



Our Congregation



News and views from Belsize Square Synagogue

TIME TO SAY FAREWELL

Shalom, Belsize Square Synagogue,

What do you say when it is your last time to address the congregation you have served for the past ten years? Sadly, this is our last communication in *Our Congregation* and time for me to let go and move on.

Looking back over a decade of the privilege you have bestowed upon me as your spiritual leader, your rabbi and teacher, I can only thank the Almighty for the vast experiences and triumphs we have shared together. There are so many things to remember. I have given over 1300 sermons, led over 1500 services, channelled through the education, Bet Din and mikveh for over 60 Jews by Choice, four of whom became Israeli citizens and made Aliyah. We have had hundreds of classes and some incredible trips abroad to Jewish sites in Berlin, Israel, Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

Our congregation has grown in size and stature since I started here in January 2011. Belsize Square Synagogue is a recognised voice and presence for Israel Bonds, the Zionist Federation, Faith Matters of Camden, the Israel Diaspora Trust, the Masorti movement and more.

We have heard the voices of Natan Sharansky and Maxim Vengerov here, two of the Jewish world's most famous and talented persons. Who will forget the concert that my friend

Maxim gave a few years back, and then played his violin at the Israel Embassy residence for Ambassador Mark Regev. We have welcomed Douglas Murray, Professor John Barton, Dr Alan Mendoza (Henry Jackson Society), Rabbi Dr Ismar Schorsch (former Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary), Dr Jack Wertheimer (former provost and professor of Jewish history at JTS), and many more leaders in the wider Jewish world. And what an honour it has been to have among our very own members Professors Tessa Rajak and Antony Polonsky, two of the Jewish academic world's most outstanding scholars.

We have had over 200 B'nei Mitzvah, countless weddings, too many sad times together at shiva minyanim, but celebrations at the synagogue for sacred life cycle moments.

Most importantly, it is the strength and will of all of you—as much as I have tried my best to give you my heart and soul, completely and totally, each day, each year, it is your friendship, support and encouragement that made that task one of total joy and fulfilment.

I am not going to even try to mention all the people here who have so enriched my rabbinical life at Belsize Square, so I will just mention those who have worked with me in a

professional capacity: Gordon Larkin and Paul Rowland whom I thanked in my January letter. Jennifer and Varsha in the office – thank you for all your help through the years, Jagdish from the years past. Ben Wolf – our incredibly talented music

director. Cherish him and keep him here for years to come. We will continue to collaborate on future music projects, no doubt. The choir—I am going to miss them so—they are all gifted and have brought the voices of angels into our midst each week.

Adam Rynhold: my able assistant, my partner in making sure that the Torah scrolls were set, keeping me straight with our honours, with services, with communication, with all problems and situations that needed attention. His father, Isidore, z"l, welcomed me from day one and I will never forget his kindness and his wisdom. May he always be remembered. So, thanks Adam.

Lee Taylor (and Henny Levin from my early years), thank you for our work together. Lee is not only a talented and devoted administrative director, he is a dear friend of mine and I will miss working with him—we have been in communication virtually each day since he has been with Belsize Square and every moment, every challenge has been a partnership.

Cantor Paul Heller: I knew Paul years before he joined us here at Belsize Square Synagogue. We have always meshed well together and he has brought his incredible voice and talent to us each and every week. It is not always easy to find rabbis and cantors who get along as well as we have over the last decade and more. He will always be my friend and in touch regularly. I feel that Cantor Heller's arrival at our synagogue was one of the milestones of my tenure.

And much thanks to everyone who has been a support along the way: Rabbi Emeritus Rodney Mariner; Mike Cayton, the brilliant musician/organist who is a gem to us all; Eve Hersov and Dorothy White for their devotion to our congregants;

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Synagogue Snapshots

NAME: Claire Walford
JOB TITLE: Lead Tutor in Undergraduate Medicine, UCL (and Facilitator of the BSS Adult Discussion Group)



What's your favourite thing about your work?

From the age of 10, I wanted to be a doctor and specifically a paediatrician. I loved little babies and children but I thought that a doctor's job was more interesting than a teacher's job, which needed a lot more patience. I started paediatric training and had a family. At that time, there was no part-time work in hospital medicine and one of my twins was sick so I had to stop paediatrics. Instead I became a GP for 11 years, before finally becoming an A&E consultant at UCLH for over 20 years. I loved A&E as you are a jack of all trades (and a master of none) but you have to be good at quick diagnosis and treatment. No two days were ever the same. Although often tragic and very challenging, working in a major incident such as the Soho bombing and the Paddington rail crash (both in 1999) and the London 7/7 bombings were the best examples of the teamwork that I so enjoyed. Since the year 2000 I have also worked two days a week as a tutor at UCL Medical School. I love teaching and find, contrary to what I thought at the age of 10, I do have the patience. It's never dull. My specialist teaching topic is Medical Ethics and Law.

What is the hardest part of your job?

I'm not sure there is anything that I found really hard. Yes, challenging and sad sometimes, with long hours, but not hard. What I don't like is occasional internal politics and bureaucracy that can be very counterproductive and damaging.

If you could do any other job for one day, what would you choose?

I'd like to be a chef in a Michelin-starred restaurant kitchen. It requires teamwork, an eye to detail and good cooking skills. The hours are long, so not dissimilar to working in A&E, but I just love cooking for people so it would be fun.

How did you come to be a member of Belsize Square?

When I married, I joined my late husband's shul – Edgware Reform. I did not like the reform services, having been brought up at first at New Cross and then at South Hampstead United Synagogues, but I did like a temporary rabbi who came there – Rabbi Rodney Mariner – as did my husband. We joined Belsize Square when he became the rabbi here.

What's your favourite festival?

Although it's a fast, Yom Kippur is my favourite festival as it really makes me focus and reflect on what my Judaism means to me and the person I want to be. I love the special prayers and the music, which make the day unique. I always feel spiritually uplifted by the end of the day and very appreciative of that first glass of water and bite of food.

Where do you like to sit in shul?

I tend to sit near the front in the middle, to the right side of the shul. I'm short so prefer to not sit behind six footers! Except on the Yamim Noraim, just like the students in the lecture theatre, most congregants avoid the first few rows in the front so I can see the Bimah and ark clearly from that place.

NAME: Gordon Larkin
JOB TITLE: Caretaker, Belsize Square Synagogue

Gordon may well be at Belsize Square Synagogue by divine guidance. He was only in London temporarily in 2002 and thought he'd find something to do during his temporary stay. He sent off his CV to two jobs and got called for interview by the Belgian Embassy. He cleared security, had two interviews and was offered the job. But then Gordon got a call from BSS asking if he could come for an interview that night. Gordon biked over to meet a whole group of Board members and was asked to bring his wife along on Sunday. Gordon had a tour of the synagogue and twigged that the job came with accommodation. And here we are, 18 years later; our gain is the Belgian Embassy's loss!



What's your favourite thing about your job?

My holidays for sure! But seriously, the thing I love most about my job is the community and the people I get to meet on a daily basis.

If you could do any other job for one day, what would you choose?

That's actually a hard question to answer because (one day) would never be enough time for me to get to grips with any job, but my dream job would have to be travelling the world as a photographer for the National Geographic magazine.

What is your favourite festival?

St Patrick's day 🍀 My favourite Jewish festival has to be Sukkot.

Do you have a favourite part of the sanctuary or building?

I love this place. Every little brick in this building. I love it. This place is my home just as the community are my adopted family and are the heart and soul of the Synagogue. I feel very protective towards the community.

TIME TO SAY FAREWELL

Continued from page 1

Cantor Norman Cohen-Falah, who was a superb partner my during first years here; Jeanie Horowitz for the tireless devotion and support over all the years she gave to our children and their Jewish education; and Caroline Loison who has been a light of enthusiasm since she began her tenure as our Education Director. I will always remember the smiles on the faces of our youth whenever they shared their learning with them. To your continued success. Finally, Jelena and Misha for being the kindest people a rabbi could know.

To all our lay leaders, too many to mention by name, thank you for

everything you have done for me and my family, in service to the entire community of Belsize Square.

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick – you have the same privilege that was given to me ten years ago. You will see that you have been blessed with a wonderful and unique community. *Hazak v'Amatz* – as Moses gave that charge to Joshua before he left our people, the same to you: be strong, be resolute in your love of the Jewish people, of Israel, and of our Judaism. God, Torah, Israel – that triad has served us well throughout our history, may it continue to guide you and the congregation for years to come. As Rabbi Tarfon said almost 2000 years ago – it is not our obligation to complete the work, but to plant the

seeds for the future. May you and the entire congregation continue to plant those seeds of growth, of *Yiddishkeit* and devotion to God that will ensure our survival and strength for many years to come.

Please stay in touch, everyone, as I leave for my new home in Sarasota, Florida. There's still much work and writing for me to do and I will be sharing all that with you in the years ahead. If anyone is interested in joining the first trip I have planned for next July 2022 to Budapest, Vienna and Prague, please let me know.

L'hatzlaha to Belsize Square Synagogue – blessing, shalom and success.

Rabbi Altshuler

FAREWELL TO RABBI ALTSHULER

He arrived in NW3 on a snowy December day in 2010, and now after over a decade as our spiritual leader, it is time to say farewell to Rabbi Stuart Altshuler. He has been part of all of our lives – at simchas and at sad times – and before he leaves us in June for the warmth and sunshine of Florida, *Our Congregation* has asked a number of those who know him best to offer their thanks and reflections.

Paul Burger (former Chairman)

Rabbi Altshuler had an immediate effect on all of us at Belsize as he and I (as Chair at the time) found ourselves needing to confront what was known as the 'women's issue' [*i.e. whether adult women could be called to the Torah*] immediately upon his arrival. His leadership and commitment were instrumental in getting us as a community through this challenging period, always with an approach to encouraging all views to be heard and respected, yet insisting we move forward in a way which would not compromise *shalom bayit*.

Steven Bruck (former Chairman)

Miriam and I remember his support at the final passing of my dear mother, emotional experiences of our Jewish history in Berlin, Warsaw and Vilnius, celebrations and prayer; the inspiration of his commitment to our Jewish heritage, to education and particularly to Israel; the warmth of his friendship and companionship; his emphasis on our participation in the wider Jewish community; laughter, prayer, study and tears. We send all our love for the future.

Joe Brookes (Chairman of the Liturgical Committee)

So farewell, Rabbi Stuart, I cannot believe that 10 years have passed so

quickly. And now I am thinking back to merry breakfasts with you in Chamomile, preparing for Liturgical Committee meetings about the role of women in the service, or working with you introducing the unwrapping of the scroll on Simchat Torah, the Israel dinners. Ah yes, the B'nei Mitvah, the musical evenings, the beautiful services with our wonderful community. Thank you for all the good things and good luck and best wishes to you in Florida.

Claire Walford (Adult Discussion)

I have had the great pleasure of working with Rabbi Altshuler over the past 10 years creating the Adult Discussion Group programme. It's been a wonderful learning and growing experience for all, as were the four successful shul trips we organised together. His teaching and enthusiasm for Judaism, Israel and fighting anti-semitism has been a shining light throughout his time at Belsize Square.

Charlotte Le Vay (Introduction to Judaism class)

I joined Rabbi Altshuler's Introduction to Judaism class almost seven years ago now. It has been such a wonderful experience, not just the in-class learning, but also the long-standing friendships made. I will miss

the communal dinners where we shared so many ideas and enjoyed some lively debates!

Lee Taylor (Chief Executive)

It's been an eventful eight years working with Rabbi Altshuler. From the moment I started, he welcomed me into the community and our relationship has grown as we have worked closely together. I will miss his dedication, wisdom and advice and I wish him every success with his new community.

Reverend Paul Nicholson (St. Peter's Church, Belsize Square)

Rabbi Altshuler's warmest of friendships and 'can do' positivism have led us into collaborations which have brought immense benefit to our two communities – and beyond. It's always a joy to meet and speak together as fellow Ministers, to share our love of scriptures and our theological curiosity. I hope you return often, Stuart – blessings!

Jackie Alexander (Chairman)

Thinking of Rabbi Altshuler, I find that I cannot focus on the 'Chairman' side of our relationship. What I will carry with me in years to come is his ability to be a wonderful teacher. I have been privileged to be able to learn from him whenever I had a question.



AN INTERVIEW WITH RABBI BOTNICK

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick joined Belsize Square at the start of April from Temple Mishkon Tephilo in Venice Beach, California. Here he talks to **Rob Nothman** about his first few weeks and his hopes and aspirations for Belsize Square.

RN: You've been here at Belsize Square for only a few weeks – what are your initial impressions?

RGB: Well, almost every Synagogue you visit describes themselves as a 'warm and welcoming community'. It may say it on a sign and yet not a single person comes up to you to say hello. Belsize Square is not a Synagogue which has a sign saying 'warm and welcoming community', but it actually is. Everyone has been very kind and effusive – not at all the so-called 'reserved British way'. So many people have already reached out to me and want to meet up, go for a walk on Hampstead Heath – it's been a really nice reception.

RN: Moving from California to London would be quite a challenge at the best of times – doing it in the midst of a pandemic can't have been easy, I imagine?

RGB: Yes – it's quite a big shift. But what I found in the last few years is that all the things I really loved about Los Angeles when I first moved there, I really wasn't taking advantage of any more. My life had changed from when I was a twentysomething to a fortysomething. By the time we left LA, besides a few close friends, it felt like we were only leaving behind the beach, hiking trails, and - barring the pandemic – restaurants. So, in London you don't have a beach, but you can go for a walk on the Heath every day and find a new little corner you've never discovered before, and obviously there's no lack of restaurants here. We may not have warm sunshine every day but I grew up in Cleveland where you can get two feet of snow overnight so climate-wise, it's not such a big deal. But what is a big deal – which is one of the main reasons we wanted to move anyway – is having family around. My family is in Ohio and my wife Rose's family is in London, so it was really difficult without anybody being near us. And then when our daughter Lev arrived, it was hard getting a babysitter every time we wanted to go out. I'm not saying we're now going to be taking advantage of my in-laws . . . but it's nice that Lev [now aged 5] can have a fun night with family. We can now have Friday night dinners together; it's a real treat. Rose's grandmothers are both in their nineties, so it's nice they're able to spend some time with their great-granddaughter.

RN: What challenges is the pandemic providing not only for Belsize Square but all synagogues – is there a danger that some Jews have got out of the habit of connecting with their synagogue because they haven't been able to be there physically?

RGB: It's interesting. At the start of the pandemic, when people thought this was going to be only a few weeks, they were so enthusiastic about participating in Zoom services and classes – anything they could do online. But within a few months, the popularity fell away drastically. And it's because people had adjusted to this new reality. We've all retreated literally into our own little bubbles. But the one thing we all truly long for is the social interaction.

Even if you've become used to celebrating Shabbat not in Synagogue, that's only one reason why people go to Shul. People want to see their friends and they want to be able to sit and 'kibbitz'. And yes, I know you can now meet up with a friend to go for a walk or have a few people over to your back garden, but it's not quite the same as having everybody together as a community. So, while some synagogues are concerned about how they will survive when we come out of this, I actually think there's going to be a huge boom. As long as they know it's going to be safe, I think everyone will be so excited to come together again. If we have to use 'passports' so people feel comfortable and confident in the building, so be it. Then you can have everybody returning to something which feels normal. I think people are hungry for that.

RN: How excited are you at the prospect of being back preaching to a community and physically being in the same space again?

RGB: The Shabbat of April 10th was my first in-person Service in more than a year. I think once we get to a point when we are able to touch, take off our masks, sing and feel the presence of everyone around us, then I think I'll really feel the difference – that's something I long for. I'm a physical person – very tactile – so when we get to that I'll be really excited. But even being in a space with other people since that Shabbat has been really nice.

RN: What do you consider to be your priorities at Belsize Square?

RGB: My number one priority is getting to know the community, meeting people and hearing their stories. It's getting a sense of how this community operates, its customs and traditions, understanding what works really well and what could use some attention. Once I have a sense of that, I'll want to go back to the people who I've gotten to know and ask, 'What do you think about this? What's the priority for you?'

It's important for me to state that I don't have a personal agenda coming in here. My goal is not to turn Belsize Square into Gabriel Botnick's vision of what this Shul should be. It's just learning how I can be the best Rav for this community and how I can inspire as many people as possible to feel connected to it, to be excited about Judaism and to feel a connection to the Divine.

I think it's really important for everyone to know I am accessible. If anyone has a concern about something, please get in touch. I realise that not a single Rabbi at Belsize Square has been British born – we've all been either German, Australian or American – so we're all outsiders in a way. As an outsider, I might do something which goes against the customs of this community, but if I do, I want people to reach out to me and say, 'Rabbi – just so that you know – this, that or whatever . . .'. Because I'm always happy to listen. It enables me to

learn and grow and become a better Rav. I may not always agree with what people share with me, but I always prefer to receive a critique than have someone bear a grudge.

And related to that, I want everyone to let me, and us as a Shul, know what's happening in your life. With the pandemic, there's often a feeling of 'there's so much going

on, I don't want to be a burden,' but everybody's issues are important to us. So, if you're having a small procedure, have been feeling unwell for a couple of weeks, or suffered any other sort of problem, I truly want to know. Being part of a community and having a Rabbi is about knowing there are others there to support you. If we don't know what's happening in your life, we can't be there for you.

SWEET NOISE by Max Hirshfeld

Alex Antscherl

The most moving online event I attended at this year's Jewish Book Week was with American photographer Max Hirshfeld, about his book *Sweet Noise*. This beautiful volume documents in very striking photographs the journey he made to Poland with his mother, a Shoah survivor, in the 1990s. The book also includes the amazing post-war love letters between his parents who were separated after liberation from Auschwitz.

His mother Franzia was given a home by an uncle in the US but his father Julek had to wait in Paris, desperately applying for a visa to join his fiancée. After his parents' death, Max

discovered 70 letters written by his parents in this period. He has selected for the book and had translated from Polish those that spoke most resonantly of their love and the practical struggles they faced to be reunited. They are a wonderful complement to his beautifully observed photographic portraits of his mother revisiting her childhood home.

For the Book Week event, Max was in conversation with Stuart E. Eizenstat, a former US diplomat, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and special adviser on Holocaust-era issues to the Obama White House. He is a specialist in Holocaust restitution issues and

successfully pushed for child survivors and Kindertransport children to receive symbolic payments and for the return of Nazi-looted art from museums, particularly in the US and UK.

Nevertheless, he was careful to point out at the event that 'The last word on the Holocaust should be not be compensation, vital though that is. We should look at the time when there are no eye witnesses left.' He cites as more critical the three-year agreement with the German government to pay for worldwide Holocaust education, worth over \$25 million, with the US government giving \$10 million to Holocaust education in the US.

THE PASSENGER by Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz

Adam Freudenheim

In 1942 the ship on which writer Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz was travelling from Australia to Britain was torpedoed by a German U-boat. Boschwitz, just 27 years old, perished along with everyone else on board the ship. Less than four years before, Boschwitz had published what was undoubtedly the first fictional response to *Kristallnacht* – *The Passenger*. The book appeared in the US and Britain in 1939 and 1940 (under two different titles) and was largely ignored. It went out of print and was pretty much forgotten until in 2018 an enterprising German editor, Peter Graf, discovered the original manuscript in a Frankfurt archive and set out to publish the book in German for the first time. It was Graf's new edition of *The Passenger* that I was sent and which I have just published at Pushkin Press in a new translation by Philip Boehm and with a preface by André Aciman.

My own father was born in Stuttgart in 1937. Like the founding members of Belsize Square Synagogue, he was one of the lucky ones. In late 1937 my grandfather managed to get himself to the USA, and in spring 1938 he obtained visas for my grandmother, my uncle and my father who followed him there. So my father and his family were

not in Germany when a few months later the terrible events of the night of 9 November occurred. Ulrich Boschwitz was no longer in Germany either.

Boschwitz, whose father was Jewish but who had converted, had left Germany in 1935 after the Nuremberg Laws came into effect; he never returned. But Boschwitz continued to follow events in Germany closely, and struck by everything he read about *Kristallnacht* he was inspired to write a novel in response in the weeks immediately after it. He created the character of businessman Otto Silbermann, who finds himself in internal exile, travelling across Germany by train in order to escape the Gestapo. *The Passenger* reads like a Hitchcockian thriller at times, but its real power comes from its honest, unsparing depiction of Otto in all his contradictions – he is married to a non-Jew, he doesn't 'look' Jewish, he isn't overtly political, and yet the times in which he's living have caught up with him and forced him to flee his apartment, his family and his hometown, Berlin.

The Passenger is a powerful novel in part because reading it today we know what came next – for Silbermann, for

the Jews of Germany and Europe and for Boschwitz himself. He was interned in Britain as an 'enemy alien' when war broke out and then shipped off to Australia; he was on his way back to Europe when his ship was sunk.





ANNELIESE GOLDSTEIN – AN EVENTFUL LIFE

Anneliese Goldstein, who died in January aged 102, was one of the last of the adult generation of Jews who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s, having escaped with her new husband Hans to Malaya in spring 1939. Her long and active life showed her gift of resilience in the face of misfortune. With her strong personality and striking looks, she overcame the poor education that many girls had and relied on her natural resourcefulness to enjoy life, and to earn a living in her later years.

Her father and his brothers owned a large clothing factory in Breslau in eastern Germany, now Wroclaw in Poland, and after leaving school at 16 she trained in dressmaking. The family was well assimilated into German society and it could be said that it wore its Judaism lightly.

In 1933, aged 15, she met Hans Goldstein at a Jewish cultural society meeting. They married in 1938 when she was 20 and Hans was 23. By that time, he was a fully qualified civil engineer. Faced with Hitler's persecution of the Jews, they tried to leave Germany, but by February 1939 they had been refused entry to Britain, the United States and British Mandate Palestine. Penniless, they took a boat to the Far East. In Penang, Malaya, Hans's credentials enabled him to secure a job with a Danish firm. Always keen on a challenge, Anneliese started to learn English. Hans's widowed mother joined them a month later. But in late 1940 they were rounded up by the British as enemy aliens and sent to Australia, where they were placed in an internment camp.

When they were released, Hans joined the Australian army and they took Australian citizenship. In 1943 they decided that the progress of the war was such that it was safe to start a family and nine months later their son, Robert, was born, followed by Clive.

While religiously unobservant, Anneliese always stayed in the German-Jewish community and insisted on her children saying the first line of the Shema at bedtime. After the war they were joined by her parents



who had previously escaped to Brazil. With three generations, their two-bedroomed flat was extremely crowded.

Hans rejoined the Danish firm in Singapore in 1948. Their third child, Catherine, was born in 1953. Anneliese did not enjoy colonial life and hated the tropical heat. But she discovered a passion for bridge, which she played for the next fifty years, to an international standard. She also learned to drive, another lifelong enthusiasm. The children were sent to board at schools in England at a very young age. Their parents finally moved to London in 1964. But Hans began an affair with a young woman and Anneliese, now 46, with minimal education, no work experience and no close family or friends, refused to divorce him until 1976, since he kept promising to return. But she had wonderful support from her Jewish neighbours in Ealing, her GP, Dr Cecil Angel and his wife, who became her close friends. Fortunately, the house was in her name.

Resilient and positive, despite having no money or qualifications, she became an accounts clerk at Callard & Bowser, a local sweet factory known for its butterscotch and toffee. She then followed a career in administration and accounts, ending up with a Hatton Garden diamond firm. When the owner retired, Anneliese, now in her seventies, was out of a job. But by now well known in Hatton Garden, she found a similar position, until she finally retired in her mid-eighties. She loved the area, and

bargain-hunting in the neighbouring Leather Lane market.

At 70 she had followed her Ealing neighbours when they moved to Hampstead Garden Suburb. This placed her near her sons and spurred her to join Belsize Square Synagogue. Her daughter had moved to Cornwall, which she loved visiting for its sea air. Twice a week she drove to a bridge club. Most of her partners there were men who wanted to be more than friends, but she was not interested. The only man she was genuinely close to, Geza Roth, died soon after he had proposed to her.

Self-sufficient, shrewd, economical and determined to make the most of everything, her talents included dressmaking and camp cooking – she would cook surreptitious meals on the balcony of her Swiss hotel room. An older brother and sister and a younger brother, also all survived the war. In Switzerland she regularly met her sister from Israel and, once, her brother from Australia. She always returned refreshed from her summer month in the Alps.

At home, she did her own cleaning and gardening until forced to give up. She made jams and jellies from her fruit, enjoyed theatre and opera, learned Chinese calligraphy and discussed art with her son-in-law in Cornwall. Sadly, disabilities started in her 80s, as she gradually suffered from blindness, deafness, fragile bones and limited movement, but she never complained and she loved having a child or baby on her lap. She had a live-in carer for her last 12 years, who encouraged her painting and pottery.

She dismissed the Queen's congratulations on her 100th birthday, saying that nowadays people live to at least 110. She outlived her friends but seemed at peace with the world and finally allowed everything to be done for her. She refused to dwell on the past, always looking on the bright side and she never spoke of her early experiences. She just got on with things. She is survived by her two sons and daughter, seven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

THE HOLOCAUST EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Peter Bohm

This time last year when we started to plan our Holocaust education programme for schools for February 2021, we couldn't imagine how different things would have to be.

We were determined not to cancel the programme. This would mean a whole school year missing out on this vital part of their education. This year, perhaps more than ever, we felt the need to deliver our message about the relevance of the Holocaust to contemporary issues of discrimination and racism. Suggestions were made to produce a pre-recorded presentation, but we felt strongly that part of the uniqueness of the Belsize Square programme is that pupils see the Synagogue and really get to understand the human side of the Holocaust. So, despite some reservations, we decided that the best solution would be to present the event live over Zoom or equivalent.

This raised several challenges. It was clear we could not replicate our normal half day presentation. We originally envisaged delivering the programme to pupils in their classrooms with their teacher, whereas by February all the pupils were at home.

A small but intrepid team put together a programme of which we are proud,

which we feel retains the special flavour of Belsize Square, condensed into the duration of a single school period.

As always, we are particularly lucky to have the services of our very own broadcaster, Rob Nothman, who introduces and links the live sessions in his own unflappable and inimitable way, accompanied by the sights and sounds of the Synagogue with its choir and organ.

The presentation would have been impossible without the under-publicised technical skills of Cantor Paul Heller, who has put together slide and video presentations and who himself delivers a presentation about Judaism and Jewish symbols, and presents our closing ceremony, utilising videos of survivor members of the congregation lighting candles, juxtaposed with the Belsize Square six-branched Holocaust memorial candelabra.

The centrepiece of our programme is Hilary Solomon presenting 'Herbert's Story', relating the history of the rise of the Nazis and the unfolding of the Holocaust, using events from the life of her dear late father Herbert Levy, well known to many of you.

With the limited time available making it difficult for our usual team of survivors to

tell their stories, we utilise video material of an Australian survivor called Eddie Jaku, and a powerful short film made last year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day by well-known professional footballers for their campaign 'Stand Together Against Racism'.

We had various panics along the way, ranging from technology issues to one school's pupils not turning up when we were all ready to present, because they were having Covid tests. We had to get used to speaking to an invisible audience and answering questions through the chat function. Nevertheless, we have now delivered four presentations to three schools and there are another four possible schools to come.

The presentations have been well received and the schools really appreciated it being 'in person'. We would, however, be delighted if schools are able to return to the synagogue next year.

Finally, huge thanks to our wonderful team of presenters and also those on standby. We look forward to seeing our regular and new volunteers next year and, above all, our valued survivors, who are championing at the bit to get back to meeting with and speaking to pupils who are, themselves, eager to learn.

PURIM 2021 – A ZOOM LIKE NO OTHER!

Adam Rynhold

Who would have thought that when we were together in the Synagogue for Purim on 9th March 2020, it would be almost the last time that the community could come together in large numbers without restriction? Who would have thought that we would soon all be experts on Zoom? Who would have thought that we could now organise a superb Zoom Megillah Reading with 120 people joining, most in fancy dress? **See photos here and on page 12.**

Purim 5781/2021 began with Cantor Heller and Rabbi Altschuler leading us in Maariv, with the siddur instantly accessible via shared screen so that everyone could follow the service.

The Megillah *leiners* were faultless and showcased our incredible youth – Harry Abrahams, Max Chalfen, Zoe Cutner, Benny Landeck, Jack Loison, Eve Salama, Joey Sanders, Harry Solnick and Jack Walsh. Intertwined with the Megillah, Penny Homer, our Youth Choir director, had co-ordinated the recording of Purim songs by Orly Landeck, Lily Landeck,

Celeste Livingstone, Benji Loison, Zoe Loison and Mimi Rosenberg, who will ensure that our musical heritage continues.

Then came the 'Purim Spiel', written by Nina & Susannah Freudenheim, who had expertly combined the Purim story with current affairs and of course a few jokes along the way. They were joined by Max Freudenheim, Sonny MacDonald & Poppy Spencer.

Our thanks must go to Cantor Heller and Pat Hirschovits for overseeing the evening and ensuring its success. Here's to next Purim, when we hope we will be able to celebrate, and of course drown out the name of Haman together, in Belsize Square Synagogue on Wednesday 16 March 2022.



Top L - Charlotte Le Vay
Top R - Claire Walford
Middle row L - Faye and Ran Levin and their daughter Eden Liberty Levin
Middle row R - Dorothy and John Brook
Bottom row - Mary and Richard Schiffer



News from Abernein Mansions

Dear Fellow Members

When you read these words we will be on the cusp of my favourite time of the year. The darling butts of May. Mrs Klopstick is already in summer mood and is in training for her latest passion, cliff diving. For this she has set up a tramp online in our communal garden. There she bounces up and down on it, our from our, and even at night. Sometimes she puts in some summer salts too. Thankfully there are no immediate cliffs in this vicinity.

Here in Abernein Mansions the chat of Opera Winfred with Harry and Markle is still on everyone's lips. After watching for just a few minutes I had to switch off, because I found the acting so bad, even worse than in The Crown. With the exception of Professor Claus Steinhirsch at number 41 and Doctor Ena Krumbelbein from number 6 who are self-possessed republics, all other inmates here are loyal objects of the Queen and of all the Royal family, except for Andrew of course.

Talking off family, because we hear in the Mansions are considered to be all in the same balloon, we were able to have a full Seder without masks. This year, Mrs Lotte Fleischberger, as the youngest at 84, recycled the Ma Nishtana. Unfortunately, the evening was nearly ended in tragedy when she choked on the afikomen. Mrs K had to perform the Heimlich maneuver on her, which was no mean feat. Mrs Fleischberger might be the youngest, but she is also the most highly proportioned. It is her luck that my wife has kept up with her weight lifting. With one snatch of this choking woman over Mrs K's shoulder the

affending article was immediately projected from the lady's esophagus to far across the room. This meant searching for that part of the afikomen all over again. We are still looking for it now several weeks later.

Mrs K and I are very much looking forward to meeting Rabbi Botnick, our fifth rabbi at Belsize Square. When my old ankle Emile Klopstick emigrated to America his eye sight was already not good, also his hand riding was very weak and wobbly. Whoever readed his abbligation form rode down Plopstick instead of Klopstick. Then the US registrar put him in as Plotnick, so if these changes continued up the line, I might be related to our new minister.

At the moment of riding, the Prime Minister of Israel, Nathan Yahoo, is being asked to form a collision government at the same time as he is being tried for corruption in caught. With the not so long ago double peaching of Donald Trump, the fishy Salmon and Surgeon business and the many other encriminated lieder, what chance do we have to repair the Erde?

And now there is a big fuzz being made about the Asda Jennifer vaccine. I and Mrs K have had this jab twice without any after mass. I hope this will blow over so that everyone can be inseminated and we again can mangle free among won another.

With the best of intentions

Fritz Klopstick

ASK
FRITZ

Miss Kohlrabi off Fairhazel Gardens writes; 'I have tried to lose weight, but as soon as I start a diet my appetite increases. Please help.' My advice is not to diet, but only to eat when you are really vermisched and only half from what you would normally call a proportion. In no time you will be as light as a feather.

ISRAEL CHARITIES FUNDRAISING EVENING

Emma Brookes

Despite being unable to hold our usual dinner for a second year, and missing sharing good food, wine and dancing in our beautiful sanctuary, the generosity of our Belsize community has exceeded all expectations. We have again raised much needed funds for our chosen charities.

Yom Ha'atzmaut on 14 April saw over 100 devices tune in to Belsize Square's Annual Israel Fundraising Event hosted by Rob Nothman. We heard from Mr Klopstick and from some of our previous distinguished after-dinner speakers including Lord Grade, Lord Finkelstein and Mike Freer. We were entertained by Maxim Vengerov and his talented daughters and by our own Annabel Sher, who won Belsize Has Talent two years ago, demonstrating her virtuoso

skills on the violin. Rabbis Mariner and Altshuler spoke and we had an introduction to our new Rabbi Botnick. Most importantly, we had video updates from all three of the remarkable charities that we support, showing us how vital their work has been to young people and refugees in this most challenging of years.

Thank you to everyone who was involved, and especially to all who attended and gave so generously. For anyone not able to join us on the evening, there is still time to watch the video and donate to our three incredible charity beneficiaries: ASSAF, Yemin

Orde and The Jaffa Institute via event.synagogue.org.uk/live

And here's to next year in the sanctuary!



Young people supported by Yemin Orde

HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR THE 2021 AGM

Annette Nathan

It seems like only a few months since our last Annual General Meeting, and that, of course, is because it was! Covid changed everything and, in the end, our plan to hold a delayed meeting in November in the Hall with our members present, was not to be. Having said that, we did hold a successful meeting on Zoom, which was very well attended.

As I said at the AGM, we will revert to June, and it is possible that this will be another virtual meeting. You will have received a comprehensive Committee Reports leaflet prior to the last AGM and I am loath to ask our committee chairs to write another so soon, especially as the lockdown has curtailed many of our usual activities. However, I am delighted to highlight some of the excellent activities that have taken place since that booklet was published:

Our **Tikkun Olam Social Action Committee**, brilliantly led by Deborah Cohen, along with a band of dedicated volunteers, continue to

make calls to members, particularly those who are isolated, and at Rosh Hashanah all members over 80 were asked if they would like a home-made honey cake. There were many delighted recipients. At Chanukah those who accepted received a jar of Henny Levin's delicious home-made jam, and then our attention was turned to what could be offered for Pesach.

Cheder and Adult Education

continue to thrive online and on Sunday 31 January Caroline Loison and Frank Joseph put on a very successful online quiz, which attracted over 35 families. Congratulations to the Freudenheim, Hurst and Marbach teams for being the top three.

In January 2020 the jewel in our crown, the **Holocaust Education Programme for Schools**, saw close to 1,000 pupils from 7 schools come to our Synagogue to be educated and inspired. So it was a crushing disappointment when the virus

attempted to ruin the 2021 programme. Peter Bohm's article on page 7 describes our wonderful response in putting the programme online. Our heartfelt thanks to all those involved.

The Israel Dinner committee worked hard on our Annual Israel Fundraising Evening and we can look back with pride at a very successful online experience, which brought us as close together as possible, while raising a substantial sum to help our three chosen charities.

We have all been apart for far too long and whilst we are so grateful for our BelsizeLIVE streamed services, our brilliantly accommodating ministers, for Ben Wolf and the choir, and to Claire Walford and Justyn Trenner for hosting online kiddushim after the Friday night and Saturday morning services, nothing will beat us all being together again, singing, praying, noshing and schmoozing. We do them all so well!

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

Sunday 16 May

**The theme of this year's study session on the first night of Shavuot will be
JEWISH SCHISMS, DIVERSITY AND UNITY
What unites us? What divides us?**

7:30pm – 8:10pm

Tessa Rajak: Jews and Judaisms during the Second Temple period - Jewish sectarianism. What do we know about Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Dead Sea Sectarians, messianic movements, revolutionary movements of the period?

8:15pm – 8:50pm

Antony Polonsky: Jewish diversity in Russia and Eastern Europe before World War II. What do we know about Zionists, Bundists, religious Jewish life, secularists and Marxists before the Shoah?

8:55pm – 9:35pm

Jonathan Paris: Jewish diverse views on Israel today. The secular versus religious divide in Israel, Diaspora Jews versus Israeli Jews: politics and ideology.

9:40pm – 10:20pm

Rabbi Stuart Altshuler: The religion of world Jewry - Orthodox, Reform, Masorti/Conservative, secular humanists. How do the various understandings of Judaism differ in Israel and in the Diaspora? Sephardi and Ashkenazi differences.

10:25pm – 11:05pm

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick: Disagreements turned deadly: The day Beit Shammai murdered Beit Hillel. Our sages teach that the 9th of Adar is the saddest day on the calendar, as that is when disagreements between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel turned deadly. In this session, we will explore how things went so terribly wrong and how civility was eventually regained.

11:10pm – 11:50pm

Cantor Paul Heller: Diversity in liturgical offerings here at Belsize Square Synagogue. How 'German' is our music? What are the differences between Sephardic liturgical music and Ashkenazic liturgical music?



Community News

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a cordial welcome to:

Hollie Gold
Jacob Drori
Mika Hyman
Susan & Andrew Terry
Zoe Viner
Benjamin Yass
Keile Greene
Theo Abramson
Vivienne & Mark Prevezer
Joel Goldstein
Zack Solomon
India Capper
Ben Hatch

BIRTHS

Congratulations and mazal tov to:

Juliette & Rob Cruickshank on the birth of their son Barnaby

B'NEI MITZVAH

Mazal tov to:

Charlie, son of Tina & Ben Lewis, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday 8 May
Toby, son of Sasha & Adam Buchler, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday 29 May
Ruby, daughter of Paula & Alex Keve, who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on Saturday 12 June
Poppy, daughter of Sasha & Nick Spencer, who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on Saturday 19 June
Joseph, son of Sarah Walford, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday 26 June

DEATHS

We regret to announce the passing of:

David Grahame on 19 April

STONESETTINGS

at Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery

Janet Girsman on Sunday 2 May at 12.30pm
Ann Bruh on Tuesday 22 June at 11.00am

EREV TISHA B'AV SERVICE

Saturday 17 July

We will be going to the New London Synagogue for Supper, a Discussion and Service including the reading of Eicah and Kinnot. For catering purposes, please book places through the Synagogue Office.

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THE CHEVRA KADISHA

Sunday 18 July at 11.30am

Liberal Jewish Cemetery
Pound Lane, Willesden, NW10 2HP

Annual Service of the Chevra Kadisha on Tisha B'Av.

The Service will be conducted by Cantor Heller and is an opportunity for members of the congregation and friends to observe the Yahrzeit of dear ones who died during the Holocaust and whose date is unknown.

It is hoped that all who wish to pay tribute to the martyrs of their family will avail themselves of this Service. There will be a chance to visit the graves of family members buried at the Cemetery after the service.

The copy deadline for the next issue of
Our Congregation is 18 June 2021

SERVICE TIMES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm

Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Watch online via BelsizeLive at synagogue.org.uk
Please check your emails to confirm the Synagogue is open for Shabbat services. Due to current seating limitations, please email Adam Rynhold in the synagogue office (adam@synagogue.org.uk) to book a place, or call him on 020 7794 3949.

Kikar Kids

Saturdays 1 May, 5 June, 3 July

Under-5s Service in the Crèche
Junior Service for 5-9-year-olds in the Library
11.30am – Kids Kiddush
Often followed by a potluck lunch
Contact Richard Pollins on 020 8444 3074

Cheder

Sunday mornings 9.30am-12.30pm
Enquiries to Headteacher Caroline Loison
or the Synagogue Office on 020 7794 3949
Half Term – Sunday 23 & 30 May

SHAVUOT SERVICES & STUDY

1st Eve: Sunday 16 May at 6.45pm
followed at 7.30pm by *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*
1st Day: Monday 17 May at 10.00am
2nd Eve: Monday 17 May at 6.45pm
2nd Day: Tuesday 18 May at 10.00am including Mazkir
See page 9 for details of our Tikkun Leil Shavuot

SHAVUOT OFFICE HOURS

The office will be closed on Monday 17 & Tuesday 18 May, re-opening Wednesday 19 May at 9.00am

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP

Sunday 2 May

10.00 - 11.15 Rabbi Altshuler - Ask the Rabbi
11.30 - 12.45 Sir Michael Marmot – Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health UCL - Build Back Fairer - The Covid-19 Marmot Report

Sunday 9 May

10.00 - 11.15 Rabbi Altshuler - Ask the Rabbi
11.30 - 12.45 Pam Manix - Medieval historian, author, educator. Oxford's Jewish Heritage. – To be confirmed

Sunday 16 May

No Adult Discussion Group - Tikkun Leil Shavuot at 7.30pm

Sunday 23 May

10.00 - 11.15 Rabbi Altshuler - Ask the Rabbi
11.30 - 12.45 Tony McAleer - Former skinhead and violent extremist, co-founder of Life After Hate, author and international speaker

Sunday 30 May

10.00 - 11.15 Rabbi Altshuler - Ask the Rabbi
11.30 - 12.45 Speaker and topic to be announced

Sunday 6 June

10.00 - 11.15 Rabbi Botnick - Topic to be confirmed
11.30 - 12.45 Fida Tabony-Nara - Co-Director of Mahapach-Tagir - Israel grassroots feminist educational and communal organisation that operates as a Jewish-Arab partnership

For the rest of the term's speakers and topics, please check weekly News from the Square emails for updates.

BE INSPIRED BY GERTI AND GERALD

Eve Hersov

I have heard many grumbles this winter and spring from older members who are feeling the physical impact of the pandemic. People are concerned because they feel less physically fit now that their groceries are being delivered and they aren't walking to the bus stop.

So, I want to highlight a member whose commitment to exercise is a motivation to us all. Gerti Blum Baruch, aged 94, has a daily appointment with her exercise bike, spending 45 minutes to an hour every single day pedalling on the stationary exercise bicycle. Gerti says, 'I have aches and pains and problems – it comes with age. I push it. I do as much as I can. Some days it's difficult and some days it's easier but I hardly miss a day. It's like a

drug. I have to do it. It's a job. On Sundays when I go to visit my son in the afternoon, I still get on the exercise bike even if only for half an hour. I wonder if I would be worse off [if I didn't ride the exercise bike]. I force myself. That's what people my age have to do. In the morning – it's the worst as my arms and legs ache but I stretch just a little and then I feel better.'

Gerti was born in Vienna and arrived in the UK with her mother in 1939, a few weeks before the war. Her older sister, Lily, was already in the UK. Gerti's mother became a member of Belsize Square Synagogue and took a flat in Holmefield Court, Belsize Park. When I question Gerti about her admirable commitment to stay physically fit, she says of her life,

'What I've been through – it gives you that strength.' Gerti watches TV while she rides her exercise bike and says, 'It's hard going but order a bike and put it in front of the TV. It's not a big deal. I have my schedule – my exercise.'



If you feel a bit restless and have time on your hands but can't quite manage to follow Gerti's example, perhaps you'd enjoy the quieter, contemplative occupation of doing some colouring.

Gerald Hellman, 95, took up this creative challenge with some simple templates I created and commented, 'More joy for you and an entertaining afternoon for me.' His inspired interpretation of the designs and wonderful energy is seen in these photographs.

If you want these colouring templates (which can serve as greeting cards) please contact Eve by email eve@synagogue.org.uk or by

telephone 020 7435 7129. They are available for you to print at home or can be sent already printed to members by 'snail mail'.



COMIC TIMING

Richard Pollins

If you weren't there last month – where were you? Belsize Square took its first step into live comedy and hopefully we won't look back. From the comfort of our own living rooms and kitchens we were treated to a top evening of comedic talent.

The compere for the evening was Philip Simon, a previous winner of Jewish Comedian of the Year but better known to us at Belsize Square as the man responsible for putting the layout of Our Congregation together each month.

He's a professional comedian who, as well as co-hosting Jewish podcast Jew Talkin' To Me?, has been

running his School's Out Comedy Club children's joke shows online throughout lockdown and published a joke book while he was at it. He's comedy's answer to Joe Wicks and that's not just how he does his star jumps.

Philip expertly wowed the crowd and introduced Joe Bor (also a Jewish Comedian of the Year) and Mark Simmons of Mock the Week fame.

They were all very entertaining, though also challenging for an online audience who've mastered Zoom etiquette during the pandemic. We know normally to mute and only speak when it's our turn, yet all of

this needed to be unlearned for comedy. Microphones open for background laughter and heckling in the most Belsize of ways.

It was great to see so many screens enjoying the jokes from our online talent, but of course we're all hoping for a return to IRL (in real life) events soon. When that happens, it would be wonderful to organise some in-person comedy for all to come to.

Thanks to Lee in the office for all his help beforehand and on the evening.

You've been lovely. Thanks for reading this far. I'm Richard Pollins. Good night!



PURIM 5781

See full report on page 8



Jonathan Livingstone is Top Gun at Purim, with daughter Celeste.



Jackie Alexander, our chairman – or is it Queen Esther herself?

**Notice is hereby given that the
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BELSIZE
SQUARE SYNAGOGUE
will be held via Zoom on
MONDAY 7 JUNE 2021 at 8.00pm**

AGENDA

1. Introduction and Report by the Chairman
2. Financial Report
3. Appointment of Auditors
4. Election of members to the Board
5. Election of Board of Deputies representatives
6. Some words from Rabbi Botnick
7. Any Other Business

Candidates for Election to the Board

Joe Brookes*, Paul Burger*, Simon Cutner*, Michael Horowitz*, Adam Hurst*, Liran Maller, Annette Nathan*, Marion Nathan* & Nick Viner*

* members of the present Board

Election of Representatives to The Board of Deputies

Deborah Cohen, Peter Strauss, Dilys Tausz

Under clause 17(c) of the Constitution, every member of the Synagogue not being in arrears with more than one year's subscription shall be entitled to attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting. Voting is by secret ballot of those present at the AGM and entitled to vote.

Zoom details:

Meeting ID: 873 9662 6576

Passcode: 619372

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

51 Belsize Square, London, NW3 4HX

Tel: 020 7794 3949

Email: office@synagogue.org.uk

Website: www.synagogue.org.uk

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

9.00am - 5.30pm

Fridays: 9.00am-2.00pm

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Lee Taylor - 020 7794 3949

RABBI

Rabbi Dr Stuart Altshuler

rabbid@synagogue.org.uk

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick

rabbibotnick@synagogue.org.uk

CANTOR

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

cantor@synagogue.org.uk

RABBI EMERITUS

Rabbi Rodney Mariner

rodmariner@aol.com / 020 8347 5306

CHAIRMAN

Jackie Alexander

chairman@synagogue.org.uk

CHEDER AND YOUTH

Caroline Loison

caroline@synagogue.org.uk / 020 7794 3949

CHEDER PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Frank Joseph

020 7482 2555

COMMUNITY CARE CO-ORDINATOR & BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Eve Hersov

eve@synagogue.org.uk / 020 7435 7129

CHEVRA KADISHA

Chairman: Rabbi Stuart Altshuler

Joint Vice Chairs: Helen Grunberg - 020 8450 8533

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

FUNERALS

During Synagogue Office hours phone 020 7794 3949

Evenings/weekends phone Calo's (Undertakers)

020 8958 2112

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR CONGREGATION

To the synagogue office or to alexantscherl@me.com

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Philip Simon: www.philipsimon.co.uk

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