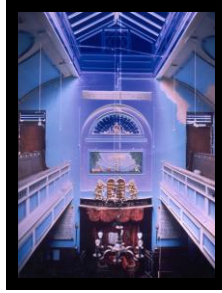


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Newsletter of the Congregation of Jacob Synagogue

Message from Editor

These past few years have been really exciting and challenging times for our community and me personally. The iconic moments were Zoom's bar mitzvah in October 2013 and the Hachnosas Sefer Torah (the dedication of a new Sefer Torah) in September 2014, generously donated by Martin Alpert in memory of his parents, Masza and Joe Alpert.

Boruch Hashem with the support of such diverse people we have been able to maintain a regular Shabbos minyan. However, I am not complacent about the current situation and all of us need to encourage one new person to join us to embolden the community.

I prefer to dwell on the issues that we have not resolved rather than self-congratulate on what we have achieved. On the theme of Sifrei Torah in spite of professional input by soferim, one of the Sefrei Torah is still not kosher. However, whoever would like to perform a mitzvah, and be a mensch, can help support us to check to ensure the kedushah of that Sefer Torah.

On the same theme, our community has managed to raise a few thousand pounds by way of donations for the Sefer Torah to be dedicated in the memory of Nochum Tzvi Potash. This is the least we can do to show our appreciation to the Potash family and in particular, to Rabbi Ephraim Potash and his family who have helped us so much over the past 20 years. If you would like to donate towards this worthy cause, please check our website on how you can donate to dedicate a portion of the Sefer Torah. Otherwise, please send donations to the above address.

On a more sombre note, I would like to pay homage to Barbara Gold who was keen to ensure our shul benefited from the talents of her son Michael, our webmaster, who has performed many invaluable roles for the shul. Michael was an excellent son and he looked after his mother for many years before she passed away.

David Russell's father Geoffrey, passed away, last year and is sadly missed by all who knew him.

Perhaps we need to count our brochas (blessings) and be grateful for whatever we receive from above. We are fast approaching the Yomim Neroim (High Holy Days) and our programme of services is on our website. I, Sandra, Gerald and "Joey" wish you all a Happy New Year.

Many thanks, to all of you who support the shul in so many different ways.

Kesiva V'chasima Tova

Rev. David Brandes

Barbara Gold (10th July 1944 – 20th May 2013)

Barbara Gold was born Barbara Woolf in Oxford on 10th July 1944. Her family moved back to London after the evacuation finished.

She spent most of her life in and around the Ilford and Wanstead area with her family. Her father Nathaniel Woolf was a Jeweller and part-time youth worker, martial arts instructor and one of the founders of Wanstead and Woodford Synagogue.



Her family were not very orthodox, but when mum fell in love with my father Barrie Gold, one of the conditions of marriage was that mum kept a kosher home. This she learnt to do gladly and I have fond memories of Shabbos candles on Friday night, and shul on Shabbos mornings. My two brothers and I were given a Jewish education at Ilford Jewish Primary School; and I continued my Jewish education under the direction of Chabad at Wanstead High School. Mum was dubious at first of my affiliation with Chabad, but soon accepted that the influence they had on me was a good one. However, the education I got at home from mum, provided me with the best lessons of all.

She taught me to treat people as I would like to be treated myself, to encourage people to follow their dreams, to laugh out loud no matter where you are or who is listening, to be accepting of all types of people including race and religion.

Both of mum's parents died very young. No one would have guessed that I was going to follow in the footsteps of my grandfather. I was only 3 years old when my grandfather passed away. And yet, without any prompting from mum, I got very involved in youth work. I teach bullied young people martial arts, and was very involved with the initial restoration project of the Congregation of Jacob Synagogue. I did in effect help build a Shul; even if it was a rejuvenation of an existing one!



Mum was very proud of my affiliation with the Congregation of Jacob and of my affiliation with Chabad. Although she did not always understand my religious affiliations and observances, she joined in where she could and when she could. Mum would come with me to inspect the renovation works at the Congregation of Jacob, give advice even when not required and often offered to talk to the builders; G-d help them!

Mum had not been very well for much of her life, she was an insulin-dependent diabetic, had a heart condition that led to a quadruple bypass and was in the final stage of kidney failure leaving her on dialysis. Yet when you met her, no one ever knew.

She always had a smile no matter how much pain she was in, she always thought of and encouraged others and she was always the peacemaker during family fallouts.

Her friends and wider family never got to hear her cry herself to sleep at night and scream in pain at times that it overwhelmed her. But as she was committed to her family, we were also committed to her, and devoted any time necessary to meet her care needs.

She lost her long brave battle with her condition at 6:30am Monday 20th May 2013 and will be dearly missed. The world is a much quieter and more serious place without her.

Michael Gold

Zooms Bar Mitzvah, Congregation of Jacob, October 2013



Rewind back to 2003 - Russell and I first set foot in this beautiful shul and met the likes of David, Gerald, Ronnie and all the wonderful people that make up the Congregation of Jacob. It was not too long after that Zoom also first came to this shul to celebrate Purim, and whilst that was quite a time ago, and thus he may not remember that occasion, there is now a huge photograph on permanent display in the Jewish Museum for all to see, to remind him!

And if you look at that picture what you'll see is a young child, at ease, being encouraged to enjoy himself.

And that is the essence of Kehillas Ya'akov. Anyone can easily be a stranger, but walk through those doors and you're welcomed like someone who's been resident here all their life.

Founded in 1903 this Shul is still going strong and almost uniquely for nowadays remains totally independent and owned by its members. The fact that it is still going is down to the effort of the regulars and the welcoming warmth they offer to anyone new. Hence when Zoom and his family were first planning his Bar Mitzvah, it was only natural for the Congregation of Jacob to be their shul of choice.

So fast forward to October 2013 - Zoom's Bar Mitzvah Shabbat. The Friday night service at Kehillas Ya'akov really is very special every week – after a busy and hectic week, I can really recommend it as the perfect start to Shabbat. For me, it was extra special because I had both my parents, both my sisters and both my nephews, altogether, a very rare occasion, making the normally moving and contemplative service even more so.

To enter the shul on Shabbat morning to a packed congregation was magical. The shul sparkled, everything was spick and span, and the recently renovated ladies' gallery looked fabulous.

David led the 200 or so guests in a warm Kehillas Ya'akov service. After months of hard work, Zoom did his piece beautifully, and everyone was very proud. David had even taught Zoom's little brother, Ace, how to sing Adon Olam.



After the service Katy and Mark had laid on a delicious kiddush of bagels, fish balls and pastries. The Bar Mitzvah boy was also treated to his favourite advocaat, the sort of personal touch that David does so well. After Mincha, the crowds started to drift away leaving us all exhausted, but very happy.

So to David, Sandra, Gerald, Ronnie and everyone else on behalf of us all, I'd like to wish you a mighty Shekoach and a huge thank you, not just for Zoom's Bar Mitzvah, but simply for being here.

Susan and Russell Eisen

The picture above shows Zoom, Ace and Rev. David looking at Zoom's Bar mitzvah portion. The two stars of this show were really Katy and Mark the parents of Zoom and Ace!

The New Sefer Torah (Sunday, 7th September 2014)



Last Sunday I had the privilege to witness the procession of the Sefer Torah (the Scroll) to a synagogue in East London, which is one of a small number that is still active in London. The friend and work colleague who invited me among other colleagues is also a reverend. Because of the presence of Strictly Orthodox (mainly Hassidic) Jewish men, women who attended had to view the event separately upstairs.

Inside the synagogue, the receiving of the scroll was met with celebration and dancing before the formalities and prayers took place. Then Kosher food, drinks and cakes were provided afterwards. In all, it was a unique and enjoyable event.



Barry Hamilton

Barry is a good colleague and mensch! We could have filled 20 odd pages full of all the various people who attended the Hachnosas Sefer Torah celebration and the pictures they took of the event, which we will have to put in the photo gallery. Mervyn Esses, Shayele Glick and many more.

Whenever Schmeichel appear there is always plenty of simcha (joy) and celebrations and Shayele who leads the group has been such an excellent example of what his band of merry men do for us all. If a child is ill in hospital they are there (before the SAS) to brighten up the kinder (children) both Jewish and non-Jewish. They are all excellent Ambassadors for Yiddishkeit (Judaism).

The Sefer Torah was completed at Rev David and Sandra's flat. Although a small flat, over 50 men managed to squeeze in to write a letter or two under the guidance of Rabbi Levy. Everyone enjoyed a l'chaim with some light refreshments.

When the Sefer Torah was completed we marched to the Congregation of Jacob Synagogue via the Sidney Street Estate and along Commercial Road. We had the use of a chupah and some yungliet (young men) who held aloft the chupah. Holding the Sefer Torah was a most wonderful experience and it was a truly uplifting event. Martin Alpert had centre stage in the Chupah resplendent in his wheelchair.

The other Sifrei Torah greeted us at the entrance of the shul and a dance ensued with all the motley crew assembled. We had the beautiful voices of Shayele and Yossi Sonenshine. The catering was by Yossi Deutch of Dagim, which was superb.

All groups of Chasidim attended with the presence of the Getters of Rizhin, Meir Gualandauer, Satmar Chasidim and last but no means least the Bochorim from Lubavitch and the Potash contingent. An array of visitors, from the non-Jewish to Strictly Orthodox, all enjoying themselves in our shul. If only the world could be like this well.... When the Moshiach comes..!

Thoughts for the New Year and beyond

We enter the New Year with a great deal of joy but tempered with a degree of trepidation. It is the beginning of the year, when we pray to Hashem for a Happy and Healthy New Year for us all (all the inhabitants in the world).

Although we are fortunate to live in a society that is reasonably tolerant, we cannot take anything for granted and our true protector is none other than Hashem. We can never rely on human beings to ensure our survival, as we can see with the pitiful plight of the refugees seeking shelter in Europe. This has echoes of the 1930s when our families were fleeing Nazi Europe, but there was very little refuge for them as the various countries closed their borders or even worse assisted the Nazis in liquidating many of them. There were over 6 million Jews killed in the gas chambers with many other groups and other Jews murdered by the neighbours they lived next door, to especially in places like Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine. The list is endless.

As I mentioned before, Hashem is our saviour and all those people who destroyed many of our people are his creatures, so it is difficult to comprehend why this happened and has done for 3,300 years when the Amalakites attacked the Children of Israel in the desert without fear of Hashem.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe discusses in one of his sichos (discourses) on how we can rid the world of these negative elements. His view was to improve yourself by performing Torah and Mitzvot and rid yourself of the Yaizer Hora (the evil inclination) which Amalakites symbolise and by increasing the yaizer hatov (the good inclination) we reduce the negativity. If we extend this to our friends, relations and colleagues by creating a positive environment where we respect one another.

The key to our survival and indeed to humankind is by creating a very positive environment as Tzaddikim (righteous persons) achieve this when they move into a neighbourhood and there are tangible benefits with brochas (blessings). Every one of us should remember that we are Ambassadors for Judaism and many people not least of all by our Creator watch whatever we do. It does not take a lot of work to improve our spirituality by concentrating more on prayers and if we attend shul to participate, if one can, in the service.

As a community, we should not be dismissive of people who are not well heeled and have health issues, as we need to search beneath the surface and see the true worth of an individual.

A Talmud chochom (a learned person) went on his travels to places that were not aware of his greatness. This famous Rov preferred to travel incognito and see how ordinary people are treated by the communities he visited.

The first town he visited they had a designated person who would welcome the stranger to the place and ensured some of their community by lodgings and food looked after them. He attended the only shul in town, and was shown great respect and hospitality, thanked all the community and the leader of the community, and gave a brocha to all the community stating that they should always have only one leader.

The Tzaddik continued on his journey until he arrived at another town and he was not greeted by anyone. He asked one of the towns folk how he could find lodgings. He gave him confusing information so he could not find anywhere. In the end through his own efforts he found an Inn, and was put up for a few nights at a premium price. He then decided to visit the local shul where no one even greeted him. He was treated with disrespect, as the congregation did not speak to him at first. Then they became suspicious and wondered why he would want to come to such a cold and unfriendly place. When he was leaving, he gave them a brocha that they should always have many leaders, and we all know that will lead to division within a community.

In Life, we never fully know whom we are dealing with and if we treat everyone with respect then we would enhance our lives. So how much more so should we treat Hashem with respect by praying with concentration (kavona) and showing kindness to all people.

Our Dad (Geoffrey) Russell (24th October 1940 – 25th January 2014)

Our Dad loved his family and friends, always concerned to protect Mum, his partner in life for 45 years, from the stress of the numerous responsibilities she undertook.

Our Dad never missed a yahrzeit or ritual kaddish for his parents, Ben and Julie, and his late daughter, Anna. Even hunting down synagogues abroad if yahrzeit fell when he was away.

Our Dad gave generously of his time to his rotary club, selling bulbs and raising money for wells in Africa. He bravely visited the Soviet Union in the early 1980s to give support to refusenik families.



He also set an example with his household chores. Emptying the dishwasher, folding the laundry and in recent years, when any of his six grandchildren came to stay – after meal clean up.

And fitness and health. He spoke to us many times about living a balanced life. Exercising and eating carefully. He was a high school athlete and as a child I recall him playing squash, golf and running marathons, in very good time.

He chatted like a familiar friend with passers by in the street, cashiers in shops and banks, waitresses and other customers in restaurants, telephone operators and total strangers standing next to him in queues.

Whenever he came to visit the Congregation of Jacob, and during the wedding of Caroline and David at the shul, he always would have a joke to tell and a smile to share with everyone.

We will all miss that warmth, his sense of humour, his support and his love.

We, his three surviving children - Samantha, Michael, and David. His seven grandchildren – Jacob, Jonah, Aerin, Noa, Asher, Leah and Eben. His children-in-law, Adam, Lauren and Caroline. His sisters Barbara and Kathryn. And of course, our incredible Mum, his companion of forty-five years, Frances.

That we have been able to enjoy the time with him that we have in recent years, has been truly a blessing.

May we meet only in good times in the future.

David, Michael and Samantha Russell

Although Geoffrey passed away, his memory lives on through his wife, children and grandchildren. He was a very pleasant man who always had time for everybody. His grandchildren Asher and Eben are regular attendees who bring Caroline and David with them.

The photo above is of Geoffrey, with a young Asher - now considerably bigger, and louder!

Max Levitas – 100 Years Not Out

Max Levitas reached the age of one hundred years old in early June 2015.

Mazal tov!

A man who has always been a folk hero amongst our community (Jewish and non-Jewish alike). He is typical of our shul folk who have no fear of anything and we are proud that he is a member of our shul.

He does so much for everybody and seeks no personal gain. He believes in his principles.



Levitas family quote: "If I agree with you we will both be wrong!"

If it had not been for Max and many of his comrades, most of us would not be living in a reasonable environment and be able to walk the streets without fear.

He came from Dublin in the Emerald Isle and we are pleased he chose our shul to be a member. He was at the vanguard of the rent strikes and played a role in the Battle of Cable Street. We say a Grosser Shekoiach and you should reach 120.

Our thoughts are still with Max over the loss of his wonderful son Steve who was a real character that joined us for services. We all miss him tremendously.

And finally...



We hold services every Friday night, Saturday mornings and major Festivals.

Shabbos services start at:

- Friday night
 - Summer services start at 6.30pm
 - Winter services start 5 minutes before Shabbat starts
- Saturday morning services start at 9:10am

Everyone is made to feel most welcome, and a kiddush is always made following the service.

Please come along and bring your friends.

And very finally...

Why not join us by becoming a member?

If you would like to know how you can get involved with our community, please contact the synagogue office on 020 7790 2874 or by e-mailing david.brandes@congregationofjacob.org

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