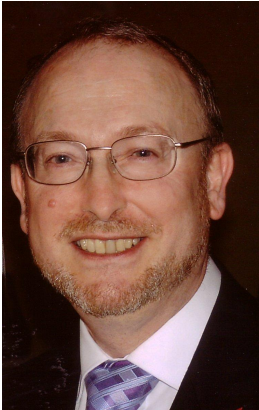


## Rosh Hashanah Message 5768 / 2007

Rabbi Geoffrey L. Shisler



This year, 5768, PG, we shall be celebrating 60 years since the establishment of the modern State of Israel.

Since I was born just before the Declaration of Independence was made, I was too young to know what was going on in those exciting days, but I suspect that some of you will recall those momentous events.

For the whole of my life, Israel has played a crucial part in my self-identification as a Jew. I was brought up in a home where Israel was spoken of frequently, and my formative years were spent as an active member and leader in B'nei Akivah, the international, religious Zionist youth movement. I could no more imagine my Judaism without the State of Israel as I could think of being married to someone else. Just as, after 38 years of marriage, my wife is a part of my soul,

so is the State of Israel a part of my Jewish psyche. And I'm pretty sure that many of you will feel the same about your spouse and your Judaism.

Every year, for as long as I can remember, it's been the practice in Shuls all over the world for the Rabbi to speak on Kol Nidre night about Israel and its place in our lives, and, usually, to couple that speech with an appeal for funds. It's not something that I invented, or a practice that I introduced into the New West End, it's been well-established here, as elsewhere, for very many years.

Because of this, you can imagine my astonishment when a congregant wrote last year to *complain* that the Rabbi spoke about Israel on Yom Kippur evening! This person was of the opinion that the Rabbi should not talk about Israel, but should restrict himself to talking about 'religious' topics!

The reality is that, for all Jews who are proud to declare themselves Zionists, 'Israel' is a religious topic. Since the second Temple was destroyed, and the sovereignty of the Jews over the Holy Land was lost, almost 2000 years ago, the Jewish people have never ceased to pray for the return of the Land of Israel to our control. The yearning for the return to Zion has been an integral part of our prayers, and we have continued to pray for it in every service that we have. Not a day goes by when we don't say:

Vahavieinu L'shalom Meiarba Kanfot Ha'arets  
'Bring us in peace from the four corners of the world..'

Every Shabbat we say:

Sheta'a'leinu V'simcha L'artseinu  
'May it be Your will to bring us in joy to our land'

On Yom Tov we pray:

V'karev P'zureinu Miben Hagoyim  
'Gather our dispersed ones from among the nations'

The commitment to the State of Israel of those Jews who are passionate about the survival of the Jewish People is absolute, and if, because of circumstances in their lives they aren't able to live there themselves, then they do as much as they can to support it and those who are fortunate enough to be able to live there.

We are the generation who has been privileged to see the re-establishment and development of the modern State. Our grandparents and their forebears, for many, many generations past, could only pray for the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of our Patriarchs. We can do that.

We can stand on pavements that Jews walked on as they haggled in the markets of Jerusalem, and we can stand on the same stones that Jewish Kings, Prophets, and people stood on, as they prayed to the same God that we continue to worship today. And we can look out over the same hills and mountain tops that our Biblical heroes and heroines gazed at.

As I write these words, a month before Rosh Hashanah, the newspapers ominously report on the build-up again of forces on Israel's northern border, and the likelihood of another round of fighting between Israel and its avowed enemies Hizbullah and Hamas.

Again and again Israel's political leaders have declared their opposition to bloodshed and war, and time after time it has had to defend itself against enemies whose only aim is to wipe that tiny State off the map.

There's a famous saying:

Eretz Yisrael B'li Torah, Hi Ch'guf B'li N'shamah  
The land of Israel without Torah is like a body without a soul.

I think that, since the miracle of the re-establishment of the State of Israel, we might also say: Torah, without Eretz Yisrael is like a soul without a body.

There may be occasions when criticizing Israel's leaders is legitimate, but praying for Israel, and speaking about its good is truly and undoubtedly a religious act.

May we all be blessed with good health and peace, and granted many opportunities to fulfill the obligation to promote the welfare of our Holy Land throughout the coming year.

Anne joins me in sending you our blessings for an abundance of goodness and happiness in 5768 for you, and all your loved ones.

*We are delighted to invite the Community to join us for a*

## **Succot Dinner**



**On the first night of Succot, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September**

**Service commences at 6.30pm**

**Adults: £18**

**Children £10**

**Places are extremely limited and **MUST** be pre-booked**

**Please call the Office on 0207 229 2631 or by email at [nwes@newwestend.org.uk](mailto:nwes@newwestend.org.uk)**

**by Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September to book your place**

**Vegetarian meals will be available on request.**