



NEW YEAR 5780 – TIME TO REPENT AND FORGIVE

Shalom Chaverim,

It is that time of year, with the cycle of time spinning so fast, when summer is almost past and it is only a month till the Jewish New Year of 5780.

What are we meant to do in Elul, the last month of the Jewish year? This is a good moment to review the traditional motifs that mark a sacred time in our lives. Let me share some thoughts that will be expounded more deeply during next month's solemn *Yamim Nora'im*.

Teshuvah: There is no greater moral and spiritual urgency in this penitential season than the power of *teshuvah*, "repentance" but literally "return" or "response". We are frail, prone to hurt others by word or deed, even those we love. Through *teshuvah* God enables us to redeem ourselves by returning to our true selves, to each other and to our Creator.

Judaism believes at its core that we are not destined to wrongdoing, that society as a whole can change for the better. *Teshuvah* is more important than ever in a society that increasingly tells

us we are doomed by history. We see celebrities and politicians destroyed by some decades-old deed or statement. With the power of social media, nothing escapes the public domain.

We live in a very judgmental society, with no escape for anyone, present or past. Whole societies and historical figures are targeted – Cecil Rhodes with less than righteous views on race, Winston Churchill's old-fashioned attitude to imperialism and colonialism or, from America, the 18th-century slave-owning Thomas Jefferson. There are problems in seeking comfort from great leaders and thinkers of the past.

Our Torah teaches that all our Bible heroes and sages had the capacity to sin. But they also had the ability to change and to grow. That was the greatness of Jacob, whose life began with deception but ended with blessing; of Joseph, who abandoned his Jewish background for Egyptian culture, yet did *teshuvah* and returned to God and his family when his brothers came back to Egypt; of Moses whose temper

love, Batsheva, yet found redemption as the greatest king of Israel.

Selichah: The second immensely powerful motif at this time of year is *selichah*, forgiveness. As we seek to improve ourselves, aware of our capacity to do wrong, Jewish tradition tells us to recognise that same trait in others. Both Torah and rabbinic tradition instruct us to seek forgiveness from and for others – and even forgive God for making us and His creation less than perfect!

This is the time to think of relationships with family and friends that need repair, the power of *selichah*. The daily shofar blowing during Elul urges us to come closer to each other and make peace. When we say "*Shanah tova*", "Have a good year", are we aware that the root meaning of *shanah*, the Hebrew word for year, is "change"? Can we find our *teshuvah* and realise the better part of ourselves? Do we have the capacity to forgive others, to release us from grudges and enmity?

May this year, 5780, allow us to truly hear the sound of the shofar, to reach up to the heavens with our prayers to find the blessings of *teshuvah* and *selichah*. Life is short and uncertain but we should recognise its sanctity and preciousness and embrace it. May this New Year be a year of blessing, health, life, goodness and *shalom* for all of you and your loved ones.

Rabbi Altshuler



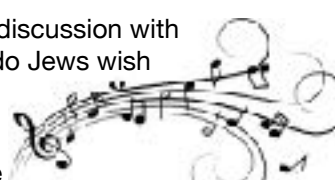
DISCUSSION & SELICHOT CHORAL SERVICE
Saturday 21 September at Belsize Square Synagogue

Prepare heart, mind and soul for our High Holidays with our Selichot Service, led by Cantor Paul Heller and accompanied by our professional choir directed by Benjamin Wolf.

The programme includes:

9.00pm: Havdalah followed by a discussion with Rabbi Stuart Altshuler on "What do Jews wish to perpetuate about ourselves?" Refreshments will be served.

10.00pm: Selichot Choral Service



KEVER AVOT (VISITING THE GROUNDS)

On Sunday 6 October 2018 at 11.00am we will gather at Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery, HA8 8QP, in a Kever Avot (Ancestors' Grave) Service to remember our family and friends who are buried at Edgwarebury

stopped him from entering Eretz Yisrael but whose leadership brought him to receive the Tablets at Sinai; of David who effectively murdered the husband of his

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RESTORED HOUSE BY THE LAKE



Photo credits:

Dilapidated house in 2014 - Thomas Harding

Restored exterior - André Wagner

Original room in 1928 - Lottie Jakoby

Restored interior - André Wagner

Restored fireplace - Peter Sussman



Restored fireplace



Cutting the Ribbon: (from left) Angela Harding (Elsie Harding's daughter-in-law), Thomas Harding (Elsie Harding's grandson), Yasmeeen Akhtar (director Alexander Haus), Peter Sussman (Bella Jakobi's son from her first marriage), Martin Gorholt (Chef der Staatskanzlei, or State Senator, of Brandenburg)

BLUE PLAQUE UNVEILED ON SYNAGOGUE WALL

Another step in our 80th anniversary celebrations was marked on 25 June by the placing of an AJR Blue Plaque on our Synagogue wall outside the main entrance. This was part of its programme of "establishing permanent memorials to some of the most prominent Jewish emigres who fled Nazi oppression and found refuge in Britain, as well as places and buildings with a strong connection to Jewish refugees".



The programme, set up six years ago, is the brainchild of our member Frank Harding, a trustee of the Association of Jewish Refugees, which put up its seventh personal plaque in April at Imperial College to honour Nobel laureate, biochemist Professor Sir Ernst Chain. This is only the second "buildings" plaque. The first is outside the Finchley Road restaurant which once housed the Cosmo restaurant, unofficial social centre for the refugee community. Guests at this ceremony included the leader of Camden Council, Georgia Gould, and former mayor Richard Cotton. The weather was fine and the teatime reception which followed Frank Harding's unveiling speech was greatly enjoyed.

THE HOUSE BY THE LAKE COMES BACK TO LIFE

Nick Viner reports on the culmination of an exciting project

For the Alexander family, the adventure began in 1927 when they moved into their newly-constructed summer house on Glienicke Lake outside Berlin. For me, the adventure began in May 2016 when I joined Belsize Square Synagogue's tour to Berlin guided by Rabbi Altshuler and Thomas Harding, great-grandson of those new owners, along with 30 other intrepid pioneers.

The visit to the dilapidated Alexander House was the heart of our trip. Set high above the lake, which could be glimpsed through the trees from the rubble-strewn terrace, at the end of a long sward of shrubby, overgrown grass, the house with its broken windows, rusted ironwork, rotten felt roof and sagging gutters, stood defiant. The back garden held the shattered remains of the former Berlin Wall which had cut off the house from the lake. Yet somehow belying its years of neglect, the house harked back to happier times.

In bringing to life the story he had set out so movingly in his book, *The House by the Lake*, Thomas inspired us all. My inspiration came with its own burden as I somehow found myself sucked into this wonderful, hugely ambitious project, by agreeing to join the very hands-on Board of Trustees. Our aims were simple – and challenging: to restore the House to its original state and turn it into a centre for education and reconciliation, a safe space for dialogue, creativity and diversity. The intention is to use lessons from history to bring people together from different cultures and religions, to create dialogue and to contribute to building a resilient, vibrant and tolerant society.

The restoration of the House required money and expertise. With Denkmal (historic monument status, the German equivalent of a listed building), the house could be protected and preserved. But it also meant that all renovations had to be scrupulously researched and executed to the highest standards. Paint and wood specialists, guided by old family photos, used the latest scientific techniques to establish original

materials and colours from the layers and layers of redecoration, modification, botching and "bricolage" resulting from 90 years of occupation.

The process was daunting, exciting, nerve-wracking and painstaking. We had many challenges, from the discovery of toxic chemicals coating joists, to the complexity of recreating the underfloor heating system. But what really set us back was the sudden and untimely death of our architect, Andreas Potthof, who drowned in a nearby lake in June 2018. This was a terrible blow. But thanks to the incredible resourcefulness of Building Committee member Uli Bochert, another remarkable architect, Frauke Weber, seized the challenge and made the project her own. With Project Manager Danie Jung, Frauke delivered a finished building of which we and she knew that Andreas would have been proud.

A labour of love for the architects and local craftsmen, the restoration took over two years before a truly special place was reborn. It began as an insubstantial wooden cabin with a lot of small rooms. But once the true nature of the building was uncovered, the imagination, playfulness and inspiration of the Alexanders' original vision were revealed in all their glory. The cabin was transformed into an elegant, spacious and airy home, with bold colours in every room, views into the expansive garden, elegant panelling, fine detailing, unexpected nooks and crannies, clever hidden storage space, and a sense of familial intimacy and generosity: so ingenious, so inviting...

The official opening took place on the weekend of 14-16 June, starting with the first Friday Night dinner since the Alexanders fled to England in 1936. (Dr Alfred and Henny Alexander with their newly married daughter Elsie Hirschowitz/ Harding and twins Hanns and Paul. The oldest daughter Bella was already married to an Anglo-Jew.) Nearly 50 people, including family members, local supporters and those close to the project, gathered in front of the restored verandah, with its

eccentrically turned bulbous columns, for the Shabbat candle lighting, a rendition of *L'cha Dodi* and *Shalom Aleichem*, and Kiddush led by Rabbi Altshuler.

A wonderful dinner eaten at elegantly laid long tables followed. As dusk fell, the House was again filled with conversation, laughter, the chink of glasses and the warmth of community that spilled out of its glowing windows late into the evening. After dinner, Doris Meisel, daughter-in-law of second occupant, Willi Meisel, led dancing to music played on the old Meisel family phonogram.

On Sunday, we welcomed close to 1,000 people, including one man in his eighties, over from South Africa, who revealed he had played at the House as a child with Thomas Meisel, Willi's son. Our new Director, Yasmeen Akhtar, described our plans for the future, after which the Mayors of Gros Glienicke and Potsdam, and the State Senator of Brandenburg expressed their admiration for the restoration and their full support for the ambitions of "Alexander Haus in these increasingly dark and difficult times in Germany".

With antisemitism and intolerance on the rise, they hoped the House and its work would act as a beacon for others in the region and beyond.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, alongside official guests was Peter Sussman, Bella's son and the only family member still living who had visited the house in the Alexander days. There is a photograph of Peter on the verandah as a baby; now there is also one of him standing proudly in front of the shiny, newly painted, front door, with its mezuzah – calligraphed by the same scribe who restored the Alexander Torah in our synagogue – back where it should be.

We have ambitious plans for this important project, including landscaping the gardens and developing our programming. If you would like to support Alexander Haus in any way, please go to our website: www.alexanderhaus.org, or contact me on nick.viner@alexanderhaus.org.



OUR CHATANIM FOR 5780

Chatan Torah: Simon Cutner



I was brought up via the United Synagogue system in North London. You know the type: park around the corner, walk the rest of the way; men and women sitting separately and a "children should be seen and not heard" type of spiritual upbringing. As a young man growing up, going to Hebrew classes three times a week and being forced to go to Shabbat services every so often, I have to say that I felt very little connection with my Jewish roots in the world around Southgate!

If you had told me then that, fast forward 30-odd years, I would be on the Board, Chair of the Youth Committee, going to Shabbat services willingly and,

most of all, being honoured to be invited to be Chatan Torah at Belsize Square, I simply wouldn't have believed it.

So, what happened in those 30-odd years, I hear you ask? Well, luckily, I met my future wife Sophie. She was a member of Belsize and I started to come along to the service with her. This was over 20 years ago, with a different Rabbi and Cantor, but it was still Belsize – organ and all! I admit, it took me some time to be comfortable with the organ, it was so foreign to me, but it soon became the norm.

However, soon after Sophie and I were married at Belsize, we moved away from the area and for a few years were shul-less. Fast forward again 10 years and, like many families (by then we were proud parents to Max and Zoe), we wanted our children to receive a Jewish education and decided to look around the local shuls in Southgate. United was out for many reasons. We very much liked the Reform but it was missing something (no, not the organ), it was missing the "Belsize vibe". So Sophie and I took the decision to rejoin

even though we knew it would involve regular use of the North Circular!

Many people will remember me as the Chairman of Alyth Belsize Football Club, with the infamous speeches from the boys and girls in their kits promoting the shul teams at the High Holyday services! After stepping down from the football club, I was honoured to be asked to join the Synagogue Board and soon became Chair of the Youth Committee. I have been instrumental in the hiring of our first full-time youth worker, Lucy Bergman, and this in turn has led to me being asked to become a trustee of the Jewish Youth Fund. I also am a volunteer Childline Counsellor.

To earn a crust, I am a Director at a City recruitment firm, LMA, specialising in Human Resources recruitment, mainly across the professional and commerce and industry sectors. In my limited free time, I am an avid squash player (when I'm not injured due to being an avid squash player!)

It is an honour to be invited to be Chatan Torah.

Chatan Bereishit: Frank Joseph



I joined Belsize Square in 2009 with my wife Nicole, shortly after we were married. We have two sons, Sam (9) and Jonah (7). Over the last 10 years the Synagogue

has become a second home for our family. It was via the Kikar Kids Shabbat services that we were drawn into the community. On those Shabbat mornings, we met other young families and watched our children find their feet in a Jewish environment. Since then they have moved to Cheder and are growing into real children of the community.

I am originally from Wimbledon and with the help of Belsize Square I have successfully made the transition to

North London. We have a strong family link with the Synagogue. Nicole's grandparents came over to London from Berlin as refugees in 1939 and were members of the community in the very early days. Nicole's parents Barbara and John Horwitz are also long-standing members.

Outside the Synagogue, I am a secondary school Physics Teacher. I have worked in many schools and I have had various management roles in Education. It was as a teacher that I started to appreciate the unique history of our community. I brought groups of students to the Holocaust Memorial Day event at Belsize. Through these visits I witnessed the impact that the survivors' stories have on the younger generation. I also saw how our Synagogue reaches out to the wider community.

I went on to become more involved in the Synagogue. I took over the running of the children's services. With a small

group of parents we developed the services and welcomed new families into our community. I became Chair of the Cheder Parents' Association and carried on Mandy Brass's work in involving parents with our children's Jewish education. For a number of years, I organised the Children's Chanukah Market and supported the Cheder in celebrating Jewish holidays.

I joined the Board and the Education Committee before taking over as Chair of Education. In this role, I work closely with our Cheder Headteacher, Caroline Loison, as we develop our wonderful Cheder and welcome children into our Jewish faith and community. The role is challenging but very rewarding. More recently I have joined the Synagogue Executive and I enjoy helping to secure the future of our community.

I am very honoured to have been asked to be Chatan Bereishit. It is a real privilege to be called to read from the Torah for the first time.

TREASURER'S REPORT

At June's Annual General Meeting, Assistant Hon Treasurer Adam Hurst reported that the Synagogue's assets at the end of 2018 had reduced from just over £4m at the start of the year to just under £3.8m. Other than the land and buildings at 51 Belsize Square and the Edgwarebury cemetery, our other main assets are cash and deposits, which reduced by £63,000 over the year. The cash decrease was largely due to an increased operating deficit during the year and no legacy income.

Adam presented a slide showing that although cash had been maintained at over £1m in recent years, this was due to some large legacies in 2013 and 2016. In previous years, legacies as well as investment income were significantly higher than more recently, which is why a formal legacy campaign was launched 18 months ago. The results of that campaign will bear fruit many years in the future and this is likely to continue to be an important source of funds.

Adam reminded the audience that the Synagogue has always run a structural deficit, as the costs of providing all our activities, including two full-time ministers and a paid choir, are significantly higher than the total membership fees. The Synagogue does have other sources of income, such as rent from Keren's Nursery and the Scout Hut. He reported that we negotiated new leases with both these tenants during 2018, improving our annual rents by a combined £27,000 on an annualised basis. And we continue to raise funds through a variety of events and many donations from our members, for which we are extremely grateful.

He said we would also like to thank the AJR, who provide funding for our welfare activities, and the Six Point and Ann Hirshfield Foundations, who have supported the highly popular Belsize Live-streaming of our services. The Belsize 100 campaign again raised around £40,000 in 2018 and makes a

tremendous difference to our finances. Overall, our income was up by £67,000 compared to 2017.

The deficit in 2018 of £126,000, however, was higher than in 2017 by £98,000, due to increased costs. This partly resulted from a one-off accounting accrual to reflect the Rabbi's sabbatical earned to date, as well as an increase in our professional fees, higher maintenance costs, increased IT costs from implementation of a new database and higher security costs.

After a vote of thanks to the various people involved in managing the Synagogue's finances and preparing the accounts, Adam proposed that the auditors, HW Fisher and Co, be reappointed. The accounts were passed and auditors duly reappointed.

[Adam Hurst was standing in for Treasurer Jimmy Strauss, who was away celebrating his 60th birthday.]

PRIDE SHABBAT

Helen Grunberg and Sue Arnold share their experience

On 6 July we were among 400 people of all ages attending a joyous occasion at Finchley Progressive Synagogue, the special Shabbat celebrating being Jewish and Gay for Pride. All of us acknowledged the double joys, as well as fears, of acceptance. Both parts of our lives are given meaning with sharing, giving and loving.

Rabbi Rebecca Birk along with Cantor Tamara Wolfson plus two student rabbis led a musical service with piano, guitar, fine singing and a well thought-out Order of Service. The

d'var Torah was exceptional. Adam Eli, a writer and activist visiting direct from New York (complete with jet lag), spoke of his feelings of oneness in being Jewish and Gay. He wanted the LGBT community to be as compassionate and supportive as he found the Jewish community to be.

Two readings by significant activists – New Yorker Harvey Milk, a gay rights pioneer elected onto the San Francisco city council in 1977 who was shot dead the following year, aged 48; and Lithuanian-born American

immigrant Emma Goldman (1869-1940), a celebrated anarchist and supporter of women's and workers' rights and individualism – gave us messages of hope.

The whole congregation saying the *Shema* filled us with hope for the future. The presence of so many young Jews marked their deep concern to keep their heritage while being able to love someone of the same sex. This was a first for Finchley Progressive, which welcomes Gay people to services. And Kiddush was splendid.

NEW YEAR GREETINGS

The Rabbi, Cantor, Emeritus Rabbi and families, Honorary Officers, Members of the Board and Staff extend their best wishes to all Members for a healthy and peaceful New Year.

EXAM RESULTS

Mazal tov to all of you who have taken GCSE, AS, A-levels and University Finals this summer. News of superb results has been reaching us daily. We are always delighted to hear good news so, please, let us know how you've done. Whether you are still at school, gapping, trekking, starting a career, or going off to University, we wish you good luck for a sparkling future and please keep in touch!

CHANUKAH MARKET: SAVE THE DATE

Please keep the weekend of 7-8 December free. There will be plenty for everyone to enjoy.

SALVATION ARMY COLLECTION

This year we shall be collecting tinned and dried goods (vegetarian only please) for those in need in Camden through the Salvation Army. If you would like to contribute to this very worthwhile cause for those who are struggling to make ends meet, please bring your gifts to the Synagogue during office hours or before or after services up till Wednesday 23 October.





JEWISH LIFE IN THE CZECH LANDS

Ruth Rothenberg concludes her account of the Rabbi's group trip

Between 1521 and 1542 Prague's Jewish population almost doubled to about 7,000, taking in Jewish refugees expelled elsewhere in Europe. The Jewish Quarter became the official and expanding ghetto. By 1708 Prague's Jewish population was the highest in the world and made up 25% of the city.

Things went downhill under Empress Maria Theresa, a devout Catholic, who in 1745 expelled Jews from Prague for three years. Her policy was changed by her reformist son, Josef II (1765-90). It was in recognition of his 1781 Edict of Tolerance, affecting all non-Catholics, that the Jewish Quarter changed its name to Josefov decades later.

During the 19th century, Prague and its Jews joined in urban development and industrialisation as well as art and culture, following the 1848 revolutionary movement when the 13th-century ghetto wall was demolished and Jews could live anywhere. The 1890s refurbishing of the dilapidated Jewish Quarter did not bring Jews back. But its remaining synagogues and Art Nouveau architecture, now a UNESCO Heritage site, have made it the third most visited museum site in the world.

The end of the First World War saw Prague as the capital of the new state of Czechoslovakia, followed 20 years later by German occupation, then Russian. It has been marked by those experiences. But with Communism over, religion has to a certain extent seeped back, including Chabad. Rabbi Hoffberg told us how these enthusiastic chasidim went too far, calling on the Chief Rabbi (in a publicly funded post) to go.

There were riots in shul and a court order put in place to stop Chabad entering the building. Chabad moved three blocks away and, according to Rabbi Hoffberg, still does good work. The usual paradoxes of Jewish life!

One of today's practical problems is getting a minyan on Shabbat. With weekend tourists flooding Prague, every one goes to their country cottage to get away from the crowds. Our group performed a mitzvah by

staying in Prague over the weekend!

Thursday was excursion day. Our coach drove through the heart of agricultural Moravia, with fields and a few wayside shrines and crosses, to our first stop at the small town of Levneho Nakupu on the river Jihlava or South Labe (the Elbe further on).

There we saw a row of quaint little old houses lining the river bank, a small 17th-century Jewish hamlet, complete with shul and essential facilities like the shochet's workshop. But more interesting to me was the local florist's apparent takeover of the front of the redbrick Victorian-looking synagogue. The florist looked oriental in a not particularly mixed society.

What we discovered went unreported in our media during the Vietnam War. While South Vietnamese fled as "boat people", many from North Vietnam took a train to East European Communist countries. Officially they came as students, trainees or cheap labour to help pay off North Vietnam's huge debt for Czech military supplies but in practice they were escaping poverty.

They lived in the bleak Russian Communist-era public housing blocks which dot town and countryside, including this small town. Since the collapse of Communism they have integrated well. There are now up to 80,000 North Vietnamese in the Czech

Republic, mostly in the vegetable trade and corner shops.

Our main destination was the picturesque town of Trebic on the same river. The 12th-century town grew from a Benedictine monastery whose church is now one of two local UNESCO Heritage Sites, the other one being the ghetto. Jews are first noted in 1335. They lived among their Christian neighbours till forced into a ghetto from 1726 to the 1848 revolution.

Today you see three long terraces of neat houses, 123 in all, separated by two streets following the river's curve. The landmark chimney at one end belonged to the Jewish-owned Subak family tannery that started in the early 19th century and provided steady employment. For one of the two synagogues in this cramped area (one is never enough) you had to go through the adjacent house to get up to the women's section.

The cemetery was moved in the 17th century by order of the Wallenstein noble family, who did not like the view from their newly acquired palace. They wanted it moved to the back of the hill and higher up. This made burial far more difficult but the result is a tranquil gem on a green hillside with interesting gravestones. We were told that many of the names had been changed from German to Czech and many others added *in memoriam*, giving the death camp name and date of death.

From a Jewish population of nearly 1,500 in 1890, only 263 remained when the Nazis arrived and sent them to be killed in concentration camps. Ten survivors came back and none stayed. Squatters and gypsies took over the abandoned houses. Soviet authorities planned to tear down and rebuild the district but the town council refused to give up this integral part of its history. People lay down in front of the bulldozers. When Communism imploded in 1989, a memorial foundation was immediately set up to restore the Jewish Quarter minus, of course, the Jews. But, as Rabbi Hoffberg told us, the guides are "completely clued up on Jewish life".

Back on the coach to Prague, Rabbi



Listening to our guide inside Trebic Synagogue

Hoffberg told us about his work. He has lived and worked in the Czech Republic for 18 years running the Masorti community. There is a successful school with 120 pupils, half of whom are Jewish, plus four kindergartens. He works with converts, whom he sends to Israel. With three-hour flights, they can easily fly home to see their parents.

Friday was spent in Prague, starting at the Spanish Synagogue which we had earlier missed. This magnificent building, inspired by the Alhambra, opened in 1868 on the site of the oldest synagogue in Prague, the Altschul, which was far too cramped and creaking to accommodate the new German *liberale* style of worship then taking over. The name "Alt" was transferred to the next oldest synagogue, the Gothic Neuschul, dating back to 1270. In other words, the Spanish Synagogue turned the Neuschul into the Altneuschul.

None of these synagogues was destroyed by the Nazis, thanks to Hitler's and Eichmann's aim to turn the country into the "museum of an extinct race". In 1964 the Communist regime sold 1,554 Czech Torah scrolls to an Anglo-Jewish philanthropist via a London-based American-Jewish art dealer. Donated to Westminster Synagogue, they were redistributed after inspection and repair.

We then took the metro to the New Jewish Cemetery. This cemetery was badly needed when it opened in 1891. With its tranquil green and spacious feel, it is a far cry from the packed ghetto cemetery. It has its own character with plaques on the wall for Shoah victims and a 1985 Holocaust memorial of twisting abstract stonework around a Magen David. A more solid block, installed in 1926, stands as a monument to the fallen of the First World War. Generous artistic licence was granted to architects and masons. Rich families bought large plots and mausoleums and hired great designers.

The wording on the tombstones conforms to Jewish regulations (even if the occasional bust may not) but the architectural styles encompass the complete art history catalogue from neo-Gothic to constructivist. One of the simplest but most striking

and visited monuments is the obelisk marking the graves of writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) who died of TB, and his parents.

Also interesting, as Professor Polonsky pointed out to us, is the linguistic change in inscriptions from German to Czech. (Hebrew is unaffected.) Czechoslovakia's creation in 1918 was the turning point in this process but Kafka still wrote his stories in German. The family monument bypasses the problem by writing the three inscriptions in Hebrew.

In the evening we trooped off for a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service at the old Jewish Town Hall-cum-Community Centre. We stood round a large table in a pleasantly intimate service, led by Rabbi Hoffberg. Three services took place in the building and this was our allocated room and time. We then walked to Prague's kosher restaurant (Dinitz) and listened to Rabbi Hoffberg and his guest, Tomas Kraus, Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic.

We were not surprised to hear that this is still the most welcoming European country to Jews but, although the community is relatively well off, the numbers are too small to sustain it at, perhaps, 300. There is also a tradition of support for Zionism and Israel dating back to Tomas Masaryk, the first Czech president, who understood Jews' desire for their own state and sent good quality, if expensive, arms to support Israel in her 1948 War of Independence. Under Communism

this alliance was brutally suppressed (the USSR was bitterly disappointed that this new socialist state steadfastly refused to embrace Communism). But the support was resumed by Vaclav Havel, president of re-emerged Czechoslovakia in 1989. His first trip abroad was to Israel in 1990.

Tomas Kraus spoke about the problems of maintenance and memorials, which require money – money badly needed for investing in the living. But they get help for restoration from European Union fund-matching, especially if it can be linked to education. Telling a different story from earlier speakers, he said they have "some" rather than "all" of their property back and were advised to co-operate with the church on compensation. And inevitably, restitution is taxed. This is an anti-religious country, he said, but mostly anti-Catholic. Jewish finances depend on tourism, which last year provided 750,000 visitors.

Saturday morning: Shabbat service at the Jubilee or Jerusalem Synagogue, outside the old Jewish area. The restored building, in bright pink and blue brick outlining horseshoe arches, is an eye-catching, if improbable, combination of Moorish Revival architecture and Art Nouveau decor. Inside is just as magnificent. The service was held in a back room on the upper level (ladies gallery) where the men of our group mixed with local congregants. The few women sat at one side divided by a wire screen that provided a good view, all familiar and no sermon. It also turned out that the very fluent Torah *leyner* was not just a convert but former Jesuit priest.

Lunch was pre-booked at the King David Hotel kosher restaurant. Rabbi Hoffberg took the opportunity to tell us his story, for which we had all been waiting. He studied at New York's Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative/Masorti), where he bumped into student rabbi Stuart Altshuler. He soon found his metier lay with youth work and teaching rather than as a communal rabbi. Invited onto the Masorti World Council of Synagogues through his love of travel, he heard about vacancies in Europe, and Prague in particular. When another American rabbi pulled out of a contract for Prague in summer 2001, Ron



Our group inside the Spanish Synagogue





Hoffberg applied and was promptly selected. "I came for a week and stayed for 18 years," he told us.

His debut was disrupted by going back to conduct two weddings booked around the same time as the 9/11 attacks on New York. He missed Rosh Hashanah in Prague, where the service was cancelled. Back for Yom Kippur at the packed Spanish Synagogue, only he and one man in the congregation knew the service. At the end of the day, they went out together to find an interpreter.

The man said how much he loved the service and that he was a convert. As a railway track safety inspector, he heard older workers refer to him as Peter the Jew. Intrigued, he tried to find out about Judaism and became one of Rabbi Hoffberg's first converts.

Practical problems included circumcision. It was against local custom and, although a local doctor undertook a mass snip in a single weekend, Peter needed an operation that was unavailable in Prague. So he was flown to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem and back. On his return he said he wanted to make aliyah.

Before leaving, he visited a great-aunt, his last relative of that generation. When he told her of his decision, she pressed an old Siddur into his hand. She was not Jewish but her brother's wife, Peter's grandmother, was. Peter's grandfather never knew. His great-aunt once caught his grandmother praying from the book. She was sworn to secrecy and promised her older sister-in-law that she would bury it with her. In fact she kept the Siddur and passed it on to a future generation.

Between Nazism and Communism,



Claire Walford, our organiser, in the memorial field at Terezin

Jews were forced out of Jewishness and were not aware of even being Jewish. Now they hold posts in the Jewish community and many have gone on to study at Orthodox yeshivas in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hoffberg evidently found great satisfaction in his role and its outcome, though now considering retirement. Restoring a community to life has been far more satisfying than serving as congregational rabbi, as sometimes surfaced with our group.

Sunday, our last day, was our second excursion. We stopped at Lidice, the village whose annihilation caused international outrage when picked out for punishment after the assassination of regional governor Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942. All the men (nearly 200) were killed along with 60 women and 88 children. The village was destroyed. At the end of war, 153 women and 17 children returned. The 1950s saw a major effort to rebuild Lidice. Today it stands with a striking memorial to the murdered children.

Our final destination was Terezin (Theresienstadt), the redbrick garrison town built by Emperor Josef II and used by the Nazis as a unique model camp, an extraordinary combination of overcrowding, forced labour and starvation, causing over 33,000 deaths, with an elaborate web of deception to conceal its true purpose of gradually sending all inmates to death camps outside Germany. Over 140,000 Czech, Austrian and German Jews were sent to Terezin and over 88,000 of them were transported "east". When the death camps hastily shut down as Russia advanced west, those surviving were forced into death marches to Terezin, which finally housed 23,000 people.

The high point of Terezin's propaganda policy was the infamous presentation by the Nazi authorities designed to deceive the International Committee of the Red Cross on its visit in June 1944. But the fact that the place was not used as a killing site, that there was a Jewish administration, even if Nazi-installed, and a vibrant cultural environment with the encouraging presence of 1,500 children (of whom only 100 survived), gave it a different feel. The children received an unauthorised education from dedicated unofficial teachers. Their art work and poems form a moving

part of the memorial's exhibits.

Among the inmates were 450 Danish Jews, who missed the vital boat rescue operation to Sweden in September 1943. (The rescue was the subject of a play at a fringe London theatre in January.) When they were rounded up and taken to Terezin, the Danish government continued to keep an eagle eye on them through the Danish Red Cross and they all survived. Our synagogue has an interest in this, as our group included Walter Goddard, one of those who escaped by boat from Copenhagen to Sweden. Due to age and infirmity, he was unable to join us on the coach but his wife Jackie was with us to report to him.

Walter later confirmed that the Danish government allowed the inevitable German occupation of their country at the start of the Second World War on condition that there was no interference in its internal workings and institutions. So the yellow star was not introduced, though the Danish King declared his willingness to wear one if his subjects were forced to. All myths have a grain of truth and this is a particularly heart-warming one, even if it came as a surprise to our disbelieving tour guide. And the situation in Denmark certainly worsened in 1943.

We even saw the small store room or cellar in a building down the street which this group of prisoners was allowed to use as a synagogue. In the main building earlier we went into a women's dormitory. (Men, women and children up to 14 were strictly segregated.) The long bunk beds had four levels. Each level was occupied by eight to ten people. We were there on a fine calm day. It was difficult to imagine what this peaceful place was like when bustling for all the wrong reasons.

And that ended our exploration. Next day, as we left on various flights, the rain poured down and I got soaked through. However, I managed to dry off before leaving and even do some shopping. I am left with the realisation that every place has its own history and you need time to absorb it. Unlike some of our group, I have no personal connection to this part of Europe and can only marvel at its rich history. But I am glad to have been introduced to it.

Dear Fellow Members

By the time you cast your ice over these words the summer will have past away. Yes I am writing it still in the mist of July. Today apart from the Erranians coursing big problems for Chipping in the Gulf or Hummus, it is just announced that Boris Johnson one the race to number 10 Downing Street. He was always the four runner against Germany Hunt.



oceans. Mrs Klopstick recently completed her forth crossing to and fro of the English Channel but on the way back she got caught in some fishermen's nets and nearly drowned. It was only because in her support boat there happened to be a refugee community witch included a moyle from Ethiopia who was able to cut her free in won slice. In this way she was not only able to survive, but also complete the swim.

From a Jewish complexion I don't think it matted who took up the reins, as long as they don't make such a mess to bring in Jeremy Corbyn and his auntie semitic and auntie Israel cronies into power. I don't know if I am alone in slightly feeling embarrassed that President Donald Trump is such an advocaat for Israel. Of course it is both highly impotent and very necessary that the U.S. is a strong ally for Israel, but I wish the lieder of the western whirl was not such a schmo.

I see in this week's New in the Square that Rabbi Altschuler has brought up the subject of green Judaism and how it complicates on the Shabbas by not cutting the grass and not preening the trees and bushes. For several decades I have burrowed my sorts about glow ball warning and kept it under my head. Mrs Klopstick in her many travels around the Globe has brought back stories of varnishing forests and melding ice packs, so I think it is time I became now outspoken on the subject.

On behalf of all the inmates here in Abernethy Mansions and the Jewish community as a whole, I hereby register my strongest protest against pollution and especially plastic in the

This edition will arrive on your door mats precisely just before or just backside of a month before the onset of Rosh Hashonah. It seems to be quite high in the year this time, which means that fasting for Yom Kippur will be expressively short. Last year old Mr Kurtzhausen at number 79 arranged a trip to Iceland for Yom Kippur because he sort as there was much fewer daylight there it meant a shorter fast. It didn't work because he had some bad schmulz herring on his arrival that brought on such stomach craps he could not eat for nearly won week.

And one more week will bring Sukkus upon us. Last year when Mrs K was wind surfing in the Gobi desert, she spent several nights inside the jerk of some Nomads. She was so impressed that she is planning to construct one as a sukka here in our communal garden. It will be just a frame work of cause as we have to see the sky. Personally I am not sure that this is really a jerk or a sukka at all, more just being outside under some sticks.

With the best of intentions

Fritz Klopstick

MUSIC AT THE GATES OF HEAVEN A message from Cantor Paul Heller

In Martin Buber's voluminous *Tales of the Hasidim* (1947) is the story of a boy who brought a flute to synagogue on Yom Kippur. He didn't know the prayers but was moved by the music and spirituality of the service. Towards the end of *Ne'ilah*, the concluding service, he took his flute and blew a long and powerful note. The congregation was unnerved but the Baal Shem Tov, the movement's founder, continued praying with yet more devotion and told his congregation:

"With the sound of his flute, this child lifted up all the prayers and eased my burden. This child knows nothing, yet through the strength of his longing he played the note of his heart truly, without distraction, for the sole sake of the Name of God. The clean breath of his lips was very acceptable to Him and because of it all the prayers were uplifted."

The Baal Shem Tov's words teach us much that can enhance our prayers. Whether we are singing, reading or simply being, our contributions matter. We each have the ability to lift our prayers and those of the entire congregation to heaven. Although the boy in this tale could not pray in conventional style, his intention brought him close to the Divine.

During the High Holy Days, we will sing many melodies evoking memories and emotions. My hope is that the many sounds of the High Holy Days will give us a chance to raise our voices and let our pleas be answered.

Shanah Tovah U'metukah – A good and sweet New Year.

SHABBAT & FESTIVAL CANDLE LIGHTING



Friday 6 September	Suzanne Shalson
Friday 13 September	Gillian Wray
Friday 20 September	Nicole Avramov
Friday 27 September	Deborah Jay
Friday 4 October	Surinder Capper
Friday 11 October	Malka Baker
Sunday 13 October	Jeanie Cohen
Monday 14 October	Rebecca Trenner
Friday 18 October	Alice Temkin
Sunday 20 October	Sophie Cutner
Monday 21 October	Nicole Horwitz
Friday 25 October	Sasha Spencer



Remember Belsize Square Synagogue in your Will and help secure the future of your community



Although the community continues to grow and attract new members, we cannot flourish on membership fees alone.

We depend on the generosity of you, our members, to provide the inspiring religious services, a wide variety of education for adults and children, social events, burials and pastoral care for all members of our community and also to preserve our unique musical heritage.

Any legacy, large or small, will make a difference!

Any questions?

For a confidential discussion please call Lee Taylor on 020 7794 5949





Community News

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a cordial welcome to:

Neal Bacon
Emily Burton
Ben Gelbart
Ethan Glynn
Ethan Sciamma
Josef Grostern

BAR & BAT MITZVAH

Congratulations and best wishes to:

Nicole, daughter of Karen Avramov, who celebrates her Bat Mitzvah on 7 September
Benyamin, son of Gillian Wray & Amir Landeck, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on 14 September
Sam, son of Sasha & Nick Spencer, who celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on 26 October

WEDDING

Congratulations and best wishes to:

Jonathan Lawrence & Khristina Belkina, who were married on 29 June

BIRTHDAYS

Congratulations and best wishes to:

Mr J Goldberger (92) on 4 August
Mr J Epstein (89) on 5 August
Cantor M Stone (88) on 8 August
Mr B Rebuck (91) on 10 August
Mrs S Allan (86) on 10 August
Mrs A Frank (99) on 13 August
Mr R Cohen (75) on 26 August
Mr S Kornhauser (86) on 30 August
Mr J Horwitz (81) on 2 September
Mrs E Ballheimer (86) on 13 September
Mrs D Lindsay (97) on 15 September
Mr F Harding (82) on 20 September
Mrs C Krasner (89) on 25 September
Mrs P Zeff (80) on 27 September
Mr M Mendel (85) on 28 September

(Many apologies to Mrs L Krieger who was 97 on 6 July and not as printed in our previous issue.)

NW3 LUNCHEON GROUP

Giacomo, 428 Finchley Road, London NW2 2HY
1.00pm on Wednesday 11 September & 16 October
Please call Judy Field (020 8455 0614) if you wish to attend

HIGH HOLYDAY TICKETS & INFORMATION

Members will have received in the post a pack with all the High Holyday Services information. This included tickets for each family member, which are sent out automatically. Application for tickets is now only required for non-members. The pack also included application forms for non-members' tickets, prayer books and transport requirements/volunteer provision. Please do not destroy. If you have not received this pack or would like to discuss any aspect of these arrangements please contact the Synagogue Office.

EXTRA OFFICE HOURS

The Synagogue Office will be open for the collection of High Holyday Prayer Books and non-member tickets on Sunday 29 September from 10.00am till noon.

The copy deadline for the next issue of Our Congregation is Sunday 13 October

REGULAR SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm & Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids

Saturday 7 September, 5 October, 2 November

Under-5s Service in the Crèche (Crèche opens 10.00am)

Junior Service for 5-9 year-olds in the Library

11.30am – Kids' Kiddush

Often followed by a Pot Luck Lunch

Contact Frank Joseph on 020 7482 2555 to bring a dish

Religion School

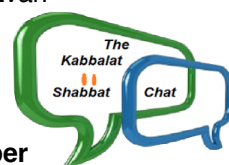
Sunday mornings: 9.30am-12.30pm

Term begins: 8 September

CANTOR HELLER'S KABBALAT SHABBAT CHAT

An invitation and opportunity for B'nei Mitzvah class pupils to make Kiddush, sing Lecha Dodi and learn the lessons of the Parsha. On the second Friday of the month 5.30pm in the Library

Next sessions: 13 September, 11 October



TEFILLIN CLUB



Sunday 29 September

9.30am - 10.00am
(within Cheder morning)

SUNDAY MORNING ADULT DISCUSSION

8 September 10.00-11.15 Rabbi Altshuler on Prayer (1): Problems of Jewish prayer - What is it? Poetry? Has it any benefit? Why repeat prayers? Why Hebrew?

11.15-12.30 Open Forum Discussion: Summer Highlights

15 September 10.00-11.15 Rabbi Altshuler on Shoah (1): Questions of scholars, philosophers, theologians & psychologists
11.15-12.30 TBC

22 September 10.00-11.15 Rabbi Altshuler on Prayer (2): Animal sacrifice; Synagogue origins; Jerusalem Temple; Creation of Siddur
11.15-12.30 Naomi Layish, journalist and author: Women in Judaism

13 October 10.00-11.15 Rabbi Altshuler on Shoah (2): History of Antisemitism - pagan, Christian, Muslim, racial, cultural, national
11.15-12.30 Richard Clarke, National Holocaust Centre - Combatting the Rise in Antisemitism

OFFICE CLOSURES

The office will be closed on the following dates:

Rosh Hashanah

Monday 30 September - Reopen Wednesday 2 October

Kol Nidrei

Tuesday 8 October 12 noon - Reopen Thursday 10 October
Succot

Monday 14 October - Reopen Wednesday 16 October

Shemini Atzeret

Monday 21 October - Reopen Wednesday 23 October



1) Rabbi Hoffberg explaining the cellar in Terezin allocated to 400 Danish Jews who literally missed the boat in the 1943 rescue to Sweden and were rounded up and sent to Terezin, where they had exceptionally good treatment, thanks to the Danish Red Cross (Photo by Eric Wilton)

2) On the down escalator to platform at Staromestska (Old Town) station on the metro to visit the New Jewish Cemetery. In ascending order: Amanda Hellman, Monica Bard, Pat Spungin (E.W.)

3) Plaque in Trebic to Antonin Kalina, a local cobbler and Communist sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. There he took Jewish boys aged 12-16 under his wing and protected them in his function as Elder of Block 66, known as the Children's Block. He ensured that they were sent to him and kept them deep inside the "quarantine area" which German soldiers avoided through fear of infection. He saved over 900 boys and was honoured by Yad Vashem in 2012 (Photo by Jacqueline Goddard, who also took photo on Page 5)

4) Monument to the murdered children of Lidice (Photo by Anthony Hellman, who also took photos on Pages 6 & 7)

5) Tomas Kraus (right), Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, addressing us at Dinitz kosher restaurant. Antony Polonsky on left (A.H.)

6) Entrance to the New Jewish Cemetery. The Hebrew text at the top reads: Dust you are and to dust you shall return (E.W.)

7) Women inmates queuing up for food at Terezin, as seen by 12-year-old Helga Weiss, now 89 and living in Prague (A.H.)

8) Rabbi Altshuler at Franz Kafka's grave in the New Jewish Cemetery (A.H.)

Course in Jewish liturgy

LEARN TO LEAD A SERVICE

What is Nusach ?

1. Learn the basics
2. Practical workshop

Cantor Paul Heller will lead this course enabling you to lead a service as a Shaliach Tzibbur (community envoy)

If you are interested please send an email to cantor@synagogue.org.uk



from Peter Freudenthal's Shmoneh Esreh

Starts Monday 4 November 7-8pm, then fortnightly



Belize Square Synagogue
51 Belize Square NW3 4HX

SKEET WEEKEND 20-22 SEPTEMBER

Enjoy arts & crafts, swimming, obstacle courses, tennis, football, performing on stage, making new friends and learning to lead. Years 3+. Cost £140 per person.

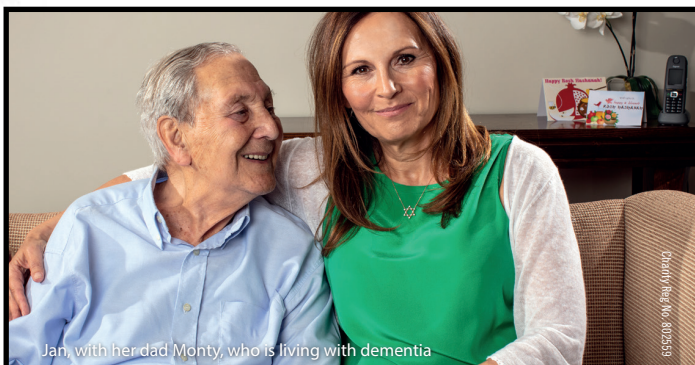
Contact Lucy Bergman: youth@synagogue.org.uk

Branch Line

If you are thinking of pruning your pine, laurel or cypress trees, the Synagogue would be very grateful to receive branches for the Succah which will be erected on Thursday 10 October.

Please contact the Synagogue Office to make arrangements for delivery if you can help.





Jan, with her dad Monty, who is living with dementia

**"I'LL NEVER FORGET THE DAY I RANG.
THAT ONE CALL CHANGED MY DAD'S
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THE BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

51 Belsize Square, London, NW3 4HX

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Website: www.synagogue.org.uk

Charity Number: 1144866

Company Number: 7831243

RABBI

Rabbi Dr Stuart Altshuler - rabbi@synagogue.org.uk

CANTOR

Cantor Dr Paul Heller - cantor@synagogue.org.uk

EMERITUS

Rabbi Rodney Mariner - 07956 352267

CHAIRMAN

Jackie Alexander - chairman@synagogue.org.uk

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Lee Taylor - 020 7794 3949

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

Office Hours: 9.00am - 5.30pm

Fridays: 9.00am - 2.00pm

CHEVRAH KADISHA

Chairman: Rabbi Stuart Altshuler

Joint Vice Chairs: Helen Grunberg - 020 8450 8533

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

COMMUNITY CARE CO-ORDINATOR & BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Eve Hersov - 020 7435 7129 or eve@synagogue.org.uk

FUNERALS

Phone (Synagogue Office hours) - 020 7794 3949

Evening/weekend Calo's (Undertakers) - 020 8958 2112

HIGH HOLYDAY AND SUCCOT SERVICES

SELICHOT

Saturday 21 September 10.00pm

ROSH HASHANAH

1st Eve

Sunday 29 September 6.45 pm

1st Day

Monday 30 September 9.30am

2nd Eve

Monday 30 September 6.45pm

2nd Day

Tuesday 1 October 9.30am

KOL NIDREI

Tuesday 8 October 7.00pm

(Fast commences 6.08pm)

YOM KIPPUR

Wednesday 9 October

Services begin 9.45am

(Fast ends 7.11pm)

SUCCOT SERVICES

1st Eve

Sunday 13 October 6.45pm

1st Day

Monday 14 October 10.00am

2nd Eve

Monday 14 October 6.45pm

2nd Day

Tuesday 15 October 10.00am

Shemini Atzeret Eve

Sunday 20 October 6.45pm

Shemini Atzeret

Monday 21 October 10.00am

Mazkir

Simchat Torah Eve

Monday 21 October

Under-5s Service 5.00pm

Family Service 7.00pm

Simchat Torah

Tuesday 22 October 10.00am