

Our Congregation



News and views from Belsize Square Synagogue

EXCITING TIMES AHEAD

Shalom Chaverim,

This is a wonderful time of year to recharge our batteries and begin planning our Synagogue calendar for next year, 5776.

Let me share with you some of my ideas to ensure that our congregation remains at the forefront of leadership, especially in Jewish education and affirmation.

Our Shabbat calendar is already almost filled with Bnei Mitzvah. I am also booked for weddings and speaking engagements.

We will continue our weekly exploration of The Great Thinkers and Jewish Responses in the modern period: Hume, Kant, Hobbes, Rousseau, Voltaire and Sartre, with their Jewish counterparts: Mendelssohn, Hirsch, Zunz, Graetz, Frankel, Rosenzweig, Buber, Kaplan and Heschel. Sunday mornings sessions are followed by guest speakers and special events.

Field trips are planned to the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge, the British Museum and British Library.

Also in the planning stage is a visit to Poland with Professor Antony Polonsky, our distinguished member who is the world's leading expert in Jewish Eastern European History, specialising in Poland, and recently appointed head of the Warsaw Jewish Museum. Together we will lead a BSS group on a unique tour, which will include the Warsaw Ghetto and Majdanek camp on the outskirts of Lublin.

Let me also invite you all to Cantor Heller's autumn leyning class. Learning to read from the Torah gives us the skills to take a greater part in our services.

Our music programme continues, with a surprise concert bringing us the very best in the classical music world. We have an outstanding Music Committee chairman in Philip Keller. Stay tuned!

I will be away in July and August visiting family in the US and attending a Bible conference in Germany. While in Los Angeles, I will meet Rabbi Professor Elliot Dorff, head of the Committee of Laws and Standards for the Conservative Movement international. With a PhD in philosophy from Columbia University, Professor Dorff teaches Judaism and Legal Ethics at UCLA Law School and is a prolific writer and good friend of your Rabbi. I hope to arrange a visit for this leading Jewish philosophy scholar to speak to us. It will certainly enhance our educational profile.

One of the things I have initiated for the benefit of our wider community is the Camden/Hampstead/Belsize Park Interfaith Matters, an inter-religious clergy association. From a handful in January, we have extended our reach to leaders in over 15 religious institutions: Jewish Orthodox (2) and non-Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim Shiite and Sunni. The group has enabled us to hold important religious dialogue on extremism and the need to combat anti-Semitism.

Through this body, I spoke at the Islamic Centre of England (in Maida Vale), where I called for dialogue with a Sunni mosque which had invited a well-known anti-Semite from Qatar to London. Dialogue can make people aware of the dangers and reduce the damage.

In May we hosted the outgoing Mayor of Camden's Interfaith Dinner, with 25 religious lay leaders of all faiths. I took the occasion to introduce them to Judaism. Such interaction is invaluable, and I firmly believe BSS can play an important role. It is a little known fact that one of the major failings of Jewish life in Berlin was the absence of inter-religious dialogue. By remaining insular, with no meeting ground to cultivate friendship and mutual respect, any possibility of averting the destructive hatred against Jews that led to the Shoah was lost. We are hoping to put together a Limmud-type study day for all religious faiths, as a huge step towards fostering better relations.

So there's lots to do. Just a note: Yom Kippur services will begin at 9.30am rather than 10.00am. *Pseukei d'Zimra* (early morning Psalms) will be abbreviated to make time for later parts of the service and a 45-minute discussion before *Mincha* on The Jewish Future. We'll uplift our services even more spiritually and intellectually.

My very best to you and your loved ones for a joyous and fulfilling summer.

Rabbi Stuart Altshuler

**Tisha B'Av Service
and the Annual Memorial
Service of the Chevra Kadisha**

Sunday 26 July at 11.30am

**Liberal Jewish Cemetery
Pound Lane, Willesden, NW10**

TISHA B'AV
A TIME TO MOURN

Selichot Service & Dinner
Saturday 5 September 2015 ~ 7.45pm for 8.00pm

Our Selichot evening programme will have a new format this year.

Havdalah

Fish & Chip Supper followed by Dessert (price TBA)
Discussion led by Rabbi Altshuler

Followed at 10.00pm by our traditional musical *Selichot Service*
Led by Cantor Paul Heller, together with Ben Wolf
and The Belsize Square Synagogue Choir





FROM COFFEE SPOON TO STOLPERSTEINE

Josie Dobrin discovers her family's Berlin coffee shops

On 2 February last year, I got an email out of the blue, which set us on a remarkable journey of family discovery. The email from Berlin resident Alexandra Scholz, aged 30, said:

“We are very glad that we found contact to you [sic]. And we are deeply touched about the tragic history of the family Dobrin. We are ready to give back this spoon to your family, perhaps it is – besides photos – the only relic [sic] and souvenir to your ancestry. If you are interested please write how we could realize it.”

As a child, I would help out in the shops called Clare's, selling beautiful hand-made chocolates in central London, owned by my grandparents. We used to hear about the wonderful Café Dobrin establishments they had owned in Berlin before the Second World War but, like many Jews, my grandparents didn't want to return to Berlin after the war to visit their former homes.

In June 2014, just four months after receiving that email, I found myself holding the silver spoon and watching Stolpersteine being laid outside the house in the Berlin suburb of Grunewald which, from 1919 until the late 1930s, had belonged to my great-grandparents. Stolpersteine, literally stumbling stones, are pavement-level memorial plaques conceived by German artist Gunter Demnig in 1993 and inaugurated in 1997, which have been adopted as a local initiative across Germany – though not in Munich.

I was joined by a special group of eight other Dobrin descendants (including my mother and two sisters) from three generations and three countries.

At the age of 40 I finally learnt first-hand about my grandparents and great-grandparents and the wonderful



Members of the Dobrin/Cohn families outside a former Dobrin's Conditorei, still in use as a cafe today. Jeremy Cohn, Norbert and Miriam's oldest child and a former Belsize youth leader, is in the centre with his arm round his nephew, Eitan, one of the triplets of his brother, Anthony. Left of Eitan is his brother, Gav. The third triplet, Elny, is on the far right. Jeremy's late second cousin's wife, Barbara Dobrin, is second right. Her daughter, Josie, is between her and Jeremy. Her other two daughters are Louise (far left) and Caroline.

lives they had led in pre-war Germany. Our great-grandmother, Helena Leiser, was born in Leipzig in August 1878. She met Moritz Dobrin, who was to become her husband, whilst purchasing a tie.

Moritz, born in 1872 to a horse dealer from Slochow in East Prussia, was one of seven children. The others were Cecilia, Wolf, Diver, Marie, Herman and Isidor (whose daughter, Miriam, was a longstanding member of Belsize Square Synagogue along with her husband, Norbert Cohn). Miriam and Norbert's oldest son, Jeremy, an inspirational former youth leader at BSS now living in Jerusalem, travelled to Berlin with us, along with Jeremy's triplet nephews (the children of his younger brother, Anthony, in London).

Moritz and Helena had three children, including my grandfather Max, who married Ida Ginsberg. The older of their two sons was our father, Michael, who passed away in 2007 and sadly missed this historic trip.

Moritz was a baker and opened his first business in 1896. He owned six cafes in total and his brother Isidor owned a further five. These 11 high-class establishments put Café Dobrin at the heart of pre-war society in Berlin and were frequently mentioned in literature of the period. Moritz and Isidor were founding members of the Grunewald synagogue and on the Board of the Jewish Old Age Home. Moritz was also on the Board of the Berlin Jewish Deaf and Dumb Association.

Moritz's cafes were destroyed on Kristallnacht in November 1938 but he continued to trade. He had served in the German army in the First World War and been awarded the Iron Cross First Class. In 1937 he and his wife had visited their son Max in London but returned to Berlin, thinking they would be spared by the Nazis.



The Stolpersteine outside the former home of Moritz and Helene Dobrin, Miriam Cohn's grandparents, in the Berlin suburb of Grunewald.



The spoon, taken from a Dobrin cafe, which set the whole story off

Max and his wife, Ida, had gone to England at the urging of Ida and her parents, who had experienced Russian pogroms, escaped the Russian Revolution and recognised the real threat posed by Hitler. The couple left Germany, apparently as tourists on holiday to England carrying tennis racquets, and Max got down to restarting his fine pastry-making craft, together with a partner, in London. Ida's parents left Germany for British mandate Palestine.

In August 1942 Moritz and Helena were deported to Theresienstadt, the Czech ghetto created as a showpiece camp to deceive the Red Cross. Moritz worked in the camp bakery, so had access to food. Tragically, he was not able to get food to his wife and she died there in 1944.

A few months later, in a freak gesture, Himmler allowed some 1,200 Jews to be released from Theresienstadt to Switzerland. Moritz was one of those lucky few. He moved to London after the war and got to know his British-born grandsons. He attended our father's Bar Mitzvah in 1950 and died a year later in 1951.

Isidor and his wife were deported to Auschwitz in 1943 and killed on arrival. But their daughter, Miriam, had been sent to England on a Kindertransport in April 1939. She later met Norbert Cohn, to whom she was distantly related through her mother, and they married at our Synagogue (then known as the New Liberal Jewish Congregation) in 1963.

Norbert also grew up in Grunewald but he escaped from Germany with his parents and brother. His father, too, had been active in the synagogue there.

The penultimate part of our Berlin tour was the laying of the Stolpersteine memorial stones for Moritz and Helena outside their former home in Hagenstrasse 19. During the War, the Mufti of Jerusalem inhabited the house while Heinrich Himmler lived at number 22. After the war, the house fell into disrepair. Fortunately the current owner has restored it to its original grandeur.

The connection with Alexandra Scholz, the Berlin resident who originally contacted us, was that her great-grandfather supplied chocolate to pastry shops and cafes. He would often bring along his daughter, Alexandra's grandmother.

It was during one of these business visits that Alexandra's grandmother took a spoon from the cafe, inscribed Moritz Dobrin's Conditorei. In later life, it was the spoon she always used for stirring her coffee. Recently, Alexandra, curious about her grandmother's odd silver spoon, decided to find out its origins. She came across Isidor Dobrin's grandson, Jeremy Cohn, over the internet and contacted him to find out how she could return it. It was a really exciting moment for us when we saw it for the first time.

A small crowd turned up for the very moving Stolpersteine ceremony, during which Alexandra handed over the spoon to us. The nine of us Dobrin descendants together spent an incredible three days walking the streets of Berlin, visiting every family landmark in the city, including the sites of the former Jewish Old Age Home, our grandmother's school, their homes and each of Moritz's six Conditorei across the city. It culminated in a trip to Gleis 17 – platform 17 at Grunewald train station – from where Moritz and Helena were deported to Theresienstadt.

Each year in Israel on Yom HaShoah the names of victims of the Holocaust are recited at the Knesset, under the title *To Every Man A Name*. The Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem is called Yad Vashem. The phrase, taken from the story of David and Absalom in Samuel II, means a memorial site, a "hand and name". Until June 2014, Moritz and Helena were just names but, through this journey of discovery, they have come to life after all. Finally we have memorial stones for them.

For us, however, there is a further Yad Vashem, an enduring memorial: their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Belsize Square Synagogue still has a Dobrin among its members, Jackie Dobrin, who is the author's first cousin. Miriam Cohn, née Dobrin, died in September 2004 and her husband, Norbert, died in June last year. Friends of the Cohns contributed to dedicating a bench with a memorial plaque to the couple, which was installed in Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery shortly before Norbert's yarzeit. There was no stonemasonry service as, according to his family, "Norbert hated stonemasonry."



One of the Dobrin cafe establishments in 1896

Memorial Bench for Norbert and Miriam Cohn

Letter to the Congregation from Judith Cohn, Norbert and Miriam's youngest child

We would like to express our gratitude for the lovely bench at Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery.

It is hard to put into words the deep emotional attachment which our family feel for BSS. Our parents would refer to the Synagogue (NEVER Shull!) as a second home and the congregation as their wider family.

Even towards the end of his life, our father still took great pleasure in reading *Our Congregation*, knowing not only every person who was mentioned, but often instructing us on their parents, in-laws and then their parents! We know that they would both have been deeply deeply touched by your very kind gesture, as indeed, we are.

With thanks
Judith, Anthony and Jeremy Cohn



Co-Chairs' AGM Reports

A ROLLER-COASTER YEAR

John Abramson's Review of 2014-2015

The last three years have been a voyage of discovery – about our community, its origins, traditions and place in the wider community of British Jews. I have learned about our members, now into the fourth and even fifth generation of our founders.

Many of our members, like me, come from a different tradition and each brings something to the table. I have received many compliments from new members who notice that we are warm, welcoming and, above all, tolerant.

We have a lot to offer. We have a beautiful tradition with accompanying freedom and independence. We have magnificent music. We have our own prayer books, deriving from and paying tribute to those in the German Liberal movement who preceded us.

We have our campus – a terrific sanctuary, comfortable office space (even if in need of a little care and attention), and a much used hall. Our services are delivered by our ministers with love of the community, Torah and God. All this resonates with new members and immediately strikes visitors. Let us never take it for granted.

In the last three years I have also faced complaints. Shy and retiring, we are not. "Why's there a new tune for *Tov l'Hodot*? I have been coming here for 45 years and now there is a new tune." Why is the service so long? So short? Where can I park?

I have said "our" a lot. This is because I am only half the story. The other half is my co-chair, Suzanne, without whom nothing would get done. She has endless patience, can tolerate inefficiency and is pragmatic and wise. We are privileged to have benefited from this. Suzanne, thank you so much for your commitment and hard work.

And now to my review of the past year.

Liturgical: Our primary purpose is to provide religious inspiration, fulfilment and education. All our vibrant activities should be centred around our services and our religious traditions. No one feels this more keenly than Rabbi Altshuler. He has brought a different energy to our services, following and preserving our traditions, but within the context of his Conservative background and training. Some of our time has been spent with him on maintaining the balance between

tradition and innovation. Some of our members are particularly skilled at pointing out when that balance may have tipped an iota either way.

We are also grateful to Rabbi Altshuler for his total immersion in adult education. He has re-engineered Sunday mornings into vibrant learning sessions, even venturing offsite to Jewish Book Week and the British Museum. His Monday evening conversion classes attract a steady stream of students. I am delighted to confirm that, over the last year, six new members have come to us through the Rabbi's conversion class.

Last year marked the completion of Cantor Heller's first year as our cantor. These days it is quite unusual to have a full-time cantor. At every service I am deeply grateful for the Board's wisdom and foresight in making this decision. Cantor Heller has enriched our services and has helped hugely by taking charge of the Bar Mitzvah programme.

One aspect of our services has begun to concern us. We have noticed that attendance seems to be dropping for some services. We are realistic about the demographic of our community and the lives we lead. However, we would like to understand our attendance patterns. We have asked Joe Brookes, chair of the Liturgical Committee, to investigate this further. The committee has already started work. We look forward to further output.

Music: Under the able leadership of Philip Keller, the Music Committee continues to produce rich programmes of excellent and intelligent events for the benefit of us all. Notable events were a terrific Jazz Evening in early December, followed by a piano recital by Alice Burla, protégée of the renowned violinist, Maxim Vengerov, who is also a personal friend of our Rabbi. In April the Wallace Ensemble performed the world premiere of Ben Wolf's *L'Chaim* Piano Concerto, conducted by Mike Cayton (our organist) with Ben as soloist. Ben is, of course, our choirmaster. Now in its third season, I can safely say the Music Committee has made its mark.

Cemetery: Our cemetery project has been successfully delivered via a small hard-working and committed team, led by Elizabeth Nisbet, Keith Conway and Steven Bruck. They have now handed the cemetery over as a going concern.



Elizabeth has stepped down down as chair of the Burial and Cemetery Committee, with our heartfelt thanks for her inspiration and dedication, to become chair of the Education Committee. It gives me great pleasure to welcome Jackie Alexander as new chair of the BCC. I would also like to record the significant efforts of our Director of Administration, Lee Taylor, who has brought order to this part of our community's activities.

Finance: You will shortly hear from the Hon Treasurer about our finances. It is a familiar tale. Our expenditure is not matched by revenue and we depend upon fundraising and donations to make up the difference. In April we held our second Night of Promises, a glittering occasion at which donated items were auctioned, raising a still-to-be finalised figure of around £75,000. An amazing result, and immense gratitude to Tom, Annette, Dennis and Marion Nathan and their team for this superb result. The annual Bazaar was highly successful, with brisk business raising just under £10,000. Philip Brass, who has run this event for the last three years, has handed it over in great shape to Vera Pollins and Annette Nathan to train a new generation of bazaar leaders.

Last year's treasurer's report was delivered by Frank Harding, who stepped in to finalise the 2013 accounts. We are immensely grateful to him for all his hard work. Soon after the AGM, the Board appointed Jimmy Strauss as Hon Treasurer, and Suzanne and I were delighted to welcome him to the team.

Facilities: I have already mentioned our campus. All of this needs constant care and maintenance, including things you don't notice, like kitchen equipment, the closed circuit TV system, the toilets. All of this goes on behind the scenes and is managed by the Facilities Committee under the expert leadership of Dennis Nathan. The hard work is actually done by our caretaker, Gordon Larkin, and his assistant Paul. They are hugely

deserving of our thanks for all they do for our community.

We are constantly reviewing the use of our facilities. Keren's Nursery continues to rent part of our building during the week. After the AJR stopped using our hall, we rented it to the Central School of Speech and Drama while their premises were being renovated. The Sea Scouts continue to use the Scout Hut.

Security has been an issue, especially in the wider Jewish community context. Since February we have enhanced our procedures and liaised with the Community Security Trust and Camden police's anti-terrorist squad. I am pleased to announce that Justyn

Trenner has taken responsibility for ensuring that our voluntary security officers, drawn from members, have the right briefing and training for their job. Security is crucial and we count on our volunteers.

Officers and Board: When we were elected we also became Co-Chairs of the Board, which is regulated by the Companies Act as well as the Charities Commission. Constitutionally, the Board is the governing authority of the community. Over the last three years, the Board has challenged us on various issues, for which we are grateful. It is not a responsibility to be undertaken lightly.

Tonight three members of the Board will

be elected, accepting a leadership position in the community. We also say goodbye to Brenda Brod, Marion Nathan and Deborah Cohen, who are standing down. Our heartfelt thanks to each for long and valuable service.

Thanks: I think Suzanne and I have covered just about everyone. But I would like to record my deepest thanks to my wife, Paula, who continues to support me and tolerate my frequent absences on shul business.

Finally, and again, my thanks to every member for making this the special community we love and cherish. It is through you we remain and will flourish for the next 75 years. Thank you.

SUZANNE GOLDSTEIN ON NEW FACES AT THE HELM

But another year for our Co-Chairs

This year I want to talk about changes not only on the staff but about those who have volunteered to take on further responsibility for the community.

We gave Dorothy White, our retiring Community Care Co-ordinator, a Belsize goodbye and wish her only good things for the future. She leaves the job in a position of strength for Eve Hersov to inherit. Eve is a member of this community, with years of professional experience working with elderly people and care-giving organisations. She is an enthusiastic, efficient and caring person and we welcome her to this office.

Now for those who volunteered for new responsibilities: Emma Brookes heads up the Editorial and Communications Committee and Justyn Trenner will help co-ordinate the increasingly important members' Security rota.

We thank John Alexander for the many years of managing the High Holydays with the help of the office. He is succeeded by David Pollins, whom many of you know as former Youth Committee chair and helping with our LiveStream facility. His organisational ability and reliability will be a terrific asset. Clive Goldstein – whom some of you may also know as my husband, the Michelle Obama of this community – has taken on the role of preparing the financial statements for the auditors, which Jon Pollins did so ably for so long.

Deborah Nerva Cohen has resigned as Hon Secretary after a year and we thank her for all her work. Before that she was Treasurer from 2010-2012 and she stepped in again in 2013 when we were without a Treasurer. We wish her well in her new job.

Annette Nathan has stepped up to this role, for which we are very grateful. Annette has been a true doer, involved in so many aspects of BSS – to name a few: Youth Committee, LiveStream, Bazaar and Night of Promises. We know she has the dedication and commitment to help us continue our work and I am truly excited to be working with her.

We are fortunate that Jimmy Strauss has taken on the role of Treasurer after Frank Harding's temporary standing-in. John and I have worked with Jimmy for the last 12 months and he has been a most welcome addition to the team. Jimmy grew up in this community and has a wealth of knowledge for us to call upon. We look forward to continuing with him on board.

For all these people to function, we need the professional support of Lee and the office. Without Lee, Adam, Jagdish and Jennifer, none of our volunteers would be able to follow through on their commitments. Thank you, Lee, for your patience, hard work and calm disposition, which has been invaluable, as has been Adam's advice and sense of humour.

As you know, John and I were due to step down from this position tonight, as it is the end of our three-year term. Despite a protracted search for our successors, it seemed that no one felt able to take on this responsibility. John and I have agreed to stay on as Co-Chairs for another year but we will not be persuaded to do so again. That means the search begins today for new leaders.

We must reflect on the consequences if no one has stepped forward by this time



next year. The congregation simply can't function without these positions being filled. Our search intensifies now! Ideally the new Co-Chairs should come from Committee Chairs, Board or Executive. When the appropriate people are found, they will shadow us over this year with a clear understanding of what this important job entails.

Working with committees, Board, Executive, as well as Ministers, is a huge privilege and one that I have enjoyed immensely. But the most significant part for me has been the opportunity to interact with our community, in good as well as difficult times. We know that we all struggle to make best use of time. The future Chair has to be a good time-keeper, as measuring and managing this is the most important skill.

I am confident that this time next year this community will have new leaders committed to taking us forward. It will be a challenge and a responsibility to which we all have to respond.

HONORARY OFFICERS

Co-Chairs: Suzanne Goldstein and John Abramson

Hon Secretary: Annette Nathan

Asst Hon Secretary: Rob Nothman

Hon Treasurer: Jimmy Strauss

Asst Hon Treasurer: Adam Hurst

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

John Alexander, Elizabeth Nisbet, Hilary Solomon, Justyn Trenner

BOARD OF THE BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

John Alexander, Philip Brass, Joe Brookes, Steven Bruck, Paul Burger, Keith Conway, Simon Cutner, Adam Davis, Adam Hurst, Pat Hirschovits, Francis Joseph, Freddy Lehmann, Dalia Lichfield, Adam Nathan, Annette Nathan, Elizabeth Nisbet, Rob Nothman, Richard Pollins, Vera Pollins, David Rothenberg, Sam Sanders, Hilary Solomon, Anthony Stadlen, Jimmy Strauss, Dilys Tausz, Justyn Trenner, Ruth Vered, Nick Viner, Claire Walford.

SINGING IN THE SHUL

Henny Levin reports on (and sang in) the 4th European Jewish Choral Festival 2015

A rainbow of sound was heard at North London venues over the mid-June weekend when six choirs sang together at the 4th European Jewish Choir Festival.

The festival began life in London in 2012 as the brainchild of Zemel Choir's Musical Director, Ben Wolf. The 2013 festival was celebrated in Rome and in 2014 it took place in Vienna.

Ukraine was to have hosted this year's festival but, unfortunately, politics got in the way. We were especially delighted to welcome the Ukrainian group, who had travelled by coach for over 30 hours to be with us in London.

The six choirs consisted of Ensemble Choral Copernic from Paris; Leipziger Synagogalchor from Leipzig; Livi Varnitshkes Ensemble from the Ukraine; Coro Ha-Kol from Rome; Synagogal Ensemble from Berlin; and Zemel Choir from London. Included in their groups were professional and amateur singers, instrumentalists and soloists.

Each choir brought along its own special type of music ranging from liturgical to Yiddish, folk and show-tunes, by composers such as Lewandowski, Sulzer, Michael Alpert and Chava Alberstein.

Based at a hotel in Wembley, the first day was spent in three mixed choir groups, learning new works to be performed at the final Gala Concert. In the evening, each choir gave a short concert to their fellow choristers. This gave a flavour of what was to come over the next few days.

The variety was immense. We heard two examples from the Coro Ha-Kol performing liturgical music specific to the Rome community, using libretti we knew but set to entirely different music. In contrast, the Ukrainian group from Lviv, so full of vibrancy, sang their traditional folk music and Yiddish songs.

On Friday we continued with our workshops. After a short lunch break, we transferred to Belsize Square for a walk in Hampstead followed by a rehearsal for the Evening Service.

What a wonderful sound the six choirs plus the Belsize Square choir made that evening. Placed at different points around the

Synagogue with a full congregation in the middle, our traditional service took on a new intensity.

With Cantor Heller leading the service, the choirs from Berlin, Leipzig, Paris, Rome, Ukraine and Belsize Square plus Zemel at times sang a section of the service on their own. At other times they participated as one. Cantor Isaac Sheffer mounted the bimah to lead the Berlin Choir in *Tov l'Hodot*. The Leipziger Synagogalchor sang *W'Shomru* (their spelling) with soprano Anja Poche and the Rome Choir sang *Oseh Shalom*.

The sound was magnificent and gave both participants and congregants an uplifting experience. Ben Wolf's short speech was especially inspired by the fact that the German choirs performing at our Synagogue consisted of Jews and non-Jews alike.

Their desire to perform our liturgical music was especially poignant for our community and its roots. It was a chance for music to bridge the gap in troubled times in Europe, which may very well have affected some of the participants directly.

Saturday afternoon was free for choristers to explore London. On a drizzly Sunday morning, the groups were taken to Camden Market and the Jewish Museum, followed by afternoon rehearsals at West London Synagogue for the Gala Concert that evening.

In a beautiful setting with a large audience, the choirs sang to perfection their own styles of Jewish music. Their conductors led them through powerful and uplifting pieces, interspersed with their "workshop" songs. The concert culminated in the Massed Choirs singing *Yigdal* and *Sh'hecheyanu* with Robert

Brodie as soloist echoing through the whole building.

Choirmasters Regina Yantian (Berlin), Andrea Orlando (Rome), Ludwig Bohme (Leipzig), Alexandra Somysh (Ukraine) and Ben Wolf (London) were thanked by Anthony Cohen, chairman of the European Jewish Choral Festival (Zemel Choir), and Diane Sheer, chairman of Zemel Choir, for their participation and the friendships formed. The presentation of certificates brought the event to a close.



*Six choirs in full voice:
Gala Concert at West London Synagogue*

DOUBLE DEBUT AT CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT

Review by Lawrence Joffe

Only rarely do concertgoers enjoy a double debut, let alone hear a living composer both performing and explaining his work. Yet that was the case with the Wallace Ensemble's April concert at the Synagogue on Jewish themes.

The first debut came when Benjamin Wolf treated a packed audience to his *L'Chaim* piano concerto with a wholly remastered second movement. The second featured the first public solo performance by cellist Mika Hyman, playing Max Bruch's immortal and poignant *Kol Nidrei Suite*. For 16-year-old Mika, whose family belong to the Belsize community, it was as much a homecoming as a debut.

The programme opened with the uplifting baroque trumpet of Handel's fanfare, *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*. Taken from his 1748 oratorio *Solomon* and lasting barely three minutes, the piece set the scene for the evening. As Belsize music programme co-ordinator Philip Keller noted in his introduction to the audience, Jewish aspects linked everything, if not the composer then the moods, motifs or references.

He then illustrated his point by guest-conducting Sergei Prokofiev's 1920 miniature masterpiece, *Overture on Jewish Themes*. A perfectly orchestrated assembly of both joyous and plaintive klezmer-sounding melodies, the piece prepared the ground for Wolf's equally life-affirming *L'Chaim*, with the composer himself at the piano.

The concerto, which was assisted by a Millennium Award from the Jewish Music Institute, premiered in 2003. Twelve years on and its first and third movements – entitled *Traditions* and *Dance* respectively – are restructured and streamlined, while an entirely new middle movement, *Prayer*, was specially composed for this concert by Wolf, who also directs the Zemel and Belsize Square Choirs.

Where *Traditions* quotes prayer modes, blended with syncopated melody, *Prayer* fuses piano inventions with orchestral responses and the sound of actual *leyning* to an Ashkenazi trope, familiar to Belsize members. The movement also combines with snatches of jazz, modern symphonic techniques and traditional melodies, like *Shema Koleinu*. And the five chanted Biblical texts straddle the paradox of a "stiff-necked people" who nonetheless are called on to "choose life".

As the excellent programme notes explain: "They suggest an acknowledgement that life – and divine will – are not as simple as the initial covenant might suggest, and that a relationship with the divine is marked by unpredictability ... The pleading nature of these melodies acknowledges suffering but hopes for its end."

L'Chaim concludes with the jaunty klezmer and Israeli-influenced *Dance*, drawing on the Jewish version of the Phrygian mode. The piece is an ambitious project. Yet in the capable hands of Wolf and under the baton of guest conductor Michael Cayton (who amongst other posts serves as organist at Belsize), the fusion of such diverse elements evidently worked and was rapturously received.

Post interval, with its tasty spread, came *Kol Nidrei*, in which Mika Hyman showed a maturity beyond her years. Soon discarding initial nerves, she tackled with aplomb and great sensitivity Bruch's explorations of the famously sonorous melody. The programme notes contained a revelation: the fact that the Christian German Romantic Max Bruch composed this piece in Liverpool, where he conducted the Philharmonic Society for three years.

A pared-down Ensemble of 13 players ended the evening with an evocative rendition of Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Though composed for a ballet, its narrative quality works equally well as a chamber piece. Here the individual musicianship of the Ensemble – co-founded by Wolf in 2001 and co-directed by him since 2004 – really shone through, and the shul acoustics brilliantly captured spring's sparse fresh morning feel.

Besides the famous *Lord of the Dance* tune, the suite's eight sections celebrate the romance, challenges, hardships and rewards of 19th-century Pennsylvania settlers. Not obviously Jewish subject matter for a Jewish composer, you might think. Yet at second glance (or hearing) you realise that Copland's universal themes have a particular Jewish resonance too – a suitably contemplative send-off for a memorable evening.

Course in Jewish Liturgy

Learn to Leyn (chanting) Cantillation of the Torah
with Cantor Paul Heller

8 September – 15 December
Held on alternate Tuesdays
From 7pm - 8pm
In the Synagogue Library

Open to anyone interested in
learning the unique trope used
in the Synagogue on Shabbat.

A wonderful chance to repeat
your Bar/Bat Mitzvah portion



Belsize Square Synagogue and
Cantor Heller invite you to...

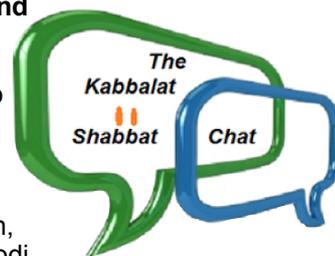
An Erev Shabbat opportunity to
learn and share with the future
B'nei Mitzvah

Let's Learn:

to make Kiddush,
to sing Lecha Dodi
the lessons of the Parsha



4 September 2015 at 5.30pm in the Library
Then the first Friday of the month
Refreshments will be provided



COMING OF AGE UNDER COMMUNISM

Tracy Chevalier reviews *The Orphan Sky*

What do you think of when you hear the word Azerbaijan? Until I read Ella Leya's *The Orphan Sky*, it was the Eurovision Song Contest (Azerbaijan – douze points!).

Belsize Square's very own rebbetzin has written a novel that will be a welcome corrective, opening up a world and a time most of us know little of. Indeed, *The Orphan Sky* is the first English-language book in 78 years to be set in Azerbaijan.

Taking place in the capital Baku during Soviet-era 1970s, it is a coming-of-age story of Leila, a young piano prodigy who struggles to remain a good Communist while being tempted by the freedoms of Western music and thought. Comrade Farhad, who takes more than a fraternal interest in Leila, assigns her to spy on a record shop he suspects of anti-Soviet activities. Inevitably she falls for both its owner, the bohemian painter Tahir, and the Billie Holliday, Nina Simone, and Vladimir Horowitz he plays for her.

This love triangle represents a wider political debate about socialist ideology versus individual freedom of expression. In the end, Leila must choose, not only between two men, but between two very different ways of living one's life.

Ella portrays Azerbaijani life from a sensualist's point of view – with much emphasis on the smells, the highly spiced food, the colourful clothes and the lively street-life of Baku. She brings it so vividly to life that I now want to visit the city with her book as a guide to this fascinating melting pot of cultures: "A Persian gem stolen by Arabs, looted by Turks, lost in the Mongolian empire, tossed between the khanates, and finally picked up by the Tsar's Russia," is how Tahir describes Azerbaijan. The title of the book comes from a line of poetic lamentation over some past era.

She writes equally powerfully about music, and how and why it moves us. Here Ella speaks from the heart, and it will be no surprise to learn (if you don't know already) that she is a gifted jazz singer and pianist.

Indeed, though *The Orphan Sky* is not strictly autobiographical, you will feel you know our talented rebbetzin much better by the end of the book. My only regret is that neither Leila nor any of the other characters is Jewish, though Ella herself is testament that there was – and still is – a Jewish community in Azerbaijan. Perhaps she is saving that for another book!

The Orphan Sky by Ella Leya, published by Sourcebooks, £9.99 or visit www.ellaleya.com/book



2015/5776 HIGH HOLYDAYS AT BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

Tickets & Information

Members of the congregation will shortly receive in the post a pack with all the information required for our High Holyday Services. This will include tickets for each family member, which are sent out automatically. Application for tickets is now only required for non-members. The pack also includes application forms for non-members' tickets, prayer books and transport requirements/volunteer provision. Please do not discard the contents of this mailing.

Please contact the synagogue office if you would like to discuss any aspect of these arrangements.

Please note: The synagogue office will be open for the collection of High Holyday Prayer Books and non-member tickets on Sunday 13 September between 10.00am - 12.00pm

Service Information

Rosh Hashanah

1st Eve: Sunday 13 September - 6.45pm
1st Day: Monday 14 September - 9.30am
2nd Eve: Monday 14 September - 6.45pm
2nd Day: Tuesday 15 September - 9.30am

Kol Nidrei - Fast commences 6.45pm
Tuesday 22 September - 7.00pm

Yom Kippur

Wednesday 23 September - 9.30am

Selichot Service

Saturday 5 September at 10.00pm

Preceded by 2-course fish supper at 8.00pm prompt
Havdalah and discussion (see advertisement on page 1)

KEVER AVOT

(Visiting the Grounds)

On Sunday 6 September at 11.00am we will come together at Edgwarebury Cemetery in a service to remember our family and friends who are buried at Edgwarebury Lane

MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS ON EXCITING DEVELOPMENT PLANS

We want to tell you about an exciting project we are considering in order to improve our facilities here at Belsize Square and to prepare for the future by modernising.

We plan to replace our existing hall with a new multi-use hall and a new open space on the Square. We are also planning a small extension to the Synagogue in order comfortably to accommodate our growing community on those days each year when we are at full capacity. To enable these improvements to be delivered, a small number of new residential units will be included in the development.

The new multi-use hall and open space will not only benefit our members but also, where possible, the wider community. We will have the benefit of a new, modern and flexible space for simchas, entertainment, education and social activities.

After the initial display of our development plans at the Synagogue at the end of June to members, the exhibition will be open to the wider community on Wednesday 1 July from 12 noon-9.00pm, when representatives from our professional advisers will be on hand to answer questions. We have written to all our neighbours to inform them.

We would very much like to welcome you to an exhibition and hear your views. If you have any comments or questions about the scheme, please do not hesitate to contact us via the Synagogue Office.

Can You Make a Couple of Phone Calls or Visits? Eve Hersov is looking for you

Many thanks for the overwhelming show of support from people volunteering to become "readers" for the audio recording of *Our Congregation*. I look forward to each new volunteer taking the opportunity to participate in the recording process over the next six months. And if anyone knows a member who might enjoy listening to *Our Congregation*, please do let me know.

My next request is for anyone interested in volunteering to make occasional visits to older members or become a

"Telefriend." Telefriends phone a small list of older members between two and four times a year to check on how they are. Neither role needs to take up a lot of time. All responsibilities can be discussed so that we achieve a good "fit." For instance, some visitors only make local visits while others travel a bit farther. Even making one visit a year is a help and a mitzvah.

Contact Eve by email at eve@synagogue.org.uk or telephone her on 020 7435 7129.

CROSSING JERUSALEM

Park Theatre, Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, N4 3JP

Julia Pascal, the only British Jewish playwright exploring the complexity of Israel-Palestine on the English stage presents her new play, *Crossing Jerusalem*.

Previews: Sat 4 August | **Press Night:** Sun 5 August at 7pm
Evenings: Tues-Sat 7.45pm | **Matinees:** Thurs & Sat 3.15pm
Prices: Previews: £12.50 | **Full Price:** £18, Conc. £15

Booking: 020 7840 6876 or online at www.parktheatre.co.uk

Located less than 30 seconds from Finsbury Park Station on the Piccadilly Line, Park Theatre is only minutes from the West End.

SAVE THE DATE BMG PUZZLE EVENING

Sunday 15 November 7.30pm

For a fabulous fun filled evening please put the date in your diary and invite your friends and family. The BMG will be providing a yummy home cooked supper and the Happy Puzzle Company will be providing a stimulating selection of puzzles that are suitable for all ages. Watch out for further details in the next issue of *Our Congregation*.



Congratulations to our intrepid freelance designer and setter for *Our Congregation*, Philip Simon, who spent the last weekend of May cycling 135 miles from the Olympic Stadium in Stratford through rural Essex to Harwich (the port of arrival for the unaccompanied minors on the Kindertransport) and, after an overnight crossing to the Hook of Holland, finished in Amsterdam.

All this to reach the narrow Anne Frank House, disproportionately made up of stairs following such a long ride, though he found Dutch roads a far more cycle-friendly experience than British roads.

But the trials and tribulations, which included freezing rain, two punctured tyres, a dodgy back, ropey knees and an eye infection, did not stop him from finding it all "an incredible experience" and raising nearly £1,300 for the Anne Frank Trust UK. Among his 20 fellow-cyclists were our members, Sara Pollins and Andy Burke.

Philip, who in his other life is an award-winning stand-up comedian, is a firm believer in the Trust's mission to educate people, especially young people, about the damage caused by all forms of prejudice and discrimination. The donation page is still up, so if you'd like to support this challenge you can do so by going to <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/PhilipCyclesLondonToAmsterdam>



Left to right: Philip, Andy and Sara, looking happy before the ride.



Dear Fellow Members

I know that a month ago has passed away since the AMG, but I am still overly upset. I was so very much looking forward to making my attendance and had already prepared a few words to deliver from the auditorium. Before sitting off outdoors to Belsize Square I set down at home for a few minutes together my notes, and the next thing I know I am waking up in front of David Cameron who is talking to me on the television. Mrs Klopstick let me drop off and left me to sleep till I woke up in the middle of the nine o'clock news programme. If I was going to drop off, I would have preferred to do so at the AGM.

As I miss the opportunity to make my voice known I am using this column to announce my proposal what I wanted to make last month. Although I am to a certain extent deaf, I do very much appreciate the great musical heritage of the Congregation which is being continuously multiplied on by the talents from doctors Ben Wolf, Rev. Paul Heller and of course Rabbi Alts(c)huler and all our singers. I understand that we have 150 quires coming to give the next concert, which is a Jewish world record in Europe.

Some years before-hand Belsize Square and Buckland Crescent was reverberating with the great words of Göthe, Schakespeare and Schiller. On top of this was many plays written and performed by ironic members who were steep in the dramatic arts. We also were rolling about with laughing at the many reviews produced and also performed by our own home-grown memberships. Apart from the music we were known for this also. It would be a wonderful thing if a dramatic or reviews would come into existence again. I believe that in this age of the eye-patch and eye-tablet, it would be a good thing for our youngsters to see what can be

made without pressing and clicking! It will take them, for a short while away from e-mail, Facebook and Twitter, which can be no bad thing.



**Klopstick's
Kompliment**

I know that this can't be made in five minutes, but perhaps over the summer holidays those interested will have it as a foot for sort. I am more than happy to be consoled on this as I have in the past trodden on board many times. Although, Mrs Klopstick is not over comfortable on top of the stage, she is both a comprehensible make-up artist and first-class prompter from the wings.

On the second Shabbas in June it was heart warming for me to see so many young people coming up to the Bima to collect their Humus for the study of their bar and bat mitzvah portions. Also there was a very big onslaught from bar and bat mitzvah anniversaries where the Rabbi made a blessing all over them. Even he received this himself from our Cantor for his birthday.

Now I think most of you will know that I don't like to throw myself forward, preferring to sit in the background and let others manifest themselves. As it happens it was also the anniversary of my own bar mitzvah on 1 June. But this was a Monday so I couldn't be called to the bima and with my legs as they are now, it would be too far to walk from the seventh row of the sanctuary.

This is the last addition now before September and the onset of autumn. So from the very bottom of my heart and also from the same bottom of Mrs Klopstick we wish you a very happy and safe holiday time.

With the best of intentions.

Fritz Klopstick

Scripture Readings

Candle Lighting	Date	Sidrah/Festival	Torah		Haftarah	
Friday 3 July Dani Weiss	4 July Tammuz 17	Balak	Numbers	23:27-25:9	Micah	5:6-6:8
Friday 10 July Carole Joseph	11 July Tammuz 24	Pinchas	Numbers	28:16-30:1	I Kings	18:46-19:21
Friday 17 July Patricia Hinson	18 July Av 2	Mattot-Mas'ei	Numbers	33:50-36:13	Jeremiah	2:4-28 & 3:4 & 4:1-2
Friday 24 July Sandra Burke	25 July Av 9	D'varim Shabbat Chazon	Deuteronomy	2:31-3:22	Isaiah	1:1-27
Friday 31 July Emily Goodman	1 August Av 16	Va'etchanan Shabbat Nachamu	Deuteronomy	5:1-7:11	Isaiah	40:1-26
Friday 7 August Harriet Jackson	8 August Av 23	Eikev	Deuteronomy	10:12-11:25	Isaiah	49:14-51:3
Friday 14 August Jenny Ross	15 August Av 30	R'eih Rosh Chodesh	Deuteronomy Numbers	15:1-16:17 28:9-15	Isaiah	66:1-24
Friday 21 August Deborah Samuelson	22 August Elul 7	Shoftim	Deuteronomy	19:14-21:9	Isaiah	51:12-52:12
Friday 28 August Rita Dos Santos	29 August Elul 14	Ki Teitzei	Deuteronomy	24:14-25:19	Isaiah	54:1-10

Community News

BIRTHDAYS

Congratulations and best wishes to:

Mr G Hellman (90) on 1 July
Mrs L Krieger (93) on 6 July
Mrs G Burns (92) on 8 July
Mrs L Kenley (87) on 9 July
Mr R Mercer (96) on 11 July
Mrs H Wilson (83) on 11 July
Mr B Lachmann (91) on 12 July
Mrs L Oppenheim (95) on 27 July

BAT MITZVAH

Congratulations and best wishes to:

Dani Weiss, daughter of Peter Weiss & Tania Linch, on 4 July

MARRIAGE

Congratulations to:

Simon Cohen & Marina Ehrlich on their Wedding that took place on Sunday 28 June

Sunday Morning Adult Discussion Group

Sunday July 5th

09.45 - 11.00: Great Philosophers & the Jewish Response
11.15 - 12.30: Gaby Bauer of Manna - UK branch of Meir Panim - Poverty in Israel

Sunday July 12th

SUMMER BREAK

Please come and join us.....

Jewish Community Event 'Security and Safety'

Wednesday 1st July
7pm to 9pm

JW3 Centre, Finchley Road, NW3 6ET

The evening will be presented by the Metropolitan Police Service in conjunction with the Community Security Trust and kindly hosted by JW3.

This is an opportunity to hear what your local Police and CST are doing to protect the Jewish community and to get answers to the questions that concern you.



The copy deadline for the next issue of *Our Congregation* is Tuesday 11 August

REGULAR SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm & Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids

4 July and 1 August at 11.00am

Under-5s Service in the Crèche

5-9 year-olds Service in the Library

11.30am – Kids Kiddush

Often followed by a Pot Luck Lunch

Contact Frank Joseph on 020 7482 2555 to bring a dish

Religion School

Sunday mornings: 9.30am-12.30pm

Term Ends: Sunday 12 July

Autumn Term begins: Sunday 20 September

LOCAL LUNCHEON GROUPS

Still running and happy to welcome new members
Please let us know if you plan to attend

The NW3 and Wembley Group

1.00pm on Wednesday 22 July and 19 August
Giacomo, 428 Finchley Road, London, NW2 2HY
Please phone Deborah Jay on 020 7435 8835
or Anne Goodwin on 020 8452 3997

The Edgware Group

12.30pm on **TUESDAY** 14 July, 11 August and 8 September
Amaretto, 12 The Promenade, Hale Lane, HA8 7JZ
Please phone Inge Strauss on 020 8958 9414
Please note change of day and dates for Edgware Group

BELSIZE BOOK CLUB

Wednesday 29 July at 8.00pm

We will be reading **Herzog** by **Saul Bellow**

Call Dorothy White on 020 8445 6388 for information



SAVE THE DATE: CHANUKAH BAZAAR

Saturday 12 December 5.00-8.00pm
Sunday 13 December 11.00am-4.00pm

Mega Machaneh!!!

Friday 14 July - Sunday 19 July for Years 7-9



A fun & unforgettable weekend with Belsize Friends!

Fun activities from morning till night
£115, including accommodation & tasty food
Friends from other synagogues are also welcome

RSVP to youth@synagogue.org.uk

BELSIZE SQUARE MEETS AZERBAIJAN A Different Tale of the Rabbi's Wife

Members of Belsize Square Synagogue and London's Azerbaijan community met at Waterstone's flagship bookshop in Piccadilly on 27 May for a very special book launch, *The Orphan Sky*, written by Ella Leya, aka Mrs Altshuler.

Better known as a jazz singer and pianist, Ella Leya has turned her hand to a novel about her native city, Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, combining the city's mediaeval myths with modern tensions, star-crossed love and, of course, music.

The evening was opened by the event's organiser, Dr Sabina Rakcheyeva, Arts and Cultural Advisor of The European Azerbaijan Society. The author answered questions about how long it took her to write the book (about three and a half years) and what inspired her to do so. Nostalgia was a powerful element, she explained.

"Although I have been an American for 25 years, I have never ceased to remain the daughter of my native country," she told her audience. "I am now proud that *The Orphan Sky* has taken me on a mission to introduce Azerbaijan to my Western audiences."

See book review on page 8



Ella Leya flanked by her husband, Rabbi Stuart Altshuler, and Dr Sabina Rakcheyeva, Arts and Cultural Advisor of The European Azerbaijan Society



Holding a spellbound audience

ROYAL GARDEN PARTY GUESTS

Invited to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party on 28 May, our member Judith Farbey QC met other synagogue connections.

Clive Sheldon QC was also a guest, along with his wife, Jeanie Horowitz, our head of Cheder. Jeanie said: "It is such a nice idea and was a lovely occasion." Hosting the event were Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip, Prince Michael and Princess Michael of Kent, and Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie. For Clive it was "a real treat to celebrate taking Silk."



A brace of QCs: Judith Farbey and Clive Sheldon

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

THE BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

51 Belsize Square, London, NW3 4HX
Tel: 020 7794 3949

Email: office@synagogue.org.uk
SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

9.00am - 5.30pm

Fridays: 9.00am-2.00pm

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Lee Taylor - 020 7794 3949

BELSIZE MEMBERS' GROUP

Co-chairs: Marion Nathan - 020 8361 2443

and Dilys Tausz - 020 7435 5996

CHEVRA KADISHA

Chairman: Rabbi Stuart Altshuler

Joint Vice Chairs: Helen Grunberg - 020 8450 8533

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

COMMUNITY CARE CO-ORDINATOR &
BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Contact Eve Hersov on 020 7435 7129

or email eve@synagogue.org.uk

or call the Synagogue Office for a leaflet

FUNERALS

During synagogue office hours phone 020 7794 3949.

Evenings/weekends phone Calo's (Undertakers)

020 8958 2112

JUDAICA SHOP

Open during office hours and on Sunday morning during
term time only

KIDDUSH

Rota enquiries to Jennifer Saul in the Synagogue Office
(not Thursdays or Fridays)

LIBRARY

Open Wednesdays 10am - 12 noon

At other times please check first with the office

CHEDER

Enquiries to the Head, Jeanie Horowitz, in the Synagogue
Office, or email jeanie@synagogue.org.uk

PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Chairperson: Mandy Brass - 020 8452 6936

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Email Youth Workers Yohel Heller and Michelle Heller -
youth@synagogue.org.uk

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Philip Simon: www.philipsimon.co.uk

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO *OUR CONGREGATION*

Emails to office@synagogue.org.uk

or to the Editor: ruth@famrothenberg.com

CO-CHAIRS

John Abramson and Suzanne Goldstein

07946 353340

MINISTER

Rabbi Dr Stuart Altshuler

rabbi@synagogue.org.uk

EMERITUS

Rabbi Rodney Mariner

rodmariner@aol.com / 020 8347 5306

CANTOR

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

cantor@synagogue.org.uk



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