



TU B'SHEVAT

Turning over a new leaf

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick on how trees – and humans – prepare for change

The world of trees is fascinating, yet some of it is invisible to our eyes. We can watch buds develop into leaves, and flowers give way to fruit, but for these events to occur, something far more miraculous must first take place, hidden from sight.

Around late summer or early autumn, perennial trees will begin their transition to dormancy – when they slowly stop growing in anticipation of winter. It's during this time that a tree will begin shedding its fruit and losing its leaves, so that by the first frost, the tree is fully dormant and protected from the cold weather.

But dormancy actually consists of two periods: the earlier endo-dormancy, when a tree will not grow at all, no matter what conditions it is exposed to; and the later eco-dormancy, when the tree is open to the possibility of growing new buds once it has met a requisite number of hours under

ideal conditions. This protects the tree from budding too early and being exposed to frost damage.

For most fruit-bearing trees, the moment of transition from the endo- to eco-dormancy periods occurs around January. It then takes a number of weeks before the first buds appear on a tree, signalling to us that spring has arrived. But as far as the tree is concerned, the rebirth of spring actually begins far earlier – at the start of the eco-dormancy period.

While we may have no idea that such changes are happening within our arboreal neighbours, those who are finely attuned to nature certainly are aware of these processes. Although scientists didn't begin to understand these stages of growth until about 200 years ago, our ancestors have been keenly aware of this process for at least 2,000 years.

The two great schools of thought in the Mishnah, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, understood that trees began their rebirth in the middle of winter – they just couldn't agree on the exact date. While Beit Shammai said this transition coincided with Rosh Chodesh Shevat, Beit Hillel argued that the change happened two weeks later, on the 15th of the month, or Tu B'Shevat.

It's remarkable to think that, even without access to empirical science, our ancestors could understand the hidden, inner world of trees. But it isn't terribly surprising, as anyone who strives to understand God's world will realise

there is complexity and beauty hidden below the surface wherever we look – especially within humans.

The rabbis of the Mishnah explain that people are similar to trees in many ways. I imagine the rabbis understood that within each of us occurs a multitude of changes that are hidden from the view of others. Often times, the most profound changes come on so slowly and subtly that we don't even recognise them occurring within ourselves. But when we pause to reflect on our lives' journeys, we realise how much we have grown and changed.

When we are trying to make a change in our lives, it is important to be patient and to remember that even while we may not realise it, microscopic changes are happening within us all the time.

Right now, we might feel like that barren tree, braced against the harshness of winter. But soon – and likely before we even realise it – we will be standing tall and beautiful in the full bloom of summer. We simply need to have faith in the process.

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CANTORS' CONVENTION

An uplifting and moving experience in Budapest

Cantor Paul Heller attended the European Cantors Association's 14th annual convention in Budapest on 2-7 November 2022

Almost 100 participants from all over the world attended our meeting, which took place in the breathtakingly beautiful Rumbach Synagogue, built in 1872 and meticulously restored by the Hungarian government in 2021. For five days we shared our knowledge, our experiences and our music, and we also prayed. We were joined by choirs from London and Israel. We engaged in workshops, panel discussions and masterclasses and we enjoyed concerts by prestigious cantors.

In a panel discussion on the future of the prayer modes, I was

honoured to be seated between Cantor Asher Hainovitz and Cantor Deborah Katchko. My contribution included introducing how Belsize Square Synagogue children grow up listening to, and learning, the legacies of the great composers of synagogue music, Louis Lewandowski and Salomon Sulzer. In that way we fulfil their vision of preserving the ancient modes of musical liturgy.

On the third day of the convention, the last day of the 11 months that I had been reciting Kaddish after the loss of my mother z"l, I was invited to lead the Friday morning and afternoon prayers. We followed the style of the Princes Road Synagogue in Liverpool and included Psalm 145 as set to music by Sulzer and Mendelssohn, with accompaniment by Israel's Kol Rina choir directed by Maestro Johnny



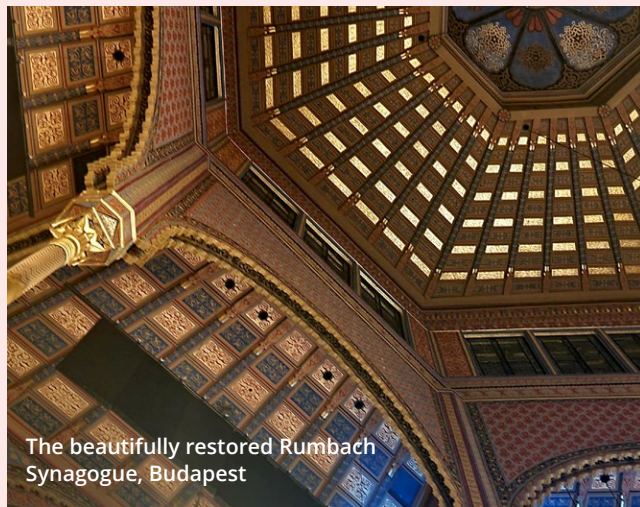
Cantor Heller leading the Mincha service in the Rumbach Synagogue

Greenstein. I was very moved to have my colleagues share this significant milestone in my life.

The convention concluded with a gala concert that included two duets that I sang with Cantor Sofia Falkovitch. Both can be heard on my YouTube channel.

The meeting provided me with the opportunity to grow and learn, inspiration for my role as a Minister and Cantor at Belsize, and a great occasion to socialise with new and old friends. The programme was impeccably organised and in particular I should mention the European Cantors Association's co-founder, Geraldine Auerbach MBE, a member of our synagogue and the founding director of the Jewish Music Institute.

After the convention we toured Budapest's Jewish quarter. Our guide reminded us of the deportation of almost 500,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in 1944. Thousands who remained in Budapest were shot on the bank of the Danube, where there is now a shockingly moving memorial in the form of a sculpture of their shoes, which they were forced to remove before they were murdered. May the sacrifice of the victims of the Shoah be a motivation for us to continue to maintain our beautiful heritage and in particular, our ancient prayer modes.



The beautifully restored Rumbach Synagogue, Budapest



The Shoes on the Danube Promenade memorial to the thousands of victims shot into the Danube by Hungarian militiamen in 1944-45

YEMIN ORDE

Yemin Orde, the Youth Village near Haifa, is one of the Israel charities supported by our Synagogue. Here Vivien Lewis updates us on her recent visit

Three years ago, I spent a month at Yemin Orde, talking with staff and students and observing the amazing ethos of the place. I kept in touch with them online, counselling and mentoring many students, staff and graduates. Covid prevented my return, but I was finally able to pay them a short visit in November.

The village is currently home to 400 'at risk' 14-18-year-old girls and boys who live there in group homes, each cared for by a *madrich* (youth leader or houseparent). The residents come from many countries – the geographic range of backgrounds reflects some of the world's current problems. There are many from Ethiopia, the former USSR, France, Brazil and Israel itself. And now there are very many from Ukraine, with another 30 arriving soon and a special Ulpan organised for them. The staff set up groups for Ukrainian and Russian students as soon as the war broke out, enabling conversation and understanding between the two nationalities to help them accept, respect and accommodate the feelings raised by the conflict.

Yemin Orde residents on their annual long hike



The village's facilities – educational, sport, drama, music, the eco farm, library, woodwork, art and pottery – are wonderful. But it is not merely in bricks and mortar that the incredible value of Yemin Orde can be measured. The commitment, passion, insight and positivity of the staff is reflected in each young person. The mantras 'we never give in and we never give up' and 'we listen to the music, not the words' sum up their approach. The social workers in the team are available to support the students, the professionals and, very importantly, the family members.

I spent time with several students, one to one, each with heartbreaking stories of abuse, neglect, loss and more. Yemin Orde becomes their home for ever, as each 'graduate' has an ongoing contact with a member of staff chosen by the student. They are welcomed back to celebrate life events, to receive advice and guidance or just to touch base. Many return to share their stories of success in the army, the workplace or family life. They provide role models for the young residents who learn that they too can achieve their goals

After the age of 18, over half of residents attend a Mechina, a one-year voluntary pre-army leadership programme primarily for immigrants. The Village Way, the outreach programme based on Yemin Orde's methodology, has two of these residential units, one for boys and one for girls. Using the ethos of Yemin Orde/Village Way, the young people have delighted, and often surprised, their families and those administering the army entry process by the huge change created by the year's programme.

The Belsize community is much loved by Yemin Orde's staff. We have given financial help over the years, for example increasing the size of their eco farm and enabling the weekly distribution and sale of veg boxes, grown and harvested by the young people, thus increasing village income. We've also provided equipment used in the very challenging annual one-week hike that teaches the young people skills such as cooking and sleeping in the open and map reading, improving their self-confidence and self-esteem. I would suggest that on a visit to Israel, Belsize members should consider visiting Yemin Orde, where you will be warmly welcomed and shown around. You will understand the value of our ongoing support for this fantastic place. Volunteers from Belsize, over the age of 18, are also invited to spend a minimum of three months there – a great opportunity for forging links with Yemin Orde and its residents as well as being a wonderful personal experience.

SAVE THE DATE

BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE ANNUAL ISRAEL DINNER

Wednesday 26 April 2023

A full announcement will be made in the coming weeks including:

An exciting speaker

An incredible new partner charity

Plus all the details of the wonderful evening you've come to expect

If you haven't been to our Israel dinner before please consider coming this year. The Synagogue is transformed, the food is incredible and the atmosphere is warm and inviting. You can also host tables and invite non-members and we would dearly love to see some new faces!

But for now....PLEASE SAVE THE DATE!

A Chapter in the Book

Alex Antscherl explores a new Second Generation memoir

Several members of Belsize Square have contributed to a thought-provoking project that collects together the memories of over 20 members of the 'Second Generation' – those whose parents were refugees from the Nazis.

The idea was dreamed up by retired caterer Ralph Kley and his friend Ronnie Dunn in a conversation during the first Covid lockdown. They recognised that despite leading very different lives, they had been drawn together by their membership of the Second Generation, something they also share with many friends who are members of our own community. Ralph and Ronnie agreed on the importance of recording the stories of their parents and their own experiences – lockdown provided the ideal time to do it. Feeling that writing a whole book was a daunting proposition, they hit on the idea of inviting contributors to write a chapter each, detailing 'how our families overcame unbelievable hardships and still kept their dignity and managed to make a life in their new countries'. This idea also gave rise to the name of the project 'A Chapter in the Book'. Twenty-two people have



Alfred Brod, father of Michael, in Prague in 1938, with his mother Meta

risen brilliantly to the challenge, providing fascinating glimpses into their parents' refugee stories of escape, life in the UK during the war years, and burgeoning family life in later decades. Contributors include Belsize members Marion Godfrey, Stephen Wiener, Kitty Brod and Michael Brod.

The very personal nature of these stories and the many pre-War photos that are included in many

of the chapters bring the familiar history of this period vividly to life. Unsurprisingly, there are many heart-wrenching moments in these pages, such as the fact that Michael Brod's father Alfred drove from London to his hometown, Prague, to collect his mother and grandmother in the summer of 1939. The two women refused to leave Nazi-occupied Prague, with the inevitable tragic results.

There are lighter moments too. I'm charmed by the thought of Marion and Stephen's mother Gerda, employed as a 19-year-old maid by an English family, being instructed to 'clean Aga' and spending the morning trying to catch the family dog, never having heard of that type of cooker before!

If anyone would like to have access to this collection of Second Generation stories and memories, please contact Ralph on ralphisfood@gmail.com



Hans and Gerda Wiener, with Marion, 1946



Dilys Tausz introduces our regular report from our Board of Deputies representatives

The Board of Deputies (BoD) is the voice of the British Jewish Community, representing our interests to the government, to the media and to others. It represents synagogues of all denominations and many Jewish organisations. The BoD has a broad membership, with Deputies of all political persuasions. Belsize Square's elected representatives are currently Deborah Cohen, Peter Strauss and Dilys Tausz. We are all enthusiastic and active members of both BSS and the BoD, and we hope we bring something constructive to both organisations.

Our particular strengths are in mental health, the interests of younger members and finance, and also the constitutional aspects of the BoD.

As an organisation, the BoD is particularly active in combatting anti-semitism, in student welfare and in facilitating education programmes.

In each issue of *Our Congregation* we will provide a short summary of what has been happening at the BoD plenary meetings. There will also be a new BoD noticeboard in the synagogue. **If you'd like to know more, just drop us a line via the Synagogue Office.**

Deborah, Peter and Dilys

NEWS FROM ABERNEIN MANSIONS NW.3.

Dear Fellow Members

You will be receiving this addition of Our Congregation in the first phew days of too sousand und twenty three. So it is behoovering to me to wish all from you the beast of health und heppiness over the necks twelve months. I know I can also speak for Mrs Klopstick, if she will let me.

Talking from my wive, at this time off year her sorts are always pointed on winter sports. She has already bean prectising the looge down Parliament Hill by attaching her roller skates to a large tray burrowed from the synagogue kitchen. She also wants to go off-peas skiing. I am sorrowly against this because of the danger from avalunches. This woman dozent recognise her age, she still sinks off herself as an eighty-year old.

Chanuka in Abernein Mansions was eggseptional this year. One from our inmates is Clara Riesenpflaum, a well noun soprano. She made the singing of Mow Owsewer into an area from an opera. The power from her lunks nearly blue out the kendals on the menorah und old Doctor Krumbein's twopay went all logsided.

Und vile I mansion Chanukah, a phew weeks ago I mate attendance at the now called Chanukah Market. I was knot able to stay long, as I hat promised to sheer Mrs Klopstick in her wait lifting competition where she was in the final of the over neinteas snetch und twerk. In the end I filled my longer than life beg with the wonderful distraction of foot products, like jars of asparagoose, rot coal (ret cabbage in English), sauer kraut und stollen to diet for. Won disappointment was the lag of Kristmas wrebbling paper. Mrs K und I always took sum home to wreb our cleaner's Kristmas present und for the gross schildren from other nun-Jewish friends. If it is aloud stollen Kristmas cake, then why knot Kristmas wrebbling paper?

With the best of intentions
Fritz Klopstick

ASK FRITZ

I have bean asked buy sum members how they can come over global warning. The proplem is that the world is over popular. If every won took a leave from Mrs K und my boot und only hat one schild, who we heartly ever here from, the Erse could be salvaged in won oder two generalisations. Also to help survive the planet, wood be to install solar pedals. We have them on our balcon ware we are trying to grow mangroves und pickled cucumbers und become self-efficient.

SYNAGOGUE SNAPSHOTS

Justyn Trenner

Businessman, warden of Belsize Square Synagogue and head of security



What is your favourite thing about your work?

I have been fortunate in my career – I built a business in the international financial services world, evolved and sold it, and then was able to mix voluntary and consulting

work. So life has been varied and interesting. I enjoy seeing complex challenges, particularly ones that bring together people, workflows, technology and innovation, and then figuring out and implementing solutions.

At Belsize Square, it is a privilege to be close to the torah and involved in the services, as well as sharing in simchas and family events. My role in security is important, but although it has given me opportunities to get to know so many of our community, I am glad to have a more positive (and indoor) role as a warden.

What is the hardest part of your job?

I think the hardest part of most challenges – and the most rewarding – is the people. It's great learning from colleagues and growing with them, and frustrating when they won't see how right I am!

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

I love different modes of transport – cars, motorbikes, boats – so my pipe dream would involve some of those. Perhaps a classic vehicle dealer. One day I hope to buy and restore a motorbike or car the same vintage as me.

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

My sister, Deborah Jay, had her Bat Mitzvah at Belsize and I really enjoyed the whole experience. So I came back with my family for a Kikar Kids and Pesach service. Both times what struck us was the inclusiveness and warmth of the community – the feel of a kehillah, not simply a service. So we kept coming back.

What's your favourite festival?

I think that at home it's Pesach – seder and the changes of food and crockery. At shul it's probably Kol Nidre for the sense of occasion and the music, or Simchat Torah for really engaging in the celebration of torah – and also the music, especially the Jahres Kaddish. I also lead services at Otto Schiff House where I can share the joy of Chanukah.

Where do you like to sit in shul?

Well, somewhere near Norbert Cohn z"l, still smiling ... Looking at the Aron Hakodesh, to the left and two-thirds of the way back.

CHANUKAH MARKET

The annual prelude to the season of latkes and candles, the Belsize Square Chanukah Market, took place on 4 December 2022. As usual, visitors were able to take advantage of a huge array of delicious foods, including smoked salmon bagels, home-made cakes and freshly cooked crêpes.

All our favourite stalls were there again, including Ellie's half-price high-end beauty products and Tom and Dennis's Continental Foods.

Poignantly, even Henny was there in spirit, with many jars of her wonderful homemade jams made this summer on sale. This year we also had a particularly varied, uplifting and enjoyable musical programme to entertain us, with an amazing amount of talent on display. The Chanukah Market is a major fundraiser for the Synagogue and this year the longstanding organising committee were proud to have made over £10,000.

The committee would be delighted to have some new volunteers to take over the smooth running of this well-oiled machine, or to run or volunteer on a stall, to help with advertising – or to make jam.

If you are able to help, please email Annette on AnnetteNathan@msn.com.



Belsize Beauty stall, run by Ellie Davis



Entertainment from talented musicians including John Abramson on bassoon, Sarah Percival and Jennie Abelman on clarinet and Josh and Raphael Rossiter on melodica

Right: The Belsize Klezmer Band including Michael Zur-Szpiro on harmonica, Saul Zur-Szpiro on drums and Mike Clayton on guitar



SPORT

Lothar's legacy

Rob Nothman explains how a bequest has made dreams come true for young players

Over many years for Shabbat regulars at Belsize Square, the diminutive figure of Lothar Weiss, sitting in the back right corner of our sanctuary, was a reassuring sight. He was small in stature but large in character and warmth. Kiddush chats about his beloved Arsenal were always enjoyable. To those who were closest to him, he repeatedly said that he wanted to make a financial contribution to support young Jewish footballers in memory of one of his relatives, Gustav Oppenheim, who was killed near the end of the War in 1945.

Lothar died five years ago at the age of 93, and thanks to the work of Belsize members Brian Harris and Kelly Saul, that dream of supporting young players was realised this summer at the Maccabiah Games in Israel. Four members of the Maccabi GB girls football team received assistance from Lothar's fund to play for their country. The reports they wrote of their experiences illustrate just how profound the impact of his generosity was.



'My dad had told me how massive an event a Maccabi Games is,' wrote Amelia Bloom, 'but it was beyond anything I could imagine. To walk out at the Teddy Stadium in Jerusalem waving the Team GB flag

and seeing my family in the crowd was the biggest buzz I have ever had. Personally, the tournament was really special for me as I scored 10 goals (including hat-tricks against Australia, Argentina and Mexico) and was the only footballer in all male and female competitions to score 10 goals! Now that I know where the funding came from to enable me to go, I will forever be grateful to Lothar Weiss for making my dreams come true. I hope I did him proud. I would like to thank him, his family and fund and Belsize Square Synagogue for giving me this wonderful experience.'

Dalia Baker describes 'a once in a lifetime opportunity which I would never have been able to experience without the kind help of the Lothar Weiss Fund. The Maccabiah Games, whilst allowing me to play football, also helped me to discover my Jewish identity and incredibly, I had the opportunity to have my Bat Mitzvah at the Western Wall with some of my new peers. It taught me all about my religion and educated me on traditions that I would have never known about without this trip.'

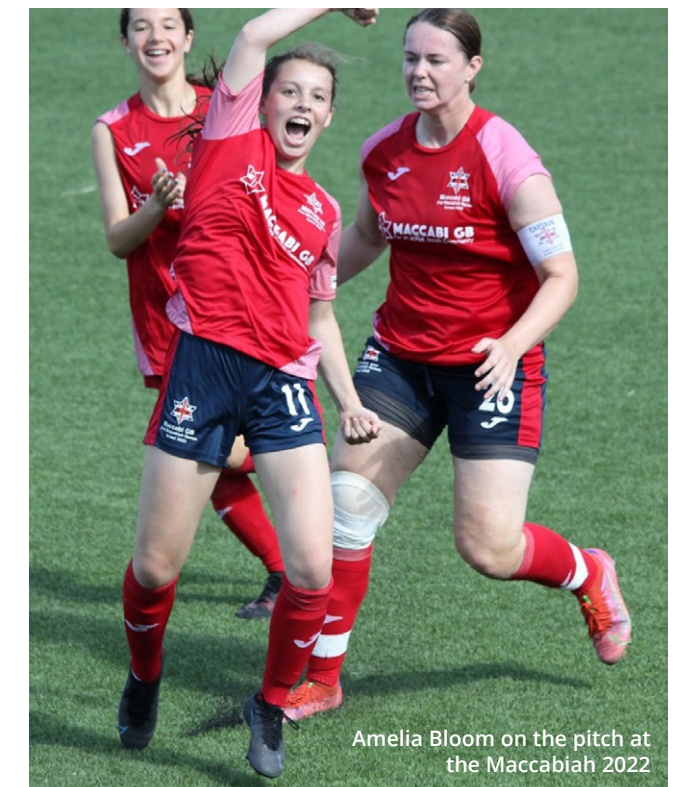
Another player Charis Howell admitted: 'I went into the games held in Israel hoping to find my confidence in my footballing ability again and with the help of my coaches, the junior management team, and my incredible teammates I came home to my family loving football.'

Finally, this note of appreciation from Boo Mills: 'Through being part of the Maccabiah it has not only extended my sporting family but my religious family too. It has further allowed me to educate my friends who aren't of the Jewish faith with my traditions and make them aware of Judaism as something to not be feared but to be loved and treated with the utmost respect. The generosity of Lothar Weiss Fund demonstrates a core value within the Jewish community – it is their kindness that allowed me to experience Israel and the Maccabiah Games, they gave me the chance to fully find myself and be proud of who I am.'



GB girls football team at the Maccabiah 2022

and seeing my family in the crowd was the biggest buzz I have ever had. Personally, the tournament was really special for me as I scored 10 goals (including hat-tricks against Australia, Argentina and Mexico) and was the only footballer in all male and female competitions to score 10 goals! Now that I know where the funding came from to enable me to go, I will forever be grateful to Lothar Weiss for making my dreams come true. I hope I did him proud. I would like to thank him, his family and fund and Belsize Square Synagogue for giving me this wonderful experience.'



Amelia Bloom on the pitch at the Maccabiah 2022

SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm
Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids – Junior Shabbat Service

Saturday 7 January, 4 February, 4 March
11.00am in the crèche for under 5s Service
11.00am in the library for 5-9-year-olds
11.30am Kids Kiddush

Often followed by a potluck lunch

Contact Richard on rgpollins@gmail.com
for more information

CHEDER AND BEIT MITZVAH

Sunday mornings 9.30am–12.30pm

Enquiries to Head: Caroline Loison
caroline@synagogue.org.uk

Term commences, Sunday 15 January
Half Term, Sundays 12 & 19 February

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

A service to commemorate the anniversary of the end of the Holocaust will take place on Friday 27 January at 6.45pm and will include Mazkir for all those who died *Al Kiddush HaShem*.

PURIM

Erev Purim Monday 6 March

5.00pm Family Pizza Dinner, Fancy Dress Parade,
Purim Spiel, Youth Choir
6.45pm Evening Service, Megillah reading,
magic and more!

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP

Meetings continue weekly on Sunday mornings
at 10.00am.

Some sessions are on Zoom only and some in person
at the Synagogue, with an online option available.

For further information, please contact Claire Walford
claire.walford@yahoo.com.

COMMUNITY NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a cordial welcome to:
Rebecca Wicking & John Rogerson
with children Zachary, Noah & Leah

BNEI MITZVAH

Mazal tov to:
Hava, daughter of Lynn Serfaty & Emmanuel Breuillard,
who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on Saturday 28 January

Freddie, son of Nikki Gewirtz & Justin Bass, who
celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday 11 February

DEATHS

We regret to announce the passing of:
Roberta Cohen who died on 14 November

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES



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London NW3 4HX

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www.synagogue.org.uk

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Mon–Thu: 9.00am–5.30pm
Friday: 9.00am–2.00pm

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video or telephone
appointment with Rabbi
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020 8958 2112

OUR CONGREGATION

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alexantscherl@me.com or
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SECOND NIGHT SEDER

FRIDAY 7 APRIL

Rabbi Botnick and Cantor Heller together
with their families invite you to join them for:

Second Night Seder at the Synagogue
following the Service at 6.45pm

Members £30.00

Non-Members £35.00

Children under 13 £15.00

Please contact the Synagogue Office
on 020 7794 3949 or
office@synagogue.org.uk
if you wish to attend.

