfilment.

However, all these considerations may effectively be countered by the argument that nowhere in the Torah is it stated that a person must have his own succah, and indeed the Gemara in Masseches Succah expressly allows one to fulfil the mitzvah by means of a 'succah she'ulah' – which involves sitting and sleeping in another person's succah with their consent.

Therefore, in line with this reasoning, a poor man should rather spend the limited funds available to him on the purchase of a set of arba'ah minim, which by Torah law, must actually belong to the individual making the beracha on them on the first day of Yom Tov in any event. (The Gemara in Succah interprets the word 'lachem' employed by the Torah to mean 'mishelachem' – 'belonging to you'.) But the force of this argument too is somewhat weakened by pointing out that the Gemara in Succah legitimises an arrangement whereby, even on the first day of Succos, someone owning an arba'ah minim set can 'gift' it temporarily to another individual who does not own one, so as to enable him to make a bracha upon it, on the strict condition that the set must forthwith be

returned to its owner (i.e., A 'mattanah al menas le-hachazir').

At this juncture, where we appear to have reached an impasse, we receive a novel insight from the 'Besamim Rosh'. (A brief digression is in order here to explain the background and halachic credentials of the author of these teshuvos. The author, R. Shaul Berlin, was an outstanding 18th century talmid chacham but he possessed a strange personality. At one point in his life he published the work 'Besamim Rosh', which he claimed constituted 392 lost teshuvos authored by the 'Rosh' [Rabbeinu Asher] which he had personally discovered in an ancient manuscript. Whilst the language of these teshuvos was certainly in the style of the Rosh, several contemporary experts noted that many of them contained halachic leniencies which they felt the Rosh himself could not possibly have countenanced, and they indeed suspected that the true author of these was none other than the 'Besamim Rosh' himself, written by him under the influence of the emergent *haskalah* ['enlightenment'] movement.)

However, somewhat to my surprise, several charedi rabbis with whom I have discussed this matter maintain that not all of the printed teshuvos in the 'Besamim Rosh' are to be written off as forgeries, and that some of them, at least, constitute significant contributions to the development of halacha. I accordingly rely on this view as justification for quoting him here.

The 'Besamim Rosh' observes that whilst



one may indeed fulfil mitzvas succah by arranging to reside in a third party's succah, and one can also fulfil the mitzvah of arba'ah minim by recourse to 'mattanah al menas le-hachazir', there is a fundamental difference between the two arrangements. For a poor man to have to ask the owner of a succah for permission to sit and sleep in it for seven days will be highly embarrassing for him, as he knows that he will necessarily be intruding upon the privacy of the succah owner and his family. The poor man will, moreover, also continue to feel such embarrassment at every meal and every night. Therefore, says the 'Besamim Rosh', we should not expect the pauper to have to undergo such embarrassment in order to fulfil mitzvas succah. In regard to arba'ah minim, on the other hand, no real embarrassment is caused when the pauper requests the very brief use of another's arba'ah minim on a 'mattanah al menas le-hachazir' basis, as such arrangements were most common in the pre-war era in northern Europe, when arba'ah minim were hard to obtain and frequently only the rabbi of a shul possessed a set.

Thus the 'Besamim Rosh' concludes that a poor man faced with the choice between the two mitzvos should spend his money on the succah rather than upon the arba'ah minim.

R. Shlomo Kluger, one of the halachic giants of the early 19th century, holds, by way of contrast, that in such circumstances, the poor man should spend the limited funds he has on purchasing arba'ah minim. He places great emphasis on the fact that, in the Torah, the mitzvah of arba'ah minim is mentioned first, before that of yeshivas succah.

How far does mitzvas succah extend?

The charedi Chief Rabbi of Antwerp immediately before World War 2 was a certain Rav Chaim Rottenberg. He was an outstanding lamdan and communal leader.

Sadly, shortly after the outbreak of war, he was forcibly removed from his home to a Nazi concentration camp in Malines/Mechelen. He survived the war, and ultimately became charedi Chief Rabbi

of Paris. He wrote a series of teshuvos on halachic issues, one of which describes the dilemmas faced by him on one particular occasion with the onset of chag ha-succos.

He tells us that on erev Succos, having regard to his specific location in the camp, and the comings and goings of the Nazi administrative staff with which he was familiar, he felt that it was safe for him to construct a succah, in which he would sit and eat a kezayis on the first night of Succos, but which he would then promptly need to destroy, as it would inevitably be discovered by the camp commandant the following day, when he might well have been summarily executed for practising Jewish rituals. Several halachic questions, however, instantly presented themselves. First, was he allowed to erect the succah at all, as he was thereby potentially endangering his life? Second, was it permissible for him to build it, knowing in advance that he would have to dismantle it on Yom Tov, which would involve the melachah of 'setirah', destruction of a binyan on Shabbos and Yom Tov? And finally, even if the first two questions could be answered in the positive, could such a succah be considered as being 're-uyah le-shivah', fit to stand for seven days, i.e., for the entire length of the festival, which the Gemara in Succah insists upon as a halachic requirement for a kosher succah?

Regarding the first question, Rav Rottenberg concluded that he was indeed allowed to construct the succah, as he had estimated that its presence would not be discovered at night-time, since the camp commandants operated only by day.

Regarding the issue of 'setirah', the gemara in maseches shabbos makes it clear that, from the Torah's perspective, 'setirah' is forbidden only if the dismantling is carried out for the purpose of rebuilding. Should the 'setirah' not be for such purpose, it is reduced to a mere rabbinic prohibition. Now in this instance, the rav had no intention of rebuilding the succah after the first night, as that would have violated the mitzvah of 'pikuach nefesh'. Accordingly, he was entitled - be'sha'as ha-d'chak - to violate an issur de-rabbanan for the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah de'oraisa, i.e., residing in the succah.

As to the issue of whether the succah was fit to stand for seven days, the rav observed that in the gemara, the stated criterion was physical fitness. So although he knew in advance that this particular succah could not stand for seven days, this was in no way due to its physical frailty, but rather to the fact that he would have to destroy it on account of 'pikuach nefesh'. By means

of these arguments, the rav felt able, in hindsight, to justify halachically the course he had taken.

There is, however, an important sequel to this story. Some 20 years ago, my son, who was as yet unmarried, invited to our family succah a Jewish friend from university, who had spent his childhood years in the Soviet Union, where public religious practice was forbidden. He was therefore perforce totally non-observant, though manifestly he set store by his ancestral roots. During the course of conversation, I told him the story of Rav Rottenberg, as I felt it might have some relevance for him as another victim of religious persecution. Finally, being curious to discover whether he had grasped the essence of the halachic issues, I asked him whether he thought that the rav's succah was indeed 're-uyah le-shivah'. His response was entirely unexpected, but so profound that it has remained seared in my memory ever since. "Of course that succah was 're-uyah le-shivah'" he exclaimed, "because although it had to be dismantled after just a single night, the mental image of that succah will have remained etched in the rabbi's memory for the rest of his life! That mental image, and what the succah represented - G-d's eternal covenant of protection for his people - the Nazis would never be able to take away from him!" ■





THE MAGEN AVOT AND IMMANUEL COLLEGE PARENTS' POLAND TRIP

By Rabbi Yoni Golker

Our recent three-day journey to Poland was an unforgettable exploration of Jewish history and heritage, deeply enriching and profoundly moving. Joined by members of our Kehilla and parents from Immanuel College, we embarked on a mission that took us through the poignant remnants of Jewish life before the Holocaust and the harrowing tales of those who suffered during the Shoah.

Day 1: Arrival and Historical Reverence

Our journey began on September 15, with our arrival at Warsaw. After meeting our guide and loading our bus, we set off for our first destination, the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street. This vast necropolis, with its approximately 250,000 graves, was a profound introduction to the rich tapestry of Jewish life that once flourished in Poland.

Walking through the Beit Hachayim during the month of Elul lent an even deeper significance to our visit. This period of introspection before the Yamim Neraim offered us a chance to reflect on the lives of our ancestors and the vibrant community that was lost. We paid tribute to notable figures like Rav Chaim Brisk and The Netziv, whose legacies have left an indelible mark on Jewish Torah scholarship. Having two of my great-great-grandfathers buried there made it incredibly powerful for me to feel such a deep connection to my past.

Following our visit to the cemetery, we

explored the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto. We saw the fragments of the Ghetto Wall and the Umschlagplatz, where close to 300,000 of Warsaw's Jews were forcibly transported to their deaths. The Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Monument stood as a testament to the indomitable human spirit that resisted the crushing oppression, both literally and spiritually. The contrast between the vibrant Jewish life of the past and the stark, sombre reality of the present was both powerful and humbling. Visiting the newly discovered Mile 18 bunker, which was only unearthed by archaeologists in 2022, was especially moving. This underground site was used by those involved in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to hide.

We concluded the day with Mincha at Nozyk Synagogue, followed by a meal at Chabad Warsaw, where Rabbi Stambler, the local Rov, shared insights into the current state of Jewish life in Poland. Our evening ended with a drive to Lublin and check-in at the Ilan Hotel, situated in Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin.

Day 2: Spiritual Reflection and Historical Lessons

The following morning, we began our day with Shacharit at Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, founded by Rabbi Meir Shapira, who initiated the Daf Yomi program. The yeshiva's enduring legacy of Torah study, despite the devastation it faced during the Nazi occupation, was a testament to the

resilience of this place. To be accepted to Chachmei Lublin, one had to memorise 200 pages of Gemara by heart. In its day, it was truly one of the most prestigious institutions in the Jewish world. Although many of its students did not survive, the institution's Torah scholarship and legacy continue to endure. Rabbi Shapira, who was also a member of the Polish parliament, was a prominent Torah leader of the pre-war 20th century. His legacy is exemplified by his dedication to Daf Yomi, which he founded. To me, this underscores the power of consistency and commitment through daily learning.

After breakfast, we went to visit the ancient Beis Olom, and final resting place of the Chozeh of Lublin and the Maharshal. It was powerful to be able to briefly daven there.

Our next destination was Majdanek, a concentration camp near Lublin. The camp's preservation allowed us to witness firsthand the brutal conditions faced by its prisoners. The chilling remains of the gas chambers and crematoria spoke volumes about the horrors endured by the almost 60,000 Jews who died there. We learned of the camp's tragic history, including the mass graves that starkly reminded us of the immense loss.

In the afternoon, we visited Lejansk, where Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, a pivotal figure in Chassidic history, is buried. His teachings on "שנראה כל אחד" (to see in everyone the virtues



of our friends) and living with humility resonated deeply with us. The story of Rabbi Elimelech was a powerful reminder of his profound impact on Chassidut. Our journey then continued to Lancut, where we visited the magnificent Lancut Synagogue. This architectural gem was a stark contrast to the devastation we had witnessed and symbolised the enduring strength of Jewish heritage.

The day ended with a painful visit to the forest of Zbilatowska Gora, a sombre site of mass graves where many victims, including children. This solemn location, where over 800 children from Tarnov were murdered in 1942, cast a profound shadow over our reflections on the tragic loss of life during the Shoah. As we stood in this sacred place, it was impossible not to consider the painful irony that, 80 years later, the world still witnesses such atrocities. The current hostage crisis following October 7, 2023, echoes the same harrowing theme, with children once again being held hostage in tunnels deep beneath the ground. Each participant received a photo and name of a different hostage to daven for, and we took time to dedicate Tefillot at this holy site.

Day 3: Confronting the Past and Embracing the Present

On September 17, our final day began with Shacharit and breakfast before we headed to Auschwitz. The horrors of Auschwitz I and II-Birkenau were overwhelming, with their well-preserved remains serving as a dark reminder of the genocide. The camp's watchtowers, fences, and the infamous Arbeit Macht Frei gate left us grappling with the scale of the atrocity. At Birkenau, the sheer size of the extermination facilities and the gas chambers stood as a stark testament to the systematic annihilation of 1.1 million Jews.

Returning to Krakow in the afternoon, we explored Kazimierz, the historic Jewish quarter. Our visit took us to the Remuh Shul

and cemetery, where we encountered the enduring legacy of Rabbi Moses Isserles (Remuh). Rabbi Isserles, a towering figure in Jewish scholarship, was renowned for his profound contributions to Jewish law and tradition. His meticulous work in harmonising and codifying Jewish practices provided clarity and cohesion in the face of diverse interpretations. Rabbi Isserles' efforts exemplified his deep commitment to preserving the integrity of Jewish law and ensuring its accessibility to all, underscoring his pivotal role in the continuity and richness of Jewish learning.

Our journey concluded with a final dinner at Rimonim Kazimierz, where we were honoured to hear a moving talk from a Polish lady, Alvera, a "righteous among the nations." She recounted the powerful story of how her family had saved a Jewish girl during the war years. It was a fitting end to our day, providing a moment of light amidst the darkness, and hope amidst

the reflections on our profound historical journey.

Reflecting on our three-day journey, we were deeply moved by the experiences and insights gained. The journey was not only a pilgrimage through the remnants of Jewish history but also an affirmation of the resilience and continuity of Jewish life.

This Rosh Hashana, as I stand in Shul with the Sifrei Chaim open before us, my thoughts will undoubtedly turn to this journey through Poland. This trip has been a profound reflection on our past, a celebration of our present, and a source of inspiration for our future. It has highlighted the importance of remembering our history, cherishing our heritage, and striving to uphold the values and lessons imparted by those who came before us.

I would like to thank the members of Magen Avot who joined me on this unforgettable journey.

Shana Tova. ■



UNETANE TOKEF ונתנה תקף

By Rabbi Michael Pollak



“
The miracle of this period which we conjure up through our prayers and meditations is to change the facts of the past.

and his unknowable Creator and Sukkot – the miracles which enabled us to survive in the desert. Even Purim and Chanukah have their respective miracles. Alongside them Rosh Hashana seems bereft and mundane. In which case how does it qualify as a Yom Tov?

We can however identify a truly supernatural miracle during the special period of the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Let us take a topical autumnal example. Over the next few weeks chestnuts, acorns, leaves and even some very over-ripe fruit will become detached from the trees on which they grew and they will all, irrespective of

R

osh Hashana is a strange sort of festival. All other Yamim Tovim commemorate a miracle. Pesach – the Exodus, Shavuot – the encounter between man

size, weight, shape or colour, behave in the same way. They will all fall towards the ground. Absolutely none will float up to the heavens nor will any hover menacingly over heads. We know this with some degree of certainty because the universe in which we live conforms to the knowledge we gain through the methods of scientific discovery. There are rules which give us certain knowledge of an utterly knowable and predictable world. One of these certain rules is that we cannot change the past. Once something has happened it cannot “unhappen”.

From the beginning of Ellul through to Yom Kippur all our prayers and reflections are designed to shatter that “reality”. Whilst our actions of the past actually happened. The mistakes, the insults and the sins. The miracle of this period which we conjure up through our prayers and meditations is to change the facts of the past. Firstly to avoid divine punishment for those actions but surprisingly to negate the outcomes of our failings. Despite behaving in an unpleasant manner we invoke this special miracle to ensure that our past has no impact on our present or future. This twin miracle of no



enter the Kriat Hatorah for the second day of Rosh Hashana – the Binding of Isaac. Elokim tells Avraham that Yitzchak has to die. By right G-d created him and G-d can equally well expunge him.

punishment and no consequence we call Teshuva. At the high point of the three Yamim Nora'im we declare confidently

**וּנְתַנֵּה תִקְוָה
וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה מֵעַבְרִיּוֹן
אֶת רֵעַ הַגִּזְרָה.**

**UNETANE TOKEF
Repentance, Prayer and Charity set
aside the evil decree.**

As real as the miracles of our Freedom from Egypt and those of our time in the desert which we celebrate on the other festivals so we confidently and communally state the reality of the miracle of Teshuva. No requests, no conditions, just a statement that real Teshuva is life changing.

We have two different names for our G-d each which designates the before and after of Teshuva. Elokim is the G-d of rules, law and predictable certainty. Hashem indicates the world post Teshuva where kindness trumps certainty and a world in which we have the power to overturn reality. The interplay between these two names during the services of the Yamim Nora'im is designed to guide our personal journey to individual redemption.

On the first day of Rosh Hashana we deal with the rejection of Yishmael and Hagar from the home of Sara and Avraham. Although Avraham receives confirmation that he should follow Sara's advice, there is something deeply unsatisfactory about this whole episode. The name of G-d through this whole episode is Elokim. Facts and rules. Yishmael is a bad influence on Yitzchak, the real Prince of the Jewish People. He has to go. But surely Avraham might have hoped for more for his oldest son. He has just begged for mercy for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gemora. The least he might have done is to pray for Yishmael.

With this concern in our minds we

All the instructions of this passage are delivered in the name of Elokim – the G-d of law and unchangeable rights until... the story pivots and an angel appears. This angel we are told, represents Hashem and gives Avraham a new perspective. Kindness can dissolve law. G-d's kindness can change fate and what was right and proper can be made irrelevant by that power. G-d illustrates his kindness and Yitzchak lives.

In the final few verses we return to Avraham's own qualification to be the progenitor of three faiths. Has he internalised the lessons of the Akeida and crucially has he recognised his failure to reach beyond the world of rules in dealing with his own family? Yishmael is gone and his destiny is lost to the Jewish People but Avraham is notified that he has eight new nephews. The Avraham of the past would have shrugged shoulders and wondered whether he has any responsibility for these folk. They are even given semi comic names such as Uz and Butz to emphasise their odd separateness. The new Avraham is asked to face the challenge of meeting G-d's kindness with human kindness. Avraham has learnt that in the affairs of mankind nothing is certain and the rules are for challenging by invoking the miracle of Teshuva. G-d can act with astonishing kindness in changing our lives, but are we able to deserve His kindness by rising to our own personal challenges and acting beyond the rules of human custom?

Is there an old friend or relative for whom a call from us would be so uplifting? Is there an old difference of opinion which still festers and has not been resolved? There are no rules for trying to rectify these past moments but if we are trying to invoke G-d's kindness it might very well be appropriate to try to match Him with a few acts of kindness of our own. ■

**“
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custom?”**

MARC OVITS CHATAN TORAH



This year's Chatan Torah is a stalwart of the community – Marc Ovits. Born in Haifa, Marc moved to Edgware in Northwest London in 1973 as a one-year-old child with his parents. His father had been born in Romania and his mother was English; they married in Israel. Marc has two younger brothers, Elan, who lives in Edgware, and Eli, who lives in Jerusalem.

Marc attended Rosh Pinah School, then City of London School for Boys and graduated with a degree in management studies from the University of Leeds, where his soccer skills were honed as well as his financial acumen.

He spent time studying at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Back in London, he had been offered a job at the prestigious Hambros Bank but the offer was withdrawn when his religious observance became a factor! The Bank later went bust!

Marc spent the first 15 years of his career in investment banking, with directorships at Barclays Bank, Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein, BNP Paribas, Exane and J.P. Morgan, primarily offering investment advice on European equities to institutions. Once his daughter Ariella was at school, he wanted to spend more time raising her as well as davening weekday Shacharit in a minyan. So, in 2012 he decided to embark on a career change which would give him more time flexibility whilst leveraging his financial know-how. At 40 years old, Marc dusted off the academic cobwebs and spent three years qualifying as a chartered financial planner. In 2016 he opened Alpha Wealth Management Limited offering independent financial advice on investment, retirement and inheritance planning to individuals, companies, charities and trusts, and has never looked

back since. Beyond work, Marc is a keen fundraiser for various charities and says this value emanates from his parents' efforts assisting charities over the years.

Marc has lived in Hendon for over 30 years and when Magen Avot opened its doors in Finchley Lane a few years ago – becoming his next door neighbour – he could not resist the chance to try it out. Attracted by the decorum of the services and the friendliness of the community, he also felt inspired by the divrei Torah of our rabbinic teams. He has known the Golker family for many years and considers them ideal to meet the community's needs as it moves forward.

Marc has encouraged attendance at the weekly Tehillim prayers at Raleigh Close shul every Tuesday since the Gaza war broke out and has marched with us at the Central London demonstrations in support of Israel.

His daughter Ariella is active with the Magen Avot children. Marc feels truly honoured to be this year's Chatan Torah and, ever modest, he claims he has "no idea why I was selected!" However, he is delighted to share this honour with Jonathan Sacks, and this will give him an opportunity to deepen their friendship especially during Simchat Torah. ■

Marc has encouraged attendance at the weekly Tehillim prayers at Raleigh Close shul every Tuesday since the Gaza war broke out and marched in demonstrations in support of Israel.

DR JONATHAN SACKS

CHATAN BEREISHIT

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, Jonathan Sacks was educated in South Africa before taking up a place at Yeshiva University in New York on a four-year course where part of the day was spent in secular studies (he majored in biology) and the rest in yeshiva.

He never returned to South Africa as he secured a place at a London medical school before qualifying as a GP and began work with a local practice in Hendon. Jonathan now works in St Johns Wood. His parents and grandparents live in Cape Town and his oldest brother lives in Johannesburg.

In 2013 he married Choulamite, a Swiss national. They had met at Hillel House in Golders Green where he was a warden and she was staying. She too is a GP, now working in Muswell Hill, and they are blessed with two young children – Lia aged 9 and Eitan aged 5. Both attend Hasmonian Primary school and Jonathan is already encouraging their interest in science at home; they engage readily with chemistry and related scientific experiments.

The family joined Magen Avot soon after it opened, and were immediately attracted by the decorum and warm welcome from the community. The children love the services and Jonathan is quick to praise the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the new youth leaders Rafi and Ariella who, he is confident, will completely revitalise the youth services – something to which he is also committed.

Given his hectic professional life, Jonathan spends his limited free time enjoying his children and is at pains to compliment Choulamite, who supports him in every aspect of his life and without

whom he would not be the success he is.

Modest and self-effacing, Jonathan says he is truly honoured to be Chatan Bereishit but is slightly bemused as to why he – above others “more worthy of the position” – was selected. He is determined that the Simchat Torah celebrations this year will focus on the good things we have to be thankful for despite a difficult year. He is especially delighted to be joint honouree with Marc Ovits, who has “done a fantastic job with encouragement of the community to join the weekly Tehillim services”. His brother was chatan in his home shul in South Africa last year and Jonathan is looking forward to enjoying this “wonderful honour” too. ■

Jonathan says he is truly honoured to be Chatan Bereishit but is slightly bemused as to why he – above others “more worthy of the position” – was selected. He is determined that the Simchat Torah celebrations this year will focus on the good things we have to be thankful for despite a difficult year.



PEACE OF MIND VISIT



10 -17 NOVEMBER 2024

Pease of Mind is a unique programme that was developed by the Israel Centre for the Treatment of Psychotrauma. For many years, it has been providing a bridge and pathway back to civilian life for young men and women who have served for three or more years in high risk combat units in the Israel Defence Forces.

Without singling out individuals, the programme treats an entire unit of soldiers – who are ‘regular’, healthy men and women – through workshops and therapy over a nine-month period. A central component of the programme includes a seven-day overseas trip, hosted by local communities. During this week abroad, participants have daily, intensive, six-hour group therapy sessions with their Peace of Mind therapists, allowing them the time and space to process traumatic events

in a supportive environment, far from distraction and the painful places where they happened.

On 7 October 2023, after the most heinous attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust, the death, destruction and sheer brutality witnessed by IDF soldiers will stay with them forever. Some have suffered psychological trauma, lost friends, or question split-second decisions they had to make in combat. If left unprocessed, these experiences can deeply affect them, their families and their ability to function. The need for the Peace of Mind programme is greater now than ever before: to provide IDF veterans with an opportunity to process their combat experiences and emerge healthier and stronger, both mentally and emotionally.

Magen Avot is delighted to be welcoming a unit of male IDF veterans

from 10-17 November 2024, with participants being hosted by families in the community throughout their stay.

The week-long programme will be full-on! After their daily group therapy sessions, afternoons and evenings will be filled with outings, activities, and dinners.

This will be very much a community project with opportunities for everyone to get involved and show their support.

We are looking for volunteers to :

- help plan and co-ordinate the week’s events;
- help out during lunch times;
- accompany the group on an afternoon activity;
- accompany the group on an evening activity;
- collect the group at the end of an evening activity and drop them back to their host family;
- buy a ticket for the communal Shabbat lunch which will be held in honour of our Peace of Mind participants, in the presence of Chief Rabbi and Rebbetzin Mirvis, taking place at Magen Avot on Shabbat 16 November.

If you are able to get involved in any of the above ways, we would really love to hear from you. ■

Patti Adler
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Toni Zekaria
tonized1@aol.com



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**WE
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HER.**

We **believe** all Jewish women.

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HAVDALA



By Simon Bentley

A braided candle, a cup of wine, a bunch of cloves... sounds like such a random list of items and yet, somehow, together they work together to create a fitting farewell ceremony for Shabbat. What is the deeper significance of our elaborate Havdala experience?

The Rambam writes that there is a well-known mitzvah of, זכור את יום השבת לקדשו of remembering the Shabbat by making Kiddush on Friday night. He says that there is also a parallel mitzvah to remember the Shabbat as it leaves, by making Havdala. By greeting the Shabbat and then taking leave properly, we give honour and respect to the Shabbat.

How does the Havdala enable us to escort out the Shabbat properly? We use the Havdala to accomplish two things – 1. To give ourselves some comfort as Shabbat leaves 2. To make sure we hold on to the important lesson of Shabbat.

Havdala starts with a message of consolation and encouragement. In Gemara Beitzta 16a, Rav Shimon ben Lakish explains that we are all given a neshama yeteira (an extra soul) on Shabbat and that it is removed from us on Motzei Shabbat, bringing a sense of loss as Shabbat ends. As we take leave of Shabbat, there is a feeling of melancholy. The past 24 hours+ were a welcome hiatus from the stresses of life. We spent time connecting with Hashem and the things that are important in life.

On Motzei Shabbat we are being thrust back into the real world. Our neshamot are quivering, we are not ready to leave this oasis. So, we begin the Havdala with a message of encouragement – הנה Hashem קל ישועתי אבטח ולא אפחד salvation, I trust in Him and will not fear Draw ושאבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה –

water with happiness from the springs of salvation – we can draw inspiration and encouragement from our Shabbat experience and bring it into the rest of the week. ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר. כן תהיה לנו In the past, the Jewish people have experienced light and happiness and we will experience the same.

After this “pep talk”, we give ourselves added encouragement in a variety of ways. The Rambam (Mishneh Torah Shabbat 29:29) explains the purpose of spices at Havdala – מפני שהנפש דואבת – מציאת שבת, משמחין אותה ומישבין אותה בריח טוב the fragrant smell of the besamim helps to cheer up and restore our saddened souls. This, together with the light of the Havdala candle and the simcha of the wine, is a recipe designed to uplift us as we take leave of Shabbat.

The second message of Havdala is about our ability to distinguish and

to discern. As Rabbi Norman Lamm wrote, “Havdala means to distinguish or separate. When we recite this prayer, we bless G-d who distinguishes between sacred and profane, light and dark, Israel and the nations, Sabbath and weekday... Havdala is vital for those of us...who believe that the function and the mission of the Jew in the world is to illuminate the darkness, to sanctify the profane, to bring the Jewish message to the nations, and to introduce the warmth and meaningfulness of the Sabbath to all the days of the week”.

As we re-enter the regular world, a world where there is a jumble of good and evil and it's not always so easy to always know what's right and what's wrong, we emphasise to ourselves that Hashem has given us the ability to distinguish between the two.

We purposely use fire which can either cause great harm or provide great benefit, wine which can be used for celebration or for profanity, and spices which can enhance or ruin the taste of the food, to bring home this message – everything in this world can be used for the good or the bad, it's just a matter of how much we use and how we utilise it. A world full of only chol (the mundane) would be pointless, but a world of only Shabbat wouldn't be ideal either. It's the fusion of the two, when utilised correctly that makes a winning combination.

And so, we end with the words –

ברוך אתה ה' המבדיל בין קודש לחול,
בין אור לחושך... ברוך אתה ה' המבדיל בין קודש לחול.

We look to you Hashem as a model of how we are meant to live in a world of contradictions and incongruities, to be able to distinguish and differentiate, and make the most of the world around us. ■

“
When we recite this prayer, we bless G-d who distinguishes between sacred and profane, light and dark, Israel and the nations, Sabbath and weekday

A TIME TO TAKE CARE

As the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana, approaches, it is a time for reflection, renewal, and setting intentions for the coming year. Among the many values emphasised in Jewish tradition, the respect and care for elderly parents hold a significant place. The commandment “Honour your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12) is not just a duty but a sacred privilege, reflecting the deep gratitude and respect for those who gave us life and nurtured us.

Looking after elderly parents can be profoundly rewarding yet can also be challenging. It involves ensuring their physical well-being, providing emotional support and practical support and often making difficult decisions regarding their care. Practical steps include arranging medical appointments, managing medications, ensuring their living environment is safe and comfortable and ensuring all their domestic bureaucracy is taken care of.

A parent’s natural resistance to



relinquishing their independence is a hard enough starting point. Add to that the dawning realisation by the parent that these changes are directly attributed to their own declining physical and mental health, and you have the ingredients for a perfect storm.

The Jewish New Year is an opportune time to make realistic plans that will have a positive impact on our parents’ lives.

To make the most of this commitment it helps to be fully conversant with all the practical steps that can be made, both paperwork and physical changes. Paperweight’s ElderCare Hub will help you do just that. We understand the practical side and the emotional side, and will work with you to create the best possible outcomes. ■



The Jewish New Year is an opportune time to make realistic plans that will have a positive impact on our parents’ lives.

Facing the **CHALLENGE** of caring for aging parents?

As our loved ones grow older, their increasing frailty, the loss of a lifetime partner, or making critical decisions about housing and care can upset the family status quo.

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CHESSSED IN THE COMMUNITY WOHL COURT REPORT

By Richard Taylor

Wohl Court is an Independent Living community on Church Road run by Jewish Care. It is the home for up to 36 tenants who choose to live there to maintain their autonomy but have support available if required. Some tenants have moved from close by and have families who visit regularly, whilst others have moved from as far as Scotland to enjoy being able to spend their retirement within a Jewish community. It is a few hundred yards from Magen Avot, therefore a natural location with which to form a partnership.

For the last 18 months, a group of volunteers from Magen Avot has undertaken specialist Jewish Care 'Befriending and volunteering training' to develop this relationship. It is a unique project between a United Synagogue community and a Jewish Care Residence and involved Jewish Care creating a tailored training course for our volunteers. We are grateful for the resources and time that Jewish Care has committed.

Thanks go to all our volunteers but in particular to:

Ellie MacDonald, who has run a number of courses and discussion groups to engage tenants. These have included pre Chagim shiurim, quizzes and sessions on Anglo Jewish History.

Rafi Berke, who made himself available weekly on a Monday afternoon for six (!) months for anyone wanting to drink coffee and chat.

Orna Hillman, who has shown infinite patience in becoming our go-to befriender.

Aliza Spizzichino and Yonit Sassoon, who expertly led a wonderful Seder for a majority of the tenants, before returning home and doing it all again!

Sophie Harris and Shira Neville, who have led Y@ma Shabbat morning visits



Wohl Court

every two months, which have been a highlight of the project.

On each occasion I have received moving feedback from both tenants and their relatives complimenting the maturity, warmth and manners of our youth. On these occasions Sophie or Shira adapt their Parsha based discussions to enable our youth to form small group conversations on subjects such as sibling relationships. I have repeatedly witnessed



On each occasion I have received moving feedback from both tenants and their relatives complimenting the maturity, warmth and manners of our youth.

a startling level of skilled listening, questioning and reflecting on behalf of our youth, who rapidly and sensitively adapt to the individual tenant with whom they are engaging. We should be very proud of our youth who have engaged enthusiastically and repeatedly with this project. I am also very grateful to Wohl Court staff who over time have lavished an increasingly abundant Kiddush for these visits.

Over the past year members of our Shul have visited in preparation for Shavuot, blown Shofar (by a very expert Rafi Berke) on Rosh Hashana, shaken Lulav on Succot (Devorah Taylor), shared doughnuts on Chanukah (Y@ma) shared mishloach manot and Seudah on Purim, and broken matzah on Pesach. We continue to invest and experiment with this partnership.

Currently we are exploring having a joint 'bring your own craft' group based at Wohl Court for our own community and those who live there.

If you would be interested in any of these activities, or if you have suggestions for anything else I would be very happy to discuss it. ■



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SHMUEL CHAIM

By Geoffrey Posner



Shmuel Chaim (Sidney Posner) z"l

Shmuel Chaim (Sidney Posner) was a man whose life spanned almost an entire century; he was 97 this past February. He was a man of his generation, having lived through poverty in the East End of London and the blitz during the Second World War. His formal education suffered and as a result he was very much a self-made man.

My father was a tailor, a working man. Over his career, he worked in the schmatta business on four continents. He was a charming man, and women warmed to him instantly. He sought relationships and reached out to people whether on the metro in Paris or London, on the bus in Cape Town, or anywhere else. He was always talking to strangers and could strike up a conversation at will.

One of the key relationships in Judaism is not just that with Hashem but also that with other people – בין אדם לחבירו. My father was a tailor, putting pieces of material together – making connections, in the same way he made connections with those he encountered.

He was also a singer – a person who felt music in his soul. As a boy in the 1930s, he was a choirboy at the Great Synagogue in London, known as Duke's Place. When he met my Italian father-in-law, as neither spoke each other's language, they communicated through singing. His face would light up when he sang, perhaps a Lecha Dodi melody from Friday night services, or Netane Tokef from the High Holy Days, one of his favourites.

My father was outspoken and controversial. He had some interesting ideas, but it could be very difficult to debate him because, how can I put this, he became very wedded to his ideas. He was a man with very strong likes and dislikes. Certain TV programmes were definitely off limits, football was definitely off limits. He had been an evacuee to Isleham for a short period but didn't like the place or the family he had been assigned and missed the East End. His mother brought him back.

On a Sunday sometime in the late 1980s we drove to Isleham to see the

village where Dad had been evacuated. We knocked on the door to the very house to which he had been evacuated, and a man, roughly my father's age, opened the door. It turned out that the family had not moved, and this was the same man who my father had known as a boy during his evacuation. The man realised who we were but did not invite us in, and I got a sense of why Dad had wanted to return to the East End so urgently.

I said at the beginning that we lived on four continents, we were always travelling, and my father was always travelling in his mind.

As a tailor, he explored relationships with other people.

As a singer, he explored his relationship with God.

And as a traveller of the mind, a philosopher, he explored his relationship with himself.

יהי זכרו ברוך – May his memory be for a blessing. ■



He was a man of his generation, having lived through poverty in the East End of London and the blitz during the Second World War. His formal education suffered and as a result he was very much a self-made man.



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FOOD BANK AID



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For information about volunteering:

Email: volunteering@foodbankaid.org.uk

We are a community-led registered charity which raises funds to purchase and deliver food and other essential items to a network of food banks across North London. Our model provides the food banks with the products that they need to offer a varied choice to their guests (attendees).

We welcome debate and work collaboratively with other parties who are involved with food security, especially the managers and trustees of the food banks which we support. Our work with over 30 food banks is based on operating efficiently and in line with

the expectations of food bank guests, volunteers and donors.

Our donation system is designed to prevent over-reliance on Food Bank Aid. We seek evidence from the food banks to which we donate that they have secured other product sources and funds and we collaborate on fundraising activities. We take these steps to enable food banks to develop other support streams to mitigate against them becoming overly reliant on Food Bank Aid. Food banks which receive donations also understand that they need to provide “wrap around” services that enable guests to access advice, benefits and services



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VOLUNTEERING AT FOOD BANK AID, THE HUB, FINCHLEY

By David Berke

I am fortunate to work for a company that promotes social responsibility and provides its employees with an allowance of five days a year for volunteering with charities and other good causes.

My first volunteering day in 2024, was spent with Food Bank Aid in Finchley. Having not volunteered for that charity before, I was curious as to how I would spend the day. But after a short induction I was soon knuckling down and helping the many volunteers who keep the place running.

I was soon in awe of the magnitude of the operation. Food Bank Aid helps over 20,000 people each week who face hunger and food insecurity by providing a network of 32 food bank partners with essentials. They collect, sort, and distribute food and household goods specifically requested by the food banks, including the United Synagogue food bank and supply across North London and Hertfordshire.

From their humble beginnings in 2020, they have – to date – collected and distributed goods worth over £5 million. They ensure that individuals and families across all demographics and communities can access culturally and ethnically relevant, nutritious food, even in the toughest of times. Their belief is that that families and individuals experiencing food poverty deserve the right to dignity and to enjoy meals together, thereby boosting the wellbeing that stems from putting together a healthy and balanced meal for the people they love. That’s an ethos that should resonate strongly with Magen Avot’s initiatives to support and advocate for the interests of those in need, including persecuted groups in the UK and abroad, consistent with Torah principles.



David Berke volunteering at Food Bank Aid




As well as supporting an excellent cause, if you choose the packing and sorting role, you will also benefit from an excellent workout and sleep well that night!

Food bank aid relies on a thriving network of community-based volunteers, who help in a multitude of ways: packing and sorting food donations at the Hub; delivering to food banks; facilitating drop-off points outside their homes; connecting to local schools and partners; and running fundraising events.

My personal experience was that of a day working with some really lovely people, passionate about the charity’s mission. Of these, several were retired and therefore had the opportunity to regularly volunteer at the Hub. But others like me who cannot volunteer on a frequent basis, are welcomed with open arms as well. The charity runs an excellent online sign-up system, which provides flexibility in selecting three-hour slots, of which there are three per day. As well as supporting an excellent cause, if you choose the packing and sorting role, you will also benefit from an excellent workout and sleep well that night! Other less physical roles are of course, also available.

It is a sad reality that we need food banks of such scale and the demand for them seems to be increasing. Volunteering is one way of enacting Torah values through giving back to our local communities and playing our part in helping such a worthwhile cause. ■



By Josh London

HEAT, HUMIDITY & INNOVATION ISRAEL'S M&H DISTILLERY



Israel's M&H Distillery surprised the international drinks industry last year when its "Elements Sherry Cask Single Malt Whisky" was awarded "World's Best Single Malt" at the World Whiskies Awards 2023 competition in London.

For a country with no tradition, history or culture of whisky production, world-class or otherwise, there was no obvious reason for this stunning result. M&H Distillery has harnessed the same irrepressible spirit of enterprise and indomitable can-do chutzpah that enabled Israel to establish itself as a global centre for technology, innovation, agricultural genius, and increasingly world-class wines.

Moreover, in the "The Rest of the World" category in the same competition, M&H Distillery was named "Distiller of the Year", "Craft Producer of the Year", and, for the second year in a row, was named "Brand Innovator of the Year".

For those of you who may not be familiar, M&H, short for "Milk and Honey", is a sleek, compact, urban distillery located amongst the nondescript warehouses in the small, strip-mall-like industrial zone on the border of Tel Aviv and Yaffo, near the Bloomfield Football Stadium. The distillery was established in 2013, the dream project of a small group of six whisky-loving Israeli entrepreneurs. They turned to crowdfunding for their initial capital, raising more than USD 76,000 through an Indiegogo campaign. I was privileged to be one of the original 730 backers! Following construction in 2014, they began distilling spirit in 2015 and opened their visitor centre in 2016. They were able to release their first whisky to market in 2018.

Free from the constraints of any whisky regulation, since Israel had no industry to protect or market to guide, M&H could have bottled literally anything as "single malt whisky." Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed, and from the very beginning, M&H sought to emulate Scotch whisky and adopted—and continues to adhere to—the UK's Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) production regulations and guidelines.

Initially, M&H released new-make spirit and gin to generate some revenue and buzz until they had enough quality aged product to release their first "proper" whiskies. The SWA regulations stipulate at least three years of oak ageing to be called "whisky".

I visited their 10,000 square foot



distillery in late 2016, and even then, despite not yet having bottled any whisky, M&H projected a successful, slick, well-funded corporate image. This cool vibe extended to its visitor centre, which was already busy offering tours, tastings, spirits education sessions, and private events.

The M&H Distillery had also closely consulted with the legendary Dr Jim Swan (1941-2017), the leading independent expert on the drinks industry. One of Swan's core areas of expertise was hot-climate whisky production and maturation. "The trick," Swan once put it, "is to use the local conditions to your advantage—not fight them."

Tel Aviv-Yaffo is, after all, typically very hot and humid for nine months of



From the very beginning, M&H sought to emulate Scotch whisky and adopted—and continues to adhere to—the UK's Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) production regulations and guidelines.



the year, enjoying over 300 days of sun and temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius with 90% humidity. To illustrate the challenge of these conditions: the proverbial Angel's Share, the amount of whisky that evaporates annually during maturation, tends to run around 10-12% in Tel Aviv. By contrast, Scotland's distilleries tend to experience just 1-2% evaporation annually. Swan's guidance for adapting production to the local climate proved crucial to M&H's entire operation.

Swan helped M&H design and equip the distillery to better adapt to the local climate and to better explore how to make the sort of whisky they wanted to make. This involved tweaks and changes all along the line, and they continue to experiment and innovate all the time.

For example, they had to make adjustments to the portion of the distilled spirit that they collect for whisky; they collect the spirit run at a fairly high percentage (70-80%) of alcohol by volume so as to use less of the back-end (the "tails"), for instance, because they know they won't be aging it for very long,

and that part of the spirit run takes longer to purify through interaction with the oak cask.

Indeed, the oak interaction is crucial. The industry believes that up to 70% of a whisky's final characteristics can be attributed to the oak casks used to mature the whisky. This is where Swan's input is most dramatically felt.

"The biggest challenge in rapid or short-term maturation," Tomer Goren, M&H's head distiller explained, "is achieving sufficient oxidation" of the whisky in the cask. One of Swan's great innovations to the industry, and one which remains central to M&H's production, was the development of the STR cask—a used barrel that has been shaved (S), toasted (T) and re-charred (R) to maximise rapid maturation in hot and humid climactic conditions. This re-forms the properties of a used oak cask so that the characteristics of the previous contents won't overwhelm the natural oak properties and similarly won't smother the maturing whisky. This is especially important where there will be a truncated yet rapid maturation

period. In the case of a red wine cask, for example, an STR cask would strive to retain just enough red wine influence to be beneficial while getting rid of the unwanted acids and unwanted flavours that would otherwise overwhelm the maturing spirit or smother the cask's natural oak characteristics.

With the STR cask, explains Goren, Dr Swan's re-charring process makes "the wood's surface resemble crocodile skin, allowing the liquid to move in and out of the wood more freely, thus enhancing oxidation." These STR casks, he notes, "breathe much more than standard casks, infusing the whisky with a lot of flavours in the first year and providing better balance due to the intense oxidation facilitated by this process."

Shaving and charring wood to rejuvenate clapped-out casks is an old industry trick, but Swan's innovation is in leaving just enough residual 'wine effect' in the oak staves whilst reactivating the oak by toasting and re-charring to gain all the benefits without the drawbacks. This precision balancing act is much more science than art and was the product of Swan's extensive research and experimentation.

It is no wonder that M&H refer to Dr Swan on their website as, "A mentor. An inspiration. A friend". M&H continues to innovate in the pursuit of whisky excellence. They mature whisky across five "maturation regions" or climate zones: Dead Sea, Upper Galilee, Jerusalem Mountains, the Negev desert, and Tel Aviv (along the western coastal plain). The pace of new releases is, at times, dizzying, but the quality is increasingly evident in the bottle. Whisky competitions come and go, but it seems clear that the M&H Distillery is here to stay. ■



HAMUSSAF HAMAGEN SUPPLEMENT


Our theme for
HaMussaf this
edition is
PAST, **PRESENT**
and **FUTURE**.

In the **PAST** section we examine those family stories and events which have shaped us, made an impression and which bear re-telling. While personal in content they nonetheless resonate with many families who will have had similar shared experiences.

The **PRESENT** looks at where we are today, those community members who are shaping our identity and looking at how events over the last year have impacted – in particular – some of our students.

In the **FUTURE** section we anticipate the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of this community next year and, more broadly, how artificial intelligence will affect us as humans but also as Jews.





MARCUS SEGAL

LETTERS FROM THE TRENCHES

By Julian Pollard

Some years ago I was winding up the estate of a woman who had died in her late 90s. Among her effects tucked away in a desk drawer, neatly tied up in ribbon, was a collection of hand written letters. Closer examination revealed a treasure trove of some 150 letters sent by this lady's brother from the trenches on the Western Front. I realised they were a precious find which needed to be preserved as a poignant, and rare, record of the life of a Jew in the trenches. So this is the story of a remarkable man, Second Lieutenant Marcus Segal.

Marcus Segal was born on 5th December 1896 in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, later moving to West Hampstead with his family. After attending University College School he went straight into the London Regiment.

His application to join the army, records that Marcus was just 17 years 10 months at the time of enlistment. He was a short man at just 5 ft 2 ¾ inches. Marcus was then commissioned as a temporary Second Lieutenant in the 16th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment on 29th October 1915 (he later became part of the 13th Battalion). By September 1916 Segal had joined the British Expeditionary Force in France and it is from here that he

wrote the letters.

All letters from serving soldiers were subject to Army censorship. They were read by senior officers to ensure no military secrets were inadvertently divulged and offending passages were deleted in heavy black marker pen. As time passed on the Western Front, Marcus was promoted as senior officers were killed round him and he became responsible for censorship of his colleagues post. But none of his own letters and postcards were subject to scrutiny so we read the unexpurgated reality of his life and can understand his experience and emotions at first hand.

Marcus saw himself as a Jewish man (his family were members at Dennington Park Road Synagogue in Hampstead where he was bar mitzvah) and asked his parents to 'let Grandma know I have carrying (sic) on my work as a Good Jew'.

He tried to arrange Jewish services in the trenches with Chaplains Rev Jacob Phillips and Reverend Adler and to participate in Jewish festivals, such as Succot: "I had my last dug-out full of leaves on top in honour of Succot but I dare not put any fruit hanging as fruit would not hang long here...life out here makes one very religious and it makes one think what the Almighty can do...we

get issued with biscuits just like Matza".

In September 1916, Marcus writes:

"My dear parents, I do not want you to worry if you do not hear from me every other day. I am, at present, in a very nice billet here and the only fault is that the Madame is so frightfully religious and I can tell you without doubt she is a very close runner to Grandad".

Marcus was a keen sportsman and was the head of the sports committee for his regiment. He played football and rugby, and went skating and riding. Marcus also enjoyed listening to music on the Gramophone which reminded him of home. He also began to read a lot, telling his sisters he had become an 'avid reader'. Trench life was not all fighting and loss. Soldiers had a lot of time on their hands and were able to play sports, poker, listen to music and write home.

Marcus was very popular with his fellow officers and men and made many friends, possibly because he had a great sense of humour, and he liked to tell stories about his life in the trenches and home. He joked about catching his brother's measles:

"I patted his sweet letter against my face hoping to catch a few germs, but up to the present, no luck".

He recalls a remarkable story following



A picture taken at home during a short period of leave. Note how he has aged!

the capture of a German trench. Some Jewish German soldiers had been davening and sets of tefillin were discovered and assumed by his fellow soldiers to be secret spying devices!

“A strange thing happened, one of the Scots took a prisoner who had a tefillin in his pockets and he rushed to Hdquts (sic) thinking he had found some new signalling device. I did laugh”.

Marcus was a loyal son and brother, he loved his family very much and wrote to them always asking after their health and sending them prayers. “I am sure there is no man in the world could be blessed with better parents than you are to me. I think all day of you just as you must think of me”.

He felt he needed to repay their kindness. “I... only pray to God that I might be returned safely to you and make myself worthy of your tender care”.

Even in his first days on the front line Marcus saw his comrades killed. He told his parents he would write an obituary for one man and publish it in the JC. A month later he wrote: “I am attached for a few days to the R. Engineers and have quite a decent time I expect to be going over the top in a couple of days and with Almighty’s wish I will come back safe and sound”.

In November 1916, he wrote: “The main complaint I have is the lack of good old tomato soup, and various other kosher dishes. I may as well tell you I have not received the chicken with the soup cubes in”. He was sent food parcels from home but inevitably meals such as chicken were inedible by the time they reached him. Instead he pleaded for thick socks to keep him warm.

By March 1917 his thoughts were back to his religious observance. “You might

let Grandpa know I could do with a tzitzis when he gets time to send me one out”. As Pesach 1917 approached he wrote: “I am sure you will miss me no more than I will you on Seder. Please God we will all be together another Seder night and will sing Manashtana with all our musical voices”. A week later he noted how his officers enjoyed trying the matzah sent out by his family.

One of his last letter home dated 13 May 1917 reads:-

*My dearest parents,
I am again dropping you a few lines
hoping this will find you all well as
I am pleased to say this leaves me
at present. We are all feeling much
better now but it is so sad there are
such a lot of old friends missing. I will
send you a photo of the Batt., and
will mark the killed and wounded
with a cross. It is quite possible if we
get out on rest that I will get 4 days in
Paris and if I do I will wire if possible
and go to Hotel Astra. I have not yet
received the gramophone but expect
to in a day or so. I am simply longing
to get home and see all your dear
faces again. I expect there will be a big
change in all of you and expect to see
two lovely sisters.
I am not going to write you anymore
about this horrible show I have been
in, as it does not improve matters in
the least.*

*God bless you.
Your loving son*

Marcus was made responsible for burying his fallen Jewish comrades.

“There were 15 Officers of the Kings L’Pools killed and they were all such top-

hole fellows. I helped to bury several Jews on the battlefield and said the Memorial Service over a good few graves,” he explained. “During these awful moments one’s mind is continually thinking of home and wondering how the parents of the unfortunate fellow will receive the news. When I read on one chap’s prayer book – a small barmitzvah present from his dear Grandad – I can tell you I was crying like a baby”.

He was wounded a couple of times and found himself in the hospital ward reserved for senior officers. With Dukes and Lords sharing the same room he felt quite intimidated. In early 1917 the Regiment received a visit from Viscount General Haig, the head of the army no less. Marcus records this in his letters as a bad sign because such a visit could only mean a new “push” into enemy territory and that usually only led to one bloody outcome. And so it turned out to be.

Heartbreakingly, aged just 20, Second Lieutenant Marcus Segal was killed by a shell at Arras on 19th June 1917. Reading what was to be his last letter home is deeply emotional. He was still full of hope and optimism the day before he was killed.

“I am keeping quite well despite pretty rough times. We expect to be relieved in a few days’ time and then hope to go out for a week or twos rest”.

The last record is a short note from his batman Private Edwin Stone (a kind of unpaid helper which officers had in those days). This expresses his deep affection and respect for Marcus Segal. He wrote to Mrs Segal:

“It is with deep regret that I am writing to inform you of your son’s death. I cannot find words that will express the sorrow of both my comrades and myself. He was respected by every man in the Battalion. He was buried at Arras by a gentleman of his own denomination”.

Of the 50,000 Jews who served King and Country, 2,500 died in battle and a further 9,000 were wounded. ■

[Postscript:- The Jewish Chronicle picked up the story and did a two-page spread on the find. A couple of days later I was contacted by a major collector of Jewish servicemen’s war memorabilia who informed me that he held Marcus’s war medals. The correspondence and Marcus’s medals were reunited and are now preserved for public viewing at the Jewish Military Museum, now located at Raymond Burton House, 129-131 Albert Street, London NW1 7NB. See:- <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk>]

MY FATHER, HARRY SPITZ: 1900-1972



By Shirley Gamsu

My dear father, Harry Spitz, was born in 1900 in the village of Shkud ("Skoudos"), Lithuania some five kilometres from the Latvian border.

History of Shkud

Jewish settlement in Shkud began in the 17th century. On the eve of the Second World War, the Jewish population numbered about 2,200, almost 50% of the population. The Jews worked in trade, agriculture, transportation and crafts, notably in the manufacture of shoes. By 1931, 80% of the stores and businesses in Shkud were Jewish-owned.

The Jews established their own religious and educational institutions as well as active youth groups, including a Maccabi Sports Society. The youth were also given a grounding in Zionism. Other organisations included an orchestra, choir and drama club producing plays in Yiddish. Jewish doctors provided medical services.

The largest city nearest Shkud was the Latvian port of Libau (currently known as Liepaja), situated on the Baltic Sea. Prior to the onset of the Second World War, over 7,000 Jews lived in the city. This represented about 13% of the total population. Libau had a lively Jewish community with many schools, a yeshiva, cultural institutions and synagogues.

Harry's Story

Harry was the eldest of seven children, although one boy died in childhood. He enjoyed a close relationship with his maternal grandparents who lived across the road. He would sit on the wide windowsill and listen to his grandfather's stories.

He read about Josephus, not really appropriate for a young child but this

encouraged his interest in Jewish history. He accompanied his grandfather to shul on Shabbat while his father attended an early minyan so he had the day to relax. His grandfather was a tanner, and my father loved watching the different processes for leather to be made into shoes.

He went to cheder where he learnt to read Hebrew. He hated it and would run away and hide. The second teacher was better and then he learnt Chumash. Thirty to forty children would attend and at times the Tsarist government

would inspect the schools to prevent overcrowding. Forewarned, the children would jump out of the windows and the inspectors would only find two or three children.

The family landholding was about four acres, behind the house with fruit trees and vegetables and potatoes, beetroot, cabbages, cucumbers were put in barrels for pickling and milk from cows. He hated warm milk.

Rural village life was simple and pleasures the same. In the winter, my father enjoyed skating on their pond. In the summer children would swim nude in the small tributary of the river. Before 1914 there was no electric lighting in the village so he had to take a lantern to school in the winter.

But he recalled that the architecture of the main shul was magnificent and the Aron Kodesh was hand-carved. Indeed the records show the Old Synagogue in Shkud was famous all over Lithuania. It was one of the three oldest synagogues



A typical street scene in Shkud



The Old Synagogue in Shkud

in the country, built of wood, and approximately 15 metres tall.

The Ark was very ornate with wooden carvings. Hundreds of guests came on special trips to see this Ark. In the Old Synagogue, people prayed only from Pesach until after Sukkot. Because of its height, it was impossible to install a chimney for a heating stove, and because of the cold, people were forced to pray in the study house next to the synagogue. The Ark's artistic carvings reached all the way to the arched ceiling. On both sides of the Ark were delicate wooden carvings that were especially beautiful: lions, deer, doves, apples, pears, and flowering trees of all kinds. A priestly crown and a kingly crown and the two tablets, together with all the shapely contours – all created a wonderful wholeness and beautiful harmony.

My father was a finicky eater so when he had lessons at a poor rabbi's house, his mother sent food which he would eat there.

Lithuania was under Russian control, and in 1912 the Russian government opened a school with lessons even on Saturday. His mother obtained permission for him not to write on Saturday. He couldn't read then, so he had to learn the story by heart, and if he was stopped he couldn't continue. After the first term his grades rapidly improved but in August 1914 World War 1 broke out and his schooling stopped. As the German advance across Eastern Europe continued, the Russians retreated; the German army occupied Skud and were "quite decent." The Russian school was closed and he had private lessons

Life was in turmoil. The children dressed in two suits of clothing and had their names sewn in their clothes in case they got lost. There was often trouble on market days in the village with arguments over the sale of alcohol where a few traders held a monopoly and could control prices.

Jewish married men gave their wives a conditional get divorce in case they were conscripted and didn't return

My grandfather had sold full-length boots to the Russian army and when the Russians began to withdraw he hid them, but a Russian soldier discovered them and threatened to shoot my grandfather although he showed the receipt that the boots were for Russian soldiers. The soldier was illiterate. Fortunately he took them to his commanding officer who could read it and released my grandfather.

Fortunately during the war they had



The 7th of Kislev 1936. In memory of the member Reb Moische Taitz. The Khevre Germara in Shkud says farewell upon his aliya to our Holy Land.



Inter-war group in Shkud.

vegetables and fruit which they grew themselves. They bought wheat but had a windmill to make flour. Sugar was short.

There was compulsory labour and on Friday he even had to weed and was not released until the job was done. He was driven to tears because he had never desecrated Shabbat before.

When the German army arrived, as he could read German he became a messenger to peasants who were required to deliver butter, eggs, etc. to the Germans. This made my dad unpopular, so his grandfather asked for him to be excused as he wasn't well.

By 1917 the tide of war had turned against Germany, but after the Russian Revolution in November, Lithuania became independent and life for the Jews improved until compulsory military service was ordered by the Lithuanians. In the Lithuanian army the conscripts

were so illiterate that they didn't know the difference between right and left – straw was left and hay was right.

Now aged 17 he became eligible for army call up but the pupils at the school he attended were exempt from military service. When his school was closed he risked conscription so he pretended to be ill with piles and still studied at home. Police came to the house but his young brother forewarned him and he went to bed. Eventually, dressed as a girl, he was taken by his father to Leibow in Latvia where he matriculated. He took extra lessons and within a year passed all his subjects – only Latvian was hard but the teacher helped him.

After the First World War, Lithuania and Latvia achieved independence. Initially the situation of the Jews was relatively stable. Some Jews were even elected to the Lithuanian parliament.

PAST

There was an active Jewish life in these countries. The children attended Jewish schools, played sports and were able to maintain their religious practices. This changed in the late 1920s, when antisemitism once more reared its ugly head and emigration of Jews from Lithuania and Latvia began in earnest.

In 1921 my father matriculated and wanted to attend university in Germany as he spoke German. He remembered attending an open-air concert in Breslau and hearing Mendelsohn's Hebrides Overture

Despite discrimination against Jews, Giessen University in Germany admitted him as a student of philosophy but he attended many diverse lectures. There he made friends with Ostjuden (Jews from Eastern Europe) and enjoyed life and theatre. He started attending medical lectures and the dean of the medical faculty encouraged him to apply to study medicine instead of philosophy, and he was accepted. He passed his exams but changed to complete his medical degree in Leipzig. Interestingly, female students were refused admission to the medical school.

He described the shocking inflation problems in Germany, where half a dollar would last him for five days.

Horrors of the Holocaust

On June 20, 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. In view of its close proximity to Germany, Lithuania was immediately occupied. By June 28, Shkud was under total Nazi control.

On August 15, several large pits were dug at the foot of Alka Hill, which was 1.5 kilometres from Dimitravas. The women with children were taken in groups, forced to undress and then pushed into the pits. When some tried to resist, they were viciously beaten. Many of the women and children were killed by shooting, but when the local gunmen ran out of bullets, the remaining innocent victims were just thrown into the pits and buried alive.

Local Lithuanians, many of whom had been neighbours of the Jews, perpetrated these barbaric acts. After the war ended in 1945, a Soviet commission investigated what happened on Alka Hill. According to the official reports, 395 women, 94 teenagers and 31 babies and infants were killed in Alka Hill. In 289 of the women and children, no gunshot wounds were found. They had been buried alive.

In March 1964, a trial was held in



Holocaust memorial

Klaipeda, Lithuania, for the murderers of the Jews of Shkud. It emerged that the organiser and head of the gang was a Catholic priest and teacher from a school in Shkud. He subsequently escaped to the US, where he lived out the rest of his life peacefully. The Soviet Union wanted to extradite him for public trial, but this was the era of the Cold War. The Americans would not sanction his extradition.

A Happy Ending

My father had family in London and after learning English passed his medical exams, and in 1932 obtained work as a GP in Northampton where he stayed for five years. He was thrilled to obtain a British passport before joining family in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1937, who had financially supported him during his studies and would not let him leave again.

Later, my family and I left Johannesburg for a new life in London. I obtained a British passport – but not for sporting prowess like Zola Budd!

My father died in 1972 in Venice but was buried in Johannesburg and later reburied in Jerusalem next to my mother.



Burial site

My brother Irving revisited Shkud, but like countless shtetls in Eastern Europe there remained no remnants of the vibrant pre-war Jewish life. ■

[ED:- Harry's story is also recorded by Shirley's brother Irving here:- <https://www.jpost.com/jerusalem-report/uncovering-a-family's-tragic-holocaust-story-688896>]

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PAST

THE ARKUSH FAMILY AT WAR

By Deborah Myer

My Father, David Arkush – ‘Chief Rabbi of Siam’

At the start of WW2, my father, David Arkush, signed up for the army, aware that every man would be needed to fight. His family history stretched back to 1770 in Kalisz, Poland, where many of his family still resided.

He was posted to Singapore, a quiet backwater, where he worked in the hospital as a medical officer and dentist. Then Japan entered the war. The bombing started, the Japanese came nearer and nearer, and one morning he came on shift to find that the Japanese had overrun the hospital and bayoneted the patients and staff. He felt guilty about his survival for the rest of his life.

He was rounded up, sent to Changi Prison for several months and then transported to Chungkai Hospital Camp at the Bridge on the River Kwai.

The POWS were forced to work on the infamous Burma Thailand railway through the jungle. They were all systematically starved and beaten by vicious guards. Diseases such as beriberi, malaria, pellagra, dysentery and cholera were rife.

The Japanese had decided to build a 415-kilometre railway from Thailand to southern Burma to ensure supply routes to their troops. All but 50 kilometres of the route was across rugged terrain covered in dense, malarial jungle. It would require building more than 600 bridges as well as hundreds of viaducts, embankments and cuttings.

Conditions in the camps were horrendous, particularly at the more remote sites where resupply of food, equipment and medical supplies was difficult.

The mortality rate was very high, particularly among the Asian labourers. More than a quarter of Allied POWs would die by the end of war and nearly



David Arkush

half of the Asian labourers. The main causes of death were maltreatment, starvation, overwork and disease.

The work itself was gruelling and dangerous. Apart from building bridges, it involved clearing jungle, then constructing embankments or cuttings on steep hills to ensure the gradient of the track was gentle enough for the trains.

My dad's upbringing as a chazan's son inspired him. He gathered the Jewish

boys together and acted as their minister, nursing them, encouraging them and sharing memories of home and family.

He held Friday night services in the jungle and tried to keep abreast of the Yom Tov dates. On Pesach 1943, he organised a rudimentary Seder, and in lieu of matzos and wine, he managed to provide rice cakes made from sago flour, charoses from grated coconut, rice and coffee, maror made from mint leaves, and



Army Group photograph



Building the Bridge over the River Kwai – contemporary sketch

eggs made from spinach, rice wine and bananas. It was a vital taste of home for the 50 or so POWs and injured men lifted from their hospital beds on stretchers to attend.

He managed to keep his siddur and tefillin with him and each morning would look at the mountains and say, “Esoh Ayni ... I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills” to keep his spirits up. He never lost hope of eventual freedom, even when he had to bury the Jewish boys. He later said that religion was very helpful, “because you felt that you were not alone, that you

were being protected, that you would come home, G-d was with you”.

He also collected a small amount of money from the Jewish boys once a week so that injured men who could not work would have food, because if you did not work you would not get any money.

As a medical man, he was allowed out of the camp to purchase rudimentary medical supplies at the local village from a local merchant called Boon Pong, later revealed to be a British agent who played a crucial part in victory. Two Japanese sentries accompanied him. While a

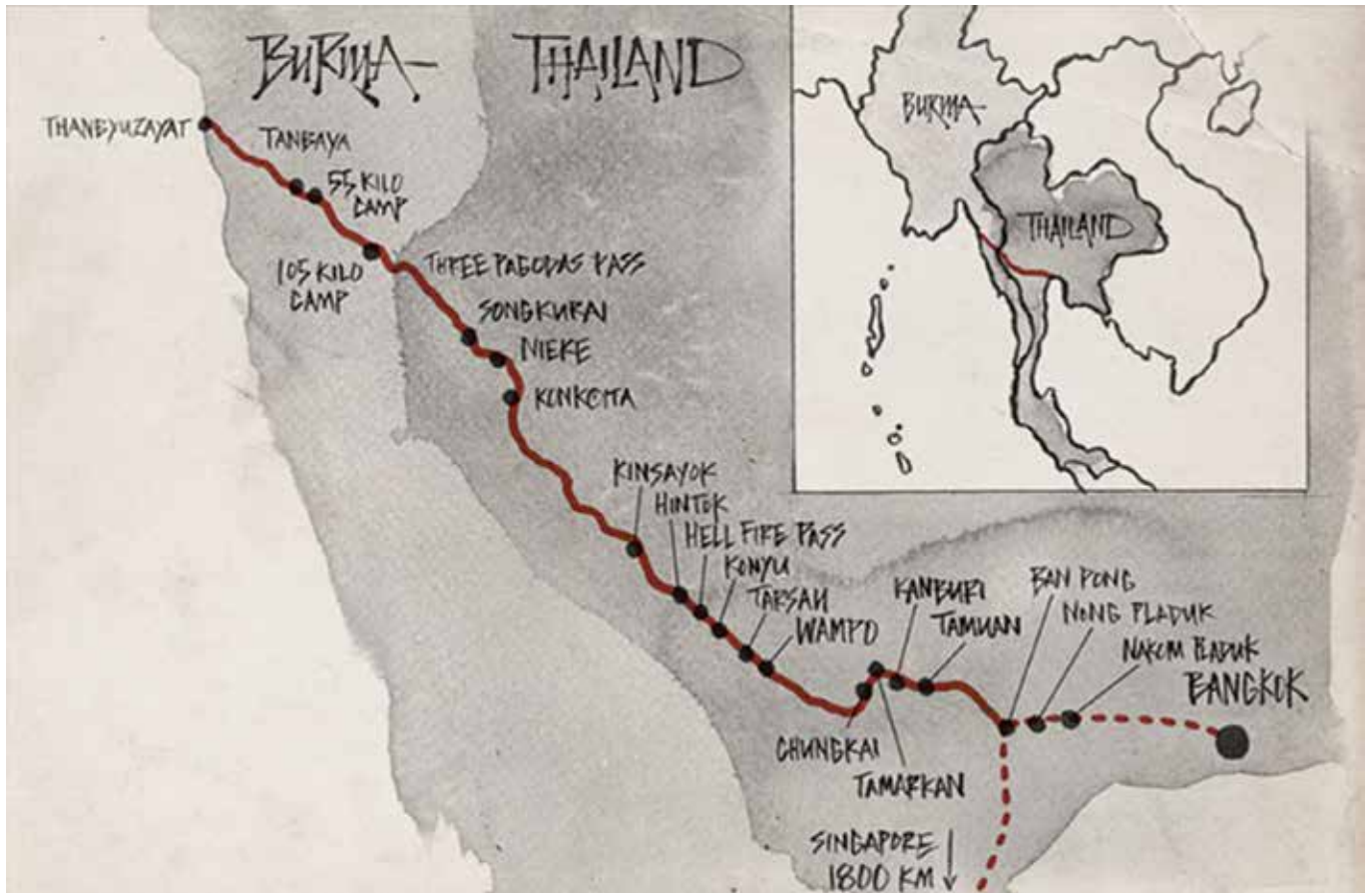


Sketch of David Arkush by artist G Old in Thailand 1943

diversion was organised by Boon Pong’s wife, Dad’s rucksack would be filled with supplies, including radio parts concealed in tins of jam. Walking back to the camp between the two guards, Dad was always aware of the fate that would meet him if he was discovered. Thank G-d that never happened.

The railway was completed in October 1943. The Japanese were able to use it to supply their troops in Burma despite the repeated destruction of bridges by Allied bombing.

More than 90,000 Asian civilians and



Map of the Burma Railway system



Soldiers constructing the railway

16,000 prisoners died on the railway, The end of captivity came suddenly in August 1945 when the atomic

bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. That saved the lives of three quarters of a million POWs, including my

father. He had a growing feeling that Rosh Hashana was near, and felt a desperate need to be with other Jews. He found his

“

He returned home to his dental surgery, met my mother and together they spent 70 years as members of Finchley and Hampstead Garden AJEX, always working for others, including volunteering in hospitals on December 25th to give staff a day off. He lived to be 100.

way to Bangkok, located the shul there and recited the Haftorah there on the second day, a free man.

His feelings when he learned that all his Kalisz family, over 100 people, had died in the Holocaust, together with what he had seen and suffered, were overwhelming.

He returned home to his dental surgery, met my mother and together they spent 70 years as members of Finchley and Hampstead Garden AJEX, always working for others, including volunteering in hospitals on December 25th to give staff a day off. He lived to be 100.

He always joked about his war experiences and we referred to him as the “Chief Rabbi of Siam”.

In the 1980s, the detailed stories of WW2 in the Far East became of interest to others, and he told us the full story. In 2004 we made an emotional family trip to the Kwai with him, he retraced all his steps including the fateful path from Boon Pong’s shop to the back gate of the camp.

This is what my dad said:

“I found the graves of the three Jewish soldiers I had buried and also those of other Jews re-buried there after the war. I began to say Kaddish and we all wept unashamedly. I wept not only for the 2,000 buried there but for my youth which I had lost and for the sheer futility of it all. They had died building a railway of which little remains.

“The peace and quiet of the place made



Bamboo dentist chair made by British POW's

a very great emotional impact on us and yet, in the silence, I could still hear the strains of “The Last Post” as we buried the worn-out victims who had died in the camp hospital in misery and degradation. It was hard to believe such awful things had happened in this peaceful place.”

A full account of his experiences and others is in the book “*Under the Heel of the Bushido*” by Martin Sugarman.

Shirley Arkush, My Mum – The Evacuee

To complete the story, while my dad was a Japanese POW, my mum, Shirley Arkush, who was 16 years younger, was being affected by the war at home. Her family had come from Kiev, ‘Little Russia’, in the 1890s, and her father had served in the army in WW1, in the Motorcycle Machine Gunners Unit, though she did not find this out until she herself was in her 70s.

Born in Clapton in 1930, she was brought up in Walthamstow, then a Jewish area, and her father was a founding member of Lea Bridge Road Shul.

At the start of the war, the family were on holiday in Bognor and thought it would be safer than London. She then stayed in Brighton where her grandmother lived but fear of a coastal invasion sent them up to Derbyshire and then back to London. Sleeping in air raid shelters and losing their house to bombing, they went back to Brighton, and the whole school was then evacuated to Honley in Yorkshire.

My mum and her sister had the good fortune to be billeted with a gentleman farmer’s family. The family looked after the girls devotedly and formed a strong attachment with my grandparents, who visited them when possible. They exchanged many emotional letters. My mum was traumatised by all the changes in her life, but loved the countryside and being on a farm, feelings that we all share to this day. The farmer also hosted two orphaned boys from the Holocaust, helped them to keep kosher, and settled them in England.

After two years Mum came back to London to a flat in Mulberry Close in Hendon and carried on sleeping in the shelters due to the German V2 rocket attacks. She went to Copthall School and remembers doing her matriculation exams in shelters dug under Copthall Playing Fields.

When she was 17, her father died, having been in poor health for many years. My mum was forced to leave her architect training and had to drive the van, stocking up her family’s tobacco shops. Eventually she met my dad, married and became a full-time wife and mother. She always felt she missed out on a good education and career.

The farmer’s daughter married a Scottish soldier billeted in Honley and went to live in Edinburgh. She became the closest thing to being a sister for my mum, after my aunt died young, with all their shared memories. They and their daughter have kept in touch with all of us for 80 years, hosting us, sharing our simchas and always supporting Jews and Israel, and visiting the Jewish sites of interest wherever they go on holiday. ■

ARTEFACTS FROM THE HOLOCAUST

By Simon Bentley

These artefacts, presented courtesy of the Artifacts Retrieval Department at Yad Vashem, inform us about a specific part of the Holocaust period. These items, which are part of the Yad Vashem collection, are unique: they characterise events that occurred during the Holocaust and hold emotional value. Each artefact has a story to tell.

A hollow wooden duck

A hollow wooden duck that was used to smuggle documents. The toy was used by Judith Geller in the course of her activities in the French Resistance, in her guise as a social worker visiting children.

In the course of her activities in the French underground, Judith Geller (or as she was known by her pseudonym - Jacqueline Gauthier) received a hollow toy duck containing hidden documents. The duck was added to a collection of toys used by Judith under her assumed identity as a children's social worker. The duck was made by "Cor" who brought people from Holland to France and was connected to both the French and Dutch undergrounds. Judith received the duck from him after she was arrested with a package of documents belonging to the underground that miraculously was not discovered by the Germans.

Born in Metz, Judith was 17 years old when the war broke out. In 1941, her older brother Joel was arrested and sent to the Pithiviers camp, and later deported to Auschwitz, where he perished. Judith's parents and younger brother hid in occupied Paris while Judith walked around "openly" with false papers under the assumed name of Jacqueline

Gautier. She worked for the underground, smuggling documents and false papers. Judith also organised false papers for her mother, and a hiding place for her parents and brother. During the war, Judith continued to see her beloved,



The wooden duck used by the French Underground for smuggling documents. Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection loaned by Judith (Geller) Marcus, Petach Tikva, Israel.

Alfred Marcus (a good friend of her elder brother Joel), who was imprisoned in a detention camp for British subjects. After the war, Judith married Alfred and together they immigrated to Israel.

The shofar

The shofar was made in advance of Rosh Hashana 5704 (1943) by Moshe (Ben-Dov) Winterter who was an inmate in the camp and worked in the metal workshop of the armaments factory.



Shofar (Ram's Horn) made under perilous conditions in the forced labour camp Skarżysko-Kamienna in Poland in 1943. Yad Vashem Collection, Jerusalem, Israel. Donation, Moshe (Winterter) Ben-Dov, Bnei Brak, Israel.

The idea of making a shofar was initiated by the Radoszyce Rebbe, Rabbi Yitzhak Finkler, who was also an inmate in the camp. He yearned to fulfil the commandment of blowing the shofar on the Jewish New Year in

order to arouse the Almighty's mercy, particularly at this time. Finding the horn of a ram, as required by Jewish law for the making of a shofar, was a far from simple task. A Polish guard was bribed, and brought a horn to the camp, but it turned out to be the horn of an ox. Only in exchange for a further bribe did he bring a ram's horn. The Rabbi approached Moshe Winterter, whom he knew from Piotrkow, and asked him to make the shofar. At first, he did not agree. Preparing an item that was not an armament in the metal

workshop, or even carrying something from the workshop to the barracks, carried with it the penalty of immediate death. In spite of the danger, Moshe carried out the task and on the eve of the holiday brought the shofar to the Rabbi. Word spread, and on the holiday eve the inmates gathered for prayers, and to hear the sounds of the shofar.

Moshe kept the shofar with him throughout his incarceration in Skazysko-Kamienna, and managed to keep it with him even when he was transferred to the camp at Czestochowa, but when he was transferred from there to Buchenwald, it remained in Czestochowa. When the camp was liberated, the shofar was passed on to the local Jewish community and later taken to the United States. Moshe immigrated to Israel after the war. In 1977 he assisted in the shofar's transfer to Yad Vashem for safekeeping.

Preserving the traditions of an ancient community

The town of Zakynthos is located on the island of the same name, the westernmost of the Greek islands. From 1482-1797, Zakynthos was under Venetian rule, then British, and since 1864, it has formed part of Greece. The presence of a Jewish community there is documented as far back as the Venetian period. From May 1941 through September 1943, the island was subject to Italian rule. When Italy surrendered to the Allies, the area was then taken over by the Nazis. The island was liberated in September 1944.

A reign of terror ensued as soon as the Nazis took power. The mayor, Lucas Carrer, consistently evaded the Nazis' demands for lists of Jewish inhabitants, and Carrer and Archbishop Christomo Dmitri were eventually successful in saving the island's Jews from deportation. They found the Jews hiding places in the neighbouring villages, and only gave the Nazis their own names, as opposed to a complete list. Despite the Nazis' tempting offers of food and money to anyone who would report a Jew's location, none of the inhabitants were prepared to betray his or her Jewish compatriots. According to further testimonies, the commander of the partisan organisation on the island, Dimitri Catvatis also sided with the Jews, and warned the Nazi commander of the island against deporting them.

The community of Zakynthos is the only Greek Jewish community that was saved in its entirety from extermination. After the war, most of Zakynthos's Jews immigrated to Eretz Israel. In 1984, Molcho, the last Jew living on the island, died and was buried in the local cemetery.

The Matza family – parents Moshe and Esther (née Porta), and seven of their nine children – Rosa, Shulamit, Devora, Michal, Dino, Avraham and Herzl – were hidden by Stephanos and Panayiota Villiardo in the village of Katastari. Their son Shlomo immigrated to Eretz Israel before the war. Their son Aharon, who left the island and moved to his wife's hometown in Corfu, was deported to Auschwitz together with the rest of Corfu's Jews, and perished.

In an effort to maintain his large family while in hiding, Moshe spent each day going to different villages and selling



Moshe Matza's circumcision kit, used in Zakynthos during the war years. Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection. Gift of Michal (Matza)Albela, Dvora (Matza) Levi and Sheila (Albela) Cohen, Israel

haberdashery from his traveling stall with the help of his older children.

Moshe, who served as a cantor and mohel in his community and in the Jewish communities of the Greek Isles, continued, fuelled by a sense of mission, to fulfil these duties during the Nazi occupation, in spite of the grave danger.

After his death during the festival of Chanukah, in December 1944, his daughters Michal and Devorah kept his



A Yellow Star of David Button, which the Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear in 1941 with the onset of the German occupation. Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection. Gift of Sonia Koperwaser Shem-Tov.

circumcision instruments and brought them to Israel when they immigrated.

A Yellow Star of David Button

Sonia Koperwaser was the oldest child born to Aaron and Simcha in 1930. Her younger sister Milka was born a year later. The family lived in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 1941, a curfew was imposed on the Jews, permitting them to leave their homes for only two hours each day. In addition, every Jew was ordered to sew a yellow star button on his/her lapel.

Yellow stars were distributed to

the Jews in Bulgaria by the KEV, the "Commissariat for Jewish Questions," and the KEV also saw to it that it was worn by all Jews. However, it encountered some unexpected difficulties in carrying out its tasks. First, privileged and converted Jews were exempt from wearing these stars, which were the smallest Jewish stars produced for this purpose in Europe. Second, factories were not manufacturing the stars as quickly as the Germans wanted (by November 1942, only 20% of stars had been produced).

Instead of sewing the button onto her clothes, Sonia's uncle pinned the button onto his niece's clothes. One day Sonia was caught by a policeman who beat her for wearing a pin with the yellow star rather than sewing the entire Star of David on her clothing with yellow thread.

In 1943, the Jews of Sofia were deported to the peripheral areas of Bulgaria, leaving behind their possessions and their homes. Sonia's family moved to the city of Pazardzhik and from there continued onto Kyustendil. At first the family slept in a school building in Kyustendil and later managed to rent a room in the house of a local family. Sonia's family remained there until September 1944, then the Russians entered Bulgaria and those who had been deported could return to their homes.

At the end of the war when the Koperwaser family returned to Sofia, Sonia met a man named Chaim Shem-Tov. They wanted to immigrate to Israel and decided to get married on the morning of their trip in order to ease their permits for immigration (aliyah). They boarded the ship "Pan-York" and sailed to the land of Israel. When they reached the shores, Sonia and Chaim were arrested by British soldiers, along with the other immigrants on the ship, and were sent to Cyprus. They were in Camp Number 70 in Cyprus for about a year and a half when their first child, Lily, was born. When Lily was a year and a half old, the family finally immigrated to Israel.

Sonia never forgot her story from World War II and kept the Jewish star with her throughout her life. This item, which signified humiliation during a difficult period in her life, was nevertheless something that she found worthy of saving and later donating to Yad Vashem, for others to learn about a piece of her story and the Jews of Bulgaria. ■



MY LIFE IN ISRAEL DURING THE WAR

By *Libby Maurer*

I am currently living in a shared apartment with three other girls in Katamon (Jerusalem) after a year in sem, followed by a year as a bat sherut and then as an assistant in a gan, and now working full-time in a hair salon.

Living in Israel during the ongoing war has been a challenging and transformative experience. The recent missile attack from Iran was particularly terrifying for me and my roommates. Without a bomb shelter (mamad) in my apartment, we had to run to a nearby mamad when the sirens went off. I spent about an hour there, anxiously waiting for the missiles and booms to stop. It was a miracle that none of the missiles reached any civilian areas that night.

Adjusting to a new normal during the war has been difficult due to the uncertainty of the situation. However, despite the chaos I slowly managed to get into a good routine working in a gan this last year. Reflecting on my time last year as a bat sherut working in an integrated school in Jerusalem, both of these experiences have been fulfilling and eye-opening to me. Caring for the children of soldiers while they were away fighting gave me a strong sense of contribution. During the first few months of the war when there were ongoing sirens, we often had to stay in the gan's bomb shelter, which was frightening. However, it was important to stay as calm as possible for the children's sake.

I have recently started working in a hair salon in Jerusalem, pursuing my career in hairdressing, an opportunity I am immensely grateful for, and one that has given me a sense of stability amid the uncertainty. A lot of people who come into the studio have husbands, siblings, cousins and friends who are currently in the army, and it is an opportunity for them to be able to relax and disconnect from the chaos around them. No matter where you work or go in Israel, there will always be someone with a story connected to the war.

The support from my family in Israel has been invaluable during these times. Their presence and reassurance have helped me navigate the emotional and mental toll of living through the conflict. Additionally, the local community has been incredibly supportive, providing a network of solidarity and resilience.

Despite the hardships, what keeps me going is the hope for a peaceful future and the strength drawn from my community and family. I am determined to continue my training and make a positive impact in my field, no matter the circumstances.

To Magen Avot, I want to express my gratitude for your davening and support. Your solidarity means the world to those of us living here in Israel. Continue your support and stay informed about the realities we all face. Together, we can hope for a brighter and safer future for all. ■



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MY STUDY YEAR IN ISRAEL

By Ariella Ovits

In August 2023 I arrived at Midreshet Harova, a seminary located in The Old City of Jerusalem. One of the most beneficial aspects of my time at Harova was its location. Living in the Old City meant that whether I was having either a good or bad day, I could simply run down to the Kotel to daven and speak to Hashem. I experienced tens of thousands of people gathering at the Kotel for various occasions throughout the year, including Selichot, chagim, and communal prayers to end the war and release our hostages. As a resident of the Old City, I was privileged to experience several ceremonies (tekes) honouring our soldiers. Soldiers were transported straight from serving in Gaza to the Kotel where they were reunited with their families and honoured in a special ceremony. Hearing our soldiers recite Birkat HaGomel together was really touching and something I will never forget.

Harova has some amazing teachers. I had the opportunity to learn from many exceptional educators teaching a wide variety of subjects. Harova offers students a choice of subjects to study and this autonomy made me feel more responsible and accountable for my future studies and increase my spiritual connection to Hashem. Selecting the teachers and their respective teaching styles for each subject also helped me to really enjoy my learning of subjects that I hadn't always enjoyed previously.

Experiencing war during my gap year impacted my "gap year experience". Some trips were cancelled, schedules were altered, and teachers had to leave for military service, but looking back, I realise that this challenging time enriched my experience in ways I never could have anticipated. We were able to contribute and offer chessed in multiple ways, including packing at supply centres and food banks, baking for smachot for displaced families, providing daycare for kids from families living in the Old City whose parents serving in the army, tying tzizit for soldiers.

My favourite activity was visiting farms



across the country to assist farmers in harvesting and tending to their crops. These outings provided an opportunity for students and some teachers to do some hands-on work outdoors and without fail, the farmers would generously give us some of the fresh produce to take home – such a treat! Beyond the enjoyment of these outings, I valued listening to each farmer's story and understanding how they were impacted by the war. I felt very touched when farmers expressed their gratitude for the help we gave them in meeting the orders they received from shops for supplies. Their heartfelt words, such as "you have given me oxygen for the week", truly made all our hard work feel rewarding.

Spiritually, living in the holiest place in the world during such a challenging time of terror and uncertainty transformed my spiritual experience. It was not merely a privilege, but also a responsibility. Our rabbis would regularly remind us that our learning and prayers were no longer solely for our own benefit, but also for the well-being of our country. This added an extra layer of significance and intention to everything we did. It allowed me to feel like I was contributing, even though I wasn't on the front lines.

Upon reflection, I feel far more connected to my Judaism and Israel as a result of my amazing experiences. It has

given me added purpose as I commence the next phase in my life - university education. ■



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PRESENT

ISRAEL GAP YEAR

2023/4

By Akiva Ehreich

Israel has always been a focal point of my upbringing, with my grandfather being crowned a UJIA Legend who helped to raise over £100 million for them throughout his career.

After completing high school and with the guidance of Raffi Maurer, who is at Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, the closest yeshiva to the Kotel, situated in the Kotel Plaza, I decided to spend my next year there. Immediately, I fell in love with the country and during Ellul, with Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and the daily demonstrations by the Kotel also with the culture and people – it really felt like home.

Right from the get-go, I started spending Shabbasos at the home of Family Avihod – one of my mother’s best friends. They were one of the warmest, most welcoming families I’ve ever had the pleasure of staying at. Moreover they selflessly host Israeli soldiers who have no home of their own in Israel, so get “adopted” and looked after throughout their army service.

I met scores of incredible soldiers, and this got me thinking about my own army plans. After talking to many of my new soldier friends I decided that after yeshiva I was going to join them.

At 7am on October 7th the whole yeshiva was in for Yom Tov, and we were all awoken by the sirens. It was roughly time for shul, so we proceeded like normal. I went to the Yeshiva roof with a few friends during a break and we immediately saw five missiles racing through the sky followed by sirens, and shortly after, they were blown up right above our heads. This repeated multiple times for the next half hour.

I walked back from shul and as I walked into the Rovo Square I saw a thick ring of smoke around the entire perimeter of the square from a fighter jet doing a sharp turn a few metres above the tall buildings, and I knew this was more than just a few rockets. Something bigger was happening.

As I approached my dorm building I saw my madrich rushing to put on his army gear, and he informed me of the terrorist infiltrations and how we’d declared war on Gaza. With that he ran off.

Shortly afterwards, I walked from the Old



City to the Avihods’ for lunch, and group after group of boys in Shabbos clothes ran past me with huge army bags. I noticed buses were running, which is unheard of on Yom Tov, and when I arrived at my lunch hosts they’d just got out of the car after driving their adopted soldiers to the bus stops where buses were to take them to their respective bases.

At this point in the day, we still knew very little about what had happened but we knew it wasn’t safe to remain outdoors – and a large group of my friends were now about to go to war.

There was so much uncertainty to the point that the Avihods wanted to drive me back to yeshiva on Yom Tov. Although I declined the offer, it was definitely a big mindset check.

That night was Simchas Torah for me, and friends keeping just one day had started sharing all the tragedies of the past day. Everyone was so broken-hearted, but our rosh yeshiva sat us down and told us how we have an obligation on Simchas Torah to dance and be happy, just like when his son tragically passed away on Shabbos, so that’s what we’re going to do.

Immediately after Yom Tov two things happened. Firstly, there was a tangible change in every person in the country. There were no individuals, just one unified

country working towards one goal and the achdus was like I’ve never seen and probably will never see again. People making tzitzit for soldiers, Shabbos food packages, barbecues, blood donations, tens of thousands gathering for Tehillim at the Kotel, and fundraisers for army gear. Everything and anything was being done for the war effort. This was the case for many months following.

Unfortunately, the second thing to happen was a large number of the boys in my yeshiva left and went back to America, where a lot of them stayed for the rest of the year.

Obviously this kickstarted my year into a different gear. Alumni were coming back to yeshiva confused as to why the boys had matured so markedly after only a couple of months, and it was really due to the new feeling of importance for our learning. One saw boys sitting all day, every day, in the beis, skipping all breaks, just to get that extra learning in.

The rest of the year saw us visiting the National Cemetery at Har Hertzl numerous times for various funerals including Daniel Perez’s, which was one of the most powerful moments throughout my year, seeing how the public treats a fallen soldier by coming out to his funeral from all over the country in heavy rain.

About six months after October 7th, the yeshiva organised a trip down to the Gaza border where we were shown around some of the yeshuvim by people who were there there on October 7th, and shown exactly what happened and where the terrorists got in, where they went and what happened on each street and house. We ended the day at the Nova festival site, where we could hear heavy artillery fire from the war front less than a mile away; it really awakened us, a bit like a shofar, to the situation at hand and what was really going on.

In summary, my year has been incredible, and I’ve taken so much from my time spent in yeshiva and in Israel this year. My time in the army is something I now look forward to more than ever, seeing now that I’ll really be impacting the country more than I could have ever imagined. ■

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.

Book Club meets again on Wednesday, 30th October 2024 at 8pm. Venue to follow.

We shall be reading:- *“Cutting for Stone”* by Abraham Verghese.

Summary: A sweeping, emotionally riveting first novel – an enthralling family saga of Africa and America, doctors and patients, exile and home.

Marion and Shiva Stone are twin brothers born of a secret union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa. Orphaned by their mother’s death in childbirth and their father’s disappearance, bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age

as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution. Yet it will be love, not politics – their passion for the same woman – that will tear them apart and force Marion, fresh out of medical school, to flee his homeland.

He makes his way to America, finding refuge in his work as an intern at an underfunded, overcrowded New York City hospital. When the past catches up to him – nearly destroying him – Marion must entrust his life to the two men he thought he trusted least in the world: the surgeon father who abandoned him and the brother who betrayed him.

An unforgettable journey into one man’s remarkable life, and an epic story about the power, intimacy, and curious beauty of the work of healing others.

New reading suggestions will be welcome and if you are interested to join the Group please contact Cathy Fisher at: cathyfisherpr@gmail.com.

Save the Date

THE MAGEN AVOT SUPPER QUIZ

Motzei Shabbat 14th December at 7.30 pm!



Our first **Supper Quiz will be held in November in the shul – “a splendid time is guaranteed for all”.**

It will be run by the excellent QuizQuizQuiz Team who are experienced in delivering a highly entertaining evening for all ages and quizzing experience.

We are encouraging families of all ages to join in and a Juniors table (or tables) will be especially welcome to compete. Prizes to be won by the winning table and tombola gifts will support fundraising efforts by the shul.

Scan here



**Adults £30 each
Juniors (under 25) just £15 each.**

Book a place / table (of 10) here:-
<https://tinyurl.com/MAQuiz24>



Magen Avot

PRESENT

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF ADAM KAY



On meeting our new Council member, Adam Kay, one is immediately struck by his relentless energy and unbounded positivity. In many ways Adam personifies the future of Magen Avot, and he is already contributing significantly to our community.

Born in Manchester to our much-loved former (but frequently returning) members Joy and Mel Kay, Adam moved to Kenton in Northwest London with his parents and sisters Avital and Ilan, aged just 1. He attended Sinai School in Kenton and aged 9 went to University College School in Hampstead before taking his GCSEs at Immanuel College. He was a keen sportsman and made lifelong friendships at IC, where from the all-male environment at UCS he embraced (metaphorically) the presence of Jewish girls for the first time.

He engaged with Bnei Akiva locally and began to organise BA camps nationally and spent a year in Israel on the BA Torani programme – seven months in yeshiva, three on kibbutz and a month volunteering for army support.

On returning to the UK he began a management studies degree course in Leeds, where he admits life was sweet and study obligations limited to just six hours a week. He lived in Hillel and became chair of the J Soc, pursued his love of sports and again made lasting friendships. His degree offered no immediate work prospects but he was offered a training contract at prestigious law firm Linklaters, so he undertook a two-year law conversion course and after a two-year training contract he qualified as a solicitor. But he had already decided that the law was not for him. He had been offered a job in the audit department of PwC accountants to start in September 2009, but the six-month interval enabled him to flex his leadership muscles and desire to hone his selling skills in joining a computer software sales team. He had found his true milieu and never looked back.

The demanding and exhilarating environment of sales, where “you eat what you kill” was in marked contradistinction to the conventional corporate (and political) atmosphere of large institutional law firms but matched Adam’s temperament perfectly and he never took up the position at PwC.

“I learned two valuable lessons – never stay in a job that makes you miserable, and always take opportunities which

Nadine and Adam with their children
left to right: Maayan, Eli and Talya



suddenly present themselves”.

He pushed himself to out-sell his colleagues and achieved recognition and management promotion, and after a year and aged 28 he was able to travel to Tel Aviv to start up the Israel operation of the company. By now he had married Nadine, whom he had met up with again at law school and who also qualified as a lawyer. She was born in Israel but her parents had moved to Finchley when she was young. Adam and Nadine have three children – Eli, born in Israel in 2009; Taliam, born in 2011; and Maayan, born in 2015 (who hold the distinction of being the first child born within the “family” of the Magen Avot community).

The Kay family returned to London when it became clear that Eli had serious health challenges, having been diagnosed with autism and suffering from frequent epileptic fits – now largely controlled. Eli now attends Kisharon School in Hendon and after a 10-year gap Nadine has returned to work, heading up the Ulpan Programme at LSJS.

Covid was a turning point for Adam as it accelerated the demand for software services as an increasing number of us turned to our screens to replace face-to-face meetings. Adam immerses himself with new startup IT software businesses as an executive and equity stakeholder, and is excited by the possibilities of AI influencing our lives for good. A high flyer, he is somewhat less of a frequent flyer now – he was often travelling to the

US and China – but has more time to spend with his family.

Adam is a frequent ba’al tefillah in shul and is taking a central role in planning the package of events to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the founding of Magen Avot next June. He exudes passion about the community he clearly loves and will positively promote the ideas it now needs to advance to the next level in its development. Given his skills and commitment, that future looks secure and exciting. ■



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RAFI KLEIMAN LEADER OF MAGEN MAXIS

Everyone is excited about the recent appointment of Rafi Kleiman as the dynamic leader of our Magen Maxi Services. He is newly married to Sophie (nee Harris), who has been instrumental in revitalising the children's services. The shul is happy to have such a formidable couple in our youth department.



He had become involved with Bnei Akiva (BA) in Leeds and served on the National Executive voluntarily for a year – running summer camps and acting as a local leader. Heavily influenced by BA, he had also run children services at the Leeds BHH Synagogue. During Covid he strove to bring children back

Rafi first met Sophie in September 2022 at BA. She has completed a year at sem in Israel; he proposed in October 2023 and they were married in June 2024. An English graduate from Kings College London, Sophie recently completed a year working at BA herself in the role of Educational Director and will embark upon a new position at Stanmore Synagogue where she will run events and marketing co-ordination.

After a year at BA, Rafi was appointed Project Executive at Tribe. Rafi brings experience, new ideas and passion for developing programmes to attract our youth. He believes that the combination of education and shul involvement will deliver the USP which will continue to make Magen Avot an inspiration to other communities on how to secure their future. The relaunch of these services by Rafi and Ariella Ovits (see below) is already providing reassurance that his appointment was fortuitous and prudent.

He relaxes by showing continued loyalty to his beloved Leeds United FC, hiking and enjoying travel – especially recent trips to Morocco and Tuscany in Italy! ■

But this excitement is contagious as Rafi exudes confidence and optimism about the programmes he will bring to our youth services – making it, he believes, a unique offering of all the shuls in Hendon.

Born in South London in 1998 Rafi moved to Redbridge as a child and then spent his formative years in Leeds. After school, Rafi spent two years at Yeshivat HaKotel in Yerushalayim before taking up a place at Leeds Beckett University where he took a degree in Youth Work and Community Development. This involved annual placements at Leeds Jewish schools and mental health youth work in Manchester.

to shul and engage with the community – one notable event being the BHH Pesach Family Parody show where parents and children tried their hand at comedy acting – luckily this has been preserved on YouTube here:- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V-Cq0wVDic>.

His final year placement was in London as Communities Director for BA UK. He graduated with a First Class degree and became a qualified youth worker.

Both his brothers have moved from Leeds to London and his parents have recently been appointed as rabbi and rebbetzin at Pinner Synagogue and will take up post early next year

ARIELLA OVITS LEADER OF MAGEN MINIS

At Magen Avot we are blessed with youth leaders of the highest calibre, and none personifies this better than Ariella Ovits, who has recently taken over responsibility to lead our Magen Minis services.

Ariella is the daughter of our member (and Chatan Torah) Marc Ovits but has been active in the shul in her own right for several years. Educated at Noam Primary School and then Hasmonian High School, Ariella then attended seminary at Midreshet Harova in Yerushalayim. Amongst the plethora of post-high school seminaries for non-Israelis, the overseas programme is regarded as well rounded and inviting for all levels of learning.

Ariella returned to London this June. In September she begins a degree course in international relations and business management at Queen Mary College, London University. She is excited to begin this course and while wary of campus agitation about the Gaza situation she is

positive and resilient, and looking forward to engaging with the Jewish Society.

As a young teenager she started attending Y@MA services and immediately made friends with whom she still remains close. She enjoyed the services and values the friendships made then.

Meeting her, it becomes clear immediately that she is engaging, intelligent, positive and committed. She feels part of the community and wishes “to give something back” by leading the services for our youngsters. She encourages them to come to shul every week and to bring their friends. She is keen to show the welcoming attitude which so attracted her to Magen Avot in the first place. If the children are happy to come back each week then their parents, some



of whom may not (yet) be members at Magen Avot, may also feel the wish to affiliate.

Magen Minis services last about 40 minutes during which time the children are introduced to the idea of Shabbat: from the preparation on Friday afternoon through zemirot at the Shabbat table to the services in shul. Some basic prayers are read and

age-appropriate stories are used to illustrate these themes.

Ariella looks forward to working with Sophie and Rafi Kleiman. She is excited about the programme being structured for both Magen Maxis and Magen Minis groups. Our community can have confidence that our children and their religious upbringing are in safe and caring hands with Ariella in charge. ■



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לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם

Wishing our wonderful Magen Avot community a happy, healthy and successful year. We look forward to seeing our Shul continue to thrive and grow. Grateful thanks to Rabbi and Rebbetzin Golker, the Executive and Council for all their hard work.

Karina, Ashley, Joey and Minna Katz

EXCLUSIVE Q&A WITH DAVID PINTO- DUSCHINSKY MP

During the election hustings David Pinto-Duschinsky agreed, if elected, to come to daven at Magen Avot (which he did recently) and to be interviewed for HaMagen by **Julian Pollard** who raised with him issues of concern to our members. This is our exclusive interview...

Q. Congratulations on your election and thank you for taking time out at a very busy and exciting time to be available for this interview. What have been your first impressions of Parliament and the process of induction?

A. Parliament is an extraordinary place with deep rooted traditions – many of which are to be admired, and some of which I’m still trying to get my head around! The induction, led by Parliament’s incredible staff, has been second to none.

Right from the start, there’s a huge amount to do. People aren’t generally aware, but each new MP has to recruit their team from scratch and find an office to rent. And all this while receiving several hundred emails a day. Despite all this I’ve tried to hit the ground running and serve the people of Hendon, and I have already held five resident surgeries and a further two roving surgeries.

Q. Dealing first with local issues, what are the top three priorities you will wish to pursue as MP for Hendon?

A. The three biggest issues people raise with me are those of crime and community safety, getting the local NHS back on its feet and getting the economy moving (particularly in relation to tackling the cost of living). But personally, my very top priority is making sure everyone in Hendon feels safe and secure – it’s about crime, it’s about policing and resources, but importantly it’s also about tackling antisemitism and making sure the community feels safe. This is the hardest time to be Jewish in Britain in my lifetime and antisemitic incidents are up 1500%. Many members of the community have felt the need to cover up their kippot, remove a school blazer that has a Magen David on it or even take down their mezuzahs.

And that’s why one of my first acts in Parliament was to become the vice chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Antisemitism.

Q. This constituency has a wide and diverse demographic profile including sizeable Jewish and Muslim communities. What steps if any do you intend to take to engage with both to encourage better dialogue and understanding and mutual respect?

A. The great strength of this area is its diversity and how people live together, whatever community they are part of. Inter-faith work is really important to build on that diversity. That’s why I’ve attended many events at the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum, from their Diwali event at Middlesex University to the seder they held in a Christian church at Pesach. I’m really keen to build on these events and keep bringing people together, something I think is especially important given the challenges we’ve faced around community cohesion since 7 October.

Q. The redevelopment of the Edgware shopping centre has been hugely controversial. Where else within the constituency would you be happy to see major new housing development?

A. I’ve been clear that I’d like to see changes to Ballymore’s plans. Edgware needs development, but a 29-storey building is too high, the development is too dense, and I’m particularly worried about the lack of supporting infrastructure, including GP capacity and parking.

I’m also concerned that the proposed development does not include enough affordable housing. Most of all, I’m troubled by the sense that Ballymore is not listening to the local community.

That’s why I’ve met with Ballymore and will continue to raise these concerns with them. I’ve made it clear that I expect them to listen to residents’ views and modify their plans accordingly.

Barnet does need development but it has to be appropriate and developers need to listen to the local community.

Q. The Gaza crisis has highlighted serious fractures in UK society and many Jews are deeply suspicious of inciteful rhetoric and acts of intimidation on the streets. The cohort of MPs includes many Labour MPs who have openly demonised Israel and equated Zionism with racism and worse. The new Justice Secretary has in the past been accused by communal leaders of inciting the mob. What steps will you take to stand up for the rights of Jews in Hendon and beyond and hold to account those who demonise Israel? And how will you ensure the new Home Secretary delivers a policing strategy that is more robust and even handed?

A. The period since 7 October has been the hardest of my lifetime to be Jewish in Britain. We’ve seen a 1500% rise in antisemitic incidents. It breaks my heart, and it makes me even more determined to stand up for our community and make sure that Britain remains a good place to be Jewish. That’s why I’m Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Antisemitism – and I will use every opportunity to press my parliamentary colleagues to demonstrate solidarity with our community.

On the question of policing, I’m pleased that the Government is pressing forwards with plans to recruit an additional 13,000 neighbourhood police officers nationally on our streets. I’m setting up meetings with the police locally to discuss security in the local area, will engage fully with the Met to ensure that people here feel the difference the extra officers make. I will also make full use of my APPG role to make representations with the Government to ensure that Jews are and feel safe wherever we go in London.

Q. On the wider Middle East scene if and when the Gaza crisis eases, and the Government’s stated policy on a two state solution is adhered to, with whom should the Israelis engage? Mahmood Abbas an aged demagogue who has no electoral legitimacy and whose PhD thesis was based on Holocaust denial or the Hamas leadership who are not interested in a two state solution in any event?

A. This is a question with no easy answer, and the long years that have passed since the last elections to the Palestinian Authority have damaged civil society and denied Israel and the wider international community a strong partner for peace, and part of the pathway to peace must include development of Palestinian civil society. The reconstruction of Gaza will provide a potential opportunity to begin this work.

Q. To what extent if any do your Jewish heritage and religious beliefs dictate your values as an MP?

A. My Jewish identity is incredibly important to me, and I'm in politics not in spite of my Judaism, but because of it. It's our shared Jewish values like tzedakah, chessed and responsibility that have helped shaped my world view and my politics.

Q. What will your maiden speech deal with?

A. My Jewish identity and my father's experiences as a survivor of the Shoah are at the heart of my maiden speech. I also talk about Hendon and why it is an amazing place, but also the challenges the area faces.

Q. Why did you retain membership of the Labour Party when Jeremy Corbyn was in power and providing support to terrorists and facilitating antisemitism within the party?

A. The period under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership was the most shameful in our history. I'm not here to make excuses for that period and Labour under Corbyn disgraced itself. Many people fought the antisemitism in the Party by leaving, but many of us decided to stay and fight. I led that fight in my local party. That's why Dame Margaret Hodge, Dame Louise Ellman, Baroness Ruth Smeeth and Luciana Berger – the leaders of the fight against antisemitism in Labour – all backed me and supported my campaign. I'm proud that because of the changes Keir Starmer has made to the Labour Party, the Party has changed irreversibly and for good and is now a safe space for Jews. There can no better measure of how far Labour has come than the fact that Jeremy Corbyn was expelled and chose to run for Parliament against the Labour Party.

Q. Now that the Labour Government has offered to recognise a Palestinian state would this be "From the River to the Sea" and will they endorse the right of return to all diaspora Palestinians?

A. All major British political parties support a two-state solution entailing the recognition of a Palestinian state. Recognition of a Palestinian state can and will only come about as part of a process, and our commitment is to recognition as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. This commitment is in line with Labour and the UK's long-term commitment to recognition of the 1967 borders, in accordance with international law. ■



“

My Jewish identity is incredibly important to me, and I'm in politics not in spite of my Judaism, but because of it. It's our shared Jewish values like Tzedakah, Chessed and responsibility that have helped shaped my world view and my politics.

PRESENT NACHAT PAGE

Celebrating the Mazal Tovs and thank yous from the past year. We apologise if any were inadvertently missed or if some occurred after our publication deadline.

Date	Celebration
21-Sep-24:	Mazal Tov to Muriel and Josh Abeles on the Bat Mitzvah this weekend of their daughter Amie. Mazal Tov also to brother Jack!
31-Aug-24	Mazal Tov to Yael and Netanel Lorenzi on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Uria this Shabbat. Please see the Kiddush Lunch invitation on the back of the newsletter.
24-Aug-24	Mazal Tov to Shelley and David Berke on the marriage of their daughter Natalia to Simmy Wahnon on Sunday 25 August.
03-Aug-24	Mazal Tov to Marc Ovits who will be our Chatan Torah and Jonathan Sacks who will be our Chatan Bereishit this year. We look forward to celebrating with them on Simchat Torah!
03-Aug-24	Mazal Tov to Shoina and David Kass on the birth of a granddaughter to Shoina Kass, a daughter to Uriel and Jessica Debson.
27-Jul-24	Mazal Tov to Jaqui Franco on the recent marriage of her son Eitan to Talia Goodkin, and on the birth of her first grandson, a son to Ilana and Otto Shwalowsky. The brit took place last Friday and the baby was named Moshe Tzvi. Remembering the late Simon Kalman at this happy time.
27-Jul-24	Mazal Tov to new member Joey Katz who has changed his status from longtime attendee to full member!
20-Jul-24	Mazal Tov to Shifra and Dan Shaerf on the aufruf this Shabbos of their son Shimon. Mazal Tov also to Rivka, Eitan and family!
20-Jul-24	Mazal Tov to Sophie and Rafi Kleiman who are new members!
29-Jun-24	Mazal Tov to Magen Avot as we celebrate nine years since our launch in June 2015. Over the next year we are planning events to mark our first decade. More details will follow but in the meantime please feel free to join our "10 Year Events" WhatsApp group to be part of a sub-committee which will spend the next year planning out our celebrations marking our first decade.
29-Jun-24	Mazal Tov to our new leaders of Magen Minis and Magen Maxis! Maxis will be led by Rafi Kleiman starting next Shabbat 6 July and Ariella Ovits will lead Minis starting on Shabbat 13 July.
22-Jun-24	Mazal Tov to Sophie Harris (our Youth Director) on her marriage this Monday to Rafi Kleiman.
15-Jun-24	Mazal Tov to Chaya and Moshe Langerman on the recent brit of their grandson who was named Aryeh Shmuel.
08-Jun-24	Mazal Tov to Chaya and Moshe Langerman on the birth of a grandson, a son to Inbar and Natan Macabi.
25-May-24	Mazal Tov to Anouk and Darren Abrahams on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Joseph. Mazal Tov also to the whole family!
18-May-24	Mazal Tov to Jackie and Michael Roodyn on the recent Bar Mitzvah of their grandson.
11-May-24	Mazal Tov to Tammy, Jeremy, Micha, Eliya and Aviya Beider on the occasion of Zachy's Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat!
11-May-24	Mazal Tov to Ruth and Henry Ehreich on the birth of a great-grandson, a grandson to Shoshana and Jon Shooter, a son to Miryam and Aaron Shooter.
04-May-24	Mazal Tov to Cecil Taitz on the birth of a granddaughter, a daughter to Liza and Jason Taitz, and a sister to Ariella and Eliana.
04-May-24	Mazal Tov to Esther and Simon Bentley on the Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat of their grandson Jayden Bentley in Mill Hill.
20-Apr-24	Mazal Tov to Shifra and Dan Shaerf on the engagement of their son Shimon to Chavi, daughter of Sara and Chayim Venitt from Edgware. Mazal Tov also to Rivka and Eitan Shaerf!
06-Apr-24	Mazal Tov to Rabbi Joel and Rebbetzen Sarah Kenigsberg on the birth of a baby boy born on Tuesday night!
23-Mar-24	Mazal Tov to Sara and Marco Spizzichino on the occasion of their son's Bar Mitzvah. Mazal Tov also to Reuben and his siblings and wider family who have joined for this occasion.
16-Mar-24	Mazal Tov to Samantha and Paul Taylor on the birth of a granddaughter, a daughter to Michal and Akiva Crouse.

Date	Celebration
09-Mar-24	Mazal Tov to Shoina and David Kass on the marriage of David's grandson, Yisroel Kass (son of the late Rabbi Shmuli Kass) to Gitti Roth of Golders Green.
24-Feb-24	Mazal Tov to Rebbetzen Dina and Rabbi Yoni Golker on the brit of their son Moshe Yehuda Leib.
17-Feb-24	Mazal Tov to Rebbetzen Dina and Rabbi Yoni Golker on the birth of a son. The Sholom Zochor will take place this Friday night from 8.15pm at 17 Mayfield Gardens, Hendon NW4 2PY. Details of a possible brit on Monday morning (along with Shacharit) will be released separately to this newsletter).
10-Feb-24	Mazal Tov to Penina and Daniel Ehreich on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Yishai. Mazal Tov to grandparents Maureen Spiegel and Ruth and Henry Ehreich. Mazal Tov also to the whole family!
03-Feb-24	Mazal Tov to Julia and Daniel Greenberg on the birth of a grandson, a son to Shira and Yair Halberstadt in Carrei Gat.
03-Feb-24	Welcome to new members Gloria and Keith Posner.
27-Jan-24	Mazal Tov to Sara Spizzichino on her being honoured this Shabbat as this year's Eshet Chayil. Mazal Tov to Marco and the whole family!
20-Jan-24	Mazal Tov to Jaqui Franco on the engagement of her son Eitan Kalman to Talia Goodkin. Remembering the late Simon Kalman at this time.
13-Jan-24	Mazal Tov to Florence and Alex Weinberg on the Bat Mitzvah this Shabbat of their daughter Naomi.
13-Jan-24	Mazal Tov to Deborah and Howard Myer on the birth of a granddaughter.
30-Dec-23	Mazal Tov to Mazal and Paul Nisner on the birth of a grandson.
09-Dec-23	Mazal Tov to Linda and Laurence Lovat on the birth of a grand-daughter, a daughter to Adina and Shaul Rosten.
02-Dec-23	Mazal Tov to Sam and Tony Newgrosh on the Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat of their son Bailey Newgrosh.
02-Dec-23	Mazal Tov to Judith and Ben Perahia on the birth of a baby girl. Mazal Tov also to grandmother Vivienne Kesztenbaum. We remember our dear friend and founding member Michael Kesztenbaum at this happy time.
02-Dec-23	Thank you to Family Bialoguski who have donated five navy blue tablecloths to the shul and also committed to maintaining them by washing and bringing back whenever they are used.
18-Nov-23	Mazal Tov to Family Bialoguski on the Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat of Yossi Bialoguski.
18-Nov-23	Mazal Tov to Vivienne Kesztenbaum on the birth of a grandson, a son to Neal and Danielle Kesztenbaum. Remembering our founder and dearly missed friend Michael Kesztenbaum at this happy time.
18-Nov-23	Mazal Tov to Shoina and David Kass, on the engagement of David's grandson, Yisroel Kass (son of the late Rabbi Shmuli, and Batsheva Kass) to Gitty Roth of Golders Green.
18-Nov-23	Mazal Tov to our Baal Kriah Shimon Levy on his Aufruf this Shabbat.
28-Oct-23	Mazal Tov to our Youth Director Sophie Harris on her engagement to Rafi Kleiman.
21-Oct-23	Mazal Tov to Shelley and David Berke on the engagement of their daughter Natalia to Simmy Wahnon.
14-Oct-23	Mazal Tov to Julia and Daniel Greenberg on the birth of a grandchild, a son to Elisheva and Avi Greenberg in Beit Shemesh.
14-Oct-23	Welcome to new members Eliana and Yaniv Cadosh. We look forward to seeing them in shul!
07-Oct-23	Mazal Tov to Laurence Lovat and Cecil Taitz on being given the honour of being our Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit this year. We wish them and their families a hearty Mazal Tov!
09-Sep-23	Mazal Tov to Shimon Levy on his recent engagement to Penie Finegold. Mazal Tov also to their families.

DANCING THROUGH THE TEARS



Corporal Shirat Yam Amar, 18, an observation soldier in the Border Defense Corps's 414th unit, from Kiryat Ono, was killed on October 7 when Hamas terrorists overran the Nahal Oz IDF outpost.

Shirat Yam had only enlisted in the IDF at the end of August. She finished up her basic training on Wednesday, October 4, and arrived at the Nahal Oz outpost the next day. Less than 48 hours later, she was slain in the Hamas onslaught along with 14 other observation soldiers.

Her brother said she called him at 6:54 a.m. that Saturday and told him that terrorists had stormed across the border and "to warn everyone," while he heard the sounds of grenades and volleys of gunfire in the background. She assured her family that everything was OK and that she had to hang up to run to the bomb shelter. That was the last they heard from her.

She was considered missing for several days until her family was informed on Wednesday evening that her body had been identified.

She was buried on October 12 in Petah Tikva. She is survived by her parents, Keren and Moshe, and her brothers Yonatan and Ben.

Her younger brother, Ben, 12, wrote on Instagram that his sister had "the most perfect laugh, we called you 'shikuti' at home because you always wanted us to kiss you and to pay attention to you and you succeeded in that. You were always here



Coporal Shirat Yam Amar a'h,

for us, I love you always and I am sure that you are in heaven and sitting in the chair of honor like a true queen. I love you a lot, you are the best sister I had in my life, a sister who everyone looked at and loved."

Her father, Moshiko, told the Kan public broadcaster that his daughter "really wanted to be an observation soldier, really wanted to serve the country."

"Yam was a girl of fields, Yam didn't hang out in the malls," said Moshiko. "She

rode on horses, she ran barefoot through the wheat fields.

"She was so vibrant, she was blossoming, she was goal-oriented," he said.

She had a sewing machine at home, he added. "She would sew, her room was full of pictures of clothing that she designed." He noted that a manufacturer was planning on producing a line of swimwear she designed in her memory.

Yam's older brother, Yonatan, wrote on social media, "Our Yami, you were so strong, you had such a strong soul, our Yam, the queen of the house. We grew up together, we rode horses together, motorcycles, everything you can imagine, we were driving vehicles since age 0 together. We did everything together, we always had each other."

He said that Yam would always tell him, "Yonatan, we live every day and we die only once." His sister, he said, "was brave, with a pure heart... always looking to help."

"I promise you that every second I am on this earth will be to make you proud of me, as long as I am breathing I will memorialize you and speak about who you were to me and to the family and to everyone," Yonatan said.

"I will love you forever, and I know that you are waiting for me at the end with your cheeky smile and your arms open for a hug. My little sister, Shirat Yam Amar, I salute you. I had the honor and privilege of being your big brother for 18 years — and forever." ■

SHIRAT YAM a”h

Compiled by Chaya Langerman
from the words of Shirat Yam’s father Moshe Amar

Shirat Yam was a child full of joy and life. With her unique and beautiful smile that was always on her face, Yam knew from a young age how to live each day to the fullest and turn every small event into a celebration. Every step she took radiated light and love, and whenever she entered a room, all eyes were on her. Yam spent her childhood playing in the fields, orchards, and a treehouse. She loved animals and rode horses on the family farm. She was ambitious, independent, brave, and confident, excelling in her studies and serving as a guide in the Scouts. Yam had big dreams, and with her determination and hard work, we were certain they would come true.

Before enlisting, she had already completed a skydiving jump, learned to scuba dive, and took a short solo trip abroad. She dreamed of becoming a commander and officer in the military and eventually becoming a fashion designer. No one could miss her amazing style and colorful ‘look’. She received a sewing

machine as a gift and designed dresses in her free time. Yam always reminded herself, “You’re not alone—you have yourself!” She believed that happiness depended solely on her, and through each challenge, she learned about the inner strength she possessed and how truly strong she was. Yam was a good listener to others and knew how to say the right thing. She was a supportive and loving daughter, sister, granddaughter, and friend, with a huge heart and values that guided her to always care for those around her and make everyone feel comfortable and open. She was never judgmental.

Our Yam enlisted on July 30th in the lookout course, which she found especially enjoyable and meaningful. She quickly bonded with her classmates and commanders and was already marked as a candidate for command and officer training. She was proud of her role and the beret she received. Yam was stationed at the ‘Nahal Oz’ post, where she arrived just two days before October 7th. Yam fell on the morning of Shabbat Simchat Torah



L to R: Agam Berger and Shirat Yam Amar a”h,

in the shelter at Nahal Oz base, alongside the heroic lookouts, may their memory be a blessing. Just like the ‘Song of the Sea,’ associated with crossing the Red Sea, she crossed our hearts when she left us.

Shirat Yam and Agam Berger enlisted together on July 30th. They met and became close during training, and at the end of the course, they were both stationed at the Nahal Oz post. Agam was kidnapped just two days after Yam and she arrived at the post. We have a picture from their first day and their time together on the base, and it seemed like the beginning of a beautiful friendship. On the morning of October 7th, Yam was murdered in the shelter, and Agam was kidnapped from the shelter. Shirat Yam and Agam spent their final moments together. ■



**IN JUNE 2025 WE
WILL CELEBRATE OUR
10TH ANNIVERSARY
WITH A PROGRAMME
OF EVENTS FOR ALL
THE FAMILY.**

**We welcome your suggestions
as to how we can
commemorate this special
landmark in Magen Avot’s
development.**

**Please contact Adam Kay at:-
adkay1@gmail.com**

SIMCHAT TORAH PROJECT

Magen Avot Community has joined 325 synagogues in 22 countries in a project organised by Mizrachi to commemorate the 1,200 victims of the October 7 terrorist attack – a day when Jews across the world were celebrating Simchat Torah. This year on Simchat Torah, many communities will open their Aron Kodesh and take out several Torah scrolls. One, or more will be adorned with a new me'il (Torah cover), designed to mark the first Yahrzeit of a victim of the tragedy.

Magen Avot members have donated more than £2,000 for this project (with £1,400 donated by one member). About half of that amount was given to Mizrachi for making a cover for Elkan Adler's family Torah scroll. The rest will be donated to charities in Israel helping those injured in the attack and the subsequent war.

Our Torah scroll cover will commemorate Shirat Yam Amar.

Cpl. Shirat Yam Amar, 18, an observation soldier in the Border



Defense Corps's 414th unit, from Kiryat Ono, was killed on October 7 when Hamas terrorists overran the Nahal Oz IDF outpost.

Amar had only enlisted in the IDF at the end of August. She finished up her basic training on Wednesday, October 4, and arrived at the Nahal Oz outpost the next day. Less than 48 hours later, she was slain in the Hamas onslaught along with 14 other observation soldiers.

Her brother said she called him at 6:54 a.m. that Saturday and told him that terrorists had stormed across the border and "to warn everyone," while he heard the sounds of grenades and volleys of gunfire in the background. She assured her family that everything was OK and that she had to hang up to run to the bomb shelter. That was the last they heard from her.

She was considered missing for several days until her family was informed on the following Wednesday evening that her body had been identified.

Shirat Yam was buried on October 12 in Petah Tikva. She is survived by her parents, Keren and Moshe, and her brothers Yonatan and Ben. ■

PRAY FOR ISRAEL!

- WEEKLY TEHILLIM
- EVERY TUESDAY NIGHT
- 18 RALEIGH CLOSE NW4
- MA'ARIV 7.45PM
- DIVREI CHIZUK AND TEHLILLIM
- ENDS 8.30PM

MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN WELCOME



Hendon United
Synagogue



BEIS GAVRIEL
בית גבריאל



Magen Avot



ALII ZION



בס"ד

THE PERSISTENT THREAT OF IRANIAN & HIZBOLLAH TERRORISM

By Eran Benedek - Senior Threats Analyst at the CST

Prior to October 7th 2023 the threat from Iranian sponsored and funded terrorism was only too well established. July 18 2023 marked the anniversaries of the terrorist bombings of the AMIA Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1994 and of an Israeli tourist bus outside Burgas airport in Bulgaria in 2012. 85 people were killed in AMIA and six people killed in Burgas, all of them victims of Iranian and Hizbollah terrorism. They are a stark demonstration of Iran and Hizbollah's continued efforts to weaponize sensitive anniversaries by committing further attacks.

In fact, the day after the AMIA bombing, on 19 July 1994, a Hizbollah suicide bomber took down mid-flight an Alas Chiricanas Airlines carrier travelling from Colón to Panama City. Twelve of the 18 passengers were Jewish, including three Americans and four Israelis.

Similarly, within days of Hizbollah's Burgas bombing, Bulgarian authorities also arrested an IRGC-Quds Force operative surveilling a synagogue in Sofia. And 11 days before the Burgas bombing, another Hizbollah operative was arrested (and later convicted) in Cyprus of planning to attack Israelis, confessing to authorities that he "was just collecting information about the Jews, and this is what my organisation is doing, everywhere in the world".

The AMIA and Burgas tragedies were not isolated incidents, and Iran and Hizbollah remain motivated to target Jews, Israelis and Iranian dissidents worldwide. They possess global terrorist capabilities that are evidenced by a record of international criminal activities and covert operations spanning four decades.

This long-term campaign of anti-Jewish terrorism is underpinned by the promotion of antisemitic views from senior Iranian leaders. In April 2022, the IRGC's commander-in-chief, Maj-Gen Hossein Salami, called the Holocaust a "fake event",

lauded the jihadist attacks in Israel and declared that Ayatollah Khomeini's original threat that "Israel should be wiped off the face of the earth" was not a simple phrase but part of a long-term strategy.

Methods and targets

In July 2023, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office highlighted that, "Iranian threats to the UK and our partners are not a new phenomenon", citing European and British officials condemning past Iranian operations in France, the Netherlands and Denmark. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, Iran has been involved in over 100 global operations, according to seminal research by Matthew Levitt, a terrorism expert and former counterterrorism official with the FBI and US Treasury official.

- *Iranian and Hizbollah operatives adopt these tactics:-*
- *Long-term pre-attack planning, often over years*
- *Hostile reconnaissance and information collection*
- *Assembling "human target packages" to kill or capture adversaries*
- *Subcontracting surveillance and assassination operations to criminal gangs*
- *Using diplomatic, business and education cover stories to disguise operational activities*
- *Recruiting operatives worldwide, especially those with dual nationalities and Western passports*
- *Counter-surveillance tradecraft, which is sometimes sloppy, sometimes professional*
- *Infiltrating Iranian dissident groups under cover stories or coercive tactics to flip their allegiance*

They use local proxies and hired criminals to undertake hostile reconnaissance against targets – usually Iranian dissidents, followed by Jews and Israelis, diplomats, Western interests (including politicians and state VIPs)

and others - for example at least five operations involved the fatwa against Salman Rushdie.

Historic terrorist operations

Consider the following selected cases demonstrating the longevity and consistency of Iranian and Hizbollah behaviour:

1985 - Hizbollah claimed responsibility for bombs planted at the Great Synagogue and the office of a US airline in Copenhagen, injuring 22 victims and damaging a Jewish old age home.

Between December 1985 and September 1986, Iran reportedly provided logistical support for a Hizbollah cell that bombed some 15 locations in Paris against various targets, including Jewish community locations, killing 13 victims and wounding 250.

In 1987, Iran was behind two separate attacks in London: a car bombing that injured a former Iranian cabinet member and chairman of a local Iranian dissident group; and the execution of two Iranian monarchists, a father and son, who were shot dead inside their flat while they were living in exile.

In 1992, an Iranian operation using Hizbollah operatives infamously assassinated four Iranian Kurdish dissidents in a shooting attack at the Mykonos café in Berlin.

Contemporary terrorist operations

In the last three years alone, Iranian operations have reportedly targeted synagogues, Israeli businesspeople, tourist venues, Iranian journalists and others in over a dozen countries worldwide, including in the UK and Europe. It is notable that these plots are not restricted to Israeli targets, but also target Jewish community buildings.

German authorities, for example, suspect that Iran is behind the targeting of three synagogues in North Rhine-

Westphalia in November 2022.

In July 2023, an Afghan national was arrested in Azerbaijan suspected of planning with others to target the Israeli Embassy in Baku. A couple of weeks earlier, in late June, authorities in Cyprus thwarted a suspected Iranian plot to attack Israeli businesspeople, a Chabad House, as well as hotels and entertainment venues frequented by Israeli tourists in Limassol.

In March 2023, Greek authorities arrested two Iranian-born Pakistani nationals on suspicion of planning an Iranian-directed attack during Passover against Israelis and Jews.

The suspects in Athens allegedly conducted hostile reconnaissance of the area and were in the final stages of planning the attack on the Chabad House, a kosher food shop and the Gostijo kosher restaurant.

Iranian threats to the UK

In February 2023, the UK’s then Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat MP, addressed Parliament about the threat of Iran and its operatives in the UK. In addition to emphasising that “the Iranian Intelligence

Services work with organised criminal gangs”, he also provided what is almost certainly the first official acknowledgement of Iranian targeting of Jews in the UK. In Tugendhat’s words:

“Between 2020 and 2022, Iran tried to collect intelligence on UK-based Israeli and Jewish individuals. We believe this information was a preparation for future lethal operations”.

Tugendhat elaborated shortly after in an interview with the Jewish Chronicle:

“You can be very clear that I wouldn’t have mentioned Jewish and Israeli targets unless I had good reason to do so...I take all threats against anyone in the UK very seriously and the reason I highlighted Israelis and the Jewish community is that we have been seeing threats and Iranian operational activity directed against them. I do not issue these warnings lightly”.

Tugendhat’s statements followed a marked change in tone by UK authorities warning very publicly about Iranian threats. In November 2022, Ken McCallum, the Director-General of MI5, described Iran as “the state actor which most frequently crosses into terrorism” and emphasised

that Iran “projects threat to the UK directly, through its aggressive intelligence services”. McCallum also revealed that Iran – at that time – was behind 10 plots since January 2022 to kidnap or kill UK-based individuals considered enemies of the regime.

At present, UK authorities say they have disrupted 15 credible Iranian threats since January 2022 to kill or kidnap UK-based individuals. And since last year, British police have warned UK-based Iranian dissidents of threats, including “credible threats” to their lives, from Iranian state services.

On 6 July 2023, UK’s then Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, who addressed Parliament to introduce a new sanctions regime against Iran, emphasised that Iran continues to target Persian-language media outlets and Iranian journalists. He also contextualised this as part of Iran’s wider operations worldwide:

“We know from working closely with our international partners that these Iranian menaces extend beyond the UK to the rest of Europe and the wider world. In March 2023, an Iranian-orchestrated plot was stopped in Athens. We have seen similar attempts in the United States of America, Türkiye, France and Denmark. Such brazen activity is unacceptable”.

The threat continues

The threat may, in fact, be accelerating. In early July 2023, Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) announced that it plans to continue operations abroad to pursue members of the Iranian opposition Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation. MOIS also (falsely) warned that, “the terrorist proxy acting on behalf of the passing Zionist regime... shall be entirely rooted out”.

Eternal Vigilance and CST- Why robust security is essential

The AMIA attack remains among the worst terrorist attacks against a Jewish target in the history of modern terrorism. The fact that the victims have yet to receive justice exacerbates the pain.

Among CST’s core missions is to counter antisemitism and protect the UK Jewish community from threats related to anti-Jewish terrorism and violence. That is why diaspora Jewish communities devote so many resources to organising security for buildings and communal events. The threat of Iranian and Hizbollah terrorism remains acute and is a real and present danger. Our responsibility is to learn from these trends and translate them to practical security lessons to protect individuals and facilities across the UK and abroad. ■

TABLE: IRANIAN OPERATIONS TARGETING JEWS AND ISRAELIS WORLDWIDE, 2020-2023

Date	Country	Target
Jul 2023	Baku, Azerbaijan	Attack plot on Israeli Embassy
Jun 2023	Limassol, Cyprus	Attack plot on Israeli businesspeople, tourists & Chabad House
Mar 2023	Athens, Greece	Attack plot on Chabad House
Nov 2022	NRW, Germany	Attack plot on synagogue in Dortmund
Nov 2022	NRW, Germany	Attack plot on synagogue in Bochum (arson at nearby school)
Nov 2022	NRW, Germany	Shots fired Old Synagogue in Essen
Nov 2022	Tbilisi, Georgia	Assassination plot on Itzik Moshe
Jun 2022	Istanbul, Türkiye	Attack plot on Israeli tourists
Apr 2022	Istanbul, Türkiye	Assassination plot on Israeli diplomat
Feb 2022	Istanbul, Türkiye	Assassination plot on Yair Geller
Nov 2021	Kenya	Attack plots on Israeli tourists & local targets
Nov 2021	Senegal, Ghana & Tanzania	Attacks plots on Israeli tourists & businesspeople
Nov 2021	Cyprus	Attack plot on five Israelis living in Cyprus
Nov 2021	Bogotá, Colombia	Attack plot on Israeli businessman
Oct 2021	Cyprus	Attack plot on Teddy Sagi & Israeli businesspeople
Jun 2021	Bogotá, Colombia	Attack plot on Israeli businesspeople
Jan 2021	New Delhi, India	Bombing outside Israeli Embassy
2020-22	United Kingdom	Intelligence collection on UK-based Israeli & Jewish individuals

[The table is based on CST research and the dataset maintained by Dr Matthew Levitt at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy]

AUTONOMOUS CARS: WHO IS LIABLE?

By Professor Laurence Lovat

You are on holiday in San Francisco and decide to take a cab. Welcome to Waymo robotaxis! Robotaxis are fully autonomous cars (although in theory, a driver can request control) and San Francisco is at the world forefront of autonomous driving. You decide to try one out.

You open the app, plug in where you want to go, hop in and the robotaxi is on its way. But, whilst following your instruction, it hits a pedestrian crossing the road near a lamppost. What if you can see it is about to do this, and you take over the steering (which is theoretically possible to do) but you still hit the pedestrian? Who is liable and what is the level of liability in Jewish law? (Note please that in June of this year, Waymo recalled all its Jaguar iPace robotaxis which had developed a taste for bumping into lampposts.)

This all sounds too much, so you decide to hire a car instead. But you are driving on

the opposite side of the road to the UK and you hit the accelerator instead of the brake. You mow down that pedestrian. Who is liable now?

On Shavuot this year, Rabbi Doniel Grunewald gave a shiur at Magen Avot on the subject of autonomous cars and liability in Jewish law. I thought I would try and interpret his discussion in light of the issues raised by these cases. Since I am not an expert in Jewish law, all mistakes here are definitely mine.

The questions raised are ancient. The first Mishna in Bava Kama lists four primary types of damages (Avot Nezikin).

אַרְבַּעָה אַבּוֹת נִזְקִין, הַשּׁוֹר וְהַבּוֹר
וְהַמְבַּעָה וְהַהֶבְעֵר.

There are **four primary categories of damage**: The category of **Ox**; and the category of **Pit**; and the category of **Maveh**, which, based on a discussion in the Gemara, refers either to the tooth of an animal that causes damage or to a person

who causes damage; and the category of **Fire**.¹

The first paradigm is damage inflicted indirectly via an autonomous part of one's property. This is known as Shor HaMazik (the ox that causes damage). The second (Bor) is digging a pit in a public space. Here, negligence stems from not protecting others from falling into it. The third paradigm, known as Maveh, is rather more complicated. According to one view, it relates to an autonomous animal causing damage and according to another, it includes damages caused directly by a person, known as Adam haMazik. The fourth paradigm is known as Hever or Aish. This relates to a fire that gets out of control and consumes flammable objects nearby. The one who lights the fire must pay for the ensuing damage, with certain caveats.

So, which category does our autonomous vehicle fall into? A person who owns a rogue animal maintains some degree of responsibility for that animal's actions. But an AI system is not endowed with life and therefore is not comparable to Shor HaMazik. An AI system is also unlike a pit



You open the app, plug in where you want to go, hop in and the robotaxi is on its way. But, whilst following your instruction, it hits a pedestrian crossing the road near a lamppost.

¹ English translation from Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/>

which is just present but does not do anything.

The suitable halachic paradigms of liability for an AI-enabled autonomous car, should therefore be either **Adam haMazik** – direct damage by a person controlling the car, or **Aish**, the metaphorical fire, where a person started a process which continued autonomously and ran out of control.

There is a difference in the level of liability depending on whether the damage is deemed to be caused directly by a person or indirectly by the ‘fire’ that they started. Consider the following two cases:

The Mishna describes a case of a person walking on a roof who is blown off by a gust of wind. They fall and inflict physical damage on someone else. Although the damage caused was unintentional, this is still a case of Adam haMazik (Bava Kamma 8:1; Gemara 86b) and the person who was blown off the roof must pay for the damage and ensuing losses caused to the person they fell on, including medical bills, pain, medical costs, time off work and the humiliation caused.

But in the case of a fire, the rules are different. A person lit a fire in his field in the American Midwest. There was a high wall which prevented the fire from extending outside the field. Soon after they started the fire, a tornado came along and knocked the wall down. The fire rapidly spread to the neighbour’s field and destroyed their crops. The person who lit the fire is liable for damage only if the wind that spread the fire was predictable. They are not liable for a fire that spreads by an exceptionally unexpectedly heavy wind. Furthermore, the person who started the fire is not liable for damage to something that is hidden, for example an item hidden inside a haystack. And finally, the only thing that they must

pay for are the medical bills.

The halacha does not deem them liable for the other types of loss.

You are driving a car yourself.

You mow down that pedestrian. Are you Adam haMazik? But if the robotaxi mows down the pedestrian, is the liability simply that of Aish?

It may not be so simple.

The Tur Choshen Mishpat 378:9 describes an answer given by his father, the Rosh (1250-1328) about a bridegroom who was riding with his friends after his Chuppah. It seems that there was a custom for the groom to ride a mule, and for his friends to accompany him on horseback. In this case, one of the friends was riding too fast and his horse kicked the mule and caused damage. The question recorded is: *Since the foot of the rider is connected to the horse’s saddle, does this connection makes it as if he did the action himself, even though he did not mean it to happen, but since the action was started by his wrong action (by riding too fast), is he liable for the damage caused to the mule?*² The Tur rules that the kick of the horse being ridden by a person is considered to be a direct human action and the rider is liable for 100% of the damage caused by his horse to the mule. What does that mean for our autonomous car?

The actual halachic position is nuanced and currently the subject of live debate. Nonetheless, when an autonomous car causes damage or injury, many would consider that the operator’s liability is not sufficiently direct to be considered as Adam haMazik. Liability is therefore likely to be downgraded to the level of Aish, which will also limit the level of damages payable. But who is the liable party? Is it the driver or the company that manufactured the faulty car? This will have to wait for a further shiur...

Liability Versus Permissibility

Let us turn briefly to a bigger question. If a person was considering lighting a fire in a place where the neighbour’s field is likely to be impacted, are they allowed to do this? The Torah only specifies that if one lit a fire, one would have to pay damages.

The Gemara discusses in several places what happens if a person was supposed to be guarding someone else’s property but was negligent and this led to a material loss (BK 62a, BM 42a). The Gemara’s conclusion is that the negligent guard would have to pay compensation to the owner for any losses that ensued.

Reb Boruch Ber Leibowitz, a doyen of the Volozhin yeshiva in the early 20th century in his Sefer Birkat Shmuel clarifies that this means the person guarding also has an ethical duty to guard properly. His view is that wherever the Torah says that a person is liable for damage caused, that person is also ethically forbidden from performing the action in the first place.

Conclusion

AI is going to generate many new ethical and halachic issues, whether in autonomous vehicles or in other areas of our lives. Parameters learned from Jewish law can help us create a framework for defining the liabilities of malfunctioning AI systems.

Exaggerated enthusiasm about perceived advances may come at the cost of cutting ethical corners. Whilst this might lead to progress, risks may be taken before all the safety issues have been ironed out. This may or may not have already happened with autonomous cars. Existing paradigms in Jewish law help us understand the level of liability when something goes wrong. The halachic discussion is complex, and we have only just touched the surface. But Torat Hashem Temimah – the Torah is eternal and can be interpreted in new ways to bring to bear our ancient wisdom on thoroughly modern issues. ■

MAFTIR YONAH AND THE DATING OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

By Julian Pollard

“I am Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria, King of the world”. This was not a wild boast. In 669 BCE, Ashurbanipal became the most powerful person on the planet. From his capital at Nineveh, in present-day Iraq, he ruled a vast and diverse empire, shaping the lives of peoples from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean to the mountains of western Iran. On his ascent to the throne in 669 BCE, Ashurbanipal inherited the largest empire the world had ever seen, which extended from the eastern Mediterranean basin to western Iran.

Nineveh, the oldest and most-populous city of the ancient Assyrian empire, is situated on the east bank of the Tigris River and encircled by the modern city

of Mosul, Iraq. Nineveh was located at the intersection of important north-south and east-west trade routes, and its proximity to a tributary of the Tigris, the Khawṣ ar River, added to the value of the fertile agricultural and pastoral lands in the district.

In Nineveh, the vast and imposing palace, Ashurbanipal, was found nearby on a hill called Kuyunjik. It contained one of the largest libraries in the known world. It was finished around 643 BCE and was discovered and partially excavated in 1853 by Sir Henry Rawlinson. Huge numbers of artefacts and in particular cuneiform pottery inscriptions were found and transported to the British Museum, and the task of interpretation began.

Historian Joel Kramer has provided a valuable insight to the relevance of archaeological discoveries at Nineveh, its relevance to the biblical account of the life of Jonah and how we can now date certain historical events with increasing certainty.

Before we look at the Jonah story, we need to recognise that the Bible provides us with many detailed chronological signposts to date the events described. But how do we tie these dates to the calendar we use today (the Roman Gregorian calendar)? Until now this posed a problem which vexed historians for centuries. James Usher in the 16th century made a valiant attempt to do so and with some success. But the remarkable finds at Nineveh are some of



The Palace of Ashurbanipal



Sculpted reliefs depicting Ashurbanipal, the last great Assyrian king, hunting lions, Gypsum hall relief from the North Palace of Nineveh

the most significant ever discovered.

The Royal Library of Ashurbanipal is important for a number of reasons. For a start, the number of clay tablets and fragments discovered – at least 30,000 – makes Ashurbanipal's library one of the largest collections of texts during its day. In addition to this, the large number of subjects covered is astounding. The king's personal library contained texts from such areas of knowledge as medicine, mythology, magic, science, poetry and geography. One of the best-known documents from this library is a version of the "Epic of Gilgamesh," which is often regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature. Given the range of subjects covered by the contents of Ashurbanipal's library, this collection is of immense importance in the modern study of the ancient Near East.

Amongst the most important discoveries is the Tablet of Synonyms (or Eponyms) – a detailed chronology of Assyrian history. This carefully recorded the appointment of key government officials in Assyrian society and their roles and achievements. Each year a new dignitary is noted.

Crucially this records one special event – the very rare celestial event of a total eclipse of the sun over Nineveh. One Eponym records the appointment of the governor of Gozan and a "revolt in the



Tablet of synonyms. British Museum

city of Assur” and “in the month of Sivan, the sun was eclipsed”.

By referring to NASA computations which lists every recorded total eclipse from 2000 BCE (and forwards to 3000 CE), Joel Kramer has identified the eclipse recorded as that which took place on 15th June 763 BCE. This was the only solar eclipse over Nineveh during the eighth century BCE.

By inserting the date of 763 BCE into the extensive catalogue of people and events recorded in the Eponyms it is a simple task of deduction to correlate other dates. A single confirmed date automatically confirmed the other dates. Thus it was simple to match the schedule of events to given years over a period of 244 years from 892 BCE to 648 BCE.

But how to synchronise the Assyrian dates with the biblical dates? What shared event on both calendars could be identified and thus lock the two together?

The Eponyms confirmed that King Sennacherib ascended to the throne of Assyria on the 12th day of Av in 705 BCE and led an expedition to Judah (i.e., Israel) in 701 BCE.

Now let us correlate to the Bible texts. 2 Kings 18:13 records that:-

“In the 14th year of King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib King of Assyria attacked and captured the fortified cities of Judah”.

Bingo! The 14th year of the reign of King Hezekiah is the year 701 BCE.

We also read in 1 Kings 6:1 that “... in the 480th year after the Exodus and in the fourth year of his Reign, King Solomon started the construction of the Temple”.

The fourth year of King Solomon’s reign was 966 BCE, and by adding 480 we reach the date for the Exodus, namely 1446 BCE.

[As a side note – the eruption of the volcano on the island of Thera, 70 miles (110 km) north of Crete shattered Knossos and damaged other settlements in northern Crete. The Thera eruption is thought to have occurred about 1500 BCE. Ash and pumice from the eruption have been found as far away as Egypt and Israel, and there has been speculation by some that the eruption was the source of the book of Exodus. These dates may well align.]

Back to Jonah in Nineveh

The biblical accounts records the salient events as follows:-

וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר:

The word of G-d came to Jonah son of Amittai:

קוֹם לךְ אֶל-יְנֵינָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרֵא עָלֶיהָ כִּי-עֹלָתָהּ רַעְתֶּם לִפְנֵי:

Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before Me.

Jonah went at once to Nineveh in accordance with G-d’s command. Nineveh was an enormously large city a three days’ walk across.

וַיֵּחַל יוֹנָה לְבוֹא בְעִיר מִהַלךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר: עוֹד אַרְבַּעַיִם יוֹם וַיְנֵינָה נְהַפְכֶת: *Jonah started out and made his way into the city the distance of one day’s walk, and proclaimed: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנָשֵׁי יְנֵינָה בְּאֵלֵהֶם וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוּם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שִׁקִּים מְגֹדֹלִים וְעַד-קִטְטָם:

The people of Nineveh believed in G-d. They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth.



The Taylor Prism in the British Museum is Sennacherib’s own account of the invasion

וַיַּעַן הַדָּבָר אֶל-מֶלֶךְ יְנֵינָה וַיִּקְרָם מִכְסָּאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶדְרֵתוֹ מֵעֵלְיוֹ וַיִּכַּס שִׁק וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל-הָאֲפֶר:

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי-שָׁבוּ מִדְרָכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנְחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת-לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

G-d saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And G-d renounced the punishment that had been planned for them, and did not carry it out.

To complete the picture we read in 2 Kings 14: 23-25 how Jeroboam King of Israel “did evil in the sight of the Lord” and the Prophet Jonah travels to Nineveh to tell the people to repent.

Extraordinarily, we note that the people of Nineveh and indeed the King himself put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. What could have made an entire capital city and the head of a vast empire, no less, adopt such extreme humiliation and supplication when a foreign prophet (Jonah) came to warn of the end of days? Ashurbanipal had considered himself the King of the World. What could have induced him to cower so ignominiously? Could it be that perhaps some Divine intervention took place?

We know that King Jeroboam reigned from 793-753 BCE and the solar eclipse took place in the latter part of his reign. We know that Jonah was an active prophet during the reign of Jeroboam (see 2 Kings above). Is it mere coincidence that at the very moment Jonah is sent by G-d to preach against idolatry, the rare event of a total solar eclipse is witnessed in the very place he is preaching – where the entire city is cast into darkness – a clear precursor of huge pending disaster for the Assyrians?

The prophet Isaiah (Chapter 13: 9-10) foretells of pending disaster in these very terms:-

“See the day of the Lord is coming – a cruel day with wrath and fierce anger to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light”.

But repent they did and Nineveh was spared and, as if by magic, the sunlight returned to dispel the dread of supernatural darkness. This was a rare – possibly unique – example of the repentance of a city of sinners. Perhaps Jonah’s message hit home to them but equally perhaps they were persuaded by some Divine interference! ■



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