



JULY/AUGUST 2023 | AV/ELUL 5783

News and views from
Belsize Square Synagogue

AGM GUEST SPEAKER

Marie van der Zyl visits Belsize Square

We were delighted and honoured to welcome Marie van der Zyl OBE, president of the Board of Deputies, as guest speaker at this year's Annual General Meeting on 15 June. Marie is only the second woman, and the first member of a Reform community, to have been elected president.

In her comprehensive and detailed address, she reminded us that the Board is the first port of call for the government, the media and others who need to understand the Jewish community's concerns and interests. It has representatives from 180 synagogues and 49 communal organisations. With that many points of view, often differing, Board plenary meetings 'can be challenging', but where possible a consensus is reached on important issues and 'there is more that unites us than divides us.' This unity is the envy of many other faith communities.

As president, she has many

official functions. She had the honour of representing the Jewish community at the Queen's jubilee and at her funeral as well as at the King's coronation. The Board is one of the 27 'Privileged Bodies' of the United Kingdom, so when the King acceded to the throne she attended Buckingham Palace to present the Board's loyal address.

But there are also difficult times. The first controversy that hit her in her presidency was the situation with Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. She said that he brought antisemitism from the fringes of society right into the heart of the main opposition party. This was a very tough time, but Jewish community organisations came together for the common good. In reply to a later question, she said that she had worked with Labour and that the party had been taken out of special measures by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, but that at a local level there were still concerns and that to get rid of the culture of antisemitism is 'very, very difficult – it may never go'.

During her presidency, the Board has remained very active in countering other instances of prejudice. Following the George Floyd murder, the Board's

Commission on Racial Inclusivity produced 119 recommendations. They campaigned for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to be proscribed. They tackled the BBC on its reporting of the attack on a 'Chanukah bus' in Oxford Street, the complaint ultimately being vindicated by Ofcom, resulting in a BBC apology. Last year, on behalf of the Board, Ms van der Zyl successfully brought a Church of England Tribunal case against a vicar who had circulated antisemitic social media posts and 'engaged in conduct that provoked and offended the Jewish community'. A board scheme supports people experiencing prejudice in universities and at work.

Building relationships across communities remains a major part of the Board's activity and educating non-Jewish people is an important component of this, with a travelling Jewish Living exhibition and responsibility for the Judaism section of a GCSE Religious Studies textbook. Good communication is maintained with both the Church of England and the Catholic church.

Ms van der Zyl took several detailed questions and in conclusion said that the Board is a team of volunteers, dedicated to the community, and 'if we weren't here, you would certainly notice'.

Belsize Square Synagogue's three Deputies are Deborah Cohen, Peter Strauss and Dilys Tausz. They are happy to be contacted if you have issues that you wish to bring to the Board's attention.

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GET WELL SOON

The editors of *Our Congregation* join the whole Belsize Square community in wishing Rabbi Botnick a full and rapid recovery from his recent accident and surgery.

SYNAGOGUE SNAPSHOTS

Emma Brookes

Ergonomist and chair of Israel Dinner



What is your favourite thing about your work?

As an ergonomist, I research ways to design workplaces and systems to suit the people who need to use them. As my work is mostly in health care, the last few years have

been somewhat frantic. A stint at the London Nightingale Hospital during the first Covid lockdown was humbling and exhausting. I am just starting a project looking into patient pathways in imaging. Given I am married to a radiologist, I am looking forward to some lively debate around the dinner table.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Right now, the travelling, as my study site is in Epsom.

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

This is not a hard question for me. I would be a tree surgeon: high up in the branches, immersed in nature and away from everyone else. The chainsaw is also appealing!

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

I married Joe and we found Rabbi Mariner who led me gently into Judaism and continues to inspire my Jewish journey.

What's your favourite festival?

I love all the festivals and even after 20-odd years, I still find myself thinking that a younger me would never have imagined that this would be how I find my joy. If I have to pick one it is Succot. It is so fabulously pagan! Am I allowed to say that? I love the lulav shaking and turning the etrog, all in a funny little shack that we build in the garden. I always meet with my wonderful Rosh Chodesh group at Succot, even if we have to juggle the dates a little, and some of our best times (and food) have been in the Succah.

Where do you like to sit in shul?

Usually on the left, but my very favourite place has been right up front for one of our kids' B'nei Mitzvot, with everyone we love around us.



Members are busy making delicious jams, jellies and marmalades for sale at our Chanukah Market

We need a good supply of clean jam jars with lids – but without labels

Please bring them to the Synagogue Office, if possible by the end of August

Thanks

RECENT EVENTS

LEARNING ON SHAVUOT

David Horwell

Our Tikkun Leyl Shavuot this year took on a new format, with the Tikkun programme following an excellent and convivial Erev Shabbat communal meal. The title of the evening was 'Senses and Sentience', a title that perhaps had the Tikkun participants puzzled. But the subtitle gave a clue: an exploration of Revelation through art, technology and Torah. As the three sessions developed, the meaning developed as well.

After Rabbi Botnick's introduction on the Omer and its symbolism, 'Senses' was covered by Rabbi Rose Prevezer's panel of Emily Marbach, an artist, Bea Setton, a novelist and Benjamin Wolf, our Director of Music. They discussed questions of revelation and inspiration as reflected in their work. Rabbi Botnick's panel of Michael Tessler, an IT researcher at DeepMind and Leonid Gluzman, an IT start-up investor, moved on to 'Sentience', discussing cognition, the difficult questions associated with artificial intelligence and what differentiates humans from machines. Finally, deep into the evening, Cantor Heller brought us back to Revelation, based on just two short verses in Exodus and the expositions of the three great sages Maimonides, Nachmanides and Rabeinu Bahya, 'intellectual giants', on the revelation of God at Sinai. For the stalwarts who lasted the course to 11.30pm, Cantor Heller's presentation was indeed a revelation.



Luciana Berger interviewed by Rob Nothman

ISRAEL DINNER 2023

Anthony Gee

Our annual Israel Dinner was held on 26 April, Yom Ha'atzmaut, and yet again it was a huge success!

The evening kicked off with a sumptuous canapé and drinks reception whilst the Belsize Klezmer Band entertained us with its brilliant music, as it did throughout the event. There was a wonderfully warm and convivial atmosphere which continued as we moved to our tables. The food, provided yet again by the incredible Adam Nathan and his fine team, was flawless, plentiful and utterly delicious.

At regular intervals during the evening we were shown videos by each of our three supported charities, Yemin Orde, ASSAF and our inspirational new charity Beit Uri. When you are next in Israel why not visit one or more of them? As a Belsize member you will always receive a warm welcome and I

promise you that your visit will be memorable. Please get in touch with the synagogue office if you wish to arrange a visit.

The evening continued with a fascinating interview by Rob Nothman with our guest speaker, Luciana Berger. Luciana spoke eloquently on many issues, including her own experiences of antisemitism within the Labour Party. This was followed by questions from the audience. A huge thank you to Luciana for giving us her time and for speaking so honestly and passionately.

The appeal was conducted superbly by the recently 'retired' Allan Morgenthau and as I write we have raised approximately £54,000 for our three incredibly worthwhile charities.

A quick word about next year's dinner. We would very much like to encourage those of you who have never been to our Israel Dinner to come and enjoy what really is one of the most special nights of the year

at Belsize Square. A big call out to some of our younger members too: why not put a table together with some of your friends? You certainly won't be disappointed.

Finally, the name of next year's dinner will be changed to the The Israel Charity Dinner. The reason for this small change is to underline that this dinner is solely about the charities in Israel that our Synagogue supports – and your support is needed more than ever.

For more information on our charities, please visit their websites:

Yemin Orde

www.impact-israel.org/about-us/yemin-orde-youth-village

ASSAF

www.assaf.org.il/en and our inspirational new charity,

Beit Uri

www.bet-uri.org.il

Erev Tisha B'Av Wednesday 26 July



Join us at the
New London
Synagogue
33 Abbey Road NW8

for our joint
Tisha B'Av evening
service

with New London's
congregation

PREPARE FOR THE FAST

Dinner at 7.30pm
Tickets £20
Book online at
newlondon.org.uk

LEARN WITH US

Learning with
Rabbi Gabriel Botnick
over dinner

EVENING SERVICE

Maariv and reading of
Eicha – the Book
of Lamentations
Beginning at 9.00pm

TISHA B'AV MORNING SERVICE

Thursday 27 July
at 8.00am
Shacharit at New
London Synagogue

Italian Jewish Communities

The Great Synagogue of Rome

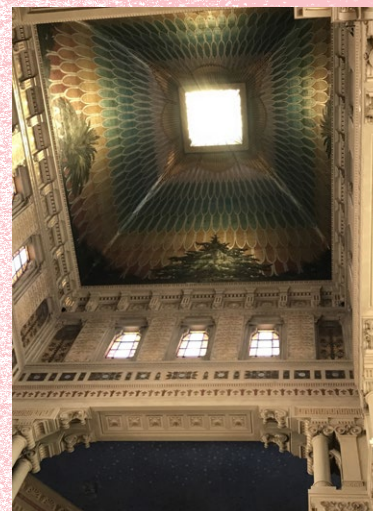
In 1555, the Jews of Rome were confined to a ghetto beside the River Tiber, built by order of the Pope and measuring just 200 x 250 metres. They were restricted to working only as money-lenders or rag dealers, were locked in at night and had to wear a yellow badge. Only one synagogue was allowed, meaning it was shared by ghetto inhabitants of different origins. Each group had its own *minhag*, so the synagogue was divided into five parts – the ‘cinque scuole’ – to serve the five communities originally from Sicily, Spain (following the 1492 expulsion), Catalonia, Southern Italy and Rome itself.

In 1870, the unification of Italy and the political changes that came with it led to Jews being released from the ghetto. The beautiful Graeco-Roman style Great Synagogue, built in 1904, was a deliberately grand statement by the Jewish community to demonstrate their improved status. The impressive 46m dome was designed to be visible from all the hills of Rome. The shul is richly decorated, with the interior of the dome painted in rainbow tiers representing the moment after the Flood. Another part of the grand ceiling is decorated in blue with painted stars, which looked very familiar to this Belsize member!

The election of Ernesto Nathan, a Jew of English origin, as Mayor of Rome in 1907 showed the rapid progress of the community. But that was a brief golden age before Mussolini’s restrictions and forensic collection of data about Rome’s 8,000 Jews. This information was handed to the Nazis in 1943 and a quarter of those people were deported and murdered before American soldiers liberated Rome the following year. Community numbers were boosted in the wake of 1967’s 6-Day War, when 10% of Libya’s Jewish community relocated to Rome. These days there are 14,000 Jews in Italy, of whom half live in Rome. Tragically, the shul suffered a terrorist attack in 1982, in which a two-year-old boy was killed.

The synagogue is proud of its improved relations with the Catholic church, with John Paul II’s visit in 1986 being the first ever recorded visit of a pope to a synagogue. He remarked that ‘Jews are the older brothers of the Christians’ and each subsequent pope has visited too.

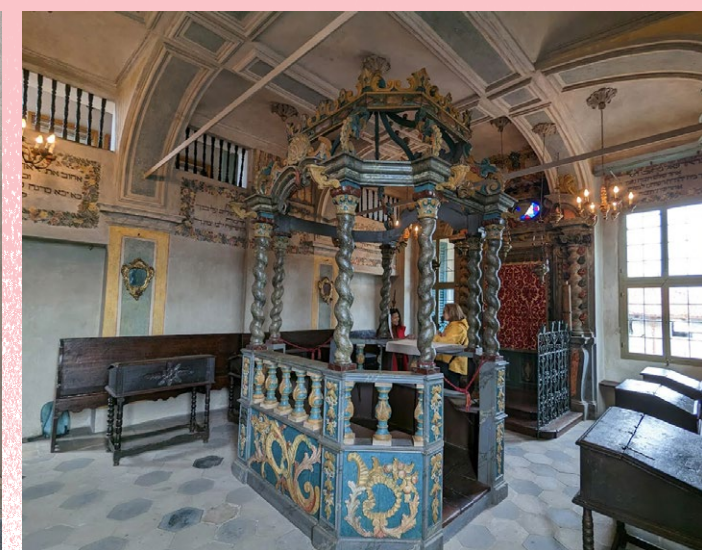
Both your editors have enjoyed recent trips to Italy, with visits to synagogues of historical interest. Alex Antscherl shares some notes and photos from Rome, while David Horwell recalls a fascinating trip to Piemonte



The Shoah memorial in Biella



Cherasco's old synagogue is on the top floor of this unremarkable building



The Cherasco synagogue with its ornate tevah (bimah), aron hakodesh and women's gallery

Piemonte's historic synagogues

The Italian region of Piemonte extends from the Alps almost to the Mediterranean and from France almost to Milan. It's a beautiful area, to which Ruth and I return as often as we can for the scenery, for the food and wine and to meet friends. We knew that it has Jewish history – the Italian National Cinema Museum, at 166 metres the tallest building in Turin for well over a century, was originally envisioned as a monumental synagogue – but it was only this year that we learned more about the smaller Piemonte communities.

There are, in fact, sixteen known synagogues in the Piemonte region. Those built after emancipation in the 19th century are grand baroque or Moorish-style structures, but the earlier ones are on the top floors of very ordinary buildings, located there both for security and because of the tradition that a synagogue should not be surmounted by any other structure. Readers who have visited the famous Venice ghetto will remember the same arrangements for the five synagogues there.

Our first stop on our recent trip was near the small city of Biella, at the foot of the Alps. I'd read that the Biella synagogue had been the home of the world's oldest complete, undamaged and still usable Sefer Torah, dated to around the year 1250, and although we were sure that we wouldn't be able to inspect the scroll itself, we hoped to visit the building. There are no Jews left in Biella and the synagogue, in a narrow alley, is in the custody of the community of the nearby town of Vercelli. Sadly, all attempts to contact them failed and we later heard that that community had also diminished substantially. So our visit was limited to seeing the outside of a well-kept old building – and a memorial plaque to nine Biella citizens who had perished in the Shoah.

But further South, in the beautiful wine-growing region of the Langhe, the home of the famous Barolo and Barbaresco wines, the situation in the historic old town of Cherasco is very different. The synagogue there dates back to the 18th century and was part of a tiny, cramped ghetto, the main family of which was the De Benedettis, who had arrived before 1547. The family still survives, an Italian Jewish elite of bankers, industrialists, jurists and diplomats. The De Benedetti Foundation, with the support of other Piemonte institutions and the Turin Jewish community, undertook the preservation and restoration of the Cherasco synagogue in 2003-6. The result is a beautiful representation of the way a small ghetto shul in the Sephardi tradition would have looked when it was new, 250 years ago.

We arranged our visit via the Turin community and were shown round by Giussi, an enthusiastic non-Jewish woman whose deep knowledge both of the synagogue and of Judaism astonished us. The synagogue room itself, with its ner tamid alight, the small women's gallery, the tiny cheder room and the balcony route through a courtyard to the ghetto's dwellings, hidden from view from the street, were all fascinating and were supplemented by a photo exhibition covering the history of all the Piemontese Jewish communities. And in the street outside, at the door of what was once a Jewish home, an Italian 'Stolperstein' again reminded us that genocide extended throughout Nazi and Nazi-sympathetic Europe.

If you're travelling in northern Italy, we recommend touring the Langhe area near Alba. A trip to Cherasco is well worth a few hours of your time and a tour of the synagogue there will make it very special. It's essential to book your visit in advance, but booking arrangements are easy to find online.

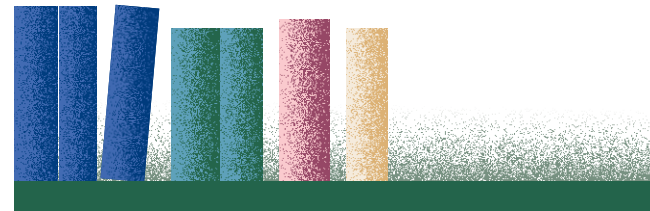
ATTENTION BELSIZE SQUARE BOOK-LOVERS!

The Synagogue's lending library is now open.

Thank you to members of the community who have generously donated their time or books to get us up and running. Our catalogue is brimming with novels, poetry and varied non-fiction for the community to browse, research and borrow.

We look forward to welcoming you to the library, which is open during office hours.

We have a number of duplicate books, which we'd be happy to give away, ideally in return for a small donation to the synagogue. The list of books available will be posted on the synagogue website.



Online Tuesday

study



BELSIZE SQUARE
SYNAGOGUE

four sessions on
repentance



FROM 29 AUGUST
TO 19 SEPTEMBER



20:00

Studying "The Gates of Repentance" (Sha'arei Teshuvah), will help us through the period prior to Yom Kippur when we are engaged in the process of "return"

JOIN US

CANTOR@SYNAGOGUE.ORG.UK



NEWS FROM ABERNEIN MANSIONS N.W.3.

Dear Fellow Members

For us yearnallists this time of year is called the "Silly Season", because of the lag of kneus. Und so, many from you will already be on your sommer holydays oder prepearing for your travel engagements. Sum will be going oversees, vile sum will be taking there brake in Briton, which I belief is called a Stagnation. Witchever you shoes to do, on behalve of Mrs Klopstick und me, we wish you a save und heppy vacuation.

When I start to ride my buy-monthly kolumn, I always remember mine old schul Englisch teacher, Dr Proffessor Nusskopf. I am immersely greatful to him for giving me the means to impress myself on paper in this wunderfol publication. He was a reel polygon und spoke not only German, but also Yiddisch, Polnisch und Romanisch. Althrough he did not egtually speak the kinks Englisch I am living prove that his teaching messod was highly sucksessfull.

Now with the sommer warmer wetter, much of our egtivities at Abernein Mansions are taking plaice in the communal garten. Only last weak we have hat our first ever barber queue. Mrs Bluhmenkohl who was in charge of the advent, has incysted that the grizzling should only be done by a mail man. So Mrs Klopstick put my foot fourword. I wood have prefurred to just shuffle the shah kohl onto the fire, but I was not aloud to abject. To make sure that the beaf bergers, wurstchen und schicken sighs all cooked threw at the same time, I walked out that the best way was to make them evenly black all round. Not only did I achief this, but I also insured that I was not asked to grizzle ever again.

With the best of intentions
Fritz Klopstick

ASK FRITZ

A gross number of inmates have come on to me recently inquering how to contradict mussel loosening in old age. Of cause, the best way is to adept my wife Mrs K's system. But wait lifting, such ass the snetch und yurg, is not for every won. Neizer is it necessary to by dump-balls. The same results can be achiefed with a back of suger order flower. With won in each hand just lift up uber your hat und down unter your niece ten oder twenty times every day. This will verstall the loosening und up-billed your strainingth.

AN INVETERATE TRAVELLER REMEMBERED

Ursula Seftel

Belsize member Ursula Seftel, who passed away earlier this year, was born in Germany in March 1295. As the situation deteriorated, Ursula's parents sent her, aged eight, to live

At university in Johannesburg, Ursula qualified as a teacher and soon after that met Jimmy Seftel, a land surveyor. They were married in October 1947. When the apartheid-



Ursula on her grandmother's lap, with her mother and great-grandmother, in Stettin (now Szczecin), 1926

with an aunt in Holland. 'People took it for granted that you could move a child from one country to another, one language to another, and it didn't seem to bother anybody. I coped,' she explained to her journalist grandson Alex Seftel in a BBC radio interview nearly 90 years later.

Ursula's parents joined her in Amsterdam in 1935. They applied for American visas but her father was told that the US didn't need any more doctors. Eventually they were granted South African visas and set sail in 1937. Ursula remembers how some passengers enjoyed the voyage as a holiday. However, her parents knew immigration laws for European Jews entering South Africa were changing the day before they were due to dock, so their journey was haunted by fear. Fortunately, the family were admitted and for a second time in her young life, Ursula had to settle into a new school, in a new country, taught in a language she didn't yet speak.

era Group Areas Act meant Jimmy had to declare to the government the 'colour' of the neighbours on every piece of land he surveyed, he no longer felt comfortable in his country of birth. Jimmy got a job as a government land surveyor in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia in 1955, meaning another move for Ursula, along with their young sons.

The colonial civil servants' perk of six months' paid leave, including fares to England, every three years meant an extended European trip in 1958. The family went to the UK, then on to Holland. Ursula was reunited with her aunt and cousins, who had survived Bergen Belsen partly thanks to one of the girls working in the kitchen and managing to scavenge turnips. While there, Ursula met her Aunt Lotte's friend - Otto Frank, father of Anne. At her parents' insistence, Ursula then went to Frankfurt to claim the £400 the German government had agreed to grant Jewish children whose education had been interrupted by the Nazis.

The Seftels remained in Zambia during the upheaval of independence but when the new government's nationalisation of all land in 1977 put an end to Jimmy's business, the couple moved to England.

But settling in Whetstone, North London, did not mark an end to their travelling days. In 1980, Jimmy went to Trinidad, surveying land for the United Nations. Ursula joined him there and had wonderful memories of Port of Spain, its beaches and freshly cooked fish. Soon, another UN contract took the couple to Dominica in the Caribbean.

Travel for pleasure and family reunions continued for Ursula till almost the end of her life. She passed away in March this year, aged 98, just after celebrating her birthday surrounded by three generations of her family.

Ursula with her son David, grandson Andrew and great-grandson George, London, 2019



SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm
Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids – Junior Shabbat Service

Saturday 1 July, 5 August, 2 September
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

End of Term – Sunday 9 July
Term starts – Sunday 3 September

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP

Meetings take place on Sunday mornings in term-time.

Programme and Zoom joining details for each meeting will
be in the News from the Square emails every Thursday.

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

COMMUNITY NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a cordial welcome to:

Avril Davis | Ronald Dunn | Harvey & Marion Jacobs
Maya Bilefield | Sophie Burton | Sara Ayeche with
children Lainey & Luca

BIRTH

Mazal tov to:

Lara & Dan Rothman on the birth of their
daughter Imogen

BNEI MITZVAH

Mazal tov to:

Aiden, son of Sarah Walford & Naci Uydac
who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on 1 July
Chloe, daughter of Laura Price & John Dick
who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on 8 July
Hetty, daughter of Abigail & Alastair Cox
who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on 26 August
Freddie, daughter of Fiona Murphy and
Richard Sherwood who celebrates her
Bat Mitzvah on 9 September

DEATHS

We regret to announce the passing of:

Victoria Rose on 28 April
Ilse Wolffberg on 27 April
Fred Antscherl on 29 May

STONESETTING

The stone setting of Henny Levin z"l will take place at
the Liberal Jewish Cemetery, Pound Lane, NW10 2HG
on Sunday 3 September at 11.30am

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

51 Belsize Square,
London NW3 4HX

020 7794 3949
office@synagogue.org.uk
www.synagogue.org.uk

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

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

SYNAGOGUE LIBRARY

Open to members during
office hours

RABBI

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick
rabbi@synagogue.org.uk

To book an in-person,
video or telephone
appointment with Rabbi
Botnick, please email his
PA Claire Austin:
claire@synagogue.org.uk

CANTOR

Dr Paul Heller
cantor@synagogue.org.uk
07949 078366

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Helen Grunberg
020 8450 8533
Cantor Dr Paul Heller

FUNERALS

During Synagogue office
hours phone Synagogue
Evenings/weekends phone
Calo's (Undertakers)
020 8958 2112

OUR CONGREGATION

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alexantscherl@me.com or
the Synagogue office

HIGH HOLYDAYS 5784 / 2023

Dates for your diary

Selichot service	9 September, 10.00pm
Rosh Hashanah	16–17 September
Kol Nidrei	24 September
Yom Kippur	25 September

High Holyday Tickets & Information

Members of the congregation will shortly receive in the
post a pack with all the information required for our High
Holyday Services. This will include tickets for each family
member, which are sent out automatically. The pack also
includes application forms for non-members' tickets, prayer
books and transport requirements/volunteer provision.

**Please read through your pack carefully and keep it
to hand until after the High Holydays.**

Please contact the Synagogue Office if you would like to
discuss any aspect of the arrangements.