

The Thoughts of Chairman Melvyn Lux



Denise and I are great travellers. We enjoy touring the world, seeing different cultures and meeting different peoples. Underneath it all we are always searching for our "landsmen".

For those of you who do not know, we lived for sometime in Japan in the mid 1990's and lived and worked at that time in Tokyo. There is one major Jewish Cultural Centre in the city, a building on four floors with a swimming pool, library, two kosher restaurants, a magnificent marble lined Shul on one floor and lots of socialising rooms and facilities. It was built by and for American and Australian ex pats, but is frequented by Jews, visitors and short-term residents from throughout the world.

Mainly because of the social implications of being a foreigner in a Japanese environment, the Shul was always full and on Shabbat and festivals pre booked, pre paid meals were provided throughout the day. The cheder had 43 pupils!

The services were similar to our own, run by a Rabbi from Baltimore. When one looked towards the Ark on the single floor Shul, the men sat on the left the women on the right and in the middle was a cross bench section of mixed seating to accommodate the equivalent of Liberal and Reform. The Rabbi's attitude was - we are all Jews and we must act as one family.

Although in the UK, under United Synagogue rules we could not accommodate non-orthodox factions, nevertheless, at the New West End Synagogue, we believe the "family" principle is right. With the tremendous input of Rabbi and Mrs Shisler the work of various committees and the wonderful feeling of belonging, I think we all feel we are one family.

It is difficult for me to single out people for particular praise as everyone involved is giving 100% effort to make ours the friendliest Shul in Central 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, Bridge 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. We also have a small but very active Cheder under Headmistress Estelle Salamon.

Unfortunately, during the last few months we have had resignations within our team of our Chazzan, Jeremy Lawson, and our Baal Koreh, Professor Lester Kershenbaum. May I, on your behalf, thank them for all their past services and wish them well. I am delighted that they continue as regular attendees as members of our congregation.

In addition 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".

Since Rosh Hashana we have had a number of notable visitors:

- US President Simon Hochhauser who attended a Shabbat Service and spoke at the lunch
- Professor David Newman spoke at the Israel Society
- Henry Grunwald, President of the Board of Deputies attended and spoke at the Shabbat Service
- Denise Phillips the famous kosher chef gave a cookery demonstration under the Guild's programme of events
- Nigella Lawson was filmed within the Shul for a BBC1 programme tracing her family roots.
- The Rt Hon Dr. John Reid, Home Secretary spoke on a Wednesday evening to a large gathering in the Shul.

All of these people were well received and each was very impressed not only with our magnificent Shul, but of our enquiring and interested members.

As is usual in our Community, we had a lot of happy festival party events. There was a superb Chanukah party and a great Purim party with wonderful entertainment from all of you. In addition there was a Simchat

Torah lunch to honour our Chatan Torah Alan Meltzer and Chatan Bereshit. Morris Weintroub. A Succot dinner was enjoyed by those who attended and we were especially fortunate the rain kept away for the evening.

We have again arrived at the Jewish festival of freedom - Pesach. As with your own families with whom you carry on traditions passed from generation to generation, the New West End synagogue is carrying on its own that have been passed down. We are again hosting a Communal Seder and look forward to many attendees as in previous years.

Unfortunately, as the Rabbi, who is our resident magician, lost his father last year he could not host the Magic Evening in November, but he invited some of his friends from the Magic Circle to entertain us just as professionally.

In January, Club Sameach, under the guiding hands of Toni Nagel, Jonathan Matheson, Gaby Morris and Michael Sharron, hosted an open day for children and their parents to show visitors how we can help them in Jewish education, community friendship, and inviting them to become part of our "Family." It was very successful with some children being enlisted to our ranks and at least one new membership form was taken away to be filled in by parents.

A Young Professionals dinner was held with a Maariv Service preceding the meal in October which was a sell out and people had to be put on waiting lists in readiness for the next event. The next event, a dinner held in March was again a sell out.

At the time of writing this article, Dorothea Josem was preparing to go out to Vietnam for a sponsored bike ride to raise funds for the Shul – it's not too late to sponsor her!

Our Welcoming Committee led by Jonathan Matheson, "Meets and Greet" visitors and has enhanced our friendly reputation. As one person said, "it is 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 have looked and continue to look after us.

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, 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.

On the religious side of our activities throughout the last 6 months the Rabbi assisted by the Chazzan made sure that our High Holiday services worked well and ran to time. They were ably assisted by Elliot Burman and the Choir, Eli Ballon our Beadle, 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 covered 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 Henry Magrill 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 Chag Sameach