



Kol HaKehilah

The Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue Magazine

Pesach 5778/2018

Being and Becoming

In this issue:

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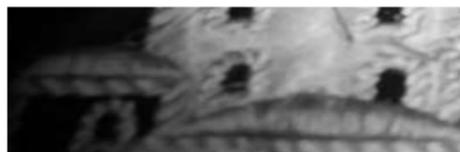
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If you'd like to be involved in the production of the next issue – or if you'd like to suggest a theme – please let us know! The next edition will be Rosh Hashanah 5779/2018.

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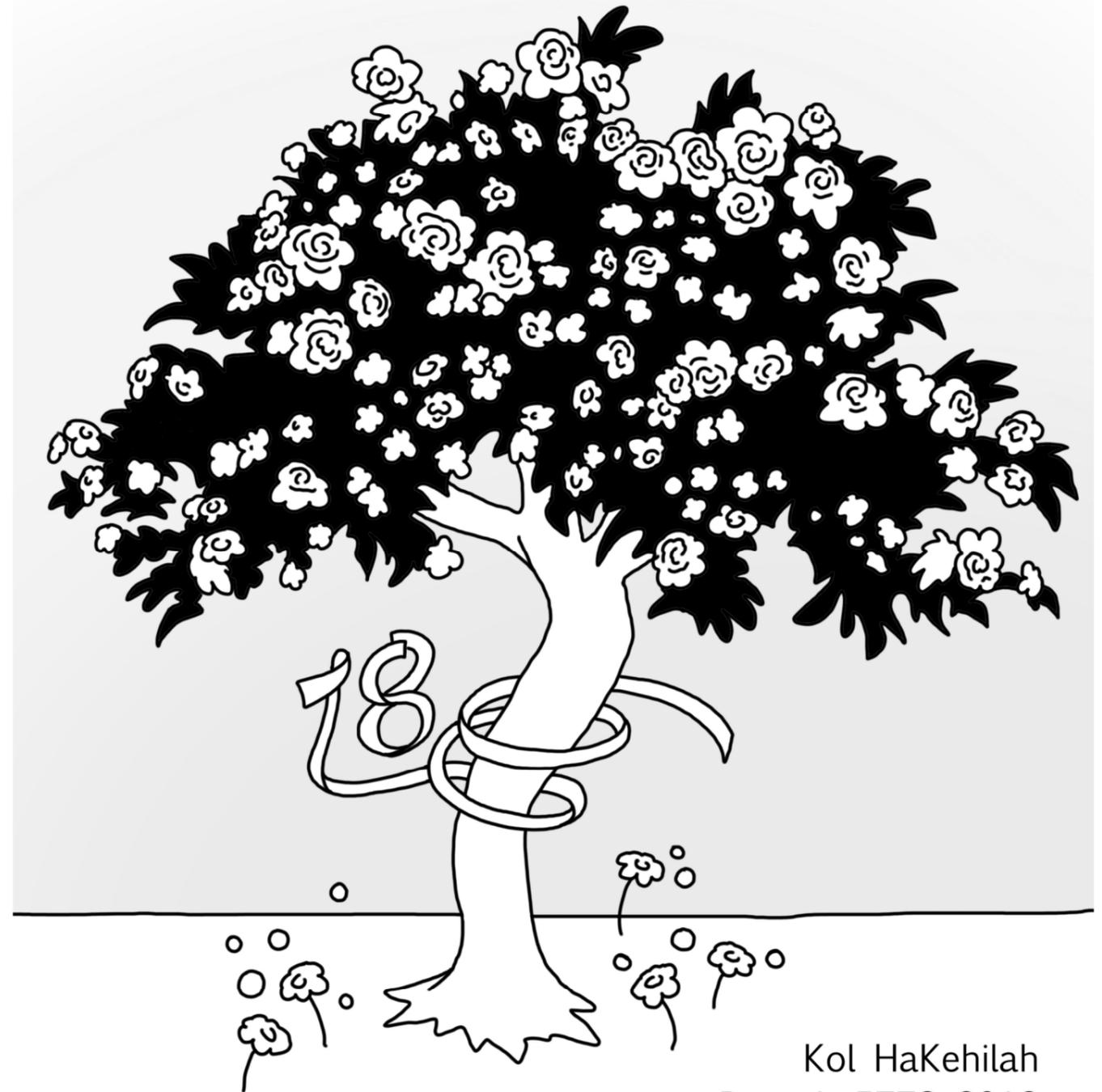
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Kol HaKehilah
Pesach 5778 2018
Being and Becoming



Being and Becoming: Kol Nefesh at 18

By Rabbi Joel Levy

For years Susanna and I have struggled at classical concerts. A concert that I, with my untrained ear, can sit blissfully through, she might not experience as so relaxing. She might hear in real time that there is a tuning problem in the wind section, that the timing is ragged in the strings and that the horns are not listening to each other. In a concert hall the same fine-tuned ear that served her well when she was preparing to give concerts can sometimes dull the pleasure of an evening's concert together!

Then under other circumstances a totally different Susanna is revealed. When working with musicians on performance anxiety she is focused on their subjective experiences. In her work as a music therapist she can be entranced by a child with disabilities playing piano with her elbows, and as a teacher she will listen joyfully to kids playing their instruments, not necessarily in tune, but going for it with gusto nonetheless. When we sing together as a family it is with joy and love, with no hint of awareness of any of our musical limitations. At these times her critical side is nowhere to be seen; she seems to be tuned into a different frequency of reality altogether.

At times, the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz looked at the world and reeled in pain at what he saw:

I have reared and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children who are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they

have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they have turned backwards. Where should you still be stricken that you revolt again? Every head is sick, and every heart is faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and sores; they have not been pressed, nor bound up, nor softened with oil... To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? said the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats... Bring no more vain offerings; incense of abomination they are to me; as for new moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear iniquity along with solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to me; I am weary of enduring them... Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the orphan, plead for the widow.

[Isaiah 1:2–17]

And at other times he looked at the world and saw only joyful potential:

For behold! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth. The former things shall not be remembered. They shall never come to mind. Be glad, then, and rejoice forever in what I am creating. For I shall create Jerusalem as a joy, and her people as a delight; And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in her people. Never again shall be heard there the sounds of weeping and wailing. No more shall there be an infant or greybeard who does not live out his days. He who dies at a hundred years shall be reckoned a youth, and he who fails to reach a hundred

shall be reckoned accursed. They shall build houses and dwell in them; they shall plant vineyards and enjoy their fruit. They shall not build for others to dwell in, or plant for others to enjoy. For the days of my people shall be as long as the days of a tree, my chosen ones shall outlive the work of their hands. They shall not toil to no purpose; they shall not bear children for terror, but they shall be a people blessed by the Lord, and their offspring shall remain with them. Before they pray, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will respond. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent's food shall be earth. In all My sacred mount nothing evil or vile shall be done —said the Lord.

[Isaiah 65:17–25]

Imagine that each of us possesses two pairs of glasses (actually I have rather more than two pairs, none of which seem to really do the trick!). One of them brings into sharp focus the imperfections of the world. When we are wearing these glasses we can see every wrinkle and flaw, every act of deception, every moral failure, every lack of effort, every out of tune note, every dot of pollution, every deed lacking in kindness, every act of lazy complacency. Wearing that pair of glasses is so damn painful that we quickly switch over and put on our second pair. What a relief! This one brings into sharp relief the unblemished beauty of our world, countless acts of lovingkindness and coexistence. With those glasses on our hearts beat a little slower. Even litter on the street has its own intricate beauty. Absolutely everything is just as it should be! We can even wonder at discordant music and see the vibrant beauty in polluted skies.

It seems clear to me that for anyone to own only one pair of these glasses would be disastrous. It is dangerous to view the world as either wholly perfect or as

wholly flawed. To see only perfection is to close our eyes and our hearts to suffering and the desperate need for change. Surely any search for improvement stems from an awareness of imperfection? Living easily with mediocrity or not even noticing it cannot be a wholly desirable quality. It is our capacity to hear the discord in the world that prompts us to try to tune it.

On the other hand, to see only imperfection is to live in a world of appalling starkness and to fail to see the stunning beauty of what is. If every vista is ruined by the slightest imperfection then our lives will be impoverished and limited. If our gaze is constantly drawn to the illness and death that await us then the good possibilities of our lives will pale into nothingness. If in every hedgerow we see only a place of brutally violent struggle for life, then we will see only brutality everywhere and not beauty.

It is dangerous to view the world as either wholly perfect or as wholly flawed. To see only perfection is to close our eyes and our hearts to suffering and the desperate need for change. To see only imperfection is to live in a world of appalling starkness.

In some way we each have to find a way to remain aware of both perfection and imperfection. In our lives we have to be able to tap into the strengths, and try to avoid the weaknesses, of both pairs of glasses. We need to be able to embrace both being and becoming; loving what is (being) and seeking to change it (becoming). I would not describe this as a balancing act, finding the sweet spot between polar opposites. I would say that both capacities need to be worked on and developed, both independently and then together. We can work on our capacities both to see beauty and to dare

to respond to ugliness. Both muscles must be trained so that we can interact more deeply with ourselves and with those around us. Religion is one tool that humans have developed to work out and strengthen both of those muscles.

Looking back at Kol Nefesh on its eighteenth birthday, there is one aspect of that tension that I believe we have managed to address and work towards as a community. On the one hand we aim to be a community that accepts its members for who they are without a shred of judgment. Too many people's relationships with our tradition have been poisoned by disapproving glances or cruel comments. KNMS has said loudly, "Come as you are, in the clothes that will make you comfortable, bring with you your story and your baggage, and find a way to interact with this strange ancient tradition." And on the other hand, KNMS has also been a place of tremendous religious aspiration. Everyone is encouraged not to get stuck nursing their wounds and preconceptions, but to work to open doorways into deeper understandings and experiences of Judaism. Being is never enough! We must always be open to hearing the commanding voice of becoming! I think that in this way KNMS has been radically successful in the realms of both being and becoming.

A religious community can never be static. There have been times when Kol Nefesh has felt at peace with itself and other times when we have felt pained and ruptured. At times we have got into a comfortable groove and simply enjoyed following our established patterns of behaviour, and at others we have felt like we are probing and questioning and seeking to change everything. As the rabbi of the community I of course look forward to moments of tranquillity; but know that the purpose of religion does not lie only in comfortable stasis! The danger of any institution becoming comfortably "grown up", especially religious institutions, is that they lose the capacity to hear the urgent prophetic voice yearning for change.

The start of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus chapter 20, tries to capture some of this tension:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

[Exodus 20:7–10]

There is a time for acting, doing, changing and becoming; and a time for being, enjoying, loving and accepting.

A Midrash asks, how can the verse say that we should "do all our work" in six days? Surely the challenges of life are insurmountable; the flaws all too apparent, the task open-ended and impossible! This is true, the Midrash answers, but Shabbat is a time to feel and act as if our work is done, to let ourselves off the hook for a fleeting moment, to view the world through the glasses of being rather than the scarier ones of becoming.

At the moment we are primarily a Shabbat community. The three regular prayers on Shabbat focus respectively on the perceived perfection of creation on the seventh day (Ma'ariv), Moses' joy at receiving the Shabbat covenant in the Torah (Shacharit), and Shabbat as creating a sense of abiding peace (Mincha). In the weekday prayers the central section of the Amidah encourages us to articulate and address different aspects of the appallingly flawed nature of our world. A community that only davens together on Shabbat will inevitably suffer from a distorted understanding of what our roles are in the world. There is still plenty of work to be done! ■



Prayer and Liturgy

By Chazan Jacky Chernetz

I am immensely proud of Kol Nefesh. As a group of people in love with our tradition in whatever way and open to every possibility, it is a 'place' that is wherever our people are, where I want to be held in my own Jewish journey, where I feel safe but able to challenge norms. After all, nothing ever stays the same, we are moving in time. And as we inevitably move with time, we crave stasis, security, certainty. Change is frightening. Dealing with this paradox is difficult, and KN provides a home where we can at least share the journey.

Services are an essential part of the communal religious experience, and the davening experience at Kol Nefesh is something that I treasure.

There is a difference between personal t'filah and communal t'filah. The former is between the individual and God, and is something that no other person has the right or even the ability to invade. Nobody knows what God is, and each person develops a relationship with this unknown. Not one of us is the same as the other and our inner thoughts, dreams, pains, are not the same as the next person's. Our personal yearnings and longings are specific to us only.

Our traditional liturgy for each service contains a plethora of verses from different parts of the Tanach and other writings, and at any given moment one of them – yes, even one word or phrase – can stand out with stark meaning as we are immersed within the mantra-like davening that leads us, almost trance-like, into the world of the soul. This has nothing to do with anyone else. It is private, even though our fellow Jew may be reciting exactly the same words wherever in the world they may be, not only stand-

ing next to us. We add our own yearnings, skip unwanted words, paragraphs, sentiments; we argue and we also linger and love.

But davening together as a community releases another dimension. We have a collective soul. The 'mantra' is the same, and not only are we standing with our people wherever they may be now, but wherever they have stood millennia before us and where they will in the future, God willing. We are then in the realm of the peoplehood experience, and our attention is focused not on our individual being but on the being and becoming of the whole community within the world.

A group of us in Kol Nefesh is currently engaged in discussions about the siddurim and machzorim that we use. We have a variety of them on our book trolley and they appeal to different people. The texts are the same texts. There are some people who add the *imahot* – the mothers (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) – to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) in the opening paragraph of the Amidah. Marc Shoffren made a plea for us to discuss this as a community in his beautiful sermon on Sedra Sh'mot. This addition appears in many non-Orthodox siddurim and so far we have left it to whoever is *sh'liach* or *sh'lichat tzibur*, leading the community, to have the freedom to use this text if they wish (as with other moderations too).

Living in our time, I am thankful, as a woman, to be an equal part of the community and not an onlooker. For many people, of course, this has begged the question of feminist language in the liturgy. Our problem is that Hebrew is a gender-based language and there is no neutral, non-gendered way of expressing it. Marcia Falk, in *The Book of Blessings*, attempted to do just this in English – a noble effort but has taken away the Jewishness of it all.

Jewish prayer has its essence in the lan-

guage of Hebrew and the structure of its flow. With regard to the prayer text, once we mess with that, we are then making choices for other people. This is why I take issue with movements that have chosen to shorten the texts, change the words to match modern sensibilities (I don't like that word!). What is happening? If I daven from one of these, someone has told me that our traditions, by omission or change, don't apply to me. They have made the choice, not I!

Much more than that, they have taken away my Jewish job of being a *Yisra-el* – one who strives with God. No – I don't want to see the physical restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem with its sacrificial rites any more than anyone else in our rational time! But it is our mythology, our story, and within the journey of Jewish yearning it is the notion of a collective activity that was sanctified and mourned at its loss. Its physical nature isn't the issue at all but the ancient connection with the God of Israel that still applies to me and to us. I want to deal with that on a much deeper level than being fed with what someone says I ought to think. I don't want it watered down. I don't want it to be 'rationalised'. I want to be angry and to have the right to shout at the text. I want to delve into the metaphor and imagination that these writings imprint and beg. And I don't want that right taken away from me as a Jew.

Our liturgy is a richness of literary, biblical and historical references, poetry and prose. It is my best friend. It is my best friend because everything is in it and it is the nearest thing to what I might be myself in terms of complexity, familiarity and almost unknowability. It will always be relevant if only we realise it and let it be. It has been thus for our people for over two thousand years. It is our constant in an ever-changing world. It isn't easy with its Hebrew and Aramaic. Of course, there is nothing to stop anyone within his or her personal engagement to

daven in their own language. But translations in themselves change the nature of what is written. Do translations into English make our t'filah any more understandable and engaging to the Jewish soul? Hebrew is the vernacular of the Jewish experience as it is davened, and it has to be learned. It has to be heard, chanted, experienced, earthy, visceral and above all else, felt.

Here is an exquisite snippet from Israel Zangwill (1864–1926). In *Children of the Ghetto* he wrote about traditional Jews at prayer in 19th-century London. It applies just as well now, however outdated some of us might think it to be:

Metaphysics, acrostics, angelology, Cabbalah, history, exegetics, Talmudical controversies, menus, recipes, priestly prescriptions, the canonical books, psalms, love-poems, an undigested hotch-potch of exalted and questionable sentiments of communal and egoistic aspirations of the highest order. It was a wonderful liturgy, as grotesque as it was beautiful... If the service had been more intelligible, it would have been less emotional and edifying.

The scholar Catherine Madsen addressed this. She wrote: "I've talked to major Jewish feminist thinkers who can't cut from their souls the words *Avinu Malkeinu*: there's more to the experience of davening than what you believe in." She examines our liturgy as a library model rather than a classroom model:

Liturgy worth years of repetition cannot be neatly packaged in intelligible units. It must be discovered in eagerness and longing and sometimes in pain, in old language and new, in random wanderings among books and in the conflicts of our own minds. It can never resemble the expurgated edition for classroom use; it is what a good book is, a compelling and inexhaustible map of good and evil consonant with our own knowledge. Liberal Jewish liturgists need to learn what librarians know: school is a way-station, a means to an end, and people are glad to get out. Confirmed library users are in it for life.¹

Strange to say, our liturgy is the book most Jewish people have even if they don't own anything else. It is the most looked at and yet the book that people least seek to understand. Yeshivot and academies, universities and seminaries delve in minute detail into our biblical, legal, kabbalistic, aggadic, ethical and every other book that makes up our rich tradition, arguing, hair-splitting, disagreeing... But this work, containing bits of all of this heritage, the most used work of all, bears scant curiosity!

And that's without the music – aaah, there's another story!

Happy birthday, Kol Nefesh! ■

¹Catherine Madsen, "Crazy Jane Talks with the Rabbis: Pedagogy and Privacy in Liturgy". In *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Cantors Assembly, USA, Volume 37, 2012.

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The Origins Trap

By Gavriel Peretz

First, a confession. I do not often share my personal story because I'm an intensely private person. Also, I am loath to share my particular background out of a fear that it will inevitably fall into the trap of gauzy, romanticized tropes, misunderstandings or well-trodden clichés that normally ensnare such accounts. So let us begin with facts. I was born into an upper middle-class family in Venezuela, Catholic, with strong links to the country's history. A president, provincial governors and mayors, Spanish colonial administrators, great landowners, Portuguese merchants and adventurers along with a few heroes in the War of Independence are all part of my family tree. And yet none of these claims to fame captured my imagination growing up. Instead, it was our distant Jewish roots that obsessed me from a young age.

Now, I've heard it said many times how it seems that every other Spanish or South American person will have some measure of Sephardic Jewish ancestry. This is not an exaggeration in light of the mass of Iberian Jews who converted to Catholicism during the 14th and 15th centuries, around 200,000 to 300,000, either out of their own choice or under duress, creating a large and distinct segment within the overall population of Spain and Portugal that came to be known, variously and interchangeably, as conversos, New Christians or Marranos. Given that a person living today who traces their ancestry back to 1492 will have the contributions of more than 100,000 forebears in their DNA, the odds of having Spanish or Portuguese Jewish ancestry are rather high if your family hails from Spain or Portugal. Some estimates put the number of descendants of these converted Jews at around 100 million, and up to 20 percent of the current populations of Spain and Portugal are thought to have Sephardic Jewish DNA markers. In many ways, my story is therefore rather commonplace. And yet when you move away from the language of statistics and probability and enter the realm of the individual, then

every story is unique. One's own past carries a meaning and emotional significance that may defeat all attempts to rationalize it away.

My identification with Judaism, or better said, Jewish history began when my father explained that his family was of Sephardic Jewish origin. Our surname, he told me, was adopted when our ancestors converted and abandoned their Jewish religion in 1492. My paternal grandfather and his siblings, he added, were very proud of this history. I was only 12 years old at the time of this revelation so I lacked the knowledge with which to understand it further. Nevertheless, my father's cursory explanation would change my life. The first manifestation of this altered perspective was an interest in and strong attachment to the State of Israel. When my parents went on a tour of Israel the following year I requested they bring back books about the country and any other souvenirs. This they did, buying me a book about the country as well as a tape with a medley of Hebrew music. With single-minded dedication, I read and re-read the story of Israel's founding and memorized the songs in a language I did not yet understand. I should add that my mother's family also had a similar memory of distant Jewish ancestry. But for some reason, it did not capture my attention strongly at the time. However, my mother's youngest sister read extensively on Jewish history and religion and went on a trip to Israel with my grandfather along with well-known figures in the Caracas Jewish community, during which time she stayed on a kibbutz and even met Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin. (In her early twenties my aunt also went through a period during which she considered converting to Judaism, but in the end she decided against it.)

The next milestone in my story occurs when I was 14 years old and refused to undergo a confirmation ceremony, for I no longer wanted to be a Catholic. The reason I could assert my preference stubbornly and reject this ceremony, in the

face of my mother's strong religiosity, was that my parents were in the midst of an acrimonious divorce. I leveraged their conflict as only wilful adolescents can. Within a single, chaotic year, I managed to reverse my orthodontics treatment and have my braces taken out and I recruited my grandfather in supporting my bid to leave Venezuela by offering to pay for my tuition at boarding school in the United States. Leaving the country of my birth and returning to the US, where I had spent a large chunk of my childhood, allowed me to lay the seeds for an identity that was to become very different to my family's, as Americanized as possible, independent and removed from the materialistic, shallow mores and values of the Caracas East Side neighbourhoods where we lived. At boarding school, I gravitated towards the small contingent of Jewish students there and became even more conscious of my own connection to this heritage, to the extent that by the time I set off for university and I was 18 years old, conversion was already dawning as a possibility in my mind.

My first year at university was also 1992, a year marked by two milestones of great historical significance and which received a substantial amount of coverage in the media: the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas (now framed as an encounter rather than a discovery) as well as the 500th anniversary of the Expulsion Decree of the Jews from Spain. I was particularly aware of the latter milestone and wanted to learn more about how this edict had affected my ancestors. This intense curiosity drove me to the Library of Congress, the best available option in those days before the wonders of Google and the internet. Yes, it requires a certain kind of obsessive, geeky disposition to devote whatever free time one has not taken up by coursework and study to inspect the Library's catalogue, spending hours in the domed, imposing reading room of the Thomas Jefferson Building rather than socializing at college parties or "hanging out". I had

such a disposition in spades. Carrying out my research, I found that a large number of individuals with my birth surname of Madrid (a fairly unusual one) were frequently listed among the victims of the Inquisition in Castile. I also chanced upon the biography of Luis de Carvajal, the younger, one of the most famous martyrs of the Spanish Inquisition and one of Latin America's first Spanish language poets, an account that gripped me and moved me beyond measure. The more I discovered, the more I read, the greater my affinity with the Spanish Jewish and the converso story, the stronger my conviction that I lived in the shadow of my own personal wrong alongside the greater historical injustice in the treatment of Spain's Jews and conversos. I hasten to add that there was no record or memory of hidden, vestigial customs maintained by either side of my family. What remained of their links to our Jewish roots was that single, long-held awareness of connection on both branches. But it was enough for me. I thought: I should have been born Jewish but Queen Isabel's and King Ferdinand's fanaticism had robbed me of this, my rightful inheritance. I wondered: could it be reclaimed?

This idea gripped my imagination and prodded me to read more about Jewish history and Judaism, turning to the considerable collection of books on these topics my aunt had accumulated over the years and kept in her suburban Washington home. During the spring term of my freshman year at university, my choice was clear. I contacted Rabbi Harold White, z"l, Jewish Chaplain at Georgetown University, to ask for an interview. I was interested in converting. Now, the Rabbi was one of the most wonderful people I ever met, beloved by students, warm, welcoming, erudite and passionate about Judaism, Georgetown University, finding the best DC restaurants and classical music. After a number of interviews in which we discussed the motivation behind my choice, we began the process. This involved an extensive period of reading and studying, which I carried out with greater zeal and dedication than my own formal degree coursework, encompassing everything from beginning to learn the Hebrew language, learning about Zionism, ancient Israel as

well as modern Jewish history, without forgetting religious practice, ethics and philosophy. In addition, I became a regular at the JSA, the Jewish Students Association, and the nearby local synagogues, where I went to have my first experiences in celebrating Shabbat and the festivals and found connection, meaning and beauty in the ritual in ways I had not expected at the beginning of my journey, which was not necessarily spiritual but historical.

My family's initial response to my decision was mixed. My father accepted it, happy to go with my choice. My mother's reaction was less enthusiastic at first, while my grandparents and aunts all told me that I should hold off. My sisters simply found my decision odd. And except for my father and some of his siblings, my relatives refused to entertain my emphasis on 1492 and a return to those ancestral roots as valid. It seemed altogether bizarre to them that I would look to distant historical figures as the driving force behind my desire to convert. Nevertheless, I would not be dissuaded. I came back to university after summer vacation in Caracas with an even greater commitment to this path, became ever more active in the JSA, eventually becoming its chairperson, and, with a convert's zeal, began turning away from the friends I had made during my freshman year to the new ones I was meeting through my involvement in Jewish student activities. By the end of the academic year, I had applied to live in "kosher housing" offered by the university and used my own savings to go to Israel on a Kibbutz Upan program. Finally, almost two years after I began, in May 1994, I appeared before a Beit Din to undergo a formal conversion under the auspices of Rabbi White and members of a DC Conservative synagogue. (By the time I graduated in 1996, my family had fully accepted my decision. When I returned to Venezuela for the summer vacation that same year, my grandparents arranged for me to meet the Israeli Ambassador in Caracas, to be hosted for Shabbat dinners and attend services in both Ashkenazi and Sephardic synagogues in the city.)

Now thanks to my affinity for languages and my passion for all things Israeli, I

came back from my summer in Israel with a stronger command of Hebrew. I was a diligent student, knew my way around the Siddur, was familiar with synagogue services and observance at home. Increasingly, my origins felt insufficient and did not match the intensity of my attachment. It was during this time that I decided that I wanted to 'pass' as a born Jew, finding it easier than explaining my conversion process, for I also felt the word conversion did not reflect the sense of return and reclaiming of my roots that also drove me. My decision to leave America for Israel and make Aliyah was the product of Zionism but it also flowed from a strong wish to get a clean slate and assimilate into Israeli society so I could forget my complicated, unusual journey (and the decision to Hebraize my name was certainly a reflection of this wish). I cannot say that I am entirely free of this attitude to this day, but as I have matured and learned more about my family's history, I have seen that this is an essentially unsatisfactory exercise. In the end, I am rejecting myself, and the unique history that led me to choose my path.

I was twenty years old at the time of my conversion. I am now forty-four and have lived longer as a Jew than I ever did as a Catholic. I am an Israeli citizen, married to an Anglo-Jewish woman who I met while living in Israel, and we send our two daughters to Jewish schools. I belong to Kol Nefesh, a community that has offered me an enriching intellectual and religious framework and allowed me to find a degree of observance suited to my temperament and interests, that is, inquisitive, open-minded, bookish. Yet despite having built an entire adult life that reflects the extent of my commitment to Judaism, it was only when the internet allowed me to finally answer many of the questions I had about my family's origins, to find the concrete proof I once sought in the Library of Congress but failed to find with absolute certainty, that I felt that I could begin to discard my mask and the urge to conceal my origins. And although what I have found has not met all that I hoped to find, it is still an interesting portrait of the effects that history can have, even when

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you think its traces should have vanished. Before you read on, allow me to add that I am fully aware that the past I present here has no practical bearing on my Jewish status. I am a Jew because of my conversion some twenty-four years ago, and the choices I have made since. However, I am still unable to discard this background as irrelevant.

It has taken me the better part of seven years to find the information I started looking for as a first-year university student, the specific link to the past I was told about as a boy, after painstakingly trawling through online archives and recruiting the assistance of helpful academics and genealogists on two continents. On my father's side, I have traced my origins to a Jewish family from Toledo by the name of Pallache, a name they dropped in 1492 in favour of Madrid, in honour of the surname of the Castilian nobleman who sponsored their baptism. Initially, the founder of the family line served as a tax farmer in Andalusia (a classic converso occupation) but his descendants pursued wine-growing and invested in a sugar mill afterwards. They had one brush with the Inquisition later on but suffered only economic losses. During the 1720s, my fifth great-grandfather left for the Spanish colonies, appointed as Tax Comptroller of the Crown in Venezuela. There, he married a woman with likely Portuguese converso roots (with the surnames de León and Carvajal), but I am doubtful about how conscious they were of their shared ancestry.

On my mother's side, I am the direct descendant of two victims of the inquisition, Juan Gonzalez Bermejo and his wife Juana Gonzalez de Alarif, who were burned at the stake in 1496 by the Inquisitorial Tribunal in Llerena, in western Spain, for the crime of Judaizing. This local chapter of the Inquisition was known to have been amongst the most aggressive and zealous of all on the Iberian peninsula, on account of the number of victims it produced during its terrible years of activity, in a town where former Jews represented around 30 percent of the population. I have not been able to

find the files detailing the trials of either ancestor or learn about their charges, but I did find their names among an exhaustive list of those killed in Llerena compiled by historian Luis Garrain Villa. Furthermore, according to research carried out by Canary Islands historian Juan Manuel Valladares, the couple's offspring fled to the Canary Islands and dropped their Gonzalez Bermejo surname, adopting a new surname to hide their origins after they settled in their new home. Yet the past was not easily banished. As part of his testimony before the Inquisition during its visit to Tenerife, one of the children of Juan and Juana Gonzalez, Hernando, was forced to disclose that his parents had been born Jews and were 'relaxed' (killed) by the Tribunal. In the decades following Hernando's testimony, several members of the family ended up in the crosshairs of the Inquisition for a variety of reasons, some for refusing to say their prayers at the accorded time, another for abstaining from work on the Sabbath and avoiding pork, one for daring to publicly criticize King Ferdinand for expelling the Jews, and the last for violating the prohibition against conversos wearing silks and riding fine horses, reserved for "Old Christians of pure lineage". Initially, the members of the family married into other converso clans but



A pictorial representation of the Auto de Fe of Mariana de Carvajal, Luis de Carvajal's sister, in Mexico.

eventually, as they rose in society and acquired great wealth, many joined the 'Old Christian' titled nobility on the island and manufactured/secured their status with a certificate of 'pure' blood not tainted by Jewish or Moorish ancestry, finally burying the past.

And so my ancestors' Jewish and converso stories come to an end. Having chosen a relative backwater in the Spanish Empire, where the Inquisition had hardly any reach, they assimilate. They become indistinguishable from their fellow Spanish subjects. Their descendants in South America later become Venezuelans and Colombians, fight for the freedom of the new republics and contribute to the political, civic and economic development of these nations. The fear over Jewish roots vanishes. All that is left is a gossamer-thin thread of awareness, a whisper here and there, a reference to this past that can be mentioned in passing once the old regime crumbled and the Inquisition ceased to exist. Our Sephardic background survives from then on as a curiosity, a historical quirk. I would like to think that it is the explanation for why both branches of my family with converso roots display an attachment to liberal, anti-clerical politics into the 20th century and a disdain for ultra-conservative traditionalism. Or why the Madrids boasted that you found their men learning in the university and looked down on those who made a career in the army or in the clergy, and the reason the men in the family drove their wives to church but never sat through mass, and would rather go to the dentist for root canal than see a priest for confession. That it explained why my mother has always had a marked aversion to pork and would not allow it inside our house. But I expect this is wishful thinking – one of my sisters insists I read too much into all of this. Why would this forgotten past mean anything, she asks. It doesn't matter anymore.

But it does to me. I am drawn to this story over and over again; obsessively, perhaps. It seems that history can and will play such tricks on us. For example, when I moved to London more than a decade ago and delivered a session on the history of the Sephardim, I focused particularly on the story of the martyred

Carvajal family and Luis de Carvajal, without any inkling regarding the potential kinship I share with them. Similarly, last year, I wrote an article about the life of Samuel Pallache, the Moroccan-Jewish diplomat and envoy to the Netherlands in the 17th century, again completely in the dark that my own Madrid forebears had once born the name Pallache. These minor coincidences are probably nothing more. And yet I wonder if they also serve to remind us of the myriad connections we inherit, the past that is part of us, which lingers on far longer than we realize.

I will confess that I felt an initial despondency when I surveyed the product of all this research. Could it be that most of my converso forebears earnestly sought to assimilate and erase any trace of their past? This should not have been surprising, for it was an inescapable demographic reality: the majority of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry disappeared within a few generations, through a mixture of emigration, intimidation, lying and intermarriage. To begin with, only a minority of Spanish Jewry chose to leave Spain rather than convert (perhaps 100,000 against 200,000 to 300,000 who converted in the decades leading up to 1492). And of those who converted, it was only a relative minority who were persecuted by the Inquisition or fled to the havens of the Ottoman Empire, Italy, the Netherlands and London (probably no more than 20,000 to 30,000). Why should my ancestors be special? What meaning or affirmation can be derived from this sad story of people desperately trying to escape the shadow of what they perceived as a dangerous secret? Moreover, had I, inevitably, fallen into the origins trap, bringing biases and expectations and fashioning a narrative that would serve my own needs, confirmed by linking random biographical dead-ends? And why did I care more about these branches in my family tree than the non-Jewish ones?

The answer I have come up with may appear to you to be a cop-out, a half-hearted compromise between the evidence and my own illusions, an irrational grasping at straws. And yet it offers comfort and meaning all the same. It enables me to understand my position as heir to

this particular past. For better or for worse, my Spanish and Portuguese converso ancestors were and remain historical orphans. For many generations, they lived in fear of their shadow, changed names, falsified and fabricated the past, collaborated with their erstwhile persecutors, took part an evil system of state sanctioned anti-Semitism, moved often and sought the safety of distant shores repeatedly as a means of escape from their dangerous origins. With the exception of my 15th great-grandparents burned at the stake in Llerena and a few of their children and grandchildren, they are not the martyred heroes and secret, devout Jews that captured the Jewish imagination as evidence of the Jewish people's endurance. No books will be written about them because it is too unremarkable and their story will not serve to inspire other Jews. Similarly, Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American history has very little use for them. While Spain and Portugal have acknowledged and tried to redress the injustice of the Expulsion, a sincere reckoning with the contributions and essence of the Jews who remained is still missing in these societies, and Spain remains one of the most anti-Semitic countries in Western Europe. Others, like the many genealogists and historians whom I encountered and read during my research, have been complicit in the polite prejudices that call for inventing origins and fabricating 'Old Christian' lineages. They are vested in maintaining a historical and well-established tradition of forgetting and lying, of denying the complexity of Iberian identity after 1492, and pretending that Jews and conversos in particular were not one of the foundational blocs of Spanish and Portuguese peoplehood. In short, the world has no use for these unhappy, haunted figures, stuck uneasily between two disparate worlds. It has nothing to learn from them.

The Llerena family home in Tenerife.



But I do. I will not forget them. I will continue to study their history, to seek to represent their particular experience in ways that capture the nuance of their period and place, and I will not judge them or deny they are a part of me. Instead, I will remember that my ancestors lived through the destruction of Spanish Jewry in 1492 and then Portuguese Jewry a few years later and tried to survive the aftermath as best they could, making difficult choices, choices that I may not agree with from the comfort and security of the 21st century, but which appeared as the only viable ones to them. I will honour their memory, identify with their struggles, yet still stand in stark opposition to their centuries-old effort to blend in, stubbornly clinging instead to the Jewish traditions, faith and past which they devoted their entire lives to erasing. I will persevere as best I can, ensnared in this origins trap, trying to make sense of what may appear to others as meaningless, as random or irrelevant, but which has nevertheless shaped who I am and captured my imagination for more than three decades. This is my story. Allow me to use the words of Jeremiah, as I feel they aptly reflect this connection between a murky path that leads to a Jewish present and, hopefully, an enduring future for the generations that come after:

Fear not thou, O Jacob My servant,
saith the LORD,
For I am with thee;
For I will make a full end of all the
nations whither I have driven
thee,
But I will not make a full end of
thee;
And I will correct thee in measure,
But will not utterly destroy thee. ■

Becoming, Still and Again

By Meira Ben-Gad

Some reflections inspired by the theme of this edition:

(i)

About a year ago, Micha called me to look at an email that had popped up in his inbox. It was from a woman living at our old address in Houston, Texas, and she'd received an official-looking envelope, addressed to us, from an address in Chicago. Would we like her to forward it, she asked? At first, we were flummoxed. But then Micha realized what it must be. "It's the embryos," he said.

Of course, he was right. Some 25 years ago, when Micha and I decided to start a family, we knew that we would need fertility treatment. Our doctor in Chicago recommended a ZIFT, or zygote intrafallopian transfer (like ordinary in vitro fertilization, except that the fertilized egg is transferred into the fallopian tube instead of the uterus). This resulted in 10 or 12 viable embryos, of which four were chosen for implantation. One of these became Yohanan. Those not selected were frozen for storage.

A while later, when we were living in Houston and ready to make Yohanan a big brother, the doctor we consulted recommended a GIFT, or gamete intrafallopian transfer. This procedure takes the process a step further back, implanting the gametes (sperm and eggs) into the fallopian tube, where they can do their thing more or less the natural way. So our embryos remained in storage. After a while, busy now with three young children, we forgot about them.

According to the letter sent to our old Houston address, the institution storing our embryos in Chicago was about to close, and they needed a decision on what to do with our little packets of inchoate life. They could be transferred to another institution, for a fee, or they could be destroyed. (The embryos were presumably too old to be useful for medical research, an option that might once have

been available, and that we would have been happy to accept.)

It was clear what our answer would be. We had no need for the embryos, nor any moral compunctions about destroying clusters of cells less than a millimetre across – not to mention that after 25 years these particular specimens were doubtless no longer viable anyway, had effectively already 'died'. And yet, and yet. These weren't just any random clusters of cells. Unshaped, just a step from non-existence, stopped in time to age without growing, they nonetheless contained the germ of fully formed life. Certain decisions, so to speak, had already been made. They felt like children, not in an abstract sense, but in a real and tangible one. They could have curly hair, or a round face. They could be playful or serious. They could love reading, or animals, or music. They could be impatient, solemn, funny, kind.

For a while after getting that letter, both Micha and I went through a process akin to grief. But this wasn't like mourning for a lost loved one (to which it cannot be compared). It was more a mourning for a lost opportunity. To be a parent is to discover that your children do not arrive on this earth fully formed. Yes, they are born with particular features, and with a particular temperament, and with propensities that, given the right stimuli, are likely to result in particular interests. But the great task of being a parent is helping your children through the long business of becoming the person they are going to be. And then at a certain point they stop needing your help, or they reject it, and they go on becoming all by themselves.

(ii)

Of course, none of us ever stops becoming, not permanently anyway. Throughout our lives, we alternate between being and becoming – periods of working on ourselves interspersed with periods of rest. Sometimes it takes a jolt to wake us up and make us realise we're in a rut. I

had such a jolt the summer before last, when I volunteered at Tel Megiddo and found myself huffing and puffing up the hill to the dig site every morning. That was absolutely not the person I wanted to be. So I started swimming for an hour twice a week, and Israeli dancing. My hour now regularly includes 30 minutes of non-stop freestyle, and I no longer deduce from my ungainliness on the dance floor that I must have three left feet. It's not a bad feeling.

But sometimes, the process of change happens without our even realising it. We're trundling along, just getting on with things, and then something makes us aware we're not the person we used to be. Wow, you might think, I've moved on to a new stage in life. I didn't think I'd be ready – but I must be, because I'm here. That's not a bad feeling either.

(iii)

There's a wonderful episode from the Matt Smith series of Doctor Who, "The Girl Who Waited", in which the Doctor's companion, Amy, is left behind on an alien planet trapped in what feels like a big white box, where she must sustain herself somehow while staying out of the way of robots who are trying to administer a substance intended to be therapeutic but which in fact will kill her. (I know, I know. We're talking Doctor Who here.) The Doctor and Amy's husband Rory return a few minutes later, but land in an accelerated time stream, where an older and exceedingly bitter Amy has been waiting 36 years for them to rescue her. The interesting part of the story is that despite having spent the past 36 years effectively in solitary confinement, with no company except a reprogrammed robot – i.e., in what most people would consider a form of torture – the older Amy does not want to help Rory rescue her younger self, as this would mean the older Amy would cease to exist.

Crazy, you think. Logically, it's obvious that the older Amy should want to reboot

her life, re-do those 36 years. And yet, ask yourself, if you had the opportunity to go back to the past, change something about yourself or your circumstances, and then re-live your life from that point, would you do it? It's not so obvious after all, is it? Our identities are shaped by our experiences in life, whether those were good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, conducive to a flowering of intellect and feeling or restrictive and stifling. Yet even bad experiences become important to us, simply because they're ours. Not being able to imagine any other possible selves, we become rather attached to the ones we've got.

As someone who suffered from depression at a formative period of life and came out the other side, the question resonates with me. Would I go back if I could and be a young adult again, this time depression-free? Certainly, there are ways in which I'd be a different person, maybe a person I'd prefer being. But the truth is, I don't think I would go back. I am who I am because of what I experienced at that time, and how I got through it. And that's enough.

At the end of "The Girl Who Waited", the older Amy sacrifices herself to save the younger one. Is she giving herself another chance at life? I think not. She's giving the younger Amy a chance at a life different from her own, just as she would do for anyone she cared deeply about. So ultimately, her own continued existence is not the most important thing in the world. That's a thought to hold on to. ■

Change

By Danny Kalman

Are we ready to accept change?

When we have a 'significant birthday' it's time for reflection as to where we are today and where do we want to be tomorrow. The big surprise to me is how quickly the last 18 years have gone by since Kol Nefesh was founded!

When the discussion about the future of Kol Nefesh gets going we should constantly remind ourselves of our stated mission – "To create a welcoming community and support members through their personal and family life-cycle events – fully inclusive and non-judgemental". However that does not mean we should not make changes at all. Discussions are already taking place about our current location and no doubt there will be other issues we need to face. From my recent meetings as one of the 'connectors' I learnt that members have different preferences and priorities as to what they are looking for from our community. Some prefer to remain small, some want more events for children while others would like more social events. For sure you can never please everyone!

Should everything change?

The thought of change, irrespective of what it may be, will be exciting for some and daunting for others. I recall during my final corporate role at Panasonic there were many changes as a result of company restructuring, product innovations, new technology and mergers/acquisitions. Even though many of the employees embraced the changes there were a significant minority who resisted and in many cases left the company.

However despite these changes the one theme that was constant was Panasonic's values as first articulated by its founder, Konosuke Matsushita, in 1932. His business philosophy is still in place today and despite passing away in 1989 he is still today known as Japan's leading business guru. When he announced his vision of "contributing to society by manufacturing products that will enrich people's lives" he also spoke about his 250-year plan for Panasonic (that might be a stretch for KNI!).

In their book *Built to Last*, James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras explained that those companies that clearly stated their values and stayed true to them (even in difficult times) had survived over many years, e.g. Johnson & Johnson, Disney, IBM, Boeing, and Merck.

Why make changes?

Indeed there are many examples in a business context of organisations that did not make changes due to being complacent and having a management team that was reluctant to 'rock the boat'. Most of us will remember the dominance in the camera market of Kodak. Because they refused to recognise the future of digital cameras they have basically disappeared. Nokia is another example of an organisation that did not see the trend of smartphones and quickly lost its market share to both Apple and Samsung.

I believe we need to have a 'sunao mind' (a Japanese word meaning open-minded or uncluttered) as to changes we should consider, and learn from the mistakes of others who for different reasons refused to make changes. However as previously mentioned we should stick to our values.

I have recently had personal experience of how supportive the community has been as I recover from my heart operation. It has been very moving for me the number of people who both made contact and came to see me. This has showed to me an example of our community living its values by expressing its genuine concern and being wonderfully supportive. ■



Project Renewal

By Miriam David

Whenever I visit Israel, I am always astounded at the speed at which development happens. There is always something new, be it a railway, new roads, tunnels, and now a bridge across one of the country's main thoroughfares, Highway 1, to protect wildlife, so that they can cross in safety.

Trends are in keeping with Western Europe. The vibe of Tel Aviv is trendy and you can almost imagine that you are in Hoxton. Huge numbers of young people are out and about on their bikes, meeting up in cafes and bars. The consciousness of the population has evolved and has become more sophisticated. It seems as though Israel is now more concerned with conservation and green issues. Hopefully, it is just a stone's throw from recycling much of its household rubbish. (Single-use plastic shopping bags are now less popular.)

I first visited Israel when I was sixteen. Tel Aviv struck me as ramshackle and quaint. Israel was still in its infancy, only twenty-four years old. There was a great sense of pride about everything that had been achieved. Pleasures were simpler: The Lunar Park in Park HaYarkon provided entertainment. Black-and-white televisions were covered with a blue or green Perspex sheet which either provided some kind of protection, or created

the illusion that you were watching in colour. The Arab film on Friday served as a focal point for families. Residents of Tel Aviv spoke of the Shalom Tower as being the tallest building in the Middle East. At that time, with the assistance of a specially appointed guide you could take the lift to the top of the building and admire the view.

Eleven years later, in the early 1980s, I returned to Israel. At some point, I was sitting in a discussion group. I can't remember where I was, but it is possible that it was connected with my Ulpan. The discussion may have been about the history of Tel Aviv and its expansion. One thing that stands out in my memory is that an American woman made a comment about how important it was for the municipality to take care of its old buildings. At that time, conservation wasn't at the forefront of people's minds and may have seemed like a foreign concept. The remark seemed to hang in the air and was

not taken any further. To my mind it seemed a poignant remark. I had often walked the streets of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and marvelled at the beauty and character of the buildings.

Fast forward to the last 10 years (approximate time frame). The conservation of old buildings finally now has prominence, with private projects receiving (a degree of) funding from the municipality. It is apparent from the ever-increasing presence of beautifully restored Bauhaus and Turkish Colonial buildings that the city of Tel Aviv now cherishes its past. By keeping hold of its past whilst moving forward, Israel is growing up.

In 2003 the "White City" of Tel Aviv was designated a world heritage site by UNESCO. The design of the central part of the city reflects a humanistic quality, with its tree-lined pavements and recreational areas. The designer, Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), believed in maintaining



Renovated buildings and renovation work in the vicinity of Bialik Square.
Photos by Miriam.



Restored and unrestored parts of Jaffa Street.
Photos by Miriam.

certain standards of living through geography, economics and cultural practice. This framework is evident in his town planning projects of Bombay and in the urban slums of Edinburgh. Geddes was primarily a sociologist and believed ardently in the centrality of quality of life in any city design. In 1925 Geddes submitted his plans for the design of Tel Aviv to Mayor Meir Dizengoff. Tel Aviv adopted his plans in their entirety, and is the only city in the world to have done this.

The White City contains many examples of early 20th-century modernism.

Variations in style abound, ranging from modernist Bauhaus to Eclectic and Colonial styles. We can observe curved and geometric shapes which are light-enhancing, making optimal use of space, or more exotic creations, with their crenellations, domes and iron trellis work. The home of the national poet Haim Bialik, built in 1925, is an example. The preservation zone located at Tel Aviv's heart is a hive of urban activity. It is exposed daily to visitors and residents in their thousands. Quite often, in other cities around the world, buildings of such design are located on the periphery.

It took 20 years from the 1970s for the planning department of Tel Aviv to reach

a logical conclusion and understanding that the city is home to buildings of historical and architectural worth. During the 1970s, these buildings were viewed as run-down relics to be erased.

The early days of the State of Israel saw the promotion of an agricultural culture and economy in keeping with the ideals of Zionism. The exploits of musicians, artists, writers and poets who occupied the buildings of Tel Aviv were not considered desirable. They were not thought to behave in a manner which was in accordance with the aspirations of a Zionist State. Cafe life in Tel Aviv represented life as it had been in Europe, and did not espouse the new dynamism of the times. The lives of these artists were seen as degenerate and consequently, the buildings which they occupied were seen as decrepit, not worth conserving and needing to be torn down.

It has taken a major shift in ideology and social awareness to recognise the cultural value of Tel Aviv's creativity and energy, and this has led to renovation and conservation in a series of phases, beginning with the artists' quarters in Jaffa during the 1960s. Since then, the conservation of Neve Tzedek gained planning reconsideration during the early 1980s. Prior to this, Neve Tzedek had been an upper-class neighbourhood of Jaffa. The neighbourhood had deteriorated and was deemed ripe for demolition and redevelopment, probably along the lines of 1980s modernist styles. However, the plans did not



In the Neve Tzedek neighbourhood.
Photo by Miriam.

go ahead. Neve Tzedek, with its low-level picturesque houses and close proximity to the financial district, attracted a new, artistic, middle-class breed of residents, who campaigned for its preservation. The area is now a tourist magnet which houses a cultural centre (the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre) and a restored Colonial railway station (Old Jaffa station), as well as spawning a range of desirable cafes, restaurants and shops along one of its central streets (Shabazi Street).

The conservation plan for the heart of Tel Aviv, or Lev Tel Aviv, followed during the early 1990s. Preservation of old buildings as well as urban regeneration formed the impetus of the project. Young families were encouraged back into buildings that had been previously used as office spaces. Recreational spaces and services were improved. Streets, boulevards and infrastructure were upgraded and renovated.

There is now a list of protected buildings marked for preservation within the boundaries of the White City. These are subject to strict planning rules. Transfer of property ownership is governed by restrictions on development which includes additions of floors and adaptations. There are other categories for buildings where there is more flexibility.

The conservation of the White City has become a movement which promotes the historical, cultural and architectural heritage of the city. There is a museum dedicated to this cause which gives lectures and guided tours of the city (the Bauhaus Centre on Dizengoff Street). There is a recognition of how important it is to conserve all that is of value from the older neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv. The rediscovery of these neighbourhoods has led to quality-of-life and cultural gains.

Conservation is a mark of a country's social awareness and sophistication. It demonstrates how Israel is moving forward and in step with the rest of the world. ■

Some of the historical information in this piece comes from Y. Rofe, "The White City of Tel Aviv", Planum, October 2009.

My Epiphany

By Steve Griffiths

If you are a member of the Christian faith, then Epiphany will have a special relevance as the twelfth night of Christmas when the three kings were said to have visited the nativity. But for us non-Christians, we can have our own epiphany – with a small ‘e’. It is defined in dictionaries as “a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization”.

Mine came when I was in my 13th year, and I can remember it as clearly today as the day it happened. It was during a fateful twelve months in my life. I was at a boarding grammar school in Grays, Essex. My father was desperately ill with what turned out to be lung cancer. My mother was in Mare Street Hospice in Hackney severely debilitated from the effects of aggressive multiple sclerosis.

I was vaguely aware of being Jewish, but it had no relevance in my life. I was born in Germany and have a certificate that affirms “...daß das Kind, Stephen Graham Griffiths, am 10 Juni 1948, beschnitten worden ist”, but that was the only evidence of any connection to the faith. I had never attended a cheder, could not speak or even read a word of Hebrew, had absolutely no knowledge of anything to do with synagogue worship and was not even aware of such things as kosher foods, festivals, a tallit or tefillin.

At school I attended church services because this was mandatory. I enjoyed Christmas because of the presents

and extra foods, but as a faith festival it meant nothing. I think my Headmaster must have known of my faith because there was never any attempt to include me in confirmation classes that my peers had to attend.

Then came my 13th birthday in June 1961. My mother and an uncle, who was to become my legal guardian until I was 18, arranged for me to have a Bar Mitzvah at the Hackney and East London Shul in Brenthouse Road (it has since moved to new premises). The very imposing rabbi was Revd Dr Barnett Joseph. What was my preparation? My uncle had given me a transliteration of the brachot before and after a Torah reading. Almost literally on the back of a fag packet. I had not even the remotest concept of why the day was so important or what the ceremony meant. I had no idea what I was saying or why, but I said what was written and this seemed to satisfy everyone present. Compared to today's extravagant gifts, my biro and propelling pencil set was, to this impecunious 13-year-old, a wondrous luxury.

My father passed away that August and my mother continued to decline in health. Despite my young age, I was allowed to visit her once a month, travelling alone from Grays by train, underground and trolley bus!! to Mare Street.

Then came the fateful day a week before my mother passed away. She was totally immobile and bed-bound, but

she could still speak, albeit in a very faint whisper. As I sat at her bedside, she suddenly asked me to come very close because she had something important to ask. I leaned in, putting my ear to her mouth. “Please”, she pleaded, “Promise me you will not turn your back on your faith. This is the only gift I can give you. Treasure it always.”

The memory of that moment still brings a lump to my throat all these years later. I of course made the promise, which I have kept every day since. There was not much I could do but start the journey by reading and learning while I was at school. After joining the RAF I met Revd Malcolm Weisman. He had all the right connections to enable me to accelerate the learning and start to gain skills in actual participation. I remember Malcolm sending me to stay with a frum family in Stamford Hill who could not comprehend that I had no knowledge of the Shema. But they were kindness itself and I left there enthused to learn more.

Throughout my 45 years in uniform I always belonged to a shul wherever I was serving.



The young Steve, and his mother, Theresa (Terry) Eleanor Griffiths (née Landon), in healthier days.

I have also been blessed with a wife who converted and so joined me on this journey. I treasure the hours I spent learning with Bernard Mushin so that I had the skills needed to teach our children their Bar/Bat Mitzvah portions, but, unlike me, they knew exactly what it was all about.

Another huge influence along this journey has been initially Edgware Masorti and now, of course, Kol Nefesh Masorti. Jacky and EAJL obviously stand out as the most influential source of study, skill development and participation. But what has deepened our faith, led us to a kosher home, regular davening, founding and leading our small kehilah here in Lincoln and being Jewishly what we are today, has been the example everyone in our precious Kol Nefesh community has set us by showing us how we can live Jewish lives.

My ‘being’ had been a young child lost in a faith desert with no awareness of what Judaism was. My ‘becoming’ was the road I have travelled and still travel ever since the day I made that promise to my mother. ■



The young Steve, and his mother, Theresa (Terry) Eleanor Griffiths (née Landon), in healthier days.

Being and Becoming as a People

By Ruth Hart

In spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to love, although had Lord Tenyson been Jewish, his thoughts, or more likely those of his wife, would have turned to cleaning a property the size of Locksley Hall. For a Jewish woman, or man, our thoughts may habitually turn to cobwebs or cookery or even couture... but let us consider becoming a nation and how we got here from there:

Being is easy if one happens to be God (leaving the chain of infinite regression out of it; I only have a BA in English literature, not a PhD in philosophy). First of all, One already is, because One always was and will be, the clue is in the Name – but the chances are you (mortal reader, not Deity) already knew that. Making other things is also easy: just say “let there be” and they are. How long that actually took is another matter, but I don't have a degree in astronomy or geology either. For the infinitely greater likelihood that if you are reading this, you are human, we have to do a lot of becoming before we can just be.

Some of those decisions are made for us before birth or even conception, even though, seemingly, biology is no longer destiny. The desirability or otherwise of being able to change one's gender may be a political sledgehammer and halachic difficulty for time to come, but few will quibble with the idea that we are no longer limited by our sex from doing the kind of work for which we have the aptitude in the religious or secular sphere. We are quite often told as children that being Jewish is who we are; in fact, the less religious our parents were, the more we probably heard it. If you converted to Judaism, likewise, it doesn't matter what's in your DNA, we are one people, although the BDS brigade is always trying to split us into ‘indigenous’ and ‘settlers’. This may remind you of others that would like to split the Jewish people on ideological grounds, but, another season, another essay, perhaps.

When Abraham first met God, we ac-

quired a religion, then we became a tribe, then 12 tribes, and when we went down into Egypt, we were a people. Definitely by the time of the Exodus, the Pharaoh and his ministers seemed to think we were, judging by the opening chapters of the book. Again, critical scholarship may have a different timescale but the process is similar. Some of us intermarried in Egypt (who doesn't love an *erev rav* when it comes to having somebody to blame?) and adopted their religion while others adopted ours. Don't get me started on matriarchal vs patriarchal descent but I would guess that wives, whether it was a love match or a war crime, took the religion of their husbands. We were a people but not yet a nation. Even at Mount Sinai, some of our people re-acquired faith but not all, because even before the Golden Calf, they found hearing God's voice somewhat daunting.

Once, tribe, people, nation and religion were one, gradually they were not... Sometimes you might unwrap them like a game of pass the parcel but be lucky enough to find a gift in each layer. It might happen faster in some eras than in others. Sometimes the elements would come together again, either in whole or in part.

Once, tribe, people, nation and religion were one, gradually they were not. Sometimes the four components peeled off like an onion until you might fear that there is nothing left at the centre but a hollow. Sometimes you might unwrap them like a game of pass the parcel but be lucky enough to find a gift in each layer. It might happen faster in some eras than in others. Sometimes the elements would come together again, either in whole or in part.

If three is a symbolic number, four is even better when talking of Pesach, and it works just as well for Sukkot. Four cups of wine, four species, four kinds of Jewish sons and daughters. Moses had to persuade the Exodus generation that they henceforth would be all of those things, in order to build a nation, but it would take another generation to become so; to cast off the slave mentality, so that the people who conquered the land were a different kind of people from their predecessors, even if they were genetically descended (at least in part) from them. Modern Zionism replicated both the problem and the solution: how to build a new kind of Jew and how to lose the ‘galut’ mentality. I hope we have moved past that phase now. Modern Jews, wherever we choose to make our homes, may identify as religious (various sorts), Zionist (likewise), ethnic or cultural, or a mixture of all or any of the above. Not so unlike our ancestors. Being and becoming, convergence and divergence strikes me not so much as the end of days or the end of Jews, but as a healthy dose of self-determination.

A happy, kosher and most of all, meaningful Pesach to everybody. ■



What Is Being Grown Up?

By Shelley Marsh

What is being grown up?

The path to adulthood has changed dramatically in three generations. The roles and responsibilities taken on by people who are now in their seventies are simply unrecognisable to those who are the teenagers today.

When are we grown up? How do we define what grown up is in today's society?

Perhaps being a grown up is defined by financial independence. That one is a grown up when one earns one's own money, has a regular salary coming in and doesn't need a to receive regular hand-outs from the bank of mum and dad?

That is challenging today, with many 20+-year-olds unable to access the property ladder and living back home (harmoniously or otherwise). For many in their 20s who are living in places they are able to call their own, they have only been able to achieve that status with financial help from their families. Does that make those 20-somethings more grown up than their peers? I don't think so. I reject this definition of grown up even though I know many people are happy to define grown ups as those who live independently.

Is grown up being able to manage the administration of adult life? Making sure the car has had its MOT? Settling bills on time? Managing time, relationships, work responsibilities and social arrangements adequately? I reject this too. Or maybe this definition has rejected me. Even though I did actually remember to get my car MOT'd this month.

Is being grown up the ability to make decisions? Or perhaps it is managing the consequences of the decisions and the fact that the decisions one makes may impact dramatically on others?

Or is being grown up about biology, about aging? That by 18, 21, 30, 40... one is clearly a grown-up. The law stipulates a number of different ages to define when

we are deemed grown up enough to make reasonable decisions.

Aristotle wrote, "Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man."

The concept that we are formed before we are seven, that our nature is embedded and we will go on to become a fully fledged adult version of our child-like self is fascinating. When do we know we have actually arrived at the destination of adulthood? When are we fully-fledged women and men in the way Aristotle was able to predict from the age of seven?

Pink, in her song Searchlight, sings:

What about all the times you said
you had the answers?...

We are problems that want to be
solved

We are children that need to be
loved

What about us?

What about all the times you said
you had the answers?

Is being a grown-up about the reality of knowing the answers? Do we look at childhood as a time of "needing to be loved" and adulthood as the time to give, to give love, to give care, to give answers to those who are born after us?

Perhaps Aristotle saw that children's ability to approach problem-solving was an aspect of nature that remains with us as we grow and develop. The aspirations of adulthood may appear to be limitless when one views them through the lenses of children. Becoming a fireman, astronaut, pop star and footballer are fairly commonplace wishes for children when asked what they want to be when they grow up. The accountants, teachers, middle managers and property developers are the reality for many, but who helped those people to make those decisions as part of their adult realities? Were the career decisions based on someone else's view that it's time to build a career, settle down, be a grown-up? Having never had a career plan and definitely never know-

ing the answers, this definition can only confirm I am not a grown-up.

So, perhaps growing up is a social construct that is used to guide others into contributing towards society?

Coolio and Stevie Wonder penned Gangsta's Paradise, beginning with Psalm 23:

As I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death

I take a look at my life and realize
there's none left...

You better watch how you talking,
and where you walking...

On my knees in the night, saying
prayers in the street light

Death ain't nothing but a heart-
beat away...

I'm living life do or die, what can I
say

I'm twenty-three never will I live
to see twenty-four,

Power and the money, money and
the power

They say I've got to learn but no-
body's here to teach me

If they can't understand it, how
can they reach me...

Is being a grown-up nothing to do with age at all but much more about how we behave during our lifetime?

Personally, I think the whole concept of being a grown-up is overrated. Grown up for me is about behaviour. I witness behaviour which I see as thoughtfulness, sharing a generosity of spirit that enhances the world. It is when a friend reaches out to another to check how they are doing. It is when someone picks up the phone to properly thank their colleague for delivering a piece of work. It is when a young person is sitting alone in a lunch hall and another invites them to eat with their friendship group. That for me is grown up. Helping oneself, and others, to grow upwards, through expressions of love, and care and thoughtfulness. I know when I receive thoughtfulness from others, I grow upwards. And when I give of myself to others, I also grow and develop myself. ■

Coming of Age as a 21st-Century Elder

By Holly Blue Hawkins

I still recall the first time someone called me "ma'am". At nineteen years of age, pedalling my new bike to the beach, it so shocked me that, nearly fifty years later, the location and the feeling are still vivid, although not the reason I had stopped to talk with the little boy who rocked my world that day. What does it mean, to "come of age" at any stage in life?

"Youth is a feeling, age is a decision" announced the placard in my mother's kitchen. But who decides? Is this a bestowal of status from some external, higher authority and based upon achievement? Or is it a state of mind, based upon an internal benchmark of mastery, bringing with it a sense of empowerment and exposure? Nancy Poer, revered elder in the anthroposophical tradition, speaks of that moment when you look around and realize that everyone who came before you, "they've all cleared out and suddenly there you are, out in front, with everyone looking at you" to be the one to deliver the words of wisdom, comfort, or the clear, prophetic voice of the way-shower.

Often the appearance of wisdom is the result of decades of accumulated, humbling mistakes. These are not just a litany of failures, but the wealth of experience in what doesn't work, and may even have been counter-productive or damaging. Sometimes our biggest mistakes become pearls of great price, increasing the capac-

ity for compassion towards self and others that comes, not from moments of mastery, but from courageous perseverance in the face of our own shortcomings, forcing us to focus on the ultimate tikkun olam beyond boundaries of perceived personal success or failure.

Coming of age stories typically focus on the transition from youth to adulthood. But what does it mean to come of age as an elder, especially in this uncharted passage called the twenty-first century? The values fed to the emerging generation of post-WWII novice elders came from a time when a mind-numbing avalanche of advertisements of products and services made it difficult to see past the addiction to artificially-perpetuated youthful appearance, optimal performance, and a voracious appetite for new-attractive-smaller-faster-smarter convenience, which has fostered a culture of neediness and disempowerment; and an ironic sense of perpetual lack in the face of ever-growing landfills of discarded last-year's latest single-use gadgets. All this threatens to disconnect us from our own sustainable, unbroken lineage of wisdom traditions and continuity, and the polishing of traditional tools and practices leading to a deeply-textured understanding of what it means to be truly human.

What does this have to do with Coming of Age as an Elder? What does it mean to come of age or, for that matter, to be an elder? What are the expectations that go

along with a particular 'age', be it the first day of preschool (are you potty-trained and socialized?); university (can you juggle studies, self-sustaining skills like good nutrition and housekeeping, and maintain lasting relationships with friends and family?); partnering, child-rearing and then... what does it mean, to be an elder in the twenty-first century? Nancy Poer speaks of the importance of "staying relevant" even as she jokes of changing banks and shopping habits based upon the availability of public restrooms and access accommodations, readable signage and shopkeepers who can communicate clearly with someone of advancing years.

At each stage, how do we move from the sense of imposter syndrome to one of being an in-the-flow dancing partner with life, in the transitions from crawl to toddle to run to leap...and then back again? How do we maintain our relevance at every stage? In the stories I hear about the most influential person in someone's life, it is often an elder, who simply recognizes and encourages that person's uniqueness. There is an inner sense of meaning that lights up on the instrument panel of the psyche when we connect with one another. It is an absolutely critical element, both in childhood development and with the incapacity of aging, without which the feeling of being truly relevant is difficult to maintain. Bottom line: Keep connecting! ■

Don't Forget the Shavuot Kiddush Drive!

Catering costs are a big chunk of the Kol Nefesh budget. To help reduce these costs, each year the Mazon (Catering) Pelach runs a Shavuot Kiddush Drive.

All families are asked to make a contribution to the kiddush cupboard sometime in the spring. This might be 2 bottles of kiddush wine, whiskey, or grape juice, or 1 bottle plus 1 kosher long-lasting cake.

Of course, members are still invited to sponsor a kiddush in honour of a birthday, anniversary, or other special event, or in memory of a loved one. Contact Ruth at ruthben-or@hotmail.co.uk for more details.

Thank You for Supporting the Mazon Pelach!

Being and Becoming After the Holocaust

By Helen Stone

How do we become who we are? What influences us to develop certain aspects of ourselves so that we become individuals with clear values and attitudes in our mature years? I was asked recently by the Second Generation Network to write about how my life has been affected by being a member of that group – namely the child of a refugee or survivor of the Holocaust – and in trying to answer the question I was forced to reflect deeply. Who am I and what has made me that person?

The children of Holocaust survivors inherit a strange legacy. For each individual the balance between burden and boon will be different. For many the emotional fallout they inherit from their parents can overshadow every aspect of their lives, whilst for others the effects can be positive and purposeful.

In his recently published book *The Road to Somewhere*, David Goodhart divides people into two distinct groups: the *Somewheres* and the *Anywheres*. The former are rooted in one place and their horizons are limited to their immediate area and local concerns, whereas the latter are international and cosmopolitan in outlook, with a commitment to justice, gender equality and mobility. My mother, who was born in a tiny village in Germany, one of many such communities where Jewish families had lived for two hundred years or more, was most definitely a “somewhere” person until fear and persecution forced her to seek refuge in Britain in May 1939. On the video she made for the Spielberg Foundation, talking of escape, she states: “We didn’t know anyone outside Germany.” Once here, she married my British-born father and became over the course of time a decidedly “anywhere” person. When your roots are forcibly torn up and your long-treasured stability shaken to its foundations, your horizons broaden and your world view changes. I believe that my brother and I have inherited this sense of being citizens of the world, looking beyond our own immediate concerns

and keen to see and understand how others live and think.

When you have lost so many members of your immediate family it is only natural to value those who are left, who may include those not related but with the same background and experiences. Growing up I was aware of a network of German refugees, many of whom were real relations and some of whom were given the courtesy titles of “uncle” and “auntie”. This need for a close-knit network of friends and relatives is more acute in a refugee community and it provided me with a sense of security and identity as a child – even if I did refuse to reply in German whilst understanding perfectly what was being said! The need to care for one another, more often than not by providing food and hospitality, was ingrained at an early stage of my life. My mother’s cousins were farmers in Kent and their daughter spent all her holidays with us in London so that she could enjoy a Jewish social life. Friends of long standing who had escaped to Rhodesia sent their son to stay with us during his university vacations and he became like an extra brother.

I believe that my attitude to adversity has been shaped by what I observed in my mother’s behaviour. Arriving penniless as a domestic servant, she was determined to make the very best of whatever opportunities presented themselves. She managed to qualify as a nurse and worked long hours, often at night, taking on responsibility for a ward full of very sick patients. Struggling financially in the early years, she and my father eventually built up a successful property business but not without hard work, much of it manual labour. I have strong memories of holding the tacks and the hammer while my mother painstakingly re-covered and upholstered rickety, fading and fraying chairs and sofas. She was a dab hand at replacing stair carpets, making curtains and rewiring plugs, all for use in the lodging house that they owned. I learned early

about self-sufficiency and independence. Perhaps this spirit was inherent in my mother even before she was uprooted. After all, in 1938, after Kristallnacht, she had ignored “Jews Forbidden to Enter” signs to confront an SS official in the Gestapo headquarters, successfully demanding that my grandfather be released from Dachau in recognition of the Iron Cross he had been awarded in the First World War. I didn’t hear about this story until later on but her fiercely determined ‘can do’ attitude, her drive and initiative, were a model for me from very early in my life and have stood me in good stead ever since.

Money was always important to my mother, not in order to buy expensive items or to afford status but to provide that essential sense of security that had been snatched away from her so swiftly and cruelly. It was money that saved the lives of my grandparents. In 1938, braving the death penalty, my mother smuggled a substantial amount over the border to France and it was this that eventually helped to provide the £1000 security guarantee needed to allow my grandparents into Britain – just three days before the outbreak of war. So money had to be earned through hard work and was not to be spent frivolously or thoughtlessly. Who knew when it might be needed? Even when she was comfortably off in her later years she was always careful and frequently asked my brother to check how much she had in savings. That sense of caution has rubbed off on me and to this day I have a sense of guilt when spending large sums. Her need for extra money when we were small drove her to run a Jewish summer school at the seaside during August for several consecutive years in the 1950s. Entertaining, feeding and caring for somebody else’s Jewish children for a month was no easy matter – especially when there was an outbreak of chicken pox affecting a large proportion of the one hundred and fifty kids in her care!

A very strong legacy from my mother was her highly developed sense of social responsibility. Having been a refugee herself and right at the bottom of the pile in terms of social status and disadvantage, she devoted much of her life to helping others in a similar situation. Her focus was on those who had been in mental hospitals for long periods and she ran a monthly club for Jewish patients in Shenley Hospital. She was chairman of a halfway house that gradually integrated these institutionalised people back into society. She also started a workshop for the elderly to give them some sense of purpose and worth and helped to run a home for single women who had fallen on hard times. She had an enormous compulsion to give something back to society and I feel that I have inherited that desire. My work as a teacher in a Pupil Referral Unit for teenagers with emotional and behavioural problems was my way of emulating my mother’s deeply held commitment to social responsibility and now that I am retired, I teach English to a class of refugees and asylum seekers and help at a Drop-In Centre. In recent years I have become involved in Holocaust education, using my mother’s story to try to teach young people about the dangers of prejudice and discrimination.

A sense of obligation and justice was also a feature of my parents’ lives which has rubbed off on me. The wonderfully kind English widow who offered my mother work as a domestic, just on the basis of her photograph, later fell on hard times

and my parents were able to make some recompense for her generosity by supplementing her income each month. The loyal couple who ran their lodging house for many years were able to pay a deposit on their own home with the lump sum given to them by my parents on their retirement. Money is not always involved in this desire to recognise the goodness of others. Sometimes, for me, it is simply the need to keep in touch and acknowledge the generosity and kindness of those whose lives have touched mine.

So where does my father fit in all this? He, too, was a member of the second generation of immigrants, his father having arrived from Poland at the turn of the twentieth century and his mother emigrating from Riga as a young child. My illiterate grandfather could not even sign his own name but two of his sons gained degrees. (Two other sons lost their lives in the First World War). My father obtained his law degree at night classes after a full day of work – he could not afford to study full-time. For many years he served as a local councillor in Brent, giving up countless evenings to meetings in an attempt to help his local community. The determination to succeed is often cited as a characteristic of refugees and their offspring. Once financial security has been established, however, this characteristic may well be lost, along with the awareness of how fragile that security can be and of how necessary it is to look around us at the needs and suffering of others. I hope that I still retain that sense

of being an “anywhere” person who looks out at the world in all its complexity rather than merely inwards at my own immediate concerns and those of my family.

My mother had the great good fortune to escape to England just before the outbreak of war and, unlike her two cousins who spent their teenage years in Auschwitz, was not incarcerated in a concentration camp, with all the attendant horrors that the experience brings. My inheritance therefore, as her daughter, is largely weighted towards the positives. I know that many survivors cannot bring themselves to talk about their horrific past but this was never the case in our household. Perhaps having my grandparents living with us for twenty-eight years meant that we retained, as a family a certain degree of continuity. My prevailing feeling when considering my background is first, one of pride at the resilience and courage of both my parents. This is tempered, however, with a great sadness at the immense loss of the potential contribution to the world that might have been made by the seventy or so members of my mother’s family who died.

I hope that as a result of parental influences and example I have become an “anywhere” person and I believe that I was drawn to join Kol Nefesh because its members are characterised by this same strong tendency to keep an open mind and embrace plurality, change and a broad world view. ■



On Erev Yom HaShoah, Wednesday 11th April, the community is invited to a commemorative event in memory of the 6 million, including a showing of the documentary film “Keep Quiet”.

Passionate in his anti-Semitic beliefs and Holocaust denials, Csanad Szegedi rose up through the ranks to lead Hungary’s far-right conservative Jobbik Party. At the peak of his political career, Szegedi discovers that his family has kept a dark secret for decades: his maternal grandparents were in fact Jewish. After the initial shock, he enlists the help of an empathetic rabbi who, to the horror of some of his peers, helps to guide him through what seems to be a 180-degree turnaround. Complete with a trip to Auschwitz with Holocaust survivors, Csanad Szegedi is forced to confront his wrongdoings and appears to make the journey from notorious anti-Semite to Orthodox Jew.

Alex Holder, one of the producers of “Keep Quiet”, will be with us and will answer questions about the film.

The evening will be at an address in Woodside Park. Check your bulletins or email admin@kolnefesh.org.uk for details.



An African Jewish Adventure

By Tanya Novick

When I was at school in the 1950s and 60s, many of the maps, especially of Africa, in my school atlas were still coloured pink for the British Empire. Much of that changed in the 1960s as former British colonies gained their independence. My *Esavian Modern School Atlas* (1959) is an historic relic! I remember the campaigns for independence, many of them violent, and the debates and discussions around PM Macmillan's Winds of Change as they swept through the Empire. I remember the first president of Uganda, Milton Obote, and the later Idi Amin. I have special memories of the hijack in 1976 of the Air France plane from Tel Aviv that ended up in Entebbe from where the IDF rescued the Israeli and Jewish passengers in the daring raid of July 4th 1976. I was in hospital having just given birth to Benjamin (I was in hospital for the then-routine week, another historic relic) when news of the hijack reached me. The day of his brit was July 4th, and as we sweltered on that hot summer's day, debating whether to sit outside or remain indoors for the post-brit meal, we had heard of the rescue. Everyone was so relieved and excited at the audacious rescue, as well, of course, as Benjamin's special day!

In 2016 my niece moved to Uganda to teach English. So when the chance to travel to Uganda with Rabbi Chaim Weiner's Jewish Journeys came up, I seized the opportunity. But *Jewish Journeys*? I had a vague memory of the British government's offer of land in Uganda

for a Jewish homeland at the turn of the 20th century. I had heard of the Abayudaya and seen Rena Pearl's photos from her visit a while ago. I was intrigued.

Twenty-three of us set out on a week's tour of Uganda in February. For those who have not travelled with Rabbi Chaim on his Jewish Journeys, I can only write that he brings a special depth to the experience of visiting ancient communities, some of them lost in the mists of history, others struggling to rebuild and survive in the modern era. The Abayudaya ("Sons of Judah") community of Uganda is different, a community who decided to become Jewish about a century ago and since then has led a Jewish life.

We met up at Entebbe airport, conjuring up memories from just over 40 years ago. It was quite a shock arriving in East Africa, all one's senses were engaged – the heat, the bright sun, the hustle and bustle, traffic, the poverty, the obvious religious influence of Christian missionaries of all denominations and Muslim communities, the large advertisements along the roadside for contraception, AIDS awareness, "menstruation is natural and healthy", the mission statements for schools and colleges (e.g., "To produce professional icons who are committed to deliver quality primary education"). We met some Jewish students in Kampala who rented a room in a building to meet in and to daven. We travelled to Jinja and cruised to the source of the White Nile, more than 6,000 kilometres upriver from the Mediterranean. We then travelled to the Jewish villages, first along a

busy paved road, then on side roads of dirt and dust, experiencing an African massage as we bumped along in our four mini-buses.

The community lives in nine villages. The main village, near Mbale, northeast of Kampala, hosts a primary and secondary school for the area, with a roll of 40 per cent Jewish pupils, the rest made up of Christian and Muslim children. There are five synagogues, including the rather incongruous Stern Synagogue, a grandiose building for the area, in the midst of basic huts with corrugated iron roofs. Gershon Sizumo is the spiritual leader of the Abayudaya. He studied at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles and is now a rabbi affiliated to the Conservative movement. He is also the local Member of Parliament and a charismatic leader who uses music as a tool to attract young people. He studied for the rabbinate for five years in LA and one year in Israel, moving with his wife and children from a home without electricity or water to an apartment in Bel Air with an indoor kitchen, bathroom and a machine that washed dishes! Then they returned to the village to lead their community. They live in a quite substantial house, but most of the villagers live in very basic accommodation, with no internal plumbing or electricity. Water is got from a well and a cistern for storing water was being dug, mainly by hand, to store water for times of drought.

We returned there for Shabbat and experienced a joyful Kabbalat Shabbat with drumming. We enjoyed a hearty dinner of matoke (a Ugandan staple of cooked savoury banana), greens, avocado, beef and goat (kosher from the local shochet), and the wonderful local fruit – pineapples and melon. We attended Shabbat morning service at the Stern synagogue, lunched out in the open, and explored the village and its environs, walking along the local paths accompanied by children – we were obviously of great interest. It's not every day that a party of muzungus (white people) visit. We saw the village pump and

mikve (an open spring) and managed to get slightly sunburnt despite it being cloudy. The previous day we had visited the schools and met the headteachers. The schools have up to 90 pupils per class, and a dearth of resources, including very basic amenities. It costs \$250 per annum to study there – education is not free – and \$500 to board. They are trying to provide healthy lunchtime meals so that the children do not go home for lunch as they then often do not return for the afternoon sessions. We poked our heads into some of the infant classes – we were met with great politeness and all the children stood up to greet and sing to us.

On the Sunday we paid another visit to the village to celebrate the conversion of four young people. They were so happy and joyous, it was a privilege to share that joy. Rabbi Chaim had been part of the Bet Din that supervised that process. We visited the clinic in Mbale, supported by American donors, that was open to the locals. Women travel there to give birth, and there is a small ward and a dental clinic.

We had stayed in a very comfortable hotel – a contrast to the village. From there we set off to Murchison National Park from where we went out on an early morning safari, the highlight of which was the sighting of a leopard snoozing after its busy night of hunting. Our cruise the next day was to Murchison Falls, a spectacular waterfall on the Nile, and we passed by many species of wildlife; the wonders of nature along with a shiur from Rabbi Chaim.

Then the tour was almost over. Unfortunately our planned visit to the top of the falls and chimpanzee tracking had to be abandoned due to the breakdown of the ferry, so we wended our bumpy way back to Entebbe airport, via Kampala. We only had a taste of Kampala – noisy, busy, crowded, seemingly chaotic. We visited the grand mosque, built with funds from Gaddafi, overlooking the city. We saw the palace of the Kabaka (king) of Buganda (another name from my historical memory) and the grand boulevard down to the parliament buildings with the cathedrals on the hills – a colonial vista. Then on to Entebbe and the flight home

for most of the group. I stayed on longer on a private visit, but that story's for another article.

Visiting the Abayudaya was humbling. This small community had chosen to become Jewish and lead a Jewish life isolated from world Jewry until recently. They have kept the mitzvot whilst living a very basic life. Rather than open themselves up to the pressures of conversion, they kept to their subsistence farming life and kept their children away from missionary schools. They had experienced hardship and persecution in the days of Amin. They are now making contact with world Jewry. The first group of young people are going on Birthright trips to Israel this year. How will they be received in Israel? Will they want to stay in Uganda once they have experienced Israel and western life? Will world Jewry accept them as Jews? Who is a Jew? The Abayudaya are exemplary Jews, keeping the mitzvot in difficult circumstances, and have even experienced anti-Semitism in their short communal life. They are so enthusiastic in their Judaism.

The tour raised many questions, general and specific:

- How does world Jewry deal with the communities of Jews springing up all over the world? Some have Jewish roots, some have decided to take on the yoke of Judaism. The NGO Kulanu helps support these isolated communities (<https://kulanu.org/>).
- The more general questions of aid and development – how best to help the people of the developing world without pauperising them? How best to support the communities to



Above: Rabbis Gershon and Chaim.
Below: A synagogue in an outlying village—more in keeping with the locality.
Bottom: Preparing the Shabbat meal.
Photos by Tanya.



The Stern Synagogue, outside and in.
Photos by Tanya and Mike Fenster, respectively.

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develop, what resources do they want/need? Who decides?

- How to encourage the youth to stay on to improve their communities?
- How do these communities balance the needs of a growing population with their natural resources? How do nations balance the needs of their growing populations with the conservation of the wildlife which is such a magnet for tourists?
- Is tourism a good thing? How can tourism improve the economies of developing nations without destroying the very things that tourists come to visit?
- How do the developing nations deal with the need for infrastructure improvements – water supply and sewerage, health systems, road, rail?
- How to encourage good management of resources? How to deal with corruption?
- How to eradicate malaria, the number 1 killer in Uganda and elsewhere? How to deal with myriad health issues including AIDs, high birth and mortality rates, poverty?

I'm left thinking of the challenges to the Jewish community in Uganda and world Jewry; the challenges of a Third World country developing its economy for the benefit of its citizens; the challenges to Uganda of absorbing refugees from the Congo, Rwanda and South Sudan.... And the friendly people of Uganda, its beautiful countryside and wildlife and tasty fruit. ■

Acknowledgements to Rabbi Chaim Weiner for information on the historical background of the Abayudaya.

Becoming, and Change—Jews in East Africa

By Mike Fenster

It's erev Pesach. African villagers take their lambs, sacrifice them and roast them on charcoal fires outside their huts, then share the roasted meat with their family and guests. No seder! The next day, they refrain from bread. A Ugandan Passover in an Abayudaya village in the 1960's! In the 50 years since then, the Abayudaya (Bugandan for Children of Judah) have been on an incredible Jewish journey, so that now they celebrate a Ugandan Pesach that is not so different from our own – probably roast goat instead of lamb, but killed by shechitah rather than sacrificed, and a seder that I am sure is very musical but also recognisable to a British Masorti Jew.

Eighteen years ago, we created the first fully egalitarian Masorti community in the UK. For me, joining KNM was a stage in a very different Jewish journey that took around 40 years from an Orthodox community in Ilford via occasional visits to hear Louis Jacob's shiurim at Abbey Road, to KNM, and a very different experience of Judaism from the one in which I grew up.

At this milestone of 18 years since KNM started, it's time to think about how these changes in our Jewish lives take place.

I visited the Abayudaya in Eastern Uganda in February. Subsistence farmers, they grow bananas, mangoes, avocados, coffee, and cassava, rear goats and chickens, and live in simple homes without running water. How they became Jewish is astonishing, given that it occurred in the absence of Jews. It's a story of leadership, in their case the tribal chief, Semei Kakungulu, whose reaction to encounters with Christian missionaries at the end of the 19th century was similar to that of many Ugandans – they followed a theology that combined elements of Judeo-Christian practice. Gradually,

after run-ins with the British who were setting up the Protectorate of Uganda, and disputes with his co-religionists, he was defining his own unique theology, and his red line was over circumcision at eight days; having decided to circumcise himself and his sons, much like Abraham did in the Torah, he was branded a Jew by others, and proudly said "so be it – I am a Jew, and so are my people". So in 1921, this tribe led by Kakungulu identified as Jews and at their peak, nearly 30 villages called themselves Abayudaya – Children of Judah. Remarkable in that they had never met a Jew, and could only base their Judaism on the copies of the Old Testament they had in English and the local Bugandan language from the Christian missionaries.

I am not sure what their biblical Judaism entailed. I think they sang psalms, much as the Levi'im did in the Temple, and still one of the highlights of their services today is their singing psalms in Bugandan and Hebrew to African melodies. They never believed they were descended from the 10 lost tribes; their Judaism probably resembled that of Samaritan, Ethiopian and Kara'ite Jews who had all developed their traditions without rabbinic Judaism. But for



Rabbi Gershom. Photo by Mike.

the Abayudaya this became a sincere, deeply held belief that they were Jews. And as the occasional contacts with Jews passing through Uganda supplemented their knowledge of what authentic Judaism was about, they enthusiastically modified their customs and incorporated new ideas and practices. This development of their religion only accelerated in recent years as they connected with West Coast Masorti Judaism, leading to their tribal chief Gershom Sizomu gaining semicha in 2008 from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. He and his family returned to Uganda to continue to lead and develop the community. While the community's numbers were sadly depleted by persecution during the Idi Amin regime, the number of Abayudaya is once again increasing, and as well as Jewish life in the villages of East Uganda, a Marom community has been estab-

lished in the capital, Kampala, to meet the needs of young Jews studying and working there.

The pace of change in their religion that this community has experienced over 50 years is astonishing, even if their economic situation has not developed with the same speed. Their Shabbat services are musically fascinating, African melodies and Californian Masorti melodies, in Hebrew and Bugandan, the foreign and the so familiar. But more unexpected was the role of women in the service, opening the ark, leading Ein Kamocho and reading the haftarah. Having visited centuries-old Jewish communities in Ethiopia and Djerba, this modern African community was closer and much more familiar.

The complaints there must have been from the older congregants when they

were told to stop sacrificing lambs on erev Pesach! And on being told not to mix milk and chicken! Call women up to the Torah? Unthinkable. It has been leadership from their charismatic rabbi, Rabbi Gershom, and presumably from his non-ordained father and grandfather who were also community heads, that has taken this community in 50 years through a remarkable transition to a fully egalitarian, African community; one that is recognised by the Masorti world, and hopefully soon by Israel, as halachic Jews, yet whose roots as Jews go back only a century. Leading by example has transformed the religious lives of these people.

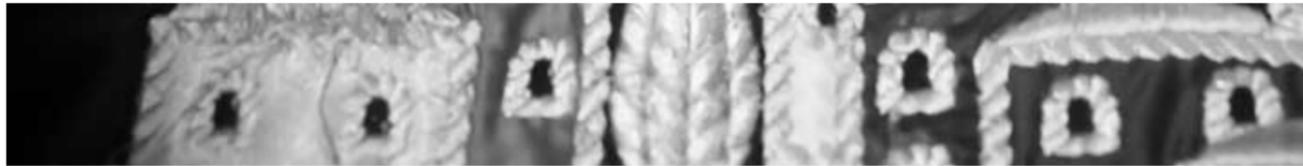
This relatively young and isolated community in Uganda has made numerous changes in their Judaism while remaining committed and proud, and is today so attractive that they are attracting converts from other villages – while we were there Rabbi Weiner made up a Bet Din to approve the conversion of four young people from outside the Abayudaya community, complete with ritual immersion in the river.

Back in the UK, KNM and its members have been remarkable in leading so many of the changes in the UK Masorti community, and though our incredible membership, have fostered so many other developments that have made the UK Jewish community more diverse and more interesting. Led by our rabbi, our chazan and many wonderful members, KNM is creating our own style of Masorti community. Both KNM and the remarkable community that the Abayudaya are currently creating in Uganda attest to the way our Judaism can change and resonate with diverse people around the world. ■



The Hadassah primary school and some pupils; Tanya with some helpful guides. Photo above by Tanya; photos at right and below by Mike.





Community News

Mazal Tov...

... To **Belinda Washington & Theodore Butt Philip** on the birth of a daughter, **Rachel Freda Karen**, on Nov 25. Mazal tov to both extended families.

... To **John Lazarus & Shelley Swade** and their family on the recent marriage of Ilan to Ruth Shir, and on Ilan's aliyah to Israel. We wish Ilan and Ruth much success and happiness in their new home in Beit Zayit.

... To **Gilead Limor** on the forthcoming marriage of his daughter Inbal to Genady Kudriavtsev. Mazal tov to Gilead, Debbie, Einav and Amiad.

...To **Andrea Grahame** on the engagement of her daughter Chloe to Robin Bernard-Baille. Mazal tov to Chloe and to Andrea, Richard and Camille.

... To **Isaac Scheer** on his forthcoming bar mitzvah. Mazal tov as well to parents Ruth & Ivan, to elder brother Sam, and grandparents Dudley & Joan Cohen and Ian & Cherill Scheer.



Rachel; Isaac;
Ilan & Ruth



The Yellow Candle Project

The tradition of lighting a yellow candle on Yom HaShoah was started in 1981 by Jewish groups in the US and Canada. The candles are lit in memory of individuals who perished without any known family to light a yartzheit candle for them.

Last year Masorti Judaism brought the Yellow Candle Project to the UK for the first time. Each candle is provided with the name of a person from the records of Yad Vashem for whom no family survivors are known. On Yom Hashoah we ask you to light the candle in their memory.



This year, Yom HaShoah starts on the evening of Wednesday April 11th and concludes at the end of Thursday April 12th. Yellow candles will be available in the shul for you to take home (please, no more than one per family).

See also page 19 for information on our Yom HaShoah commemoration on the evening of April 11th.

Condolences

To **Micky Griffiths** on the death of her mother, Lorna Wilson, in January. We wish Micky and Stephen, their children Abby and Simeon, and their grandchildren strength and comfort.

To **Simon and Miriam Gordon** on the death of their grandmother, Jean Coleman, the mother of Sue Gordon z"l. We wish long life to Simon, Miri and Nahum.

יהיה זכרן ברוך

Welcome to New Members

**Kathy Lichman
Ben Samuel
Liam Wright**

And sorry to see you go...

Goodbye to old members who are leaving us.
You're always welcome within our doors.

Esther Shallan

While Standing on One Leg

By Daniel Borin

As some of you will have heard, I recently slipped and fell – rather heavily – and cracked my pelvis; left acetabulum to be precise. It is not as bad as all that; not as debilitating as a broken wrist (Brenda, we wish you better) or a collar bone. With my one good leg and a zimmer frame I get round the flat, wash, dress, cook (a bit). I have never broken a bone before and never had to use a frame. The slower pace is salutary. And the limitations are strangely liberating. I concentrate on the things I can do and enjoy the huge relief at not having to do all the things I can't.

In the extra thinking time which I now have a few themes recur. 1. Relief. 2. Fellow feeling. 3. Refuah. 4. Patience.

Relief

Many friends have commented how cheerful and positive I am in the face of such a dramatic injury. The reality is that I have got off lightly: no surgery, no plas-

ter, very little pain and the prospect of a good and quite likely, complete recovery. I have felt more sorry for myself with a bad flu. I feel a bit of a fraud – I am regarded as seriously injured when in fact I am, for the most part, having a great time – more attention than I could wish for.

Fellow Feeling

Fraud or not, the Fellow Feeling shown by so many of you is heartwarming. I have time to respond more fully to all the good wishes than I normally would and that is a great luxury. The concern of Kol Nefesh friends, the visits from the north (and the great basket of fruit) have been very special.

Refuah

The feeling of recovery is amazing. The increase in strength and the ability to put weight on my left leg is almost daily noticeable. The miracle of the body's repair mechanisms is marvellous to experience.

But as Lisette pointed out, it brings home the opposite, an awareness of what it might mean to cope with disease that will not get better. So while I rejoice in my recovery I keep in mind those who are not so fortunate and the possibility that I myself may face a tougher fight one day.

Patience

I try to remind myself that life is not about the destination (who wants to reach the destination?), but about the journey. So although I do, of course, want to be better it is my job at the moment to savour the process; enjoy, as far as possible, standing on one leg and see what I can learn while doing that. I have to let the body get on with repairing itself; listen to it and do no more than it needs. Meanwhile I have had time to write a little something for Kol HaKehilah. Lisette and I wish Chag Sameach and Pesach Kasher to everyone at KN. ■

LOGO COMPETITION

Calling all young people over 5 and under 16!
We're pleased to announce a logo competition for KNM's
first-ever Green Team.

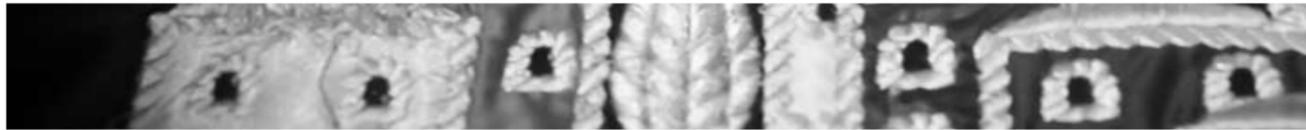
The Green Team will focus on all matters 'green' in the shul. They'll aim to ensure we reduce our use of plastic, recycle where possible, promote car-sharing.... and in general, raise awareness of the need to save the wonderful planet we live on. (See the article on page 27.)

We need an eye-catching logo which will be on all our articles and emails, and will alert people to our mission.

Please put your creative skills to work and enter the
Great Green Logo Competition!

We will choose the winner by April 20, so there's no time to lose.
There will be a prize for the winner.

Please send your logo in a pdf file to Nicola Kosmin in the office,
admin@kolnefesh.org.uk.



Tikkun Olam

Tikkun Olam, literally 'Repairing the World', has become synonymous with social action. On this page, we highlight two causes supported by the community through the 5778/2018 Kol Nidrei appeal, and outline how they used the funds so generously donated by Kol Nefesh.



Support for Women Refugees & Asylum-Seekers

Cheryl Sklan's weekly coffees afternoons for refugee women have been running now for several years, offering women living in very difficult circumstances a chance to feel valued and normal. The women hail from around the world (Iran, Sudan, Eritrea and the Congo, to name just a few) and have in some cases been in England for only a few years. These weekly gatherings allow them to meet people, practice their English, and become acculturated to British life while sharing their own stories and experiences. Cheryl established this programme through the Barnet Refugee Service, and she volunteers her own time, but funding is needed to support the women's travel to and from Cheryl's home each week.

As Cheryl wrote last year,

I have learnt a lot from these women's openness and honesty, and feel privileged to be part of this group. They are very brave to live in a different, unfamiliar country, learn a new language and try to cope with and talk about their often complicated lives. We offer support, therapy, solidarity and empathic listening. but above all friendship. We are open with them about our own Jewish identities and discuss our religion with them as the conversations develop... They have had many different experiences – not only of their journeys to reach this country, but also of living in the UK. As we have developed trust and love for each other, we share more of our lives together.

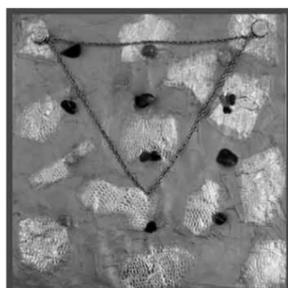
Cheryl offers her deepest thanks to those who have supported this project. Your generosity has had an immediate effect and is enhancing lives. If you would like to continue to help please send donations to the shul via Nicola Kosmin (admin@kolnefesh.org.uk), marked for the refugee project. ■

The Ruth Schneider Memorial Trust

The Ruth Schneider Memorial Trust provides bursaries for places on NOAM summer camp and Israel tour programmes. The Trust was established over twenty-five years ago after the untimely death of Ruth, who had been very involved in setting up NOAM in the UK. NOAM is a special organisation that has affected the lives of thousands of kids and young adults over the past 30 years. At the heart of NOAM's offering are their summer camps and Israel tour – powerful, transformative Jewish experiences. The Ruth Schneider Memorial Trust has enabled hundreds of young people who might otherwise not have experienced NOAM's life-enhancing summer programmes to do so.

This year KNM money will go towards helping ten young people access NOAM. Kol Nefesh members have themselves benefited from the Trust, so we are pleased to be able to give something back!

Sadly Bernard Schneider, who was the chair of the Trust for most of the past twenty-five years, died in February 2018. We wish his family strength and long life, and offer our deepest condolences. ■



Kol Nefesh's Journey to Becoming an EcoSynagogue

By Daniel Preter

The discussion on environmental issues is becoming an ever-urgent and global phenomenon, and with good reason. The world population was estimated to have reached 7.6 billion as of December 2017. The United Nations estimates it will further increase to 11.8 billion by the year 2100. All these people will need somewhere to live, they will need food, they will need energy and resources.

Pressure on the planet is increasing in many ways. Natural habitats are shrinking as the population expands and migrates. Increased industrialisation produces an ever-rising output of greenhouse gases, as well as toxins and of course vast amounts of plastic.

Although extinction is a natural phenomenon, it only occurs naturally at a rate of about one to five species every year. Scientists estimate we're now losing species at 1,000 to 10,000 times that rate, with literally dozens going extinct every day. The main causes are habitat destruction, deforestation, over-hunting and of course climate change: the planet's average surface temperature has risen about 1.1 degrees Celsius since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere. As a consequence oceans are warming and become acidified with a devastating effect on the balance of species; ice caps are melting, which leads to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, etc., etc....

These are only a fraction of the challenges our planet is facing. It is easy and understandable to become defeatist as an individual. What difference can 'little me' make? Is it all too late?

No, it's not too late. We can slow down, stop and even reverse a number of the current trends. This will of course require leadership of all (!) governments, but every individual can play their part to make a difference.

EcoSynagogue is based on the blueprint of EcoChurch, a movement to encour-

age environmental awareness and change in religious organisations. As part of joining EcoSynagogue, we at Kol Nefesh completed an online survey which assesses broad domains of activity: how we use any buildings or land we own or care for; how we eat and consume; how we use the opportunities of the liturgical year; how we teach and preach; and how we change the behaviours of our congregations.

Admittedly, KNM has so far not done an awful lot towards raising our environmental profile, so our scoring was very low. Not all aspects are relevant for us, mainly because we don't own or have control over our own building. Yet we do have to start somewhere, and there is no better time than now.

A Kol Nefesh Green Team has now formed, consisting of Daniel Preter, Cheryl Sklan, Barbara Borts, Maurice Gold and Nikki Glantz. We are looking for more members to join the pelach, so please do get in touch with Daniel, dpreter@gmail.com, if you can join us. The idea is not to coerce anyone to do things differently, but to win over minds and present changes relevant for all individuals, even in their own homes and lives. We would also like to get the children involved in this, so they can inspire others in their generation and help implement changes within their own homes.

We have identified several areas where we can make an immediate impact, such as using reusable or biodegradable cutlery and crockery; recycling the containers and bottles we can't avoid using; buying local, seasonal food to avoid air miles and so on. We also want to offset Joel's carbon footprint, which is high due to his frequent travel. This is only the start, though, as we can all introduce changes to our lives at home. We are planning events and information evenings, as well as practical activities we believe will make a difference in the way we look at our environment.

Let's make a change for our world – we only have one! ■

READY TO GO GREEN?

Here are some simple things you can try at home:

- Avoid plastic packaging and other plastic items. As an example, many cotton buds are made from plastic sticks, which easily pass through sewerage systems and into the oceans. If you do want to use cotton buds, buy those with card or paper sticks (apparently Boots have switched over to them already).
- Buy local and seasonal food, ideally organic. This is not only better for you, but the food growing standards are higher and the impact on the soil and wider environment is smaller.
- Use soap bars rather than plastic pump dispensers, to avoid yet more plastic waste.
- Recycle all that's recyclable.
- Walk or cycle; leave the car at home.
- Save energy by switching off lights, computers and other items on standby when not needed.
- Switch to a green energy supplier using renewable energy sources, such as Electricity.
- Compost your food waste (no animal products or fat). This reduces waste and produces great compost for your garden.
- Have a reusable coffee cup on you to avoid another one going in the bin (out of the 2.5 billion (!) that are thrown away every year in the UK alone!).
- Get involved in a local conservation group: it helps the local flora and fauna, is a great way of socialising and keeps you fit!

Kol Nefesh at the Masorti Annual Dinner, January 11, 2018



Photos by Marc Morris.
Reprinted with permission.

A Sudanese Feast

By Richard Wolfe

Like many people, if not all, I have encountered dishes which have left an abiding memory, where I have touched some form of culinary bliss. Be that a risotto I ate in Verona, a tiramisu by Georgia, a roast beef on the bone, the first champagne I drank (to excess), and too many others; a cornucopia of epicurean delights which have enriched my life.

I approached the 2017 Jewish Gefiltefest at JW3 (courtesy of Barbara*) with a certain diffidence. I wasn't sure that a whole day of Jewish food would reach any sensory height. The agenda though looked mildly promising. The first session was on herring and that had to be a good start. Georgia's first session was on vodka, so no further concerns from her all day.

Hidden away on the top floor a young lady was displaying her culinary wares, baklava from the Jewish community in Sudan. Now in general I can take or leave baklava; it is usually too sticky or cloying or sweet or stale or all of these. Not now. I had reached baklava heaven, an addition to memorable culinary occasions. I am not one for subtlety. I passed the stand as often as I could.

How to learn to repeat the experience, how not to let it be a fleeting moment? The Gefiltefest website gave me the link to Daisy Abboudi, <https://www.talesofjewishsudan.com/>. The recipe was now at hand, but would I be able to gain the touch?

Luckily the 18th birthday of Kol Nefesh was to be shortly upon us, so I could attempt to kill the proverbial two birds with one stone: help by organising one of the events to celebrate our anniversary, and more importantly gain the 'knowledge'.

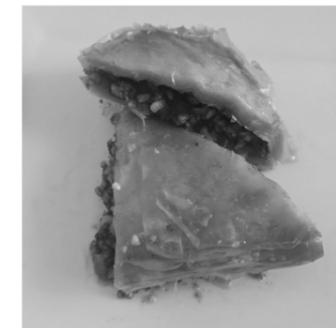
The event was advertised within our community as follows: "Earlier in the year Richard went to Gefiltefest, the Jewish food experience at JW3. He takes his food seriously (!) and was bowled over by a baklava which has its origins in the Jewish community of Sudan. The baklava lives on in his memory."

My only concerns were that my memory had played me false and would we have more than five members wishing to come.

We were oversubscribed. Thanks to Nikki and Paul we had a lovely, suitable and hospitable venue. The day was a delight. Daisy turned out to be a charming and enthusiastic young lady who told us about the Jewish community in Sudan and how she learnt at her grandmother's knee. We all helped in our amateurish way and it was a great social event. We prepared kibbeh pie, falafel, rice, fattoush, fasulia (green beans), tahini, tabbouleh and yes, of course, baklava. We enjoyed ourselves and after all was prepared and cooked we ate the product of Daisy's labours.

And did the baklava touch the soul? Ask Howard. ■

* Kol Nefesh members mentioned in this article, in order of appearance: Barbara Borts, Georgia Kaufmann-Wolfe, Nikki and Paul Glantz, Howard Feldman.



Sudanese Baklava

Makes 24 pieces

Syrup

Ingredients

- 330g caster sugar
- 250ml water
- 1 tbsp (or 1-2 drops if undiluted) orange blossom water
- ½ lime

Method

- Put the sugar and water in a pan on the hob on a high heat (don't use a non-stick pan for this). Stir gently but constantly with a metal spoon until all the water is dissolved.
- Boil for 5 minutes and remove from the stove.
- Add the lime and carefully bring the syrup back up to the boil. It should remain clear
- Stir in the blossom water. Take the mixture off the heat and leave to cool.

Filling

Ingredients

- 300g raw, peeled almonds (to peel, soak the almonds in boiling water for 2-3 minutes. The skin will then easily rub off)
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 2 tbsp (or 1-2 drops if undiluted) orange blossom water
- 1 heaped tbsp cinnamon

Method

- Blend the almonds, cinnamon and sugar together in a food processor until a coarse mixture has formed.
- Add the blossom water and briefly mix again to blend into a loose and crumbly paste.

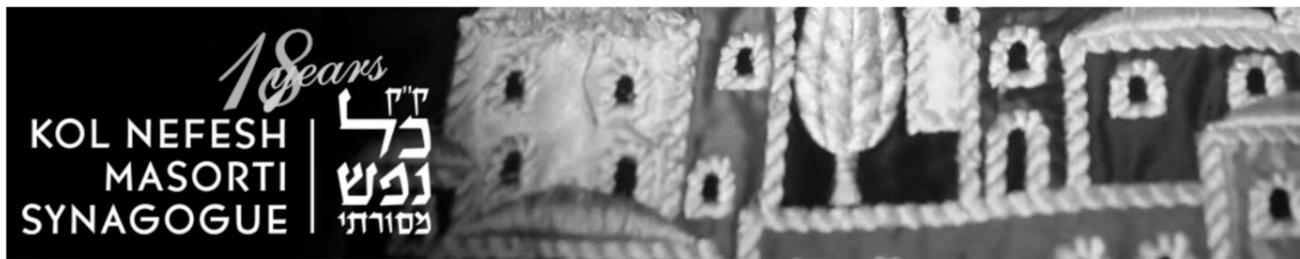
Pastry & Assembly

Ingredients

- 800g filo pastry (if you can, buy this from a Greek or Lebanese store. This pastry is thinner than the standard supermarket type)
- 150g unsalted butter
- 50ml sunflower or light olive oil

Method

- Preheat the oven to 160°C fan.
- Grease a large, shallow rectangular baking tray.
- Melt the butter and combine with the oil.
- Place a sheet of filo pastry on the tray and brush with butter, folding or adding to the pastry so that it lines the whole base of the tray. Continue until you have used half of the pastry.
- Spread the almond mixture over the pastry, making sure to get an even layer on the whole tray
- Layer the remainder of the pastry as before. Try not to press it down (this keeps the baklava light and fluffy).
- Cut or fold the final sheet of pastry so that it fits the tray as neatly as possible and lay it over the top.
- Slice into triangles.
- Bake for 40-50 minutes (until the pastry is cooked through and a light golden brown)
- Gradually pour the cold syrup over the hot baklava as soon as it comes out of the oven, letting it absorb into the pastry.



Kol Nefesh Masorti 18 Years On: A Brief Look Back

In honour of Kol Nefesh Masorti's 18th birthday, we asked some of the founders and early members of our community to share some thoughts about KNM's early days. We reprint here responses from Nahum Gordon, Georgia Kaufmann, Cheryl Sklan, and Rina Wolfson. Chazan Jacky contributed a copy of the address she gave when Kol Nefesh received its second scroll.

A Painful Conception

By Nahum Gordon

Shabbat VaYechi, 14 Tevet 5759; Saturday, 2 January 1999.

I was on the bimah in my relatively new role as gabbai of EMS. That was my job every week. Rabbi Dr Neil Gilman z"l from the Jewish Theological Seminary, 3080 Broadway, New York, was up there with me for all the leynening. Why was he in Edgware at all?

For the past week, Rabbi Gilman and, I think, 12 other rabbis from the American Conservative movement had been teaching at Limmud on Nottingham University's enormous campus. I remember going to one of Rabbi Joel Roth's sessions. Unfortunately, I cannot remember the names of the other 10 rabbonim.

All of them and their wives wanted to daven in London before they returned to the States. They could have gone to New North London or New London, but they wanted to pray in a shul that was the closest to what they were used to in America. So, they came to us because we had no mechitzah and women could take part in the leynening. In the States, they would have been used to women being shlichei tzibbur (service leaders), but that was not the case over here.

I was not around when EMS was founded on Monday, 17 September 1984, the 20th of Ellul 5744. So, I have consulted Jacky on the issue of EMS's minhag. From the outset, the shul had mixed seating and women could leyen, if they were able and proficient. Initially, Jacky was the only woman who could do this. Nobody objected because this was the way the shul operated from day one. The question of who could lead services was never considered. There were some men who could do it and they stepped up to the plate. There was never an explicit prohibition on women leading services; from the beginning the minhag had been that the men would be the shlichei tzibbur and it just stayed that way.

The Shabbat went well. Our guests had a good time and returned to their homes across the pond.

The next Shabbat was very different. I remember coming off the bimah at the end of the service and a variety of people approached me. They were all members of the shul. They were very upset. They had not realised how different American Conservative Jewry was from UK Masorti. I didn't understand this observation and I asked them to explain. They had not appreciated that women in

America wore tallitot and especially "doilies". The latter was how they chose to describe the kippot worn by the rebetzins. I asked them why they were so critical of the rabbis' wives and I received a variety of answers:

- i. They were not used to such a spectacle;
- ii. Yes, a few women in EMS wore a tallit but they were relatively inconspicuous. The previous Shabbat, there had been so many women wearing tallitot and kippot that they had felt claustrophobic;
- iii. This might set a very dangerous precedent and the character of the shul might be changed irrevocably;
- iv. A man wore a tallit and a kippah, not a woman;
- v. The rabbis' wives were making an exhibition of themselves, as they did not have to wear such garments; and
- vi. The women were aping the men.

And who were the tallit-wearing women in EMS? There were apparently four. For the record, they were:

~ Sara Bensusan, who, of the four,

had been wearing her tallit the longest in EMS. Sara and her husband, Dave, had long had connections with the American Jewish Renewal movement and were and still are members of a chavurah.

- ~ Two American Conservative members, Betty Birnbaum and Julie Pentelnik, who had recently joined the shul with their families. Their husbands had been transferred by their companies, Merrill Lynch and Procter & Gamble, to work in London for a couple of years. I think that some KNM members are still in touch with them.
- ~ Finally, Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz, a Modern Orthodox Jew who had recently moved to Edgware with her family. Lindsey still teaches at the London School of Jewish Studies.

Sue and I became quite close to Lindsey and Norm, and Miri is still a very good friend of their younger daughter, Rachel. I got to know Betty quite well and stayed with her in New Jersey a few years later when I was in the States on Cheryl's second Atid Leadership Programme. Sue and Sara started a tradition where they always come to us for second-night Seder and lunch on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The group has expanded but they still come.

Back to my recollections. I was out of my depth. I could not assuage the palpable agitation. It was not long before I was told by a few people, including some who are still friends of KNM members, to tell the 'Gang of Four' to take their tallitot off. That was somewhat ironic, as Betty and Lindsey were regulars on the leynening rota (and among the best leyners we had!), and I don't think that either of them would have been comfortable being on the Bimah without their tallitot. I remember Betty doing prodigious amounts of leynening, comparable to what Meira, Andy and Simon do now.

By now, I had done a little background reading and I was able to give the following response to the demands for zero tolerance:

- i. Halachically, women were not obligated to wear tzitzit or tefillin like

men, as instructed in the Shema, because such commandments were deemed to be time-bound mitzvot, and therefore women were exempt. However, if a woman chose to take on these mitzvot, then once she took on this responsibility she was honour-bound to continue for the rest of her life. Consequently, I had no intention of asking any woman to discontinue performing this or any other mitzvah. If they were unhappy with my decision, they were most welcome to convene an Extraordinary General Meeting. No one took up my invitation.

- ii. I also noted that they wanted me to intervene but had not approached our rabbi, Dr Harvey Meirovich. Could one of the reasons for their reluctance be that he was a very good friend of Jacky's? Or maybe it was because his wife, Cheryl, wore a tallit? This caused some consternation as they had not even realised that Cheryl Meirovich was wearing a tallit, as it looked like a beautiful shawl!
- iii. Using the rabbi's wife as the classic exemplar, had the critics noticed that all five women had chosen to wear feminised tallitot? Were they really copying the men or trying to forge their own path?
- iv. And pursuing this agenda, had the complainants taken the time to sit down with any of the five to find out why they had taken on this mitzvah? They might be pleasantly surprised to discover that they had not been motivated by feminist considerations but that they had derived considerable, spiritual satisfaction. This suggestion was received with stony silence.
- v. Were the critics aware that all the 'Gang' had asked the permission of the rabbi in situ when they had joined the shul, i.e., Chaim Weiner? Did they also know that they had asked the co-chairs of the shul, our Cheryl and Harold Segal? Nobody had objected. My point was that no one had unilaterally decided to change *minhag hamakom*, literally the custom of the place, i.e. the norms and practices of the shul. The lead-

ership of the shul had been consulted and had consented.

ership of the shul had been consulted and had consented.

vi. Finally, I felt that we had reached the point where we were talking a different language – they were reacting viscerally and I was trying to communicate cerebrally. Ne'er the twain shall meet. Any further discussion was futile.

Things spiralled out of control. I have vivid memories of four meetings. The first was the February 1999 meeting of the shul council. Alex Sklan, Cheryl's ex, had just resigned at a moment's notice from his position as the shul's segan, because he disagreed with Rabbi Harvey's advice that we needed to correct leynening mistakes more assiduously. Rather than burden one person every week, I had decided to create a rota of seganim comprising those men and women whom I felt were our best leyners. It transpired that no woman had ever been a segan at EMS, even though she was permitted to leyen! The rationale of that decision escaped me. At the Council meeting, I was accused by a member from Pinner of attempting to introduce egalitarianism through the back door. I won the ensuing vote of confidence with only two or three dissenting.

The second meeting took place a week or two later. The same individual and others wanted to know the membership status of the Gang of Four. When it was disclosed that, as a Modern Orthodox Jew, Lindsey would never become a member, another individual wanted to know why we were falling over ourselves to accommodate somebody who would never join Masorti? He felt Lindsey's presence would only exacerbate a deteriorating situation and she should be excluded from the shul. Clearly, the fact that she was an integral member of the leynening rota counted for naught. My 'friend' from Pinner was beaming. I felt sick.

The other meetings were less public. Cheryl Sklan was fast approaching the end of her term of office. There was only one person standing to replace her and he was implacably opposed to women wearing tallitot, as was his wife. They were in total agreement with my 'friend' from

Continued on next page.

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Pinner. Curiously, the wife had been one of the first people that I had invited to join me on the bimah as a segan and she had been thrilled. Her husband thanked me sincerely for considering his wife. I got the impression that he felt that her skills had never been truly acknowledged. I replied genuinely that it had been a no-brainer. In anticipation of his ascension, Sue and I were invited to tea in their impressive, detached property in Radlett. Naturally, there was no agreement, but I made sure before we left to advise them that if their fellow antagonist from Pinner had won the day, then the wife would never have had the opportunity to be a segan. I think the irony was lost on them.

The last meeting was a similar affair with my predecessor as gabbai. With Jacky as the principal driving force, he had been one of EMS's three founders. All three had known each other a long time as they had all been members of Edgware Reform's more traditional service. They had been encouraged to set up a Conservative shul by EDRS's rabbi, Michael Leigh z'l, who, when he retired, was a regular attendee at EMS. Sue and I met four or five of my predecessor's circle for tea, including his wife. All of them were left most depressed by my position on women and mitzvot.

The incoming council was led by opponents of religious pluralism. Of the inner sanctum, the two co-chairs and the Financial Representative were against women wearing tallitot. That left me. I envisaged that I would be harassed relentlessly until I accepted collective responsibility. So, I resigned with immediate effect.

The atmosphere in the shul became poisonous, so much so that people sat on opposite sides of the shul, glaring at each other. In the midst of this maelstrom came the first day of Shavuot, Friday, 21 May 1999. For some reason, Rabbi Meirovich and his wife Cheryl were away. I was down to give the dvar Torah. It was too good an opportunity to eschew. As Alex Sklan said to me afterwards, I let them have it with both barrels of my sawn-off shotgun.

I chose the haftarah about Ezekiel's psychotic vision of God which gave rise to

Merkavah mysticism. I pointed out that the Book of Ezekiel had nearly been dropped from the canon by the early rabbis, the Tannaim. One of the reasons was that Merkavah mysticism was considered too dangerous. The Talmud records other books being considered for the chop, such as Shir HaShirim because it was pornographic and Kohelet because it was so depressing and negative. However, wiser heads prevailed in the yeshiva of Yavneh and all three are an integral part of the services on Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. I concluded by observing that if very observant rabbis in the 2nd century CE understood that Judaism could be interpreted and practised in different ways, how much more should Orthodox Jews at the end of the 20th century acknowledge the Masorti approach alongside theirs. I have never received such an enthusiastic response and mystifyingly, it came from both sides of the tallit divide. I had been too subtle for the 'traditionalists'. They had missed my underlying message, namely that they needed to stop victimising four innocent women, become more tolerant and embrace pluralism within Masorti, just as they wanted Orthodoxy to accept them! Regrettably, Alex was wrong. I had missed the bull's eye by miles.

Under Rabbi Chaim's guidance, the kehilah had studied the concept of egalitarian services for a few years before he left for the Mandel School and its Jerusalem Fellowship in 1998. As an experiment, he had permitted such services up to three times a year for three years. Coming from the United Synagogue, I had never been remotely interested, but in 1993, when Sue and I were still members of Belmont United, all four Gordons went to visit Sue's cousin, Keith, in Washington, DC. His wife, another Susan, was chair of the local Conservative shul, Tiferet Israel, in Silver Spring. Many of the women in the kehillah wore tallitot. A young girl recited the haftarah and an older lady sang Musaf. Both had beautiful voices. I had never experienced an egalitarian service before and I am pleased to report that I did not have an apopleptic fit.

One of many anxieties expressed by 'traditionalists' to me was that the three-year experiment would soon be up. Rabbi Meirovich would conduct a review and

Jacky and like-minded folk would then ask for the egalitarian services to be extended to six times a year. I pointed out that, even if that were true, and permission was granted, and three years later the frequency increased to nine times a year, and then monthly three years after that, and then fortnightly three years after that, and then finally weekly, that would take us up to the year 2012.

Surely by then, the shul should have adapted sufficiently to make a rational (!) decision as to whether the egalitarian service should come downstairs into the main sanctuary or remain upstairs for an eclectic minority? Looking back, I was a naive optimist.

As the situation at EMS continued to deteriorate, the 'egalitarians' moved upstairs to the library. Initially, we were so fired up that we always had a minyan by 9.30. We had a great time, so much so that the kehillah downstairs gave up waiting for us to join them for kiddush.

Then, one Friday night in the summer of 1999, as we were entering the shul for a Kabbalat Shabbat service, I had my moment of epiphany when the third of the founders admitted that women wearing tallitot was not the most important concern for many 'traditionalists'. What really worried him was women like Jacky leading services. I was speechless. So, this was how he wanted to thank Jacky for making the Conservative Synagogue of North West London a reality. And he clearly paid scant regard to Jacky's knowledge of chazanut.

Then, the Yamim Noraim approached and the 'egalitarian' group decided to go back to the Brady Maccabi bunker in Manor Park Crescent and hold three days of services there in the main theatre next to the gymnasium. Anyone was welcome. After Yom Kippur, we received a request from EMS not to return. So, for me, Kol Nefesh was born on Erev Rosh Hashanah, Friday night, 10 September 1999. The following year was probably the most memorable when Betty, Julie and Lindsey took the three Torah services, having been tutored by Jacky. Kol Nefesh was looking to the future. ■



Personal Reflections on Kol Nefesh at 18

By Cheryl Sklan, Rina Wolfson, and Georgia Kaufmann

Cheryl writes:

When I took on the role of convenor of Kol Nefesh, I had separated from Alex and felt I had a lot of space in my life. I remember much of those years, doing a lot of convening in the early hours of the morning. It felt exciting playing a part in creating something new after the trauma of EMS, and living the values which we had established at the beginning of the shul's life. I found the structure invigorating after EMS, where I had been chair for four years. Our structure had a flow to it, it empowered everyone and did not place power in the convenors. I found that wonderful. Working with Joel was a privilege and I found that enabled my personal growth. We shared a vision and it was a great experience where I learnt enormously. Distracted through my divorce, I think that I was healed from the damage of the EMS breakup, and I loved making announcements!

Being a convenor of our special community was tremendous. I have been part of so many life events, baby blessings, bar/bat mitzvahs, weddings, anniversaries, sadly deaths of loved members, but most of all feeling a part of a vibrant and loving community. It taught me once again that volunteering is a fantastic opportunity for the volunteer. I am grateful that I had the opportunity.

Beyond my personal experience, it seems unbelievable that KNM is now 18 years old. It's been a busy and exhilarating 18 years. We have worked hard, creating and shaping our very special community. One of my beliefs is that behind every action is an unconscious positive intention, and I really believe that the truly awful split at EMS has allowed two different groups of people to thrive. We have a lot to be thankful for. We have taken the opportunity to create a truly special place, where members have brought their best selves to the project. We are blessed with an amazingly diverse and talented membership who have enabled our growth, and we have really become. I suppose we

now have to focus on what is next and how this special community has to maintain its momentum. Our 18th birthday celebrations have shown that we can do that and we have the talent to continue.

We have been inspired throughout those 18 years by Rabbi Joel, whose unusual approach and style have in the main been an amazing fit. We were born out of challenging, and he has continued to challenge us all these years.

For me the trauma of EMS has been resolved by these years and by KNM becoming. Here's to the next 18 years, may they be as good and even better than the first. ■



Rina writes:

It was something of a fluke that I even joined Kol Nefesh. I arrived in London in the spring of 2001, recently divorced and with a three-year-old son in tow. I didn't have a job or a permanent place to live so, truth be told, there were more pressing items on my To Do list than join a synagogue. But over Friday night dinner with some old friends, the consensus seemed to be that going to shul would help us settle into the local community. And as one of the people around the table was a member of Kol Nefesh, that was the synagogue I arrived at the following morning.

It was (and I say this without any exaggeration) one of the best, and most life-changing, decisions I ever made.

I will never forget the warmth and welcome I felt when I walked into that service, back in the old Maccabi building. In the time it took me to walk from the front door to the gym downstairs, I'd been invited to lunch at one member's home and a community seudah at another's.

Within weeks of that first visit, I leyned in shul for the first time, something that I had always wanted, but had never had the opportunity, to do. I soon became a regular on the leyning rota, and it was this

that kept my love for Biblical Hebrew alive. (I'm fairly certain that if I hadn't taken up this 'hobby', I wouldn't be back at University today, studying for a PhD in Biblical Studies.)

The decision to become convenor was equally spontaneous. Or at least, I think it was. During a conversation with Cheryl, I found myself offering to take on the role. But looking back, I wonder whether she knew all along that it was something I really needed to do. I think she sensed I was a bit lonely. Either way, throwing myself into the heart of the community was exactly what I needed at that time. And in return for my efforts, I was privileged to make life-long friendships with some truly wonderful people. Not a bad quid pro quo for attending a few meetings and writing a weekly bulletin.

Kol Nefesh allowed me to explore my Judaism in a critical way, without the misogyny that had turned me away from Orthodoxy. And in Rabbi Joel and Chazan Jacky, I found teachers that were truly inspiring. When Paul and I got married in 2007, it was an honour that they officiated at our wedding.

When we moved to Finchley, the decision to leave Kol Nefesh was difficult, and wasn't taken lightly. But it was the right thing for our family. That said, the values that I encountered at Kol Nefesh still inform my life. It's no coincidence that Paul is now co-chair of NNLS and BZ is active in Noam. Even our 6-year-old twins are regulars at Noam Kaytana.

But I still miss the close friendships and sense of community that I found at Kol Nefesh. I am certain that my life would be very different today had I not turned up, unannounced, on that Shabbat morning almost fifteen years ago. Kol Nefesh will always be very special to me, and though I visit very rarely, I think of the community often, and always with much fondness, and sincere thanks.

Happy 18th Birthday, KNM. ■



Georgia writes:

Over the years when Richard and I have talked about Kol Nefesh to outsiders I am always struck by how I describe the birth of the shul as a consequence of the struggle for egalitarianism and Richard chooses to say that it was about tolerance. They are not the same thing at all.

For me, it was all about giving each member an equal opportunity, and in those hazy days of the past it was all about women being able to do what men could do. For Richard, it was about tolerating what other people felt moved to do. In the intervening years things have shifted and the whole notion of egalitarianism has shifted too.

A few weeks ago, we watched the Chilean film "A Fantastic Woman". The central character is a transgender woman, Marina, played by the transgender actress Daniela Vega. Throughout the film I was fascinated by her womanliness, especially since it seemed that her body was still in part male, yet without any doubt she was, from my perspective, female. All too often Ruth and Hannah condemn my thinking as being too binary. And to be honest, I didn't really get it until I saw this film.

I had always lazily taken the view that sex was biological and fixed and that gender was a cultural and social construct, that someone could slide from male to female or the other way using social markers, behaviours, clothes, etc., but that the underlying sex was fixed. This despite knowing for a long time someone whose body was female from birth but whose chromosomes were male, i.e., a hermaphrodite. My children are used to school friends changing genders, in the way that I accepted friends who were gay while my parents struggled with it. My views have changed, and indeed in the 18 years since KN was formed the world has changed. Gender fluidity is real and it is here.

This of course begs the question about the original debate that led to the shul's birth. It was a male-female thing. Eighteen years is a long time. In that time same-sex marriages have been recognised within the Jewish world, we have enjoyed

the teachings of a transgender rabbi, whose talks brought several transgender Jews to the shul, and it makes the original tallit-wearing, female-davening, female-segan issues distant and irrelevant. Things have moved on. But what I realise, and this is of course momentous, is that Richard was right all along. It was not about equality, because the nature and components of hierarchy change all the time. It was about tolerance. What I am most proud of is that KN is a community that welcomes people and enables them to express themselves whoever they may be, as long as they buy into the same notions of tolerance as the community.

In the tenth year of its existence KN was having some growing pains. A pre-adolescent fit. This was the year that I was convenor and it seemed to me that my role was to deal with some of disgruntlement and help the shul reinvigorate itself. To that end I set up the Big Talk, taking the idea that Matt Plen introduced me to, of getting people to talk to each other more. If it achieved nothing else I had a good time visiting people at home and talking to them and starting a few other people off on their own set of talks.

One of these talks was in my mind pivotal. I visited a family with young children who were questioning the reason for driving out every Shabbat when there were shuls closer by, they were losing their connection. I like to think that the couple of hours I spent with Dan and Liz Preter somehow turned them round from what seemed like an inevitable slide into joining NNLS and that all their effort, leadership and love that they have continued to pour into the shul was secured by that talk. I think that keeping them was the highlight of my year. ■



Kabbalat Torah

By Chazan Jacky Chernett

Jacky writes:

In searching my computer for something completely different, I came upon the address I gave at New London Synagogue when Kol Nefesh received its second scroll (the one with the 'Shema Yisrael' cover). It came with the World Council of Synagogues on one of their missions, as a gift from the community in Farmingdale via the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, if I remember correctly. At the same time Rabbi Joe Wernick, President of the World Council (now Masorti Olami), presented us with a yad from Kehilat Ramot Zion in French Hill, Jerusalem, in memory of Rabbi Dr Chaim Pearl z"l.

Welcome, on behalf of Kol Nefesh, to this historic building on this historic occasion and on this historic day of Yom Yerushalayim!

First, I want to express our thanks to our dear friend and teacher Rabbi Chaim Weiner for not only hosting us at the New London Synagogue but also for the enthusiastic part he is taking in this event. He will never miss an opportunity to teach!

I must say that this is very grand for our little kehilla, Kol Nefesh. We rent modest accommodation at the Brady Maccabi Youth Centre in Edgware but unfortunately we can't use it for midweek activities. But I am not in the least sorry we are here today. For the interest of our American guests, this seat was occupied by Rabbi Dr Joseph Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations from 1913 until his death in 1946. He was the first graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He married here under the chuppah that stood in this very spot where our Torah will be received.

Hertz was a friend of Solomon Schechter, Cyrus Adler and Louis Finkelstein and modelled his ministry according to the ideals of "progressive conservatism", shared by them, which tendency in Anglo-Jewry came to an almost abrupt end after his death. Rabbi Dr Louis Jacobs faced cruel attacks by Hertz's successors for expressing non-fundamentalist views and events led to the foundation of the

New London Synagogue in 1963, ironically in the very building where Hertz presided. This building had been due for demolition but Rabbi Jacobs' supporters rescued it and the rest is history. Since then we have seen the inception and growth of the Masorti Movement that includes among its parts diverse synagogues that are independent in practice but similar in theological approach. The latest of these is Kol Nefesh.

Kol Nefesh is a fully egalitarian shul where every Jewish soul, man and woman, boy and girl, is enabled and encouraged to pursue his or her religious journey in freedom. This is at the cutting edge of Jewish congregational expression in the UK as the tradition of the service both in text and chant is retained while all Jews are eligible to lead services and leyen once they have acquired the skills. Of course, many Conservative synagogues in the United States have been egalitarian for years. Women and men have been trained together as Conservative rabbis and cantors for decades. Not here. Not yet.

This presents a huge challenge in terms of education for British Masorti Jews and I am proud to say that we have a cadre of young adults, men and women, who are making their way to Israel and America to take up serious study. Much of this activity has been inspired by the Rabbi of Kol Nefesh, Joel Levy, who lives in Jerusalem and is unable to be here today. He will be with us next week for Shavuot to celebrate the first service with our new Sefer Torah – what better time than Matan Toratenu!!

Now for our celebration...

As we welcome our new Sefer Torah from Farmingdale, which has been cared for so lovingly by Don and Judy Horowitz along their arduous journey on Monday and Tuesday, we also return with our thanks the little scroll we borrowed from New London Synagogue three years ago. This scroll is now ready to go to sleep, its letters and parchment fading with age. It

was one of the Czech scrolls rescued after the Holocaust.

From this little scroll, Danny Fenster will read the end of Sedra Behukotai which ends the book of Vayikra and we can say a fitting farewell to it with a resounding Hazak Hazak V'nithazek at the end.

Judy Horowitz will then present the Farmingdale Torah – its thick, rich claff and beautifully clear calligraphy strong and vibrant and ready for its new life with Kol Nefesh!

Before Ilana, Danny's sister, reads for the first time from the new scroll, Rabbi Joe Wernick will present a Yad in loving memory of Rabbi Dr Chaim Pearl z"l. Rabbi Pearl was one of the greatest influencers of Masorti in this country, leading services with his powerful and mellifluous voice, teaching and preaching, as he called it, during the early wonderful years of Edgware Masorti Synagogue, as well as in Israel and America. His spirit remains strong within all who knew him. We are moved and honoured that Kehilat Ramot Zion, his congregation in Jerusalem, have provided us with the Yad in his name.

Then it will be the time for our Shehecheyanu! Ilana, using the new Yad, will read the first three pesukim of the sedra for this week, B'midbar, a new book and a new beginning, while maintaining continuity with the ever moving cycle of our tradition.

We will place both Sifrei Torah in the Ark and end with Uv'nucho Yomar.

This is the marriage of Kol Nefesh to its Sefer Torah, hence the chuppah, which is another Kol Nefesh joy, as Richard and Georgia had it made for their wedding last year. So after we have ended this part of the evening, we will go into the hall, singing for our supper for the second half of the celebrations which Cheryl will host. There is no seating plan at dinner, so sit wherever you like and enjoy! ■



Coming Out of Egypt: Masorti Shuls Grow Up

By Matt Plen

Masorti Judaism in the UK is a young movement. Most of our communities are 'first generation' – their people are members by choice. Even at our older communities, New London and New North London, recent expansion means that most people are relatively new. As a rule, our members didn't sign up automatically to their parents' or grandparents' shuls. This is a point of strength for us as a movement, but it also brings a challenge. We don't have much first hand experience of growing a community in the long term and managing the processes of generational change that involves.

At Masorti Judaism, we've recently been working with Citizens UK, the country's largest broad-based community organising network, to create a synagogue growth toolkit. This is a training programme and planning process, based on research into fast-growing synagogues, churches, membership organisations and businesses, designed to teach leaders how to accelerate the growth of their communities.

One of the things we've discovered is a fascinating model of community development created by the Episcopalian Church in the United States. In their pamphlet "Sizing up a congregation" ([www.episcopalchurch.org/files/CDR_series1\(1\).pdf](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/CDR_series1(1).pdf)) they talk about four different stages in the growth of a church.

Stage one, labelled the Family Church, has up to 50 active members (in a synagogue context with typical rates of involvement this would mean up to 250 dues-paying members – the majority of Masorti shuls therefore fall into this category). The name 'family' reveals what this stage is about: strong, intimate relationships among a small, relatively insular

group of people, dependent on the leadership of a few dominant 'elders' – senior, longstanding community members who act as informal gatekeepers and guardians of the community's customs and tradition. If you're a new member and you want to be accepted, gaining the approval of these elders is an essential step. Once you're in, you can expect to be loved, cared for and appreciated.

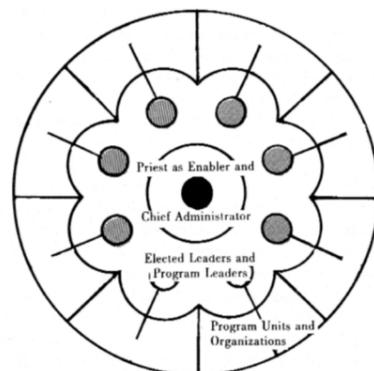
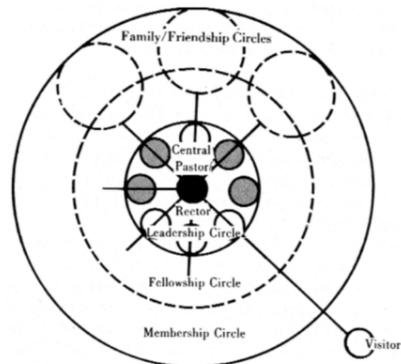
Stage two is the Pastoral Church (50-150 active members, typically equals 150-750 dues-paying members). Medium size

churches require more formal leadership structures. Where this works well, a central senior leader (typically the priest or pastor, or in our context the rabbi) provides direction, guidance and pastoral care, but is unable to carry out every organisational task or build personal relationships with each member. He or she therefore has to recruit and empower a leadership group

which, in turn, builds relationships with a 'fellowship circle' – the committed members – and through them with the wider membership. The pastoral church is not highly structured, and the primary leader plays a dominant role.

In a pastoral church, new people typically find it easy to get involved in the wider membership circle, but much harder to break into the central 'fellowship' and inner leadership core. In the words of the pamphlet: "The members think of themselves as a friendly group, but they may be friendly mainly to each other." In the pastoral church, one of the main functions of a community leader is helping people navigate these relationships and creating a widespread culture of welcome.

In stage 3, the Programme Church (150-350 active members, usually equivalent to 500-1500 dues-paying members), democratic, structured team-leadership becomes vital. The role of the pastor becomes more strategic and facilitative and lay leadership again becomes dominant in the sense of building relationships and getting things done. At this point, the life of the community starts to be structured around separate programmes and prayer-services, each with their own cluster of friendship groups. This means good communication and a clear sense of purpose



become vital to prevent people from feeling that they don't know what's going on in the community outside their own bubble. In this stage, it's vital to create a process for welcoming and integrating new members as individuals, rather than falling back on the temptation to see them as numbers.

(The model's fourth level, which we don't have space to discuss in detail here, is the Corporation Church of over 350 active members – equivalent to 1000-2500 dues-paying members.)

This model poses a clear question for us as leaders of Masorti communities: how to move from level to level, growing from family to pastoral and from pastoral to programme shul?

Father Graham Hunter, the priest of a fast-growing, successful Anglican church in Hoxton who introduced us to this model, shared an important insight. Each model of community comes with its own specific, appropriate behaviours and habits. These behaviours not only strengthen the community in the stage it's at, they also prevent it from growing to the next stage. If you want to grow from a family to a pastoral shul, you have to adopt the habits of the pastoral shul first. This means introducing leadership structures, systems for welcoming and engaging people and other appropriate habits for a larger group where not everyone knows each other.

Father Graham gave one example: when he joined his then tiny church, every Sunday anyone who had a birthday was asked to come to the front and the congregation sang happy birthday. In a bigger church this practice would be unfeasible, and it signalled to everyone, existing members and newcomers, that growth was not on the agenda – so it's one of the first things he changed. He also began introducing himself and welcoming newcomers at the start of every service. This looked strange to the regulars as they all knew who he was and – at first – there were no newcomers. But behaving as if they wanted the church to grow was a precondition for actually making this happen.

As the Israelites discovered when they came out of Egypt, changing the habits of communal life is not easy. But if we want to develop we have to consider what are the appropriate behaviours not for where our community is today, but for where we want it to be tomorrow. ■

Matt Plen is the Chief Executive of Masorti Judaism in the UK. To learn more please contact our community development director, Jon Pam: jonathan@masorti.org.uk.



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EARLY BIRD DEADLINES APPROACHING!

Highlights from the Kol Nefesh 18th Birthday Celebrations



Art & Manuscript Talks



A Sudanese Feast!
(See page 29)



Theatre Outings



Limmud at Home

Community Sit-Down Friday Night Dinner

The events below are still to come, along with others not listed here. Check our website for details, <http://www.kolnefesh.org.uk/kn-18th-birthday-events>



Grandparents' Tea & Talk—Sunday April 29th
All grandparents are invited to a tea and talk just for them – no parents allowed! Come share the highs and lows of grandparenting. KN's Sara Levan, a well-known psychotherapist and teacher, will lead a facilitated conversation over tea and cake. Check the website for details.

Bengali Cookery Workshop with Shahnaz Ahsan—Sunday May 13th
Shahnaz, a professional food writer and founder of The Tiger Kitchen, has been cooking with love since she first learnt how to work a stove. Bookings are now open for this workshop. Check the website.



Talking Opera with John Lazarus—Sunday May 13th
Also on May 13th, after the cookery workshop, KN's John Lazarus will introduce us to the secrets of Verdi's *La forza del destino*. A day for all the senses!

Photography Workshops with Marc Morris & Rena Pearl—June 10th & 17th
Enjoy hands-on workshops with Marc and Rena, two outstanding professional photographers. On June 10th, play with top-of-the-range cameras under the direction of Marc, who will give you a print of one of your photos to take home. On the 17th, learn to get the best out of your camera in a street photography workshop with Rena. There will be a discount for those attending both sessions.



Making a Difference Through Mentoring & Coaching, with Brian Chernetz
In October and November, our fabulous Brian Chernetz will offer a three-session workshop on effective coaching and mentoring. Come learn the tools and skills needed to make a difference in the lives of friends, family, children, or business colleagues at any level.



From the Convenors



Dear Friends,

A year ago, neither of us imagined that we'd be sitting down in March of 2018 to write a convenor piece for this issue of the magazine – our first since we jointly took on the role back in December, at the KN Hanukkah party.

It's been a busy few months. We are halfway through the 18 events due to take place for KN's birthday year, and so far they have been fantastic. From a Purim-focused shiur on Jewish representations in art through to the recent whisky tasting evening, they have really sparked the community's energy.

It was wonderful to see so many people, spanning the generations, at KN's Community Friday Night Birthday Dinner. Who knew that our building could fit 100 people for a sit-down meal! Thank you to everyone who helped make that event and all our birthday events happen, by offering your home, sharing your skills or ideas, coming to support the events, providing food or sponsoring.

We are especially delighted that so many different people have been involved so far. Indeed, as each event takes place a new one seems to be born from those inspired to share their knowledge, experiences or passion with the community. It feels very exciting.

Simon Samuels, co-chair of Masorti Judaism (with KN's Shirley Fenster), recently mentioned in an email how impressed he was with all that is going on at Kol Nefesh. What, he asked, is your secret sauce? In our view, our secret sauce is that we are a people-first community. Kol Nefesh is one of the few Masorti synagogues that is not named for its location. To us, this projects the essence of what we are about. Our focus is not a place or a building. It's the people who make up our community, and who

make our community a place we want to be part of. We are, indeed, Kol Nefesh – "Every Soul".

As we continue to celebrate this year, we would love to see every single person in the community connected and involved, in however small or large a way. Every person is important, and we need you! If it seems overwhelming, perhaps start by just getting to know one other member better than you already do. The Getting-to-Know-You Initiative launched last Hanukkah is one way to do this – but you shouldn't feel limited to whoever you were matched up with.

Of course, we have our challenges. A big challenge we'll be focusing on over the next few years is growth. We do need more members in order to keep the momentum going in our community, especially young families.

We also have our building committee looking at options of where we can relocate when the Leonard Sainer building is sold in two years. They will be feeding back their initial findings to consult with the community in late spring.

With all the blessings and challenges we face, we need to remember what is special about Kol Nefesh and what is important to our community. Our task is to ensure that our identity and ethos are maintained in everything we do. And let's keep connecting!

Chag sameach,
Liz Preter & Meira Ben-Gad



And don't forget... Mark your diaries for our fantabulous Summer Tea Party on Sunday July 15th, hosted by Marc & Hayley Herman. We need a small group to make this happen. Please let us know if you can get involved.