

The Thoughts of Chairman Melvyn Lux



What an amazing time - Israel is celebrating 60 years of existence. To everyone worldwide it is awesome.

Those nations, such as the Arab ones who are against the State, are astonished it both came into being and then survived. As soon as the State was declared, the invasion of all the surrounding Arab states, even though superior in manpower, could not beat the Jewish determination and G-d's miracle which made the State of Israel survive.

Those who are for the State of Israel are thrilled and delighted to see how it has grown and matured so well as a democracy in the Middle East, a restored homeland for the Jews who have been dispersed for 2000 years and as a light unto the Nations, of truth justice and modernity.

From this preamble you must realise that my family and I are ardent Zionists. This not only applies to the present generation, but my parents and their parents as well. My grandparents arrived from the pogroms of Russia to survive and prosper in this tolerant British society. Nevertheless, however loyal and grateful they were, there was a nagging at the back of their minds that there should be a homeland for all displaced co religionists.

I was 2 months short of my 12th birthday when the State was established, so I have vivid memories of the event. It was the culmination of great effort after many years of our people suffering, particularly under the Nazis in World War II. Was the world showing regret, or was it the determination and guts of the Zionist organisations? Whatever the reason, Israel came into being. I remember watching a cinema newsreel in 1945 at the relief of Bergen Belsen concentration camp by the British Troops and seeing in black and white before my eyes the degradation of humanity.

My parents were always entertaining Jewish refugees during and after the Second World War. We had American soldiers as our guests for Seder night and other Jewish troops who were away from home would frequently dine with us. There was a unity between us all.

After the war we had many visiting fund raisers from the then residents of the Palestinian Mandated Territory, later to become Israel. One of them was Menachem Begin who represented one charity selling 5 year leases for small plots of land in Haifa, knowing full well that the financial donors in the UK were unlikely to take up their option and emigrate.

To celebrate the momentous occasion of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel a group from the New West End Synagogue is going on a mission to Israel for the Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations. There will be lots to see, famous people to meet and in general a great time to be there.

At our shul many things have taken place in the last 6 months since our previous magazine:

- We welcomed the return of Jeremy Lawson to the Bimah. His exceptional musical contributions add even more beauty to our services He has brought his style of beautiful musical arrangements to add to our services. We thank Rabbi Shisler, who during that period "held the fort". He undertook the mammoth task of not only leading the community but also acting as Chazan so well and efficiently. We are extremely fortunate to have him as our religious leader.
- We are delighted to welcome our new Ba'al Koreh, Eli Kohn. His leining on a weekly basis as well as his Megilah Reading this past Purim are a pleasure to listen to.
- One of the new innovations this year has been the Eishet Chayil awards for ladies who have given exceptional service to the community. The first recipients were Susan Katz and Lynn Meltzer. These two ladies have given untold time, service and charity to every aspect of our activities. They are members of the Social Events committee, very active on all Guild activities and most especially they ensure the Kiddushim are well supplied. All of these things are undertaken without any desire to be personally recognised or thanked. They do these tasks simply for the good of us all. This must be true charity, and that is why we (the Rabbi, Executive and the Board of Management) believed these recipients fulfilled the meaning of the awards.

It is difficult for me to single out people for particular praise as everyone involved is giving 100% plus effort to make ours the friendliest Shul in London.

Suffice it to say, we have a number of committees that are providing fantastic results.

Amongst the most dynamic of these are, Children's Affairs, Welcoming, Steering, Security, Guild, Cares, House, Artefacts, Israel Society, Functions, our representation on the Board of Deputies, the Book Club, and our Friendship Club. Religious Education is also very active with the Rabbi's shiur on Tuesdays and Shacharit services plus breakfast every morning.

You may recall last year we set up a joint Cheder with Holland Park Synagogue. The Cheder meets alternate terms in each shul. This arrangement is working well and the children continue to benefit from a sound Jewish education.

We have lost a number of older members and close relatives of members who have passed away. On behalf of us all may we wish their families "Long Life".

In February of this year, we had a successful "Town Meeting" (open discussion) organised by the Israel Society, with Talya Lador Freshner, the Deputy Israeli Ambassador and Eric Moonman OBE the Zionist Federation President. This was Chaired by Rabbi Shisler. Many people were able to air their views and discuss pertinent Israeli matters.

Since Rosh Hashanna we have had a number of events including:

- A Succot Supper which was held in the Succah.
- Our Chatan Torah and Chatan Berashit this year were Eli Ballon and Jonathan Matheson who were honoured with a superb well attended party in the Herbert Samuel Hall
- A Chanukah tea with entertainer David Weeks, who kept his lively audience amused with tricks and jokes.
- In addition a Chanukah on Ice Party was held at the Queensway Ice Rink for 12 year olds plus, which showed our budding champions.
- We held a Purim Spiel after the reading of the Magilla in March, which was a sell out.
- We will be holding our Communal First Night Seder dinner on the 19th April 2008.

Other activities include:

- The Guild ran a successful social evening in November was a supper and quiz entitled "Who Wants to be a Millionaire, a visit to see Fiddler on the Roof and in February they had an interesting local trip to visit the Museum of Brands and Advertising.
- Our Administrator, Rachel Cohen, organised a Concert for Holocaust Talent.
- We held a First Aid Course with outside trainers co-ordinated by Anne Shisler
- Our Rabbi acted as the castaway on Desert Island Discs in December.
- Valerie Richman organised an outing to the Barbican on New Years evening to hear the Glen Miller Orchestra
- In January this year we held our bi-annual Burns Night Supper with special guests Rabbi and Mrs Adrian Jesner. Good food and plenty of whisky were consumed and the evening was enjoyed by all.

We have again arrived at the Jewish Festival of freedom - Pesach. We all will be carrying out the traditions which have been passed down to us through generations. As already mentioned the New West End will once again hold a Communal Seder Night service and we look forward to many attendees as in previous years.

Club Sameach, under the guiding hands of Toni Nagel, Jonathan Matheson, Gaby Morris and Michael Sharron, continues to hold a number of events for young people and there are regular children's Shabbat Services

Our Welcoming Committee led by Jonathan and Angela Skry, "Meets and Greets" visitors enhances our friendly reputation. As Angela said, "it's nice to be met by friendly people rather than Security Staff before going into Shul".

Our Security Committee guided by Mike Talalay and his team can never be thanked enough for the forward planning and efficient way they looked and continue to look after us.

Under new guidelines from the Chief Rabbi, the United Synagogue and our own Rabbi, we have now set up an Interfaith Committee. This is led jointly by Natalie Cutler and Sandra Blackman, both of whom went on a specialist training course. I will be reporting on their activities in this field in later editions of the magazine.

Others who rarely get recognised for their untold services are those on the House Committee who keep our property safe and up to date, the Artefacts Committee who maintain and look after our treasures, the Steering Committee who are planning our next 5/7 years programme and activities, the Guild, the Israel Society the Functions Committee, the Ladies Kiddush Group, the Book Club and indeed anyone who offers time effort and goodwill to make sure we function efficiently and well. As these people are too numerous to mention individually by name, I hope they will please accept a Thank You from us all.

Allow me at this point to mention the work of our Administrator, Rachel Cohen and our Beadle, Eli Ballon. Not only do they both work diligently at their regular occupations with the Synagogue but they are also active helpful and willing to undertake any addition tasks that we request of them.

On the religious side of our activities throughout the last 6 months the Rabbi assisted by various people made sure that our Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services worked well and ran to time. In addition they were ably assisted by Elliot Burman and the Choir, Eli Ballon our Beadle Mike Scheuer and Haydon Noble amongst others.

Shacharit Services have continued on a daily basis and although attendances have varied, we manage to maintain a hard core of regular attendees. May I thank all concerned and ask more of you to come along say once a week to keep up momentum.

Shabbat services continue with attendance of regular attendees and a sudden influx when we have special events. The numbers have increased steadily since we started taking records in the year 2000.

On Shabbat we continue to have a number of sponsored Kiddushim, which you will see listed elsewhere in the magazine. These cover, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, new born, recoveries from illness and any occasion worth sharing with the New West End "Family." Thank you all, we love to join in your happy celebrations, and we hope to have many more.

There is no way that the lay work of this shul can be undertaken without time and effort by so many. In this context I want to give additional thanks to all the members of the Board of Management, our Vice Chairman Gaby Morris, the Financial Representative Jeff Hammerschlag, and our two Wardens Simon Tarsh and John Harris

I hope that you and your families continue to support the shul, encourage more to join us and make this not only a wonderful and beautiful place of worship but a warm and extended family

On behalf of my wife Denise and me may we wish you and yours a Hag Sameach.