

## The Thoughts of Chairman Melvyn Lux



Sometimes I realise our generation has had so many advantages that our parents and grandparents could only have dreamt about.

As you know Denise (my wife) and I are great travellers and at this point of time we are sitting on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona USA looking in awe and amazement at this magnificent site that the Almighty has structured from these huge mountains. This and other National Parks are where the cowboy stories and movies were made. It was the original Wild West and in fact you can even go to the town of Tombstone to watch a daily re enactment of the famous "Gunfight at the OK Corral."

In the midst of all this grandeur and playacting in the State of Arizona lies the City of Phoenix. This great conurbation contains one of the largest Jewish communities in the USA. There are many synagogues of various denominations, kosher restaurants and Jewish day schools. Most synagogues have a friendly "Meet & Greet" committee wherever you visit who make strangers feel that they are among friends. With everything provided in this beautiful state of climate, culture and scenery, people still want to give thanks for their daily blessings and continue to pass on the golden cord of Judaism to the next generation.

In the same way, I really feel that we as members of the New West End synagogue community are also blessed. We have inherited a magnificent building with a great history and traditions. Simeon Singer our first minister amongst his other achievements was the originator of the Singers Prayer Book. As you all know by now the New West End Synagogue has been given the honoured status of a Grade I Listed building by English Heritage. We have been through highs and lows as a Community with our membership numbers and thank G-d we are now again in a growth period. Our Shabbat attendances have grown from 30 to over 90 from 2000 to the present. Shacharit service attendances vary, but we are still trying to encourage more members to attend as many times as is practical for them.

Developments within our Community occur because of the hard work of our devoted Board of Management, various Committee members and their activities, the support of all our members, but most especially from our devoted Rabbi, Geoffrey Shisler and his wife Anne. Under their guidance we have changed from being members to becoming a warm family community.

In the last six months since Pesach there have been a lot of activities. Highlighted amongst these are:

- The Youth Committees under Toni Nagel, Jonathan Matheson Gaby Morris and Michael Sharron and their team with their activities have gained us new juniors, by providing an interesting and stimulating varied programmes, among which are Club Sameach and their monthly Childrens Service
- The Israel Society under Dorothea Josem, Gaby Morris, Mike Talalay, and Howard Morris included a meeting with an Israeli Intelligence General who updated us all on the Middle East situation
- A Communal Seder was led by the Rabbi and the festive meal was organised by the Guild team. This again was a sell out with a waiting list.
- Tikun Leil Shavuot with the Rabbi
- Rabbi Shisler's shiur every Tuesday evening
- Shabbat Communal Lunch for a visiting Chazan, Brian Segal.
- A number of Guild events including Alan Conway a graphologist who exposed our characters thro' our handwriting.
- For Shavuot this year the Shul was beautifully decorated by flowers provided by Susan and Harvey Katz, ably arranged by among others Susan, Lynn Meltzer and Valerie Green
- Open Days were organised by Henry Magrill for the European Day of Jewish Culture and Heritage on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September and London Open House on the 16<sup>th</sup> September.
- A special Cheder prize giving took place at the end of the school year in July which included a play organised by the children and a retirement tribute made to the Head Teacher, Estelle Saloman, who had provided such excellent tuition for a number of years. All the children were sad to see her leave, but wished her well in her retirement.
- There have been nearly 20 sponsored Kiddushim on a Shabbat to celebrate birthdays, wedding

anniversaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bat and Bar Mitzvahs, Aufrufs and recent weddings in Israel and family reunions etc.

- All the Kiddushim are organised and catered by the Guild volunteers led by Anne Shisler

Much of the good work undertaken on behalf of the synagogue is run by various committees and dedicated individuals, as listed below.

- The Artefacts Committee led by Henry Magrill, with the assistance of John Bodie and Alan Meltzer have maintained our beautiful treasures, whilst the House Committee led by Harvey Katz makes sure our building is safe and functions well within the legal requirements.
- Valerie Richman who runs the Cares Committee visiting sick and lonely people in our community.
- The Welcoming Committee continues to "Meet and Greet" under the guiding hand of Angela & Jonathan Skry.
- The security of the Shul continues under the control of Mike Talalay and his team of volunteers – for which we all thank you.
- Patricia Fisher still continues to provide entertainment and interesting speakers for the Friendship Club, which is most appreciated by all who attend.
- The Steering Committee under Frank Miller, Felicity Miller and Stephen Peters have finalised our programme for the next 5 years, which I will give fuller information in the next magazine.
- The Functions Committee consists of the Shislars, Meltzers, the Harvey Katzs and the Magrills are planning a series of exciting events over the next few months.
- The Book Club continues to be well attended and Bob Chait manages to find interesting and stimulating books for discussion every month.
- May I also pass thanks to Dori Schmetterling, our Representative on the Board of Deputies and Dorothea Josem and Jonathan Matheson who represent us on the Council of the United Synagogue.

In addition to the above, there have been 3 major changes.

Firstly, like many Shuls in Central London at the present time, we have comparatively low numbers of children attending our cheder. Partly because of the demographics and partly because many children now attend Jewish Day Schools.

The same thing has happened to Holland Park Synagogue, which is within a half a mile of us.

After discussion between the two Shuls, we decided to pool our resources and premises, but keep our own individual identity. It was agreed that 3 parent representatives from each side would run the new Cheder. Our parent representatives are Michael Sharron, Ingrid Silver and Jonathan Paull. The first term will be at the Holland Park synagogue, the following term at our Shul and rotate each term after that. This will not only give the opportunity for the children to obtain a wide education, possibly reduce parent's costs, but also enable the youngsters to meet more children and hopefully make lasting friendships.

The joint classes will also offer a Religious Knowledge GCSE so anyone who wishes to add to their GCSE collection is more than welcome. We advised the Holland Park Shul of our children's social and synagogue activities, which have been growing very rapidly. They asked if their youngsters could join ours at our Shul for these functions. This was well received by both sides.

Secondly, the New West End Synagogue has become a national treasure after being designated a Grade I Listed Building – only the second synagogue to be given the award. The shul joins Bevis Marks as one of the top 3% of buildings of historical interest in the country. The upgrade was made on the basis of Dr. Sharman Kaddish's book *Jewish Heritage in England* and the letters and articles by Joseph Mirwitch relating to architecture and the Shul's design. This was widely reported in the British Press and Israeli Press.

Thirdly, for the first time in my Chairmanship since 2001, we had more people than vacancies who wished to stand for the Board of Management at our AGM in May, so a secret ballot had to take place. I want to thank all those members who stood down this year from the Board for their sterling and devoted service, these included Henry Magrill, Alan Meltzer, Jackie Abramson, Susan Katz and Felicity Miller. The following members were duly elected to the new Board, Simon Tarsh (Warden) Stuart Katz, Jonathan Skry, Sandra Blackman, Natalie Cutler, Linda Lewin and Angela Skry.

Besides the wonderful and dedicated work undertaken by our Vice Chairman, Gaby Morris, our Wardens Simon Tarsh and John Harris and our Financial Representative Jeff Hammerschlag, many members of the Board and non Board members give of their energy and time to make this synagogue run smoothly. On behalf of us all I thank them for their time and interest.

On behalf of my wife Denise and myself I wish you and your families a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year and well over the Fast.