SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN
THE MIDDLE EAST – GO EASY ON DESPAIR

JONATHAN BERGWERK
WE NEED OPTIMISTIC RABBIS

BARRY HYMAN
TALKS TO RONALD HARWOOD
1. Editorial

2. Lawrence Freedman | The Middle East – Go Easy on Despair

6. Jonathan Bergwerk | We Need Optimistic Rabbis

8. In the Eye of the Storm


16. Barry Hyman | In Conversation with Ronald Hanwood

20. Guy Wilkinson | A View from Lambeth

23. Lisa Stock | Our Teenagers Need More Jewish Support

25. Jeffery Rose | God's Mercy

27. The First Three Years

29. Jonathan Fingerhut | How We Turned a Dream Into a School

31. Julia Weiner | 'It Ain't 'Arf You, Mum'

33. Hannah Jacobs | One Morning in Jerusalem

34. Ludwik & Daniel Finkelstein | Father and Son

36. Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah | The Post-Modern Rabbi

36. Letters

37 William Wolff | Last Word

**MANNA Essay**

Danny Rich | What Is Wrong With The Chief Rabbi's Job?

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Cover:
Mark Gertler: 'The Artist's Mother', Oil on canvas (1913). (see Julia Weiner – page 31)
THIS IS ANOTHER OF THOSE first person pieces, _op ed_ as the jargon goes rather than _trad ed._ Reflections are essentially first person.

Over the last fifteen years, I have travelled about this 'sceptred isle' invariably feeling at home in Reform synagogues from Glasgow to Brighton and from Cardiff to Southend. And I have come to understand that each synagogue has its own distinctive personality. I would boast that if you were to blindfold me, disorientate me and then set me down in any one of our forty-two synagogues at a Council Meeting, I would quickly be able to tell in which synagogue I found myself. It would not be by the familiarity of the voices, even though some synagogue Council members have been around longer even than I have. It all has to do with personality.

And personality is formed from many influences. The founder members leave an indelible mark. So, too, does the subsequent history. So, too, does the lay leadership. The socio-economics and regional rivalries that are often unattractive features of British society also play their part. So, too, do the interactions of rabbi and community, both past and present. I put it that way because it becomes increasingly apparent that the best rabbinic appointment is not necessarily of the rabbi who would not be by the familiarity of the voices, even though some synagogue Council members have been around longer even than I have. It all has to do with personality.

But the personality of the Movement is also significant. It provides the context and the bigger picture, the philosophy and the developmental impetus. If the Movement does not respect the individuality of the synagogue and its personality, it will get absolutely nowhere. But if the synagogue loses sight of its place within the Movement, it is destined for stultifying parochiality.

Movements have their distinctive personality and here history plays an even larger part than in their constituent synagogues.

I have been to several Liberal synagogues recently.

My guess would be that were a _charedi_ Jew to stray by mistake into a Reform synagogue and then a Liberal synagogue, he would notice no difference whatsoever. The buildings, the sanctuaries, the services, the _sidurim_ would be equally alien and both would be sources of acute discomfort. I realise that, in reality, he would not have stayed long enough to find out, so please forgive the journalistic — or is it homiletic? — licence. But to those of us who have spent our lives in one or the other Movement, the differences are more apparent. They have much to do with the founding of West London Synagogue in 1840 as a pragmatic, essentially English response to a desire for limited reform of worship, and with the foundation of the Jewish Religious Union in 1902 with its broader, more philosophical and radical approach. You could also say that the Reform Movement owes more to German Liberal Judaism and the Liberal Movement owes more to American Reform. Let me explain that in 19th Century German tradition, Liberal was more conservative and Reform more radical. Confused? Aren't we all?

But that confusion is highly significant. For so many years the two Movements have thought of themselves as identical twins. They are not. Instead, they are siblings and one favours one parent and the other favours the other parent.

Differences in history have given each Movement a different personality and that personality is also reflected in the constituent synagogues, another contributing factor to the individual personality of each congregation.

At long, long last, there are real signs that those differences are being recognised as valuable dimensions of pluralism rather than deviations from a single norm. In the forty years that I have been conscious of the politics of Reform and Liberal Judaism, there has never been such a clear recognition of the reality and the opportunity that it offers.

The Reform Movement and its synagogues have their particular personality. Liberal Judaism and its congregations have their particular personality. Neither is 'right'. Both make valuable contributions to the Jewish needs of their members and prospective members. In a British Jewish community where no one way will meet the needs of every Jew, the pluralism of Liberal and Reform Judaism is a huge asset. Understanding and accepting that the other is a much-to-be loved and respected sibling rather than a deviant identical twin means that the scope for working together for the good of British Jewry is huge.

The signs of recent, fruitful collaborative working are now visible to everyone. That collaboration – over schools, over Leo Baeck College, and now students – is but an example of a refreshing and much needed change. This issue of _Manna_ contains a superb Essay by Rabbi Danny Rich. It is my hope that _Manna_ can continue to serve as a vehicle for the Liberal as well as the Reform Movement. Merger which suppresses individual personality and decreases choice for the community at large would clearly be vandalism. Collaboration, sharing resources and initiatives in order better to meet the needs of the British Jewish community is a no-brainer.

A closing word about the Masorti Movement. Masorti is clearly different from Reform and Liberal. Our histories are completely different. We are without question 'Progressives' whereas some in the Masorti Movement, disciples of the late Rabbi Louis Jacobs z’l, see themselves as Orthodox, the true heirs of _minhag Anglia_. Others see themselves as Modern Orthodox. Masorti does not want to be labelled 'progressive'. That is completely understandable. We have different histories and different personalities. We meet different needs.

But the Masorti Movement does want to collaborate, to work with all within the British Jewish community who are true pluralists and wish to see a community for whom mutual respect and collaboration in the interests of the community as a whole are fundamental principles.

There are signs that palpable progress is being made on this front, too, and areas of mutually respectful collaboration between Reform, Liberal and Masorti are growing. By recognising that our distinctive personalities are valuable but also recognising that we are part of a larger whole to which we have pressing obligations, the face and shape of British Jewry is beginning to change. How happy I am to be able to share these reflections with you.

AMB
THE MIDDLE EAST—GO EASY ON DESPAIR

Lawrence Freedman

UP TO THE VERY MOMENT, in January 1979, just over thirty years ago, when the Shah of Iran left his country for the last time, ostensibly for a bit of rest and recuperation, he was seen to be one of the two pillars of stability, along with Saudi Arabia, that would look after Western interests in a tumultuous region. The Shah’s appetite for Western arms, which reached gluttonous proportions, was fed by eager western governments and arms manufacturers, desperate to recycle the petro-dollars that had been flowing into the Middle East following the massive price rises of 1974. During the 1970s Iranians still supposed that America and Britain were the real powers behind the Peacock Throne. Yet these countries had little grasp of what was actually going on in Iran and the social and political upheavals that were underway. On New Year’s Eve 1978, President Carter described Iran under the Shah’s leadership as “an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world”.

Interestingly the Israelis were more alive than the British and the Americans to the risks posed by the decadence and the discontent with the Shah’s authority. They were then well placed. Israel’s Embassy in Tehran was its second largest after Washington, although formally it was not an Embassy at all. The Israeli security relationship was close. Israel provided military technology to Iran; Iran provided oil to Israel. The two spy agencies, Mossad and Savak, worked together to keep an eye on regional radicals. Immediately after the revolution all this was lost. The PLO stepped in as the Israelis hastily withdrew, and three decades of insistent anti-Zionist propaganda began.

Yet for a while Israel worked hard on Iran and developed contacts with the new regime. This was in part because of the substantial Jewish community in Iran, which was 50,000 and is still some 25,000. It was also because they believed that Iran’s strategic interests would logically push them towards

This article was written just before the Iranian elections in June 2009
President Obama has made it clear that he sees Iran as a test for the revival of diplomacy as an arm of foreign policy, accepting the need to explore the possibility of mutually acceptable deals with antagonistic countries and, at least, help ensure that conflicts do not escalate for want of proper communication.

Israel. It lay, after all, on the periphery of the Arab world, but was not part of it. Justification for this belief seemed to come when a shared enemy, Iraq, attacked Iran in 1980. Israel once again became a supplier of arms. In the middle of the decade, Israel played a notorious role when it tried to convince the Reagan Administration to supply weapons to Iran in return for help in getting hostages released in Beirut, and despite the overt American tilt to Iraq. This episode ended in farce and scandal, but the Israelis persevered with Iran after the Americans gave up.

By the start of the 1990s Israel had also given up on Iran and from that point maintained a consistent line that Iran was determined to destabilise the region, largely through its proxies, Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. In the late 1990s the Americans wavered in this conviction and explored the possibility of a rapprochement. After the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan there was a good working relationship for a while in deliberations over the future of that country. In 2003 the US toppled Saddam Hussein – an enemy the Iranians shared. With US power apparently at its most formidable, the Iranians offered talks covering all issues between the two countries. The US showed absolutely no interest.

From that point the Iranian position strengthened while that of the US worsened. The Americans got bogged down in long-term struggles in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iranians were pleased to be able to stir these two pots to keep the Americans tied in Iraq, while Hizbollah and Hamas prospered, strengthening their social bases and proving difficult to dislodge, even in the face of Israeli onslaughts. Iran acquired all the ingredients of a major threat: a radical ideology married to a sense of past humiliations and growing strength, bolstered in this case, at least until recently, by oil revenues and the prospect of nuclear weapons.

Iran has form as a meddler in the affairs of its neighbours, an exporter of militants, money and weapons to hard-line groups, accompanied by a virulent and divisive ideology. In its dealings with the wider international community it has shown recklessness and a certain swagger.

Yet it is also a country of only modest size and means, albeit in a strategically central position. In a straightforward war with the United States there would be no contest. If it is able to balance American power, this is not because of its military strength but its ability to disrupt the flow of oil out of the Gulf and to cause mayhem in neighbouring countries. It is these considerations that have encouraged a cautious American approach when considering direct attacks on Iran. Even the Bush Administration, which conspicuously maintained the military option, showed an underlying tentativeness. A multilateral approach was supported, along with active roles for international organisations, such as the UN and the International Atomic Energy Authority. Diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions were pursued as the best forms of coercion, though neither caused Iran to veer away from the UN and the International Atomic Energy Authority. Diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions were pursued as the best forms of coercion, though neither caused Iran to veer away from a confrontational course. Whatever the internal debates in Tehran the hardliners have stayed on top.

Nonetheless, Iran may not be so sure of its position. Its actions can be interpreted by reference to the insecurities resulting from instability around its borders, Israel’s own nuclear capability, and the attitudes of Saudi Arabia as well as that of the United States. There is an energy case for a nuclear capability, although not for the enrichment technology currently being pursued. Perhaps the main objective is no more than to demonstrate the ability to reach a certain technical level rather than to push to the next stage of an actual military capability. This would be unambiguously provocative and create crises and possibly harsh responses not only from the Israelis, Saudis and Americans, but also Russia. As Iran has repeatedly said this is not its intention, it would have to change its story dramatically once it sought to develop a military capability. There are also different assessments of whether it is making as much progress as it claims. Still it would be unwise to play down the Iranian intent or trivialise the significance of eventual success.

The main reason why Iran might be interested in a compromise is that its economy is in a mess. Ahmadinejad’s populist economic policies squandered oil wealth during the good times and have left nothing in the reserves for the hard. Inflation is over 30 percent and rising. The government faces a $44bn budget deficit and banks are out of money. The total population is around 70 million, but growing rapidly and very young. One quarter of the population is under 15. It suffers from corruption, poor regulation, unsustainable subsidies on fuel and food, high inflation and a chronic lack of investment, aggravated by international sanctions. The collapse of the oil price has added to its predicament, cutting dramatically its major source of revenue.

Is it ready to compromise? Iran’s political structure is curious, with ultimate power resting with the country’s spiritual rather than elected leader. The considerable elements of pluralism that the constitution permits are undermined, although by no means eliminated, by a clerical ability to veto candidates for office and set the terms for policy debates. There is sufficient here to give hope to those in the international community interested in diplomatic engagement, although at the same time, considerable scope for those Iranians determined to keep the revolutionary flame burning to thwart their efforts. The coming Iranian elections are important, and the fate of President Ahmadinejad will be watched carefully. But real power rests with the Supreme leader, the Ayatollah Khamenei and he is the one who will continued on next page
decide the terms of any engagement with the United States and the wider international community.

President Obama has made it clear that he sees Iran as a test for the revival of diplomacy as an arm of foreign policy, accepting the need to explore the possibility of mutually acceptable deals with antagonistic countries and, at least, help ensure that conflicts do not escalate for want of proper communication. The Bush Administration's approach, of treating a conversation with the United States as a sort of prize for those who first abandoned their wicked ways, is no longer credible. The only effect of that policy was to exaggerate the importance of diplomatic contacts while ensuring that the United States got the blame when no contact was made.

There are nonetheless risks to giving diplomacy a more central role. In order to give the process credibility, concessions have to be found, which might just be pocketed without anything substantial being offered in return. Resolutions to long-standing disputes will not emerge spontaneously but will have to be negotiated, and the deal-making could be drawn out and difficult when the interlocutors are unfamiliar and suspicious, and when there are doubts about whether any agreements will be honoured. The very fact of talking to unsavoury types will invite charges of appeasement, and of conferring upon them an undeserved legitimacy. If it appears that the Administration is only talking because all its other options are unappealing then its negotiating hand will be correspondingly weakened.

Yet in the case of Iran I believe that this is the right course. This is not because there will be an early deal, although the quiet conversations that have already begun on Iraq and Afghanistan might yield results even when the nuclear negotiations remain deadlocked. It is a good idea because of the impact on Iranian politics. Bush's uncompromising stance made it easier for those in Tehran with no interest in engaging with the rest of the world. Certainly Ahmadinejad enjoyed the crisis more than the west, and was generally the one to up the ante by making provocative announcements about nuclear progress. In addition to giving him an opportunity to show up the limits to American power and the ability of Tehran to stand alone and proud, an atmosphere of confrontation suited the hard-liners, allowing them to mobilise nationalist sentiment. On the same basis the hardliners fear more than anything else the warm embrace of the west, as this would require the country to open up economically, socially and politically. If such an offer is crudely rejected at a time of deteriorating economic conditions then it is the

There are still proposals on the table offering Israel recognition by the Arab world in return for settling, once and for all, its borders. To make anything of these will require a remarkable diplomatic choreography and tough talking all round.

I am not sure whether a nuclear deal is reachable. It would require recognition of Iran's technological achievements so long as they take them no further. They would be allowed a nuclear break-out capability in return for a verifiable promise not actually to break-out. A much more problematic set of discussions concerns the wider Middle East and the role of Syria, Hizbollah and Hamas. The country unhappiest about the regime's use of Zionism as a political weapon. If the Palestinians do a deal it would be odd for the Persians to be the only opponents, as a number of Iranians have acknowledged in the past. It often seems that pessimism is the only honest position from which to view the Middle East, and there are many dangers lurking in the region. But recent signs of movement have been encouraging. It would be too much to be optimistic. But for a moment, at least, perhaps we can go easy on the despair

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN is Professor of War Studies at King's College London. His book, A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson) recently won the 2009 Lionel Gelber Prize. This article is based on the Leo Baecck College Kaufmann Memorial Lecture, delivered on 14 May 2009.
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For some people Judaism means singing, for others it is learning, for others it is ritual. All can be authentic to the individual. And all require practice.

WE NEED OPTIMISTIC RABBIS

RABBI DAVID' GOLDBERG'S philosophy does not give me much help in my Jewish journey. Both of his recent articles in MANNA 100 and 101 end on a negative note — what is wrong, what is not possible, maybe why we should not bother. That approach is demoralising and fails to address the spiritual hunger which people have, regardless of Darwin or the fundamentalists.

That searching for something inspirational shines out of Lucie Russell's article in MANNA 102. She wants Judaism to be a powerful force in people’s lives and this requires it to be more relevant and accessible. Absolutely right. For thousands of years, Jews have railed against old fashioned rituals and have adapted their practice to meet the needs of the modern age. Jeremiah said we needed to adapt ourselves to life outside Israel. Animals have not been sacrificed since the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Polygamy has been banned for Ashkenazi Jews for 1000 years. The synagogue services have evolved — becoming shorter, using the vernacular, with singing replacing chanting.

Today we like to think things are radically different. We feel we have ever increasing opportunities and more freedom to choose what we do. Except “there is nothing new under the sun”. We have yet again been ‘lured into the worship and service of other gods’, whether these are the gods of slothfulness or avarice or greed, or whether they are unmentionable excuses for not going to shul. No matter how attractive a service is, it is not going to be able to compete with these hedonistic pleasures. Nor should it try. Can we be Jewish when we do not practice? The bottom line is we cannot, just as we cannot be good at bridge or cooking or just about anything unless we ‘practice’. But ‘practice’ does not mean mindlessly obeying somebody else’s agenda. Lucie Russell practices tikkan olam and that is a fantastic way to be Jewish. For some people Judaism means singing, for others it is learning, for others it is ritual. All can be authentic to the individual. And all require practice.

One of the most powerful parts of our liturgy is the silent meditation after the Amidah. And there we read ‘Open my heart to Your teaching, and give me the will to practice it’. As progressive Jews we need to work out what God is teaching us. This is certainly not every word of Torah. Quite likely it also means something different for you than for me. But to just look at God as ‘vengeful’ as Lucie Russell does, is surely only a partial reading. Although he punishes for three or four generations, meaning until you die, he shows kindness to the thousandth generation— which is after all longer than Judaism has yet existed. So when we have intellectually understood what God wants of us at a particular time, we need to have the determination to put it into effect. Knowing what is the right thing to do ‘is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach’. No, the tricky thing is putting it into effect by practice — doing the right thing, when facing difficult choices.

As for the services, going just a few times a year is never going to be enough. They are bound to seem distant and disconnected from everyday life, like the difference between seeing a friend once a year or chatting every week. To really ‘get’ services we need to be in a committed relationship with them, whatever form they take. As the prayer book says, leading a life of goodness not only involves ‘escorting the dead’ and ‘making peace between people’, but also ‘engaging with prayer’. It is wonderful how ‘engaging with prayer’ is sandwiched between these other mitzvot, blurring the divisions we can create between ethics and ritual. It demands that I put effort into making prayers work rather than simply expecting the words to do the work on my behalf.

Putting in this effort then means the prayers can take you by surprise and a phrase or a melody can touch your soul and resonate with meaning. It takes time for us to clear our mind and hear God’s ‘still, small voice’ and to find out what He is actually saying to us. That may mean staying for Musaf on Yom Kippur and experiencing the visceral spirituality of the re-enacting of the Temple Service. Or going to a Friday Oneg with guitars and singing and feeling the stresses of the working week drain away. Or coming together before services to argue about what the Torah portion means for us today.

For all these, we need enthusiastic and optimistic Rabbis to help give us confidence to inspire us to deepen our Judaism. And they need our support to respond positively to their leadership.

Jonathan Bergwerk

Jonathan Bergwerk graduated from Cambridge and is a consultant in leadership development and change management. He has been a member of six Reform and Liberal synagogues; latterly Radlett & Bushey Reform Synagogue.

Endnote

1 2 Esd 1:9
2 Deut 30:17
3 Forms of Prayer, 2008 P234
4 Exodus 20:5-6
5 Deut 30:11
6 Forms of Prayer, 2008 P169
7 First Kings 19:12
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IT WAS A SUNNY SHABBAT afternoon on 16th June 2007. Dozens of friends and family had gathered at our flat as Rhonda and I celebrated the blessing that morning in shul of our new born baby daughter, Emanuelle Noa. Big brothers Austin and Nolan showed off their baby sister. Emmy’s grandparents had travelled to London from Texas and New Hampshire to join the simchah. It was a proud and joyous occasion.

Late that day, after the last of the guests had gone, I was enjoying a celebratory cigar with my father-in-law Michael when our reverie was disturbed by a call. It was the head of hedge funds at Bear Stearns Asset Management (BSAM) in New York. “Fraser, I am so sorry to bother you at home on Saturday but this is really important. We have a problem......” He went on to explain that two of BSAM’s larger hedge funds, ironically, the High Grade Credit Fund and its more leveraged sister fund both of which invested in securitized sub-prime mortgage paper, faced a financing crisis. The banks that provided the funds with overnight financing used to carry their inventories were withdrawing funding on Monday as the result of erosion in the perceived value of the funds’ assets. That meant the funds would be rendered insolvent.

Looking back, what took place over that weekend in June 2007 was the tipping point. Many of us in banking and investment management had feared it for months, it proved the start of the slide that led to what we all now know as the Credit Crisis.

I have been an investment banker for 33 years. When I took that call in 2007, I was the Managing Partner of a multi-family office advisory and asset management business, Dartmouth Capital Partners, which I had founded three years before. The business had grown since founding and attracted the
attention of several large investment banks that were interested in adding our investment management skills and high profile client base to their business. They were interested also in my taking a larger management role within their businesses. Dartmouth Capital was on the verge of a ‘step-change’ and I concluded that the interests of clients would be better served and the opportunities for employees broader were we to become part of a bigger, better resourced organisation. So, after discussions with a few firms, I started the process to combine with Lehman Brothers in the spring of 2007.

The call from BSAM was more than a little disturbing. Many thoughts raced through my mind as the conversation developed: how would this affect the investment portfolios we managed for clients? Would these fund failures infect other funds – the dreaded threat of contagion? Would investors panic and seek to withdraw from similar funds and precipitate “runs on the bank”? And would Lehman Brothers get cold feet with respect to our developing merger plans?

Over the course of the summer, what had been small fissures in the walls of the world’s financial system began to gape wide. The BSAM funds failed, leaving investors with little prospect of recovery. Investors sought to withdraw investments from other funds which invested in sub-prime or mortgage related assets, causing asset values to fall dramatically as funds liquidated positions to meet redemption. This affected liquidity in the marketplace. Depositors at the Northern Rock Building Society demanded an immediate return of their savings. The ensuing run on the bank led to its failure and eventual nationalisation.

What caused all of this to come about? Surely a few well-heeled institutions and wealthy individuals losing money on what they must have known were high risk investments in the BSAM funds did not trip the circuit breakers of the world financial system? But it was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back.

Following the bursting of the “dot com” bubble in 2001 and the panic caused by the tragic assault on the twin towers in New York in September 2001, the world’s central bankers, led by the US Federal Reserve Bank under the leadership of its Chairman Alan Greenspan, supplied funds to the world financial system on an almost indiscriminate basis in order to re-float an economic system in shock followed was an unprecedented period of easy money and cheap credit. The world became intoxicated with it. House prices soared, fuelled by the widespread availability of cheap mortgage credit. Consumers buoyed by new found paper wealth rushed to spend in shops, restaurants, car show rooms, holidays and on whatever their willing lenders were prepared to finance.

The denizens of Wall Street and the City never had it so good. The combination of historically low interest rates and the consumer’s voracious appetite for more and more credit spurred one ‘clever’ scheme after another to intermediate the flow of capital from the providers of credit – pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and wealthy families and individuals – to borrowers, prime and sub-prime alike. The banking world devised structures, securitizations, conduits and derivatives, all along the way collecting structuring fees, arrangement fees, underwriting fees and trading profits as the whirlwind of credit swept around the globe. Investment bank profits swelled, growing bonus and pay packets were showered on the executives that made it all happen. Capitalism was working.

Dartmouth Capital formally merged with Lehman Brothers on the 1st October 2007. Clients and staff were happy that we had become part of a bigger, better resourced platform and I was excited at the opportunities that lay ahead within what had historically been one of the world’s premier investment banks. Lehman had a deep, abiding corporate culture. Many of my fellow senior managing directors had only ever worked at Lehman, some for 25-30 years. It was a very familial environment, heimisch in its own way, with a high standard of ethics – phrases like ‘do the right thing’ were said with real conviction not lip service. Many of my partners and the firm’s senior management were Jewish, a point that added to my comfort with the firm. All was going well.

It is said that when returning Roman conquerors paraded through the streets, a slave rode on the hero’s chariot whispering into the hero’s ear, “all glory is fleeting” to remind them of the ephemeral nature of triumph. The world financial system needed that admonition. The gaping cracks of the summer of 2007 widened and the walls began to crumble in March of 2008.

Hedge funds, short sellers and aggressive arbitrageurs sensed an opportunity to attack a Bear Steams already weakened by the failure of two of its largest hedge funds and burdened with large inventories of increasingly illiquid mortgage paper and real estate related assets. The pressure mounted and in March 2008, faced with withdrawal of the vital overnight financing on which all investment banks rely, Bear Steams, led by “Ace” Greenberg, Jimmy Cayne, Alan Schwartz, Warren Spector – all Jewish – was forced by the US Federal continued on next page
Reserve Bank to accept fire sale terms and was acquired by J P Morgan Bank. Its history of 90 years and more, came to an end over one weekend. Markets were rocked, investors lost billions and thousands of Bear Stearns' employees faced an uncertain future.

Once the sharks smelled blood and 'beat' Bear Stearns into submission, attention turned to the next target on the list, Lehman Brothers. Unlike Bear, whose senior executives were known for their bridge and golfing exploits, Lehman was led by a squash playing, weight lifting, Lehman lifer Richard 'Dick' Fuld, also known as 'The Gorilla.' Where Jimmy Cayne might have been soft, Dick was anything but that. He had literally saved the firm from internal warfare in 1994, led it through the 1998 crisis brought about by the failure of Long Term Capital and rallied the troops when the firm was bombed out of the World Trade Center in 2001. Dick bled green, Lehman's corporate colour. Dick would not sit idly by and watch hedge funds and shortsellers destroy what he and his cadre had built. Once again he rallied the troops and we fought back.

At first we appeared to win a few battles. Earnings in Q1 were OK, the share price recovered a bit. Our 'client' businesses in investment banking, capital raising and asset management were winning business and growing. But, Lehman, too, had drunk the 'KoolAid' of credit expansion and was the largest player in the mortgage securitization market as well as being a large player in commercial real estate. Values in those asset classes were increasingly under threat as the developing credit crisis gained steam. The 'Street' started to question the value of Lehman's balance sheet, thus putting pressure on the firm's share price. This attracted more attention from short sellers which put further pressure on the firm's share price, and so on down. The inevitable spiral had begun and despite Dick Fuld's combative response and the collective efforts of all of us who wanted to save the firm, we were headed into a crisis. That crisis reached its crescendo over the weekend of 13th September 2008. Rescue discussions arranged by the US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and the Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke came to nought. On the 15th September 2008 Lehman Brothers, wracked by a loss of confidence in it by 'the Street,' failed and the Credit Crisis demon was released from its lair.

Who was to blame? Everyone. It is far too easy to point the finger outward and seek someone else on whom to place blame. Whilst success has many fathers, failure is an orphan. The world became addicted to cheap credit and encouraged a crowd of intermediaries and bankers to supply it. They got rich and consumers got what they wanted. If anyone or thing is to blame, it was the collective greed of the consumer and the collective greed of the suppliers. Neither regulators nor politicians had the capacity to understand what was happening, let alone to effectively monitor it or prevent it. That led to the danger today which is that the pendulum of public opinion will swing too far, and politicians being who they are will over-react and lurch toward the politically expedient path of over restriction. That will lengthen the impact of the crisis.

Was there an anti-Semitic undertone to allowing Lehman to fail? Whilst we Jews love to speculate about conspiracy theory because it has proved correct too often in our history, in this case I think not. The fact is that the investment banking world is full of smart Jews who populate its senior ranks – tradition one might say – thus in any given failure, it is statistically likely that a Jewish executive will be at the helm.

Do I regret my decision to merge with Lehman? Not at all, it was the right decision at the time for clients, staff and my family. One could say that I was yet another unfortunate victim of far reaching and systemic circumstances alongside the millions of other people whose lives, jobs and financial welfare have been affected by the Credit Crisis. I thankfully have the support of my wonderful wife and brilliant children, many friends and colleagues and our community. I do not believe that I have ever looked forward more to being in shul than I did over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur last September following Lehman's failure. I am lucky. I have 33 years' experience and a reputation in the market place that afford me professional choices going forward. I worry more about those who do not and wonder how they will get on.

The immediate crisis is over. The world financial system is unlikely to collapse. Yet the impact of this crisis will be felt for years to come. The lesson we must take away from this challenging experience is the slave's admonition to the returning Roman conqueror: "All glory is fleeting..."

FRASER MARCUS is a member of West London Synagogue and Joint Treasurer of the Reform Movement.

THE LOSS

Stephi Usiskin

REDUNDANCY WHEN YOU have not got it is something you dread. It is entirely another matter when you have it. Rather like a disease: exercise, eat all the right foods, do not stand under electricity pylons, you won't get sick. If you work hard and hit the targets, you get paid. But neither is guaranteed. Out of the blue, both disease and redundancy can hit you.

Redundancy came my way on my return from a fantastic holiday in the United States. It was my first ever. I had been to the States on a business trip in 1999 and had three hours to see New York. This trip took in three States, three cities, planes, boats and a retro '49 Chevy station wagon. Big skies, big seas, big everything. It was like climbing into the silver screen.

I have worked since I was fifteen, except for two maternity leaves. I am a graduate of the 'university of life' and have never been unemployed. Even when I tempted for six years I only had one week without work. I got home from the US trip, looked at my Inbox and found an email from my boss' boss – unusual in itself – about changes in the department, how "it may affect you", Me? It was one of those moments when the world changes in a second.

I was a manager at Lehman Brothers, in the Computer Graphics centre, one of hundreds of support staff who are decimal points away from bankers' big bonuses. We delivered pitch books, on-screen presentations, newsletters and web pages 24 hours, 7 days a week.
I felt so lucky to have got out when I did. The Crash laid waste jobs in the City and Canary Wharf. My feeling lucky lasted barely a few weeks.

By the end of November, Woolworths went. There were hundreds more unemployed. I was in a whirlpool of circling job applications.

Too often ‘the client had withdrawn the instruction’, the website displayed an old ad and it was not unusual for agencies and companies trying to cope with their own recruitment to receive 200 applications for one vacancy, in one day!

Constantly on the evening news were announcements of more closures, more redundancies. Relentlessly. It was like wartime, the daily announcements of the missing or dead in battle. News of repossessions, price rises, government aid packages, bailouts and you realise you are just one of hundreds of thousands in the same situation, and you wonder how on earth to get out of this?

It is personal. Very personal. You, personally. It is your mortgage, your food on the table. The daily grind of evening news bores into the brain and is a constant thrummm throughout the day. You do not feel lucky.


The world can change in a second. It is nine months since my redundancy. A phone call. An agency. A temp job in the NHS – PA to the Board. Hmmm. Fits my plan to gain NHS knowledge and experience, and train to be a Practice Manager, or find another managerial role in the NHS. An interview. Somebody has read my CV and I am given the opportunity to discuss my knowledge and experience, show confidence in my ability to fulfil the role with skill, diplomacy and tenacity.

Now I am a valued temp. And since landing the temping role, I have been to three interviews for permanent roles and I am going from strength to strength. I won’t take the first job offer that comes along. Why should I settle for less than interesting and challenging?

It is one year since my redundancy. The world can change in a second.

STEPHANIE USISKIN is a member of Middlesex New Synagogue.

KILLINGS

Cliff Siegel

After 28 years in the financial markets, I found myself sitting on the sidelines for the best part of a year during the very worst of the global credit crisis. I wish I could say I saw it all coming, shorted the markets and watched the carnage unfold. But in fact, my exit from the markets was more luck than prescience. And the year 2008 ended up continued on next page
The problem of today's global credit crisis has its roots in the US Federal Reserve Bank, also known as the Fed, lowering interest rates on the back of the 2000-2002 technology bubble. Rather than allowing the system to cleanse itself of the overvaluations that had built up, the Fed created a liquidity bubble. As a result, consumers ran up huge debts. They bought houses, cars, boats and electronics, took trips and piled on credit card bills. At the same time, companies borrowed large amounts of money to fund questionable projects. So why did it take so long for the system to implode? The answer is that markets reflect the combined actions of literally millions of people, and while reason eventually does rule, a bubble mentality can induce a majority of people to act irrationally for long stretches of time.

While the initial source of the excess liquidity was the Fed – which was eager to avoid any economic fallout from the bursting of the tech bubble and simultaneously fund the US's ballooning trade and fiscal deficits – the banking community served as its willing accomplice. As banks could borrow money cheaply, they had an incentive to create a mechanism that allowed them to lend on a massive scale, hence that led to the creation of the collateralized debt obligation, or CDO. Banking is predicated on the premise that 1000 mortgages are far less risky than one mortgage. A few years back, a few geniuses figured out that this could be leveraged on a monumental scale. They would accumulate mortgages, credit card receivables, auto loans – just about any pool of debt imaginable – bundle it and chop it up into a pool of securities. As historical default rates on these types of widely-held consumer debt were under 5%, the majority of these securities were given investment grade ratings. There was nothing inherently wrong with this type of structure, and it worked as long as attention was being paid to the construction of these pools and the quality of the loans that went into them. However, once all the good mortgages and car loans had been pooled, which happened by around 2005, banks needed to find new loans to keep the flow of business going. This is where the trouble started, as money was lent to people who had no business borrowing it. Thus the term sub-prime mortgage – which had originally been defined as loans that were slightly higher-risk than standard loans but still had a pretty good chance of being repaid – rapidly became 'toxic' debt.

What started out as a bad bit of credit analysis turned into a ticking time bomb when the commercial and investment banks thought they could make even more money by keeping the securities on their books. As the value of the banks' asset pools inflated, they started borrowing against them to generate yet more liquidity, and soon the banking industry had massive leverage. It all started to go pear-shaped when the housing market, which underpinnned the valuations of these securities and which had been steadily rising faster than inflation, began to slow down, and individual borrowers could not keep up with their payments. This fed through into the default rates on the pools, and soon it became clear that these securities were overvalued. Things then all came crashing down, in a phenomenon referred to as 'deleveraging'. As the pools of mortgage securities became impossible to value and therefore trade, markets seized up, the collateral that banks had put up to back other loans plunged in value, and the value of all other securities was dragged down with it.

As a result, we all lost money, some more than others. But it is important to put paper wealth in perspective. These asset values were created on a pool of borrowed money that should never have been lent in the first place. So if you have more wealth than you did four years ago, you are ahead of the game.

The first lesson we have learned from this is that real wealth is generally created only over time. If it comes too fast, it probably was not real to begin with. Secondly, debt is dangerous and should be used with great caution. The old rule of thumb in banking when I bought my first property was that you can afford to spend about 25% of your income servicing debt. Those who were hurt the most borrowed 100% against their property and had big credit card overdrafts. Credit card companies charge in excess of 15% to borrow from them – so do not run an overdraft. As for the stock market, it will eventually reflect reality. Right now, the markets are rallying on expectations of a less severe recession than previously thought. My sense is that it has overshot on the upside over the last two months, much as stocks were oversold in the first quarter of 2009. This crisis will take years to unwind, so my advice is to buy companies you like with a long term holding perspective. Even the professionals are challenged trying to trade the dips and peaks of this market. Also expect the regulators to be a lot more diligent in the future. The Financial Services Authority in the UK has already increased its staff by 25%. A common sense approach to investing will create plenty of opportunities to make money in the future – just be patient and do not look for a quick killing!

CLIFF SIEGEL has been in the financial markets for the last 28 years, the last 16 of which in London running the international operations of US investment bank Jefferies and Company. After leaving Jefferies in early 2008 to take a well-deserved 12 month break, he started a boutique investment bank in January of 2009 to focus on emerging market debt. He is a member of West London Synagogue and an Honorary Vice-President of the Reform Movement.
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MANNA SUMMER 2009
SIDNEY BRICHTO
THE COUSIN WHO CAME FROM AMERICA

Andrew Goldstein

C O N T E M P L A T I N G  T H E  S A D
death of my mentor and friend
Rabbi Dr Sidney Brichto I was
reminded of the particular debt British
Liberal Judaism owes to the American
Reform Movement. The British Reform
Movement was much more influenced
by rabbis from the German Liberal
tradition.

When, in 1911, the Jewish Religious
Union decided it needed a rabbi
to encourage its growth, Claude
Montefiore, one of its founders and a
member of the West London Synagogue,
despite his study of rabbincis in Berlin,
travelled to America in search of a
rabbi. He returned with Israel Mattuck
who was born in Lithuania but studied
and was ordained at Hebrew Union
College in Cincinnati. Mattuck had an
immense influence on the early Liberal
Movement. His eccentric prayer books
were based on the American Reform
liturgy and, in many ways, he introduced
what we now call Classical Reform
Judaism to Britain. The great growth
period of the British Reform Movement,
just before and after the Second World
War, was influenced by the arrival of
German rabbis, like Ignaz Maybaum,
Werner Van Der Zyl and Curtis Cassel.
They brought a much more traditional
Judaism which is evident today in,
for instance, the attitude to Jewish
status. Liberal Judaism follows the
majority American position and accepts
patrilineality whereas Reform sticks to
the Halachic ruling which demands a
Jewish mother.

In the post-war years the Mattuck
style of Judaism continued, although
a shortage of suitable rabbis hindered
growth. Mattuck ordained his successor
Leslie Edgar. Jews College-trained
Revenerds like Bernard Hooker and
Philip Cohen turned Liberal seemingly
without a problem, adopting an
Anglican style of Judaism. But the
great growth period for Liberal Judaism
came with the arrival of two bright
young American rabbis, Chaim Stern
and Sidney Brichto. The former had a
great influence on the liturgy, the latter
on almost everything else.

In 1963, the Rev John Rayner,
ordained by Rabbi Edgar, agreed to
accept the post of Senior Rabbi at the
Liberal Jewish Synagogue, provided he
was given leave of absence for two years
to further his rabbinic studies at Hebrew
Union College in New York. To fill the
gap Rabbi Chaim Stern came to the
LJS and soon found an assistant rabbi,
his cousin, the newly ordained Sidney
Brichto. Sidney came over initially to
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LJS and soon found an assistant rabbi,
One of his childhood friends was Frank Hellner whom Sidney later brought over to be the long-time rabbi at the Finchley Progressive Synagogue: another American import to the Liberal Movement. After the Akiba Hebrew Academy in Philadelphia, Sidney progressed to Yeshiva University in New York City. Although still immersed in the world of Talmud, he was also exposed to secular literature, which he read avidly. He was in awe of his older brother Chanan, who became Professor of Bible at HUC, and through him met Dr Henry Slonimsky, Dean of the Jewish Institute of Religion, soon to become the branch of HUC in New York. Slonimsky showed him how he could wed his passion for Greek philosophy and world literature with his Talmudic education and this led Sidney to becoming enrolled at New York University for an undergraduate degree in philosophy at the same time as entering the rabbinic programme at HUC.

Sidney was ordained in 1961 and, instead of following a rabbinic career in America, came to London as a postgraduate student at University College, London, in Hebrew and Aramaic. He never took up the place but went instead to be Assistant Rabbi at the LJS. For the next twenty-five years or so, as Executive Director of UPLS, Sidney had to keep his scholarship as a private interest, although his many lectures and articles showed the breadth of his knowledge of ancient and modern sources. It was not until quite late in life that he could devote himself to his passion for interpreting the Bible and he began his mammoth task of retranslating the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, for the modern reader. He started with Genesis and explained that many readers were soon put off by the lists of “begats” and repetitions. Such material Sidney placed in an Appendix, in order to make the core text flow. Sadly he died before completing the task, but the volumes he has published have made a huge contribution to Liberal Judaism, to Anglo-Jewry and the State of Israel. Yet above all, it was his family and friends on both sides of the Atlantic that gave Sidney the most satisfaction in life.

RABBI DR ANDREW GOLDSTEIN recently retired after forty-two years at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue. He is Chair of the European Region of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.
Q: Can you tell us where you were born and something about your parents, grandparents and siblings?
A: I was born in Cape Town. My father, Isaac Horwitz, was born in Plunge, known to us in Yiddish as Plumyan, Lithuania. My mother, Isobel Pepper, was born in London of Polish immigrant parents. Both families emigrated to South Africa around the end of the 19th century.

Q: What was your upbringing like? Were you conscious, as a child, of apartheid?
A: My parents were desperately unhappy but I had an idyllic childhood. I was the youngest of three. I was conscious of apartheid but not aware of it. I only became aware of it after I had left.

Q: Was there any specific Jewish influence in your childhood?
A: My father came from an Orthodox family, my mother from what was then called Freethinkers. In 1946, my father broke with the Orthodox shul and joined the new Reform movement. I had my bar mitzvah in the Reform shul and went to shul often, taking part in social as well as religious activities.

Q: When and why did you leave South Africa and why for England?
A: I left South Africa in December 1951, having just turned seventeen. I left because I wanted to be an actor. My mother encouraged me to go to London and to RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts).

Q: Your cousin is Sir Anthony Sher, arguably the finest actor of this
I have never met Nicole Kidman.
I did not see any filming which took place in Australia. I try to avoid going to watch a film being made because it is very boring.
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WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CHIEF RABBI'S JOB?

Danny Rich

by Meir Persoff

The office of Chief Rabbi reflects both an ancient Jewish trend and the desire of secular authorities to have a readily identifiable single source by which a 'foreign' community could be managed. The Jewish tradition is replete with one or a few persons in whom central religious authority was placed, whether anointed as king, high priest, patriarch, exilarch or goan although this centralising trend runs counter to the democratic spirit of Judaism which is reflected in the process by which the rabbis made decisions by majority vote – the disagreement about the kashrut of an oven in Babylonian Talmud Baba Metzia 59b – and by the fact that rabbinic authority and influence was invariably a function of knowledge and character and not of appointment to office. Indeed, referring to the Jews who came to England after the execution of Charles I in the mid-seventeenth century, Derek Taylor observes that the title 'wise one was applicable to any rabbi of a Sephardi community and only by necessity came to be restricted to the acknowledged head of all of the Sephardi communities in a given area. Taylor continues, 'Strangely, there was no equivalent to a Chief Rabbi anywhere in the world when it came to be accepted in England; it was a purely English concept that a rabbi could have authority over other rabbis'. It was true that in the medieval period English monarchs had appointed a prominent Jew occasionally but not usually a leading community rabbi to the title of Presbyter Judeorum but his function was primarily a fiscal one by which medieval rulers extracted special taxes.

How then did this 'unJewish' office come to be established in England, later the Empire and finally the Commonwealth? It is perhaps an understatement of Aubrey Newman to observe that the office of Chief Rabbi was 'never formally created'. Taylor writes of twenty-two men who acted as the spiritual leaders – Hahanim.
or Chief Rabbis — identifying Jacob Sasportas (1664/5) as the "first Chief Rabbi". Pamela Fletcher Jones, on the other hand, describes him as merely the first 'official rabbi of England and regards Aaron Hart (1705-1756) as 'the first Chief Rabbi'. His official title was 'High Priest of the Ashkenazim', perhaps because of his length of service as 'principal' rabbi to the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place. Taylor's 2007 work gives a detailed chapter on each of the Sephardi Hahamim and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbis, and, although it is the office rather than the individuals which form the substance of this essay it would be incomplete without a few paragraphs on these fascinating characters. The first three came, like the majority of the then English Jewish community, from Amsterdam. Jacob Sasportas served only a year before fleeing the Great Plague of 1665 and was succeeded by the safe pair of hands, Joshua da Silva. His death after a decade in office gave way to Jacob Abendana who died in office after only four years in 1685. During the tenure of the unpopular Salomika-born Solomon Ayllon, the (Ashkenazi) Great Synagogue was founded and, at his forced resignation, perhaps the greatest of the early Hahamim, Italian David Nietto, took office. In his thirty years the Bevis Marks Synagogue was opened, the first recorded and recognised mixed (Sephardi/Ashkenazi) marriage took place, and the new Great Synagogue in Duke's Place was opened. The ministry of Aaron Hart at Duke's Place established the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate and a dynasty of more than 200 years which was to last until the death of Hermann Adler in 1911. From the early years of the eighteenth century until today, the Ashkenazi community has been served by a Chief Rabbi whereas, although from 1644 to 1828 a Haham was in post for three quarters of the period, since 1828 until today the Sephardi community has been served by a Haham for only half the period and not at all since the dismissal of the last Haham, Solomon Gaon, in 1977. Of the more unusual characters Haham Isaac Nietto resigned twice (1741 and after reappointment in 1757), David Schiff assured the pre-eminence of the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi over the Haham during his tenure from 1765-91, Solomon Hirschell (1802-1842) was the first English born Chief Rabbi (a feature he shares with twentieth century occupants Sirs Israel Brodie and Jonathan Sacks, and Immanuel Jakobovits was granted a peerage on his retirement in 1991. Although the office of Chief Rabbi was never formally created, its existence has been closely tied to the fortunes of the United Synagogue which came into being by Act of Parliament in 1870. The founding 1387 male seat holders were organised into five communities (the Great, Hambro, New, Bayswater, and Central Synagogues), and, although the Chief Rabbinate is not mentioned in the Act, it is referred to in general terms in the Deed of Foundation and Trust of the United Synagogue of January 1871. The Chief Rabbinate's detailed work and division of responsibilities has derived from the personal relationships between the Chief Rabbis and the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue at any given time.

As Newman (1976, p.90) concedes therehas rarely been 'any real opportunity for any thorough examination of the principles underlying the office (of Chief Rabbi), so that there could only be public discussion of these at a period of vacancy'. Newman provides details of debates during the vacancies created by the deaths of Nathan Adler in January 1890 and of his son and successor, Hermann Adler, in July 1911. Although Hermann Adler had been Delegate (acting) Chief Rabbi for some eleven years and his succession might have been considered automatic, disputes arose about the manner of selection and the range of responsibilities of the new Chief Rabbi. The well established Sephardi community had now been joined on the Anglo-Jewish scene by the Federation of Minor Synagogues since 1887 and the West London Synagogue of British Jews (Reform) which had been founded by disaffected Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews as early as 1840. An invitation to discuss issues concerning the appointment of the Chief Rabbi was issued but only the Federation accepted. In the event its contribution of £10 to the Chief Rabbi's Fund bought it two votes out of a total of some 260, 218 of which were exercised directly by the United Synagogue.

Discussions between the Federation and the United Synagogue were ongoing when Hermann Adler died. Whilst the Federation objected to the United Synagogue, having effectively the power to appoint (or dismiss) the Chief Rabbi, other organisations had different reasons to challenge the status quo including the Association for the Furthering of Traditional Judaism which declared that 'there was no room for a Chief Rabbi'. It is perhaps ironic that Brichto ('Liberal Jewish Monthly' 1965, p.102) pleads a similar case, namely that the existence of a Chief Rabbi undermines the rightful authority of local rabbis.

The process leading to the eventual appointment of Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz (1913-1946) is discussed in great detail by Elton. The controversy centred not only upon the process of election but also concerned the very nature of the candidate himself. Not only was the candidate to be 'a man of great piety, strict orthodoxy, a rigid observer of the Shulchan Aruch, and a great Talmudist', he was to be able to command the respect of East End Jews but be a suitable leader for the West End Jews. In the event one candidate was considered too young, another too fractious, and a third refused to speak Yiddish as opposed to German. The Federation again withdrew from the selection process (as it was to do on future occasions). 1913 was the last contested election for Chief Rabbi. Thereafter in 1946-8, 1965-7 and 1991 the lay leadership of the United Synagogue carried out private soundings and made a single recommendation to the Chief Rabbinate Selection Conference which simply approved the nomination. Nevertheless public debate concerning the Chief Rabbinate was not completely quashed. On 14 December 1989, before the candidate to succeed Jakobovits was known and after Liberal Jewish leaders had approached the United Synagogue to ask whether they might be consulted but had been soundly rejected, Harold Sanderson, the then Chairman and Rosita Rosenberg, the then Director, of the Union of Liberal & Progressive Synagogues issued the following statement:

In view of the procedure now being implemented to appoint a successor to the present Chief Rabbi, we feel it important to clarify our own relationship to The Office of the Chief Rabbi. The Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth is elected by a committee appointed by the Officers and Council of the United Synagogue. All members of the committee are members of constituents of the United Synagogue and associated synagogues. No other synagogue body is formally consulted in the election of the Chief Rabbi. Accordingly, it is appropriate for us to say on behalf of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, that the Chief Rabbi to be elected has no authority over our own rabbis or lay people, nor does he represent us or
speak on our behalf. Our community appoints its own representatives and spokespersons.

This statement does not detract from the status of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations or his authority over his own constituents, only to reaffirm that the Jewish community is not monolithic but pluralistic in nature. In Judaism, as in other faiths, there is much diversity of belief and practice, even though the common ground far exceeds the differences.

We make this statement before the forthcoming appointment to make it clear that our relationship to the Office of the Chief Rabbi is not dependent on the person who fills it. We will respect the view of the new appointee and seek to co-operate with him in mutual efforts towards the strengthening of the Jewish community.

We hope that he, too, will respect the differences between his views and ours and that those differences will not be allowed to diminish co-operative endeavour in areas of common interests and objectives.

This statement appears in Persoff's readable and balanced analysis of the efforts to cope with change of the Chief Rabbis from the accession of Nathan Adler in 1844 only four years after the founding of the West London Synagogue of British Jews (Reform) until just prior to the retirement of Jakobovits in 1991. Persoff spent four decades on the editorial staff of The Jewish Chronicle, and, as one might expect of such a senior journalist, his thorough research — supported by a wealth of notes and quotations in full from sermons, archive material and press reports — opens up the role of the office of Chief Rabbi and the disputatious nature of the British Jewish community in an extraordinary, novel — and for some perhaps even shocking — manner. It was Jakobovits who said, in an interview with David Nathan in The Jewish Chronicle: "(t)his obsession with unity is an Anglo Jewish fetish.'

'Anglo Jewish fetish' it may have been but it was certainly one of, if not, the raison d'être of the very office he occupied. If Persoff's volume teaches its reader one thing it is that the office of Chief Rabbi was established and maintained to create a façade of unity, initially by a community fearful of its very tolerance in Puritan and Restoration England but latterly in an attempt to ape the Establishment nature of bodies like the Church of England. As Taylor reminds his readers in the time of the first Chief Rabbi, Sasportas, "It was essential to make sure that members of the congregation did nothing as individuals to adversely affect the community's position". This was at a time when the Jews' legal presence in England was under frequent question as England veered from Puritan Commonwealth via Catholic Restoration to Hanoverian Protestantism although, by the time of the founding of the United Synagogue in 1870, the Royal line was well established.

If the office of the Chief Rabbi was to create a façade of unity then the fact that many of Persoff's readers may well be surprised by his record of the depth of conflict is perhaps an argument that, at least for a period, it succeeded. Nevertheless, behind the façade — as Persoff's book eloquently demonstrates — there was a real battle by the office of the Chief Rabbi to prevent incursions from either the left or the right. The establishment of the Federation of (Minor) Synagogues in 1887, the constant undermining of the Chief Rabbinate by its own Bet Din, and the growing number of United Synagogue pulpits filled by the sweetness of Israeli yeshivah trained bochers (whose outlook on aspects of life and views in many areas put them at odds with their own congregants) demonstrates the growing success of the right wing in British Jewry. This is mirrored to the left too where the establishment of what became known as Liberal Judaism in 1902 and the impressive growth after the Second World War of what is now known as the Movement for Reform Judaism has further undermined the façade of unity in the British Jewish community.

Lest there be any doubt that the preservation of a single Anglo-Jewish way of doing things was the task of the Chief Rabbinate, Persoff cites numerous examples of the attempt to prevent moves either to the left or right both within and without the United Synagogue. Nathan Adler (Chief Rabbi 1844-90) describes his role as "the watchman, the guardian, the preserver of the Holy Law... difficult, very difficult, to take good care of it, whilst urged on by some to constant advance, and implored by others to remain immovable — difficult, in such circumstances, to find the golden mean." Nathan Adler was fairly circumspect. His successor Hermann Adler (Chief Rabbi 1891-1911) reacted more aggressively when the founders of the Jewish Religious Union (which included prominent United Synagogue rabbis as well as those such as Claude Montefiore and Lily Montagu who were to found the Liberal Jewish movement) proposed supplementary but shortened Shabbat afternoon services. Adler declared to his congregation that he would 'gladly welcome services established on these lines in connection with one or more existing synagogues. For the (Union) service, as at present arranged, does not spell Reform, but Revolt. It makes not for Union, but Disunion... we need union of hearts and efforts...'.

These examples of the attempt to create a façade of unity within the community were paralleled outside of it. In a fascinating couple of paragraphs Persoff tells the reader of the lobbying by Hermann Adler's successor, Joseph Hertz (Chief Rabbi 1913-46), of the British Broadcasting Corporation which was considering broadcasting a service from the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St John's Wood which would include a sermon by Rabbi Israel Mattuck. Mattuck was considered by many to be the leading Jewish preacher of his generation. Hertz's 'guidance' is unequivocal. The suggestion: '...would be most unacceptable to Orthodox Jews, who form the overwhelming majority of Jewish population in this country'. Furthermore, 'as no address or service given under your auspices should be open to the charge of propagandist intentions', the suggested service with address could not be given under the auspices of the Corporation. The Liberal Jewish Synagogue represents a new subversive movement in the Anglo-Jewish community and has always been propagandist.

If it were not hard enough that, in attempting to maintain a façade of unity, the Chief Rabbi faced challenges from outside the United Synagogue, Persoff demonstrates that internal dissent could be equally as strong and persistent. As Hermann Adler sought to resist...
the innovative services of the Jewish Religious Union, he came into conflict with one of the Union’s supporters, a United Synagogue Vice President Albert H Jessel who in a speech to the United Synagogue Council declared:

He very much regretted – he could not tell them how much he regretted – having to be even for a moment in conflict with the Chief Rabbi...

But when all was said and done, he was constrained, with the greatest respect and deference, to protest against the notion that any one man was to dictate to the conscience of each individual member of the Jewish community.

They were not children; they had the right to think for themselves; and although he was placed in a position of responsibility, he protested against the new cult, that sort of papalism, which some people desired to introduce, and which for want of a better word he termed ‘Chief Rabbinism’.16

One (admittedly) eccentric United Synagogue minister, Joseph Hockman, castigated Hermann Adler for his ‘strangling of the spirit’.

Adler’s successor, Hertz, found himself under attack from both the left and the right within the United Synagogue. Sir Robert Waley Cohen who served as Treasurer (1913-1918), Vice President (1918-1942) and President (1942-1952) was the most influential United Synagogue lay person of his day and held office throughout Hertz’s career. Waley Cohen wrote to Hertz in these terms:

I do not think you will ever find the Anglo-Jewish community willing to submit to the unquestioned authority of anyone in any matter other than on questions of pure din. I am certainly not one of them.16

Hertz’s successor, Brodie, was also to find his authority challenged from within the United Synagogue during the so called ‘Jacobs affair’, the details of which are well known and reproduced in Persoff’s fifteenth and sixteenth chapters17. Once again Persoff demonstrates what the last Chief Rabbi he covers in his book concedes, Reflecting in retirement, Jakobovits confesses ‘(the) unity turns out to be a mirage’.

Were it simply that the office of Chief Rabbi maintains an illusion that might be a reason for sympathy or sadness but in practice it gives rise to misunderstanding both within and without the Jewish community and results in a missed opportunity.

Historically (at least since the beginning of the twentieth century) the very office of Chief Rabbi – and particularly the expectations which others place upon it – has prevented its occupants from playing the role of the spokesperson or the leading representative spokesperson or even one of a number of leading spokespersons in moments of crisis. It seems that the desperate attempt to retain the mirage has prevented the United Synagogue Chief Rabbi from acting as primus inter pares via a vis leadership of the community. So alienated from the office of Chief Rabbi are some major sections of the community that they are simply unable to trust it as its conduit for their views. Equally the inability of recent incumbents to be seen on platforms with Liberal, Masorti or Reform Rabbis has diminished the possibility of the Chief Rabbi as a spokesperson for the British Jewish community even in a moment of crisis.

Nevertheless the greatest failing of the office of Chief Rabbi – and its attempt to maintain the fiction of communal unity – is it simply does not reflect the growing plurality and diversity of the British Jewish community. There are perhaps some 300,000 Jews in Britain. The 2001 census asked for the first time a voluntary religion question, as a result of which statisticians estimated a Jewish population of some 290,000, not vastly different from the 270,000 estimate arrived at by Board of Deputies demographers who used burial statistics.18 Some one third of these are not affiliated to synagogues, and the numbers in synagogue membership dropped by 18% between 1990 and 2006. The falls by denomination were not uniform. The United Synagogue fell by 31% from 67,300 households to 46,330, Reform households by 4% from 17,170 to 16,570, Liberal households by 5% from 7,260 to 6860. The two gainers were Charedi households rising by 51% and Masorti by 63% (overwhelmingly former United Synagogue members).

This data can be read and utilised in a number of different ways but it is possible to predict that unless there are some dramatic interventions certain trends will prevail. By 2006 United Synagogue householders represented only 55% of synagogue affiliated Jews, the Reform 20%, Charedi 11%, Liberal 8%, Sephardi 4% and Masorti 2%. If the trends which have been evident since 1990 continue, then in 20 years there will be a changed British Jewish community in which to use broad terms one third are mainstream Orthodox (United Synagogue), one third will be Charedi and the other third will be Progressive (Reform/Liberal). Will the office of Chief Rabbi still operate as a means of creating a mirage of unity or will it fulfil its real potential as the leader of a large constituency in the British Jewish community which is able to recognise the role of the leaders of other sections of the community?

I make no apology for taking as my model the encampment of the Children of Israel recorded in the second chapter of the Book of Numbers where we read that all of the tribes surrounded the Ark of the Tabernacle, to protect what was most precious in their day, but each tribe did so al diglo under its own particular banner. That represented unity in diversity not uniformity, and a sign of a mature community. I trust it will not be long before the mirage of unity is replaced by unity in diversity which can be genuinely reflected in the office of the Chief Rabbi working respectfully and equally alongside the leaderships of the other significant parts which make up the British Jewish community of the 21st century.

Endnotes

1The appellation ‘Chief Rabbi’ refers throughout to the correctly but lengthily named Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue of Britain and the Commonwealth (formerly British Empire).
14Ibid, p.236.
15Ibid, p.133.
16Ibid, p.388.

RABBI DANNY RICH, graduate of Leo Baeck College and former Rabbi of Kingston Liberal Synagogue is Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism.
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A VIEW FROM LAMBETH

MANNA asked Canon Guy Willinson, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s right-hand man in interfaith matters, to say how things were looking from Lambeth post-Gaza and the Israeli elections. During the first four months of 2009, the Editor of MANNA published four articles in the Church Times setting out a new agenda for Christian-Jewish dialogue in Britain. This agenda seeks to take the focus beyond consideration of Christian anti-Judaism, the Shoah and anti-Semitism and into theological engagement relating to our respective scriptures, the truth claims that we each make, Israel, and key beliefs such as the crucifixion. By responding to the Editor’s articles, Canon Willinson also responds to the original questions about Gaza and the elections.

Guy Wilkinson

IN HIS FOUR RECENT ARTICLES in the Church Times, Rabbi Tony Bayfield has rendered us all a real service, just as one would expect from him. He has ventured into religious, theological and political territory that is strewn with the wreckage of centuries of disputation — within as much as between religions — and which remains an uncleared minefield with ordnance from all religions. I have an image in my mind of those individuals, committed to the greater good, who go out alone into the minefield, patiently, vulnerably and bravely to clear the ground and open it up as a safe space to be used creatively for the good of future communities.

I have been challenged by him not only to reconsider my understanding of Judaism especially as I have absorbed it from my Christian liturgy; scripture and preaching. But also I have been challenged to readdress my understandings of aspects of my own Christian belief. This is, classically, what dialogue is supposed to do, but often fails to achieve.

The relationship between Christianity, Judaism and Islam as siblings, the challenge of Israel the Land, the interpretation of Scripture, the ‘God’s eye view’ of religions — all these are explored with a refreshing openness and candour. But they still leave the reader in no doubt about his own religious commitment as a Jew within the Reform tradition.

What imagery, what metaphor shall we use to speak about the relationship between Christianity, Judaism and Islam? Metaphors are powerful shapers and there are risks that we may distort relationships by their use and may introduce unintended implications elsewhere. The family relationship metaphor for the ‘Abrahamic’ religions seems to me to risk this, whether Christianity as the daughter, Judaism as the elder brother, or Christianity and Judaism, and perhaps Islam, as siblings. Who then is beyond the family and what are the implications for our relationships with Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism — to say nothing of Zoroastrianism if they are unrelated? What is their relationship with God and with the Abrahamic family?

The inter relationship between Christianity, Judaism and Islam is more complex and subtle than can be fully explored by a family metaphor. Rather, one can discern a series of different ‘paired’ relationships which separate or join pairs from the third. The texts of our scriptures, our understandings of the nature of God, our interpretations of scriptures, our approaches to law and grace, to dietary and other limitations, our histories, all these give rise not to a three sibling resemblance, but to a series of paired relationships of greater or lesser significance.

It has also to be added that ‘Christianity’, ‘Judaism’ and ‘Islam’ include a number of strongly differing strands and traditions. Which strand is paired with which other one can lead to very different conclusions about their similarities and differences. Even words like ‘mainstream’ or ‘orthodox’ are open to different ownership claims.

MANNA SUMMER 2009
and one tradition's "orthodox" is another's "heterodox". I am from an Anglican Christian tradition. My experience of Judaism, such as it is, has been of Orthodox and Reform Judaism in this country, in Israel and to a limited extent in the United States. My perceptions of Islam are mainly directed towards historic Sunni and Shia Islam, particularly as it has developed in South Asian contexts.

In scriptural terms, Jews and Christians share a text even if we interpret it very differently. But neither shares it with Islam despite some common elements. Muslims and Christians share some understandings of the significance of Jesus which neither share with Judaism. Jews and Muslims share understandings about “halal” and “kosher” which Christianity does not have. Judaism and Islam share an approach to scripture through the ‘oral Torah’ and the hadith which has no real equivalent in Christianity. Christianity and Islam include portraits of Judaism in their scripture – often with a history of negative attitudes. Christianity’s foundational understanding of God as Trinity is distinctively different even if all three are strongly monotheistic. Each of these pairs and their inter-relationship add up to a more complex picture than can easily be borne by the family metaphor.

It is my experience that although there is certainly room for 'Abrahamic' dialogue, and not least in the form of the ‘scriptural reasoning’ which has developed so creatively in recent years, it is bilateral dialogue which is most fruitful. A series of bilateral dialogues connected by multilateral gatherings can form a strongly inclusive underpinning for religious communities to share common space and contribute positively but critically to civil society.

In my view as a western Christian, it is the Christian-Jewish pairing which is most influential for me and which, notwithstanding the horrors of the historical Christian attitude to Judaism and its association with the roots of anti-Semitism, is a pairing which holds great promise for the future.

This should not be taken to imply a simple hierarchy of bilateral relationships since, as I have indicated there are a series of complex overlapping relationships not only between Christianity, Judaism and Islam but also extending on to relations with other religions. But it is, however, the perspective which considerably influences my thinking.

Within the Christian-Jewish pairing, how can we explore together our approaches to scripture, our histories, the person of Jesus and the Land?

Christian approaches to scripture are conditioned by the person of Jesus as primarily to all scripture, both Tanakh/Old Testament and New Testament. In mainstream Christian understanding, the text of scripture is of human construction and divine inspiration and is a sufficient account of the human relationship with God and with God’s creation. The sixth of the Church of England’s 39 Articles of Religion says: “Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation”, a phrase which leaves much room for discussion and difference about its human and divine inter-relationship and requires no literalist approach. In each generation new contexts require fresh interpretation and by the same logic the contexts within which scripture emerged and was written down must be understood. Much of the gospels’ rhetoric about ‘the Jews’ needs to be understood in the context of a small movement struggling to have its message heard within the prevailing majority religious context. Such a contextualised understanding provides room for further discussion.

Our histories are full of violent, hateful or at best condescending, attitudes by Christians to Jews and by the story of anti-Semitism in which Christianity is so strongly implicated. How can our relationship continue to acknowledge and repudiate this history, work to expunge anti-Semitism from our lives and liturgies and at the same time move on from guilt/victim based discourse which perhaps necessarily has been so dominant in the years since the Holocaust? I believe that through the patient building of personal and communal relations, through deeper understandings of our theologies, through the struggle against anti-Semitism wherever it appears and through common actions in the world, that history can be redeemed. The journey to Auschwitz by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi and Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield, together with all the religious leadership of this country, which took place in October 2008, illustrates what can be done.

The name of Jesus, who for Christians is the reconciler of God and humanity and of human beings to each other, has not at all been that for Jews. What room is there for further discussion of Jesus as a Jewish person in history which does not ask of Jews more than it should? Rabbi Tony Bayfield’s generous acknowledgement of the significance of Jesus for Christians is an indication.

And what of the Land? No Jewish-Christian relationship worthy of the name can leave this aside. No relationship can leave in doubt the significance of the Land for all Jews and the necessity that there be a secure and prosperous Israel, not simply as political necessity but towards the fulfillment of the biblical vision. Christianity and Judaism may differ in their assessments of the holiness of the Holy Land and...
in their understanding of the place of Jerusalem in the economy of God. But Christians understand and respect the Jewish assessment for Judaism and are not at all without their own deep love for the Land as the place of Jesus’ life and of his Jewish history and therefore as a primary place of pilgrimage.

For Palestinians and especially in this context, Christian Palestinians, the Holy Land is not a place of pilgrimage. It is their land, their place, their inheritance as the children of those who have lived there through the millennia. They are the firstborn of Christianity from whom all others have learned their faith.

And for others, especially for Muslims, there is as well a strong

might use Archbishop Rowan Williams’ description of a healthy civil society as ‘an argumentative democracy’ to describe more specifically the way in which religious people can relate. From the global to the neighbourhood scale, ideas and understandings about the way things are, about the nature of reality, about God, are lived out, debated and explored. Some approaches have more in common with others and differ only in limited ways. Others are radically different one from another. We are intellectually and emotionally committed to our understandings. Whilst we should wish to understand more about others’ understandings, we begin from the perspective that ours is not our business. Thirdly, there is a ‘code of practice’ to be adhered to which for Christians is derived from the life of Jesus and for others from their ethics. We are not to exploit, threaten or distort in pursuance of ‘winning the argument’ or gaining power over the other.

There is an old story and a new story of inter religious relationships.

The old story runs like this: “Religions are polar opposites containing only all good or all evil, the language used is of overcoming, prevailing over and defeating the other, the rhetoric is military and violent, to dissent is to be an infidel or a heretic who is to be cast out,

The name of Jesus, who for Christians is the reconciler of God and humanity and of human beings to each other, has not at all been that for Jews. What room is there for further discussion of Jesus as a Jewish person in history which does not ask of Jews more than it should? Rabbi Tony Bayfield’s generous acknowledgement of the significance of Jesus for Christians is an indication.

historical and emotional, attachment which cannot be set aside or simply subordinated to a Jewish perspective.

What then is the contribution that Christians and Jews – and Muslims – as religious people in this country can make together? That is not an easy question to answer but one which must be faced time and again. We must surely be seen to be committed to some principles: a just and peaceful settlement which is achieved not by violence but by negotiation, a full acceptance of a peaceful and secure future for Israel, a full acceptance of a peaceful and secure future for Palestinians, respect for and access to the holy sites, a refusal to stereotype or to take part in the rhetoric which strengthens stereotypes, a desire to remain in relationship even in the most dire circumstances, and a determination to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. These are principles for the Council of Christians and Jews, for the dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and for the many other contexts in which Christians and Jews consider these matters.

To return to the broader question of how people of different religious understandings relate in our society, I at least a reasonable hypothesis from which to be working. Furthermore, because we are committed to it and believe ours to be rational and to have explanatory and life enhancing power, we wish to offer it to others from at least the initial perspective that it might be embraced by others. Where we end up as we converse, discuss, argue or engage in dialogue, may well not be where we started – indeed it should not be, but we are not indifferent to the outcome and we are not unaffected by it.

This ‘argumentative’ approach is governed, in my view by three overarching rules which must be adhered to by participants. First an acceptance that God is beyond all our little thoughts and ideas. In Rabbi Tony Bayfield’s phrase: “it is delusional for any group of humans to believe that they have grasped the fullness of God”. Of course Christians believe that in Jesus Christ is found the fullness of God, but this is not to say that any person or group can have the full mind of Christ. Secondly, whatever we may think about any other person’s account of God, we are not entitled to make judgements about the eternal consequences for them of that view. That is a matter reserved for God and human military and political power is inextricably confused with the power of God”.

The new story needs to run like this: “Religion becomes a resolver of conflict not a cause of it, we can recognise and respect foundational and inalienable differences and seek to understand them accurately and to discuss them amicably. We cease to speak the language of conflict and utter difference in favour of searching the storehouses of our religions’ wisdom for understandings held in common. We insist on full freedom of belief and worship and do not seek to prevent the full truth of one religion from being heard and if desired embraced by others. We warn that the old story will lead only to disaster for humanity and to the name of God being heard as a curse and not as a blessing”.

I know which story I prefer to tell

CANON GUY WILKINSON graduated from Cambridge and worked in international development, then at the European Commission. After ordination in 1987 he served in several parishes and from 1999 until 2004 as Archdeacon of Bradford. He was appointed in July 2003 to serve as National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser and Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury.
OUR TEENAGERS NEED MORE JEWISH SUPPORT

Lisa Stock

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS I have been researching for a PhD in Sociology. My research has been supported by several Synagogues as well as by staff and lay leaders within the Reform Movement and my thanks go to all of them. Their queries about the progress of my research have prompted me to keep going when I was flagging, and their questions about my findings have often stimulated my thinking. So here is a brief summary of some of those findings.

The debate as to whether young Jews are primarily Jewish or British is now largely seen to be sterile and the concept of ‘multiple identities’ is widely accepted. My research sought to examine the ways in which different beliefs and attitudes can be seen as resulting from an individual’s identification as both Jewish and British.

The research was conducted in two provincial cities. The young people I interviewed, all aged 16 to 18 years, came from diverse families. Over half had one parent who was not ‘born Jewish’ and several had a non-Jewish step-parent or non-Jewish half or step-siblings. So for many, the non-Jewish world came right into the family. But these young people were not disturbed by the presence of a Christmas tree in their home, or by receiving Christmas presents from one part of the family and Chanukkah gifts from another. This was just ‘the way things are’ and it did not lead them to consider themselves to be in any way less Jewish. There was none of the discomfort which some converts may feel with such matters. There was no difference in the range of religious behaviour between families with a ‘mixed’ background and those with two ‘born Jewish’ parents. Although the majority of the interviewees were positive in their attitude to ‘being Jewish’, many prefaced remarks about their own identity or attitude with an assertion that they were ‘not religious’. While these young people often showed little understanding of the differences between Orthodox and Reform Judaism, they were positive about being Reform Jews. Shira described explaining Reform Judaism to some Orthodox peers in her class: ‘I just basically tell them that you know you’re still a Jew, you – you are learning the same prayers and stuff but you are more equal – I’d say it was a more friendly way of being Jewish’.

In looking towards the future, few of the interviewees were positively committed to engaging in Jewish religious practice. Nor were they prepared to rule it out completely, particularly with regard to bringing up future children. Most felt their own future involvement with Judaism depended on whether they found a Jewish partner and the majority did not express a strong commitment to this. This did not mean that they did not want to ‘be Jewish’ in the future. Overall a positive attitude towards future identification was linked to a positive engagement with one or more of three aspects of Jewish ethnicity. The first was Judaism as a religion. This had to be more than just a belief in God. There had to be also some meaningful enjoyment of Jewish ritual, or appreciation of the intellectual content, or religious values and morals found within Judaism. The second was a strong emphasis on family relationships. This could be with the nuclear or the extended family or could be a strong relationship with one parent. It was also sometimes associated with a desire not to break a ‘link’ to preceding generations, or to the ‘Jewish people’. That linkage was through social relationships. Some interviewees had strong friendships or friendship groups originating in or maintained by one of the Jewish institutions—a Jewish Primary school, Youth Group or Youth Movement. These social networks, and the support they gave, could be associated with increased knowledge of religion, history, or Israel. They often provided a body of knowledge and activity associated with what was referred to as ‘cultural’ Judaism.

The feeling articulated by Alison that “whether I practice or not, I would always be Jewish”, was expressed by many interviewees and implied by others. While parents and children accepted the idea of ‘choice’ about their future engagement with ritual and Jewish practice, this only related to performance, to ‘doing Jewish’. There was no indication that any of the interviewees would stop ‘being Jewish’. They saw this identification as part of who they were. Their ‘primary socialisation’ was still, at this stage in their life, something they could not imagine being without. While ‘doing Jewish’, within the family and community, had been a foundation of this identification, this ‘content’ was not seen as being necessary to continue ‘being Jewish’. Although some parents and children expressed a preference for a future partner to be Jewish, this was not seen as essential in order to have Jewish offspring. It was a matter to be negotiated within any future relationship, and was dependent on future partners and their religious identification, rather than a matter of an individual belief system. A non-Jewish partner who did not have any strong religious identification was seen by some as preferable to someone with a commitment to another faith, providing perhaps a tabula rasa on which could be inscribed either a Jewish conversion or at least an acceptance that any children should be raised as Jewish.

A third of the interviewees had been to an Orthodox Jewish primary school, but none attended Jewish secondary schools. While parental choice of primary school may have

continued on next page
been influenced by its availability, almost none of these young people would have chosen a Jewish secondary school whether or not it was available. Non-Jewish secondary schools were seen as allowing the individual to be better integrated into the wider society and as a better preparation for their future life, both at university and afterwards. The young people valued their diverse range of friends, often referring with some warmth or pride to friendships with young people from other ethnic backgrounds. As Jamie said, “I like to integrate myself with non-Jewish friends... I like generally just seeing other religions and how they work, but I have a lot of... friends from other religions like Hindus, Jains, Muslims”. While some had two groups of friends, sometimes having Jewish friends from their primary school or occasionally from a youth group, or movement, the majority had few Jewish friends. Those who were ‘the only Jew in the school’ did not normally see this as problematic. Some who attended the larger independent schools had Jewish school friends, but often felt they were different in some way from those who were from a more traditional or orthodox background.

Anti-Semitism was generally not perceived by these young interviewees as racism, but rather as a form of bullying. Most of the anti-Semitism experienced from peers was either taken as insignificant ‘teasing’ and ignored or diffused with humour, or as something to be dealt with by the school authorities as any other bullying would be. It rarely provoked a feeling of defensiveness. But anti-Israel comments were dealt with in a very different way.

Almost all the young people interviewed showed some attachment to Israel. The extent of this attachment was influenced by whether they had been on an Israel tour or had otherwise visited Israel or whether they had family there. Israel was for many an icon, with some showing little real knowledge of the nature of the country. For those who had not visited Israel it was clear that they saw it as a ‘religious’ country. Their attachment arose because they were Jewish, and Israel is the Jewish state, but it lacked understanding of the reality of Israel as a modern state. Israel was for them the land of stories and biblical myths, rather than a country with a modern economy and a large secular population. As Nicola said, “I did not expect it to be like – it is difficult to explain – normal”.

Despite this emotional attachment, support for Israel was frequently equivocal. In relation to the Palestinian conflict, almost all were prepared to defend Israel in the context of discussions with non-Jewish peers. But the majority did not support ‘what Israel does’, meaning the actions of the Israeli Government or its armed forces. Nevertheless, while it was acceptable to say at home, or with other Jews, that one did not approve of Israel’s actions, there was a feeling that one should not criticise Israel in any non-Jewish arena.

This group’s experience of media coverage of Israel has been largely negative with Israel being seen as an aggressor. The tendency to conflate ‘Israel’ with ‘Jewish’ left these young people feeling that they were supporting actions with which they were not comfortable. One way of managing this discomfort was to separate the actions of the Israeli people from those of the Israeli Government. While the Israeli people are Jewish, the argument goes, Jews in this country are not Israeli and cannot be held responsible for the Israeli Government. The young person can thus feel comfortable supporting ‘Israel’. As Naomi expressed it: “a lot of people see everything that Israel does as a united act of the Jewish people and there is a lot of anti-Semitic feelings because of that”. Naomi needed to make clear to her peers that being Jewish did not mean that she supported the actions of the Israeli Government. An alternative strategy was to refer to the culpability of both ‘sides’ in the conflict – both being seen as at fault so that Israel is, morally, ‘no worse’ than the ‘other’ side. Both these strategies were common.

These teenagers often felt ill-equipped to have discussions about the Middle East with their peers. Some, but not all, of those who were involved with Youth Movements felt more able to debate these issues but several mistrusted media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, in either the mainstream or the Jewish press.

My research was not directed at practical conclusions. Nevertheless it is clear that the issue of support for our teenagers who are still at school and facing these challenges should be addressed by the community.

The names of all participants have been changed.

DR LISA STOCK worked for twenty years as a Teacher of the Hearing Impaired. A past President of Manchester Reform Synagogue, she has served on the Board of the Reform Movement. Currently a member of Menorah Synagogue, Lisa retains an interest in youth work. She received her PhD from Manchester University in 2008.
GOD’S MERCY

Jeffery Rose

Hebrew words from this verse, which translate as “love your neighbour as yourself”, form the Torah’s epicentre. They are often referred to as the Golden Rule and, long ago, Rabbi Akiva said these words contained the fundamental principle of Torah.

Important the Torah also teaches us that we, individually, have to make choices between good and evil. It follows that what is wrong with the world today is there because wrong choices have been made. Is God to be blamed for that? I think not. After all we do have the free will to choose.

I know that this does not answer questions like “Why do bad things happen to good people?” or “How could God permit the Holocaust to happen?” or “How can natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis, which cause so much damage and loss of life, be allowed to occur?” My weak answer is that I just do not know. Hopefully it may help a little if we accept Hillel’s reply to the scoffer who asked him to explain Judaism while standing on one leg. He said: “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellows. This is the whole Torah. Now go and learn.”

Is it some comfort to say that the world in which we live has not been perfect since the seventh day of creation when God saw that all that had been done was good and He rested? Maybe. At least, it is not all our fault.

I am attracted by the Midrash which asks why the first word of Genesis begins with a Beth and not an Aleph. It answers its own question by pointing out that a Beth has three closed sides and that one is open which suggests that God’s creation of the world was not meant to be final and complete. The gate of the Beth will only be closed when the world has been completed – by man.

Another difficult area – I never said that any of this is easy – is prayer. Do I pray? The honest answer is that as a shul goer I read a lot of prayers and sometimes I actually pray. On my own, when I am not distracted, I pray more. Nevertheless I actually like saying most of the prayers in synagogue because they often raise challenging thoughts that I can develop later. Do my prayers get answered? Yes – sometimes. Does this frustrate me? No, it is part of life – a long time ago Rabbi Hugo Gryn z”l taught me that God can say “no”. So why do I continue to pray? Because I am a Jew and my Judaism accentuates the basic value of tikvah, hope. Without hope, Hugo’s father taught him, in the depths of the death camps, you cannot survive for three minutes.

Lastly I want to discuss one further difficulty with which one has to come to terms when making theological assessments from within Torah. When the Children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land God commanded them to wipe out the existing inhabitants. This sits uncomfortably with the image of God as being full of mercy, slow to anger, generous in love, forgiving sin, who pardons. Can these opposing attributes be reconciled? In attempting to do this one has to remember that in those far off days such aggressive conquering was normal. Historically it is doubtful if all the dreadful and pitiless actions were actually carried out and as civilisation developed such actions ceased and became part of history.

The merciful side of God is displayed when He responses to the plea of Moses after having said that He would destroy the Children of Israel because they rebelled against the opportunity to enter the Promised Land. The sentence was commuted to forty years of wandering

continued on next page
in the wilderness so that they would die of natural causes but would not see the Promised Land. We remember that God reprieved the inhabitants of the city of Nineveh when they repented after Jonah cried out against it. So perhaps the situation is not so bad after all.

THE THINKER RESPONDS:
In the space allotted, I can touch upon only two points in this stimulating statement by one of the most distinguished non-rabbinic leaders of British Progressive Judaism.

"I read a lot of prayers and sometimes I actually pray" – a wonderful formulation. But does God, whom the writer believes did "create the world and all that is in it", hear and respond to the prayers that arise often simultaneously from human beings all over the world, in each case making a wise decision whether to grant or to deny? Certainly God may say "No", as Hugo Gryn z"l and many others have said, but – with regard to our prayer for peace, for example – why so consistently "No" for so many centuries? Does understanding prayer as an articulation of Jewish hope depend on a God who hears and responds?

The second point honestly addresses passages in the Torah that seem incompatible with the humane characteristics we prefer to emphasize – such as the commandment to wipe out the existing inhabitants of Canaan – see the beginning of Deut. 7. That this was not actually fulfilled in history does not resolve the problem of a God who is said to command it. And the assertion that "as civilisation developed such actions ceased" strikes me as overly optimistic. The conception of progress as an integral component of advancing civilisation has been fatally challenged by the bloodbath of the First and the genocide of the Second World Wars.

Perhaps we need a more sceptical approach to some of the Torah’s assertions about God and the divine commandments, insisting that even this most sacred text does not unambiguously teach us about God. Rather, it expresses varying human conceptions of God, many of them in tension with each other and some of which we must unambiguously repudiate.

JEFFERY ROSE is Hon Life President of the European Region of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, President of Alyth Gardens Synagogue in NW London and a former President of the British Association of Orthodontists.

THE THINKER is a wise and experienced teacher of rabbinics.
know me better, a large part of my work is now about 'being' rather than 'doing' – being available for people, being aware of what is going on in people's lives and being there in an ongoing relationship with people.

It is that shift of emphasis from only 'doing' to also 'being' that turns one's hair grey. It is a huge responsibility. It is much easier to let a member of the community down by not being there for them in the way they need rather than not doing something in the way they would have wanted. I have realised that people will forgive you for a service that is not really the style they would choose for themselves if they feel they have a relationship with the rabbi. As soon as that relationship breaks down or is lacking, suddenly the tune chosen for Adon Olam can be make or break.

It is easy to fill one's time doing and forget being. It is a balancing act that I am not sure I will ever feel I have got exactly right. The individual relationships are so important, as it is the web of relationships that make community successful, but it is the things that rabbis do – the services and the study sessions – that are often important occasions which open the doors to forming or continuing the relationships. Neither work in isolation. I agonise as to whether I am doing it all as well as I could be.

I am always looking to the future. I find it impossible to see a young child dancing at the back of the shul during a Friday night service or making a funny comment at the kindergarten, without hoping still to be their rabbi when it comes to their bar mitzvah. When I am officiating at a funeral I want also to be there for the family for simchas. When I have built people's trust through their simchas, I hope that I can support them during difficult times that may follow. The rabbinate is not something I can imagine doing for a few years or moving on from community to community to move up the career ladder. How can one move on and leave the relationships only to start again with new people? (Sorry Finchley Reform Synagogue, I am in it for the long haul).

I have recently moved into a house around the corner from the shul and I feel as if I live in a small village. I walk to the shul each morning, passing children making their way to Moss Hall School. I love seeing the FRS kids who are either desperate to tell me their news or have to be coaxed by their parents to, “Say good morning to Rabbi Miriam.” I have also started getting to know Tim Atkins, our local Vicar. He tells me when he has found himself chatting to one of my congregants on a hospital visit and some of his parishioners have started stopping me to talk as they now recognise me from events they have attended at the shul. It makes supermarket shopping a lengthy business. But I feel that we are reclaiming the very best of community life which has been lost to so many in the vast anonymity of London.

I feel so privileged to be involved in people's lives and to have had the title 'rabbi' given to me with all that it entails. It cannot be easy being married to a rabbi – all the evening meetings and weekend commitments must get annoying – but my husband Jonni, too, recognises the privileged position I am in. It is that sense of privilege that keeps me working when I am exhausted, keeps me positive when dealing with other people's grief and helps me to remember everyday how lucky I am to be living the life I am living.

RABBI MIRIAM BERGER is the Principal Rabbi of Finchley Reform Synagogue in North London.

THE ROLLERCOASTER REACHED its height and slowly plunged down the slope. The sound of children and adults screaming pierced my consciousness. Up and down at breakneck speed. If there was ever a perfect place to begin my Rabbinic career, it was Chessington World of Adventures. Rollercoaster ride as metaphor for Rabbinic life. I was on West London Synagogue’s summer camp. I was tickled that my time at WLS should begin this way.

The unexpected aspect of life these past three years has been that my hopes for my existence as a Rabbi have been exceeded. I had high hopes. I felt in my kishkes, my inners, that this was the life for me. What I did not foresee was that every day would bring a new challenge, which, even if difficult, was worthwhile and often funny.

The task that had worried me most during my Rabbinic training was continued on next page
officiating at funerals. Sadly, I have had ample opportunity to develop in this area since WLS is a large congregation. My mentor, Rabbi Danny Smith, had reassured me that as long as I was a compassionate listening ear for bereaved families, I would be surprised at how grateful they would be for my support. He was right, although I hope I give a bit more than just the basic service. I actually find funerals most difficult when the bereaved family are unemotional about their loss. If they are crying on my shoulder and expressive of their feelings about the death, even if those feelings are negative, I feel I can usually help more. Mirroring the way they carry themselves has been something I have learned – changing, chameleon-like, to support English gent or East-End cabbie.

The task I now see as the real challenge of the Rabbinate is to impose a vision and long-term strategy on the day-to-day demands. Where is the shul going to be in five or ten years is just as important as whether Jonathan Flugelbaum can leyn the last few verses of his Haftarah – he can, by the way. The other prong of this focus on the longer term, is the need to keep learning Jewishly. Much of my text study is targeted at a sermon or shiur. But often I come across gems which are totally irrelevant to the task in hand but make me laugh or cry and nourish me. Particularly, Talmud study, when I have time, has been mind-blowing. I am so lucky that I was given some of the tools during my training to be able to dive into the Talmud.

Training at Leo Baeck College did prepare me for life as a Rabbi in the sense that I started out studying texts and slowly increased practical experience as I travelled through my five years. The next stage of development for a Rabbi is to do less and less from a set text. Deliver sermons from notes instead of a script. Pray with those who are ill using what they have expressed during your visit instead of having recourse to the siddur. Bless the bat mitzvah girl by weaving her personal qualities alongside the priestly blessing. Addressing congregants while looking into their eyes is always more effective than alternating eye contact with looking down at a printed page.

At the three year stage I look back with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. The Rabbinic life is one which suits me perfectly. It is something that I can share with my family. I always believed that community helps reduce the alienation of modern life and provides for our intellectual, spiritual, cultural and social needs. Jewish community does that better than most.

If Chessington World of Adventures was my first day, my most recent was also memorable. Sitting and praying with a woman who had just lost her pet dog. I was able to provide real comfort, partly enhanced by my Rabbinic title. I am grateful every day for such opportunities.

RABBI MALCOLM COHEN has just completed three years as one of the rabbis at West London Synagogue and is about to take his family off on a grand adventure as rabbi in Las Vegas.

VIBRANCY

by Neil Janes

S HORTLY AFTER ORDINATION, I arrived on holiday at the airport in Melbourne, Australia. The woman at passport control was fascinated. "Excuse me sir, would you mind stepping this way please?" she said. I could feel the cold sweat break out as I panicked. What had I put on the immigration form that had aroused her interest?

Finally, having re-read my papers, she asked, "So, you’re a genuine rabbi?"

The temptation for sarcasm was almost overwhelming, but because I wanted to enjoy my holiday, I replied, "Yes, I am a genuine rabbi."

“And you have regular holidays like in other jobs?” she continued.

“Yes, just like other jobs...except that I bet you do not get stuck at immigration being asked questions like this.” I added that last bit, I did not really say it – I just thought it.

“Ok,” she said, “I was just curious.” With that I was on my way and breathed a sigh of relief.

With only a few years' work experience under my belt, there have been plenty of occasions when I have not felt like a ‘real’ rabbi and that I do not have a ‘regular’ job. Learning at the Leo Baeck College is a wonderful privilege, but then you’re ‘let out’ with a certificate and a mentor. Since then, I have frequently considered writing the article entitled, ‘Things they could never even begin to imagine teaching you at Rabbinic School’. Before ordination I took the time to read research by the Alban Institute [an organisation for research and the support of congregations, based in the USA – www.alban.org – about the move out of the ‘seminary’]. What the research showed, was that the leap from the seminary to the synagogue is not an easy jump. The Leo Baeck College works hard to train Rabbis with academic rigour and communal know-how. But the transition was never going to be completely straightforward. I was not naive. But the last few years have been thoroughly challenging with a great deal of fulfilment and opportunity.

In the rabbinate you may know the theory, but it does not always seem relevant. Truth be told, I think it is a rare exception for a rabbi to find all of the work ever comes naturally. We all learn for the whole of our careers – that is, after all, a very Jewish way of viewing things. Though there is the expectation that we will be jack-of-all-trades and master of everything. That does not even begin to appreciate the complexity of human life. It does not matter how many times I visit bereaved families or sit down with a couple considering getting married, I know that on every occasion there will be a different set of relationships with totally unique individuals.

Many of my peers are working extremely hard in their chosen professions and the rabbinate is no exception. No sooner has the year begun, than you are preparing for the next one. Long hours and evening meetings are frequent and, were the immigration officer to have asked me about regular days off I could answer, quite firmly, there is no such thing as a regular day off...ask my wife. But if it was ‘only’ a job, I do not think half of what I have been part of would have been possible.

I have been extremely fortunate with my Synagogue. There have been ups and downs, but I have been helped to establish myself and become a ‘real’ Rabbi. A warmer and more welcoming community I could not have asked for. We, as a community, have learnt together about what we can achieve and we have created wonderful things together. This working together has been, probably, the single most important learning curve of my career, for our vision, and combined efforts sustain the vibrancy and sense of community from year to year. These in turn sustain me in my work.

RABBI NEIL JANES is Rabbi of Finchley Progressive Synagogue.
Once upon a long time ago, a naive group of parents, brought together by the Jewish Community Day Schools Advisory Board, had a bright idea: to set up a Jewish secondary school.

There were already Jewish secondary schools, just not one that seemed right to these parents. For some, the existing schools were simply not available, as one or other parent was a non-Orthodox convert or had some other status issue. For the majority, the Orthodox auspices under which every one of the existing Jewish secondary schools operated were too limiting. They wanted for their children a more inclusive, outward-looking ethos, one which recognised, without judgement, a wide variety of Jewish journeys and experiences and which, in the words of the Mission statement above “embraced diversity within our community and in the wider world.”

The answer, we parents thought, was simple: to set up our own state secondary school. Like Limmud, Jewish Care and other cross-community organisations, it was to welcome all Jews on an equal basis, whatever their beliefs, practices or backgrounds. Our vision was of a school which would equip students with a high standard of Jewish literacy and enthusiasm for Jewish life, without imposing on them or their families a particular model for practice. It wished them to embark on their own Jewish journey.

Together with Linda Cooke, I was appointed as the Jewish Community Secondary School’s first chair. Away we went, naively believing that JCoSS might open in time for my then six-year-old twins. Eight years later, it is hard to believe how far we have come. If any of us had known then what we know now, I doubt we would ever have embarked on such a complex project. It is only with a lot of luck and the help of a small band of dedicated volunteers, backed by a much wider group of committed supporters and, later on, advised by a handful of professionals, that we have got to this stage where, in just four months’ time, we will receive our first applications to join JCoSS in September 2010.

We had to overcome five key challenges to succeed: (1) to find a suitable site in a local authority that wanted us; (2) to persuade the Government to give us a huge chunk of money to fund 90% of the capital costs which turned out to be nearly £40 million; (3) to raise the balance, another £10 million; (4) to get planning permission; (5) to fill it with students.

The first challenge was, perhaps, the hardest: to find a site for our school.

The concentration of most of the Jewish population of London is in the Borough of Barnet, South Hertfordshire and just one or two surrounding boroughs which meant that the search area was restricted. What is more, any site with the potential for development as anything other than a school was unlikely to be affordable, while those that were affordable were often non-starters. They were either designated greenbelt or requiring an expensive clean up.

Despite this there were a number of leads and more than a couple of false dawns. We had the phantom site in Stanmore, the brownfield site in Hertfordshire which, after a hotly contested process, became the Orthodox Yavneh College. What sustained us during these ‘wilderness years’ was, ironically, those who did not want us to succeed. The more obstacles they put in our way, the more resolute we became.

Nevertheless, by Autumn 2005, the momentum was running out. Linda and I were still diligently, if not a bit wearily, traipsing around the offices of the relevant local authorities. But nothing was happening, the prospect of finding a site seemed as far off as ever. Until suddenly a supposedly routine meeting with Barnet Council during Chanukah 2005 changed everything with six small words: “we have a site for you”. This became our JCoSS miracle.

The site in question turned out to be in the north of the borough, on the borders with South Herts and Enfield. It was home to the dilapidated East Barnet Upper School, which for some time had an ambition to be consolidated on a single site alongside the rest of East Barnet School.

The Government had for some time been making ‘nice noises’ about the JCoSS vision. The then Schools Minister, Stephen Twigg, had described it as “a blueprint for 21st century faith education” and helpfully suggested that we look for a site very near the one we eventually obtained. The Government was also ready to put its money where its mouth was. It stumped up the cash not only to pay for much of JCoSS’s capital costs, but also to enable East Barnet to put up a brand new building.

How we turned a dream into a school

"An inclusive, nurturing Jewish learning community ... providing an excellent education, allowing young people to achieve their full potential in their own field of endeavour ... preparing them to be responsible, active and knowledgeable Jewish citizens ... embracing diversity within our community and in the wider world.”

JCoSS’s Mission statement

Jonathan Fingerhut

MANNA SUMMER 2009

continued on next page
thus freeing up the Westbrook Crescent site for us.

Suddenly, we had what in sports parlance is known as “the big mo”. Almost simultaneously, we also had two further strokes of luck.

First, I had a meeting with the Chief Executive of Norwood, Norma Brier. That very morning, she had been to a meeting grappling with the problem of how to move forward their own plans for the much needed redevelopment of the Annie Lawson School. What had been intended simply as a short discussion on how Norwood might support JCoSS’s inclusive vision rapidly became a full blown proposal to co-locate the two projects. Getting into bed with Norwood was very natural for JCoSS, sharing as it did our cross-community ethos and demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity.

The second stroke of luck came from talks we were having with World ORT, the world’s largest private education provider. The then chair of British ORT, Alan Goldman, was a former Director of Heron International, one of the UK’s most successful property developers. Alan, who subsequently made a pivotal contribution to establishing JCoSS, offered to make an introduction to Heron’s Chief Executive, Gerald Ronson, one of the community’s leading philanthropists and a self-proclaimed “middle-of-the-road Jew”.

Hoping for a cheque – small or large – I went to the meeting with a degree of trepidation. Ronson’s reputation for giving short thrift to those whose plans were not thought through preceded him. But I got a lot more than a cheque.

Gerald was and is a strong supporter of Jewish education, helping to build schools both in Britain and Israel. He immediately bought into the vision of JCoSS as being crucial to extend the choice of Jewish secondary education to those who would not previously have considered it for their children. He saw education as the silver bullet, by which to reinvigorate Britain’s declining Jewish community and JCoSS, in the words of a then popular advert, could reach the parts other schools could never reach.

Not only did he agree to help finance the project but he would also throw himself into it, with a commitment and enthusiasm without which JCoSS would have remained on the drawing board.

With Gerald and Norwood on board it was full steam ahead: consultants were engaged, design work started and, in the Spring of 2007, a full planning application was submitted. In August that year, following what we are told remains Barnet’s largest ever planning meeting, with over 350 supporters packed into not only the council chamber, but a series of overflow rooms, JCoSS had its planning consent and could begin work in earnest.

The past eighteen months have seen the pace of development increase exponentially. Gerald Ronson has led both the fundraising and the design and building stage of the project.

He has raised nearly £10 million from all sections of the community to help create what will be one of the most well-equipped state schools ever built in the UK. The Pears Foundation alone has invested £2 million towards the cost of the Norwood Special Resource Provision, which will cater for students with autistic spectrum disorders.

At the same time, Gerald has brought on board leading architects, consultants, and contractors who have advised him on his many successful commercial projects.

By the beginning of 2008, in addition to the JCoSS Trust – by now responsible for getting the school built under the chairmanship of Michael Phillips, the driving force behind the Orthodox Immanuel College – JCoSS needed a Governing Body to direct the educational side of the project. Following a wide range of recommendations from across the Jewish community, we appointed Robert Shragar, a former Chair of West London Synagogue as our first Chair of Governors, on the suggestion of the Head of the Movement for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Bayfield, one of our most enthusiastic supporters. Shragar pulled together a Governing Body with a wide range of talents, from education to finance, from science to marketing and representing every section of the mainsteam community: Liberal, Masorti, Orthodox, Reform and unaffiliated.

In the latter half of last year, and sadly as it turned out, shortly before he died, Robert started the recruitment process for a Headteacher. The search spanned the globe, before turning up the successful candidate in… Hendon.

Mike Grabiner, a former Chair of the Movement for Reform Judaism replaced Robert in the chair, while Jeremy Stowe-Linder was due formally to take up the reins as Headteacher at the beginning of June. He was the Deputy Headteacher of one of London’s most improved schools, Swayneley’s, in Hillingdon. He holds an MBA in the business of education as well as the recognised Headteacher’s qualification. More importantly, he brings to the job a charisma, a feeling for the Jewish community and a commitment to excellence and inclusivity which is unrivalled.

The dream is becoming reality. In a little over a year we open to our first 180 ‘Year 7’ students. From them the school will grow to offer 1,310 places. The building work is under way, and over 2,000 parents have registered their interest from every part of our community.

Somewhere in the school’s foundations there is already a time capsule, buried a couple of months ago at a special ground-breaking ceremony by the Schools Secretary, Ed Balls. As he buried it, he declared JCoSS to be “a beacon for tackling discrimination and prejudice” and said: “I will be going to other local authorities and telling them: ‘Go and learn what has been done at JCoSS’.”

Inside the capsule, amongst some shrapnel from a Second World War bomb found on the site and an old uniform from the Annie Lawson School, is an invitation to a meeting in July 2001, to discuss setting up a new pluralist secondary school. And my heart swells with pride – we are doing something truly remarkable, and at last it is coming true.

My late father’s mantra “the impossible is at the mercy of those too young or naïve to know that it cannot be done” rings so true. We at JCoSS are neither any more.

JONATHAN FINGERHUT is married with three children under 16. He is an independent business and marketing advisor who unaccountably now finds himself much in demand to help other schools.
In October 2008 I travelled to Kazimierz Dolny, a charming, small artist’s town on the Vistula for the First Congress of Jewish Art in Poland. One of the speakers I met was Eliane Strosberg who had recently written a book and curated an exhibition that looked at the subject of Jewish artists and their fascination with the human figure. In her book ‘Human Expressionism – The Human Figure and the Jewish Experience’ Strosberg argues that despite the Second Commandment’s injunction against producing graven images, most Jewish artists were far more interested in painting the human figure than in landscape or still life painting. In particular, she explored how, during the 20th century, when artists were abandoning figurative art for abstraction, Jewish artists celebrated the human figure in their work. One of her reasons was that Jews often felt a strong sense of family and regularly painted family members. In her lecture, she developed this point and in particular showed how many artists, their mothers provided a source of inspiration. So here I would like to further explore the art of the Jewish mother.

The first painter to succeed as a Jew without recourse to conversion was Moritz Oppenheim (1800-1882) known as the “Painter of the Rothschilds and the Rothschild of Painters,” because of his close relationship with the banking family. Born in the ghetto of Hanau near Frankfurt, he was able to study at the prestigious Städel Art Institute in Frankfurt when the ghetto was abolished in 1811, following the liberalization of Germany brought about by French occupation. He then went to work in Munich, Paris and Rome before settling in Frankfurt once more. Initially a portrait painter, in 1833-34 he produced his first Jewish subject and later in life dedicated himself to producing a series that he entitled ‘Scenes from Traditional Jewish Family Life’. In many of these works, the presence of the Jewish mother is central. This was no doubt because in Oppenheim’s home the formative personality was his mother as he himself wrote in his memoirs written late in life and not published till 1924.

His first work on a Jewish subject provides a fascinating glimpse of some of the difficulties younger German Jews were experiencing in being loyal both to their tradition and to their country. Its long title ‘The Return of the Jewish Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs’ which is now in the Jewish Museum, New York, gives a clue to the issues being explored. A wounded soldier dressed in his Hussar’s uniform has just returned to his family to find them celebrating Shabbat. There is every indication that the soldier has only just arrived suggesting he travelled on Shabbat to reach his family. As he is embraced by his sister or his sweetheart, his father, who unlike the son, wears a skull cap, examines closely the military decoration his son has received which is the Iron Cross. Despite the father’s unease with this symbol, the family are still shown to be patriotic citizens as they have a portrait of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, on their wall. Above all, the painting was a piece of propaganda to show the important contribution Jews had made to the wars against Napoleon at a time when their recently gained civil rights were under threat.

Whilst the soldier and his father are positioned on the left of the canvas, in the centre stands his mother. Dressed in a spotless white satin dress, she stands with a bowl of water in her hands, ready to attend to his wounds. Her important role in the family is highlighted by the impressive bunch of keys she wears around her waist. Her home is pristine, full of books to show the learnedness of the family, the Shabbat ritual objects all gleaming in the light. Whereas everyone else in the painting is seated or stooping, she alone stands upright, the solid centre of this family.

There are many similar examples in Oppenheim’s Jewish paintings. In a picture of 1866 depicting the conclusion of Shabbat, the mother, who looks almost identical despite being painted over thirty years later, is transported into a spiritual rapture whilst her husband performs the ritual of Havdalah. In another painting of the same year entitled ‘Sabbath Rest’ also from the Jewish Museum, New York, Oppenheim shows that it is not only men who study the sacred texts. Whilst a father and his son relax outside their shop, the boy holding his closed prayer book, his aged grandmother studies her book intently. Once more a contrast between the generations is presented as in the background there is a younger woman reading not from a prayer book, but more likely a novel.

Another artist to have been inspired by his mother was Mark Gertler (1891-1939). He was born in London’s Spitalfields, his parents and their five children, of whom Mark was the youngest, returned to their home town of Przemysl in Galicia in 1892 when Mark was just a year old. These were hard times as Mark’s father tried a number of ways to make money, eventually leaving for the United States to make his fortune. It was his mother Golda who held the family together in this time and it is not surprising that she played a central role in his life.

The family returned to the East End of London in 1896 where their father continued on next page
had found work as a furrier and Mark came to the attention of the Jewish Education Aid Society which gave him a grant to study at the Slade School of Art. Despite his West End education, it was in the East End that he found many of his early subjects and his mother was a particular source of inspiration. This is made clear in a comment he made in a letter to his lover, fellow artist Dora Carrington: ‘I went out and saw more unfortunate artists. I looked at them talking art, ancient art, modern art, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Cubists, Spottists, Futurists, Cave-dwelling, Wyndham-Lewis, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry. I looked and laughed to myself... and walked home disgusted with them all, and was glad to find my dear simple mother waiting for me with a nice roll, that she knows I like and a cup of hot coffee. You, dear mother, I thought, are the only modern artist.’

He also wrote of his mother ‘Her entire happiness is bound up in my progress’. This was proved by the fact that she framed and displayed in the kitchen a letter from Gertler’s supporter Sir William Rothenstein in which he praised her son as having gifts of a high order.

His mother and siblings appear in so many of his works as he did not have the funds to pay for models. A portrait that he made of her in 1911 was prominently displayed at the New English Art Club that year where it was highly praised by critics. It is now in the Tate Gallery. In it, she wears what must have been her best outfit with beading at the collar and cuffs. She wore the same outfit in a portrait painted three years earlier. In the 1911 portrait, as in many of the paintings he made of his mother, her hands dominate, suggesting that she is very much a working woman, even when dressed in her finery. In 1913 he painted her again in a very different style, this time influenced by Post-Impressionism. His use of colour is much more pronounced. Where the 1911 portrait is painted in a range of earth colours, in 1913 Golda is shown in her work clothes wearing a bold polka-dot scarf, sitting beside violently coloured red and green apples. Her hands still dominate, this time appearing rough and worn. Gertler wrote that he wanted this portrait to indicate ‘suffering and a life that has known hardship’ and described it as ‘barbaric and symbolic.’ He painted her for the last time in 1924, where again her hands are splayed out on her lap dominating the composition. Gertler obviously wanted to keep this painting as he priced it at £200. But it sold anyway and was the highest sum his paintings earned during his lifetime.

Lucian Freud, who was born in 1922, is another artist who painted repeated portraits of his mother. As a young man, he had an uneasy relationship with his mother, resenting her attentions as he explained. ‘From very early on she treated me, in a way, as an only child. I resented her interest; I felt it threatening. She was so intuitive. And she liked forgiving me. She forgave me for things I never even did.’ After his father’s death in 1970, his mother became depressed and from 1972 Freud would collect her most days and take her to his studio to sit for him. ‘If my father hadn’t died, I’d never have painted her,’ he commented. ‘I started working from her because she lost interest in me; I could not have, if she had been interested.’

The paintings include ‘Large Interior W9’ in which Freud, as in so many other works, juxtaposes two unlikely subjects. In this case his mother dominates the foreground, sitting lost in her own thoughts in an old, battered armchair. Behind her lying on a low bed is a naked woman, Freud’s girlfriend at the time and mother of one of his sons. She is also daydreaming, staring at the ceiling. The two women did not sit together for the portrait and indeed they do not appear aware of each other at all. A further intriguing element is the fact that under his mother’s chair, Freud placed pestle and mortar that he used for crushing charcoal. All three elements demand our attention equally.

Freud painted his mother many times, once holding a book though he admitted that she did not actually read it, and many times resting. In the later works he, like Gertler, focuses on her hands, now gnarled and twisted. Perhaps the most moving of the works is the small pencil sketch he made of her the day after she died in 1989, focusing on her emaciated face. The eyes that he painted so many times staring into space, are finally closed.

Julie Held, born in 1958, was only eighteen when her mother died in 1977. Whilst her father still sits for her regularly, her mother also remains an important subject in her art. One scene that Held returns to repeatedly is that of her mother’s deathbed, sometimes focusing solely on her mother’s gaunt and almost ghostly body and at other times, showing the differing reactions of the family as they gather round.

One more theme that has been running through her work for a number of years focuses on the Sabbath Table, laid for the ritual meal held on a Friday night, which brings Jewish families together. It was Julie’s mother who organised the observance of Jewish festivals. After she died, the family meals no longer took place. In early works such as ‘Commemoration’ of 1993 from the Ben Uri Collection, the artist recreated the atmosphere of those family evenings, pictorially reuniting her late mother and grandmother with family members who perished in the Holocaust alongside the living, who now have families of their own. Subsequently, she has painted the table deserted, symbolic of the fact that the meals no longer take place.

Ten years after her mother’s death, Held began a new series. Each year on her mother’s birthday she began a new canvas showing her mother at the age she would have been had she lived. In the first of these works Held showed her ‘as young and in good health. That is how I wanted to remember her and it was important to me at this point to do so.’ For almost twenty years, Held continued work on this series. She did not paint a portrait every birthday but produced some ten works, only stopping the year that her mother would have been eighty. In one of these works her mother, who came to this country as a young girl as a refugee from Nazism, sits in a chair, enjoying the very European treats of a glass of brandy that she drank every evening and her miniature Schimmelpfennig cigar.

Many other artists have dealt with the subject of the Jewish mother: They include Marc Chagall who was devoted to his mother and the sculptor Chana Orloff who celebrated her own status as a Jewish mother in her art. It reinforces Eliane Strosberg’s argument that the close family links in Judaism lead to a preference amongst Jewish artists for figurative painting.

Endnotes
1 Human Expressionism: ‘The Human Figure and the Jewish Experience’ by Eliane Strosberg, Somogy Art Publishers, £29.00.
4 Ibid.
5 Conversation with the artist, May 2009.
I BEGNI WITH THE CAST LIST. I am Hannah Jacobs and I work for Jewish Care. My husband is David Jacobs who has worked for the Reform Movement since time immemorial.

David and I were spending a mid-winter break in Jerusalem. There we joined Rabbi Larry Englemer from Ontario, his wife Cheryl and Rabbi Danny Gottlieb, another Canadian rabbi who graduated from Leo Baeck College. They were taking part in the Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Let me introduce also Anat Hoffinan, the Executive Director of the Israel Progressive Movement's Religious Action Centre (IRAC).

A few days before Rosh Chodesh Adar, the 25th February 2009, David and I bumped into Anat Hoffinan. She invited me to join the 'Women at the Wall Prayer Group' at the Kotel - the Western [Temple] Wall - the following Wednesday. She said she was hoping that some of the Reform Rabbis for the Convention would join us and all I had to do was to be in the foyer of our hotel at 6.40 am.

At first just a few women mingled in the foyer and then more and more. I carried in my hand my Women at the Wall and realised that for once I would be among many wearing it.

At about 6.50 am we got on the coach with the Englanders and Danny Gottlieb. The coach drove around the city walls through East Jerusalem and dropped us at the Dung Gate. Our guide led us to the door of the Jerusalem Archaeological Center which leads to Robinson's Arch. We were refused entry.

Anat found us and took us through to the women's area of the Kotel where the group started to pray. She explained that we would daven together at the back of the women's section and then we would need to return to Robinson's Arch to read Torah and daven Musaf, the additional prayer for the start of the month.

The men had to stand behind the wall separating the prayer area from the plaza. Looking at them, it was as if they were behind the partition in Orthodox synagogues. Later I saw some of them, including David, Larry and Danny, standing in the men's section. Throughout the [prayer] session, I felt their support. Those of us with put them on and the re led us in the morning prayers. It was powerful davening by the Kotel with a group of women and with the men separated from us behind the mechitza. Saying the Shema was amazing - such a wondrous and powerful moment. It brought together the words with the place, the people and the event. By now some young orthodox women who had also come to the wall stood alongside us. At first they were bemused and then began to smile, at us or with us?

We sang Psalm 150. I became aware that the ultra Orthodox - men were shushing us and then hissing at us. As they got angrier, our singing became louder. Singing the Psalm, I thought of Ben Dawson, a severely disabled young man from our community in Finchley, London. This was the Psalm he responded to at his barmitzvah. I thought of Audrey, my late mother-in-law, who would have been so proud of me at this time. She had so disliked having to climb on a chair to watch her own grandson's barmitzvah at the Kotel. What a moment this was, so full of feelings and memories. Then we davened the Amidah and chanted the berachah for the Hallel Psalms.

The Hallel moment was all-powerful. We had been asked to move closer together for safety. The niggun [tune] used for the chanting of Psalm 113 was not a familiar one but beautiful. When the Ha' alat Tefillah began b'tzeit Yisrael, Psalm 114, we all joined in. By this time the group must have grown to about 150 women. The charedi men were getting really angry and the security personnel were very concerned and tried to get us to stop singing. They called out kol isha (the voice of the woman) and tsitsit - both women singing aloud and women wearing tallitot are forbidden at the Kotel. But we just carried on singing. Then the security women shouted at us to stop singing. The Hallel Psalms.

I have never sung these songs to the glory of God with such feeling. continued on next page
The words came alive and I was lifted to another place. It brought back the way I had felt when our children had their bnei/bat mitzvah ceremonies and, later, standing under the chuppah with them. Such joy. I was lifted to a totally different plane.

Later I heard that in the men’s section one particularly irate and angry man called out to both the women and our male supporters “atem Hamas”, you are Hamas. Larry tried to take a photo of him. Another man attacked him, trying to grab his camera. The camera fell to the ground and the man spat in Larry’s face. For the Women at the Wall this verbal abuse and these expressions of violent anger are a monthly occurrence. In fact, I gather that this particular Rosh Chodesh passed with considerably less violence than is often experienced by them.

When we ended the Hallel, we were asked to walk to where women are allowed to read from the Torah. We left the Kotel area and returned to Robinson’s Arch near the point we had started that morning. This area is completely hidden away from the Kotel – so the charedi men need not hear or see any such aberration. I was appalled that women are shunted away in this fashion.

We walked with our male supporters and a table was set up. The Torah came out of its sacred duffel bag. The women crowded around the Torah and the men stayed behind us. Anat announced that the person who had designed the Women at the Wall Tallit had made that the person who had designed the Women at the Wall Tallit had made a matching Torah mantle in similar design to celebrate twenty years of women praying at the Wall. The Ba’alat Tefillah announced there would be three aliyyot but, unusually for them, groups of women were called. The first aliyyah was for women rabbis and cantors. The second was for student rabbis and student cantors. The third was for the Women of the Wall and women who live in Jerusalem.

The all-female experience including the call-ups and the misheberachs, the subsequent blessing prayers, provided me with another moment of sheer joy and brought a real depth of feeling. I was, almost for the first time, truly connecting with that moment at Sinai. It became apparent that to complete the Torah reading an additional aliyyah was required. This time the male voices joined us for the response to the berachah and kol Yisrael, the voice of Israel, was heard in Jerusalem. Fantastic.

At the conclusion of the Torah reading, the housekeeping became important. Anat explained that whilst there are 200 Sifrei Torah in the men’s section there is only one Torah in the women’s section and it needed to be returned to the home of one of the group. After being put into its sacred duffel bag it was passed around the women, eventually reaching the men, before being taken back.

Anat asked if one of the rabbis would give a d’var Torah. One of the older women rabbis talked about Rosh Chodesh Adar and the mitzvah of b’zman Simchah, the time of joy. She explained the importance of bringing joy into the world even in the difficult times in which we live. She talked of bringing joy to everyone even as we walk along the street and to the people with whom we work every day. As we do this we should look at each other and see, reflected in the joy on the face of the other, the face of God.

We finished with Musaf. We said Kaddish with a mourner and then wished each other Chodesh Tov, a happy new month.

As I gave Cheryl a hug I could only say ‘thank you’ for such an opportunity to pray. I felt truly humbled yet strengthened by davening with these special women in that special place, in Jerusalem.

At that moment it was not hard to understand what the Guardians of the Wall have to fear. They do not want to let go of their male power and control. Yet it feels to me a chillul Hashem, a profanation of God’s name that more than 50% of the Jewish world cannot daven at their Kotel according to their own minhag [custom]. Is such domination and exclusion what God wants? I cannot believe it is.

HANNAH JACOBS trained as a Jewish Educator, is a member of Finchley Reform Synagogue and works as a Senior Professional in the Jewish Community and recently became a grandmother for the first time.

For many years, the Sunday Times colour supplement has entertained us with a section called ‘Relative Values’ in which two close relatives, often a parent and child, talk about each other and their relationship. As imitation is the sincerest form of flattery we know, MANNA invited Ludwik Finkelstein and his son Daniel to write about each other.

Ludwik

I AM ILL-QUALIFIED TO WRITE about the relation between Daniel and myself. My education and training in engineering science has made me develop a style of writing that is impersonal, puts emphasis on conciseness and clarity and confines itself to verifiable facts and their analysis. I have been trained to leave emotion and subjective judgements out of what I write. It is a style that makes dull reading and is wholly inappropriate for an account of personal relations.

The human interest in an article about the relation between Daniel and myself seems to lie in the presumed contrast between our respective careers – his work in politics and journalism and mine in engineering science. If there is assumed to be contrast and conflict, then this is misconceived.

Firstly, our relation to each other has been principally determined by Jewish family values. Daniel and his brother and sister honour us as parents. We are mindful that this honour has to be earned. One of the principal ways of earning that honour is to respect the children. I have always respected Daniel, influenced him principally by discussion, given him freedom to develop intellectually, held his conclusions in high regard, and was in turn influenced by him.

Secondly, there is much less difference between our educational background than might appear. Daniel has had a very quantitatively orientated degree in Economics and a Master’s degree in Systems. He has done research on technical innovation and edited computer journals. He tends to apply scientific knowledge to the problems about which he writes. I was closely involved in his intellectual de-
development. I, in turn, in my research in measurement have taken a great interest in the methods of the social sciences. As an engineer my work has always involved communicated and political skills. I have often consulted Daniel on these latter aspects of my work. He has always given me sound advice.

We are intellectually close in outlook. Our views were honed by many discussions. Above all we share the same values. They are a passion for justice, a love of kindness and a measure of humility in our views. That humility consists of being prepared to argue for our beliefs but being prepared to listen to the arguments of those who disagree with us.

I approve of Daniel's choice of career. By working in politics and journalism Daniel has in fact followed a family tradition. It is I who am an exception. My father was active in politics in Poland and was a city councillor. Daniel's maternal grandfather, Dr Alfred Wiener, was a political activist and journalist, and founder of the Wiener Library. His maternal grandmother researched English economic liberalism and was one of the first women in Germany to be awarded a doctorate.

I generally share Daniel's political views and support them. When he was growing up I influenced him. Now, in turn, I learn from him.

While we are close in our interests and attitudes, we have some differences. I pay little attention to football of which Daniel is a fan and on which he is an expert writer. I recognise that I am in a minority and I respect the scientific knowledge that he brings to bear on a game that is a major aspect of modern culture.

With the growth of our family we have less time for deep discussions. I miss them, because I found them very rewarding. I am more than compensated, by seeing that Daniel has the same close relation with his three sons that I have with him.

Daniel

A FEW YEARS AGO, MY father was given an honorary degree. Again. He invited me to attend the ceremony. Of course I went, anticipating a bit of formal stuff and a nice lunch. It would be good to be with Dad on an important day for him. Nothing more.

As it turned out, it was the most memorable, most influential three hours I have ever attended. Before he was given his award one of my father's colleagues, not someone I had met before, gave a speech about him. And afterwards, others queued up to reinforce the point the man had made.

The warmth of that speech, the warmth of his feelings his colleagues had for him, hit me with force. Every day now, I go to work thinking that I want the people who meet me, who work with me, to feel towards me as Dad's colleagues do towards him. Politics and political journalism are naturally more contentious areas in which to work. But I think it should still be possible, even with those who disagree with me.

While the sentiment his colleagues expressed impressed me, even changed me, I cannot say they entirely surprised me. Because — and I am sure my siblings feel the same — my Dad has always been remarkable as a father too.

The psychologist Judith Rich Harris says that, beyond the influence of genes, people get their values from their friends rather than their parents. But for me — even though I appreciate her general point about peer groups — this distinction, between your parents and your friends, was a distinction without a difference.

My parents — both of them — are my friends. My moderation, my liberal outlook, my attitude to other people and their foibles, my sense of humour and strong feelings about the rule of law come from them. Recently, during the fuss about MPs' pay and bankers' bonuses, I found myself completely at variance with public opinion. I kept saying to people "Who cares if someone is getting away with a free toaster?" And as I say that — usually to general incomprehension — I can hear my parents speaking.

My father worked very hard when I was a child, and often came home exhausted, ready only to watch Kojak or the absurd Quincy — people who know him even quite well find this hard to believe, but it is so. Yet he always had time for his children, particularly to talk with us, debate with us about politics and moral values, discuss with us what we were reading or what we were interested in.

He did this even when what we were interested in did not interest him at all. He was even ready to take me to watch Hendon play football. He did this several times, even though I cannot imagine anything of less interest to him.

When I made the hardest political decision of my life — to join the Conservative Party — I discussed it first with my father. I have lots of friends in the politics game, but I thought Dad would see the issues more clearly. And I was right. But it was more than that. I wanted to know that he felt it was the right thing, morally. I do not think I could do something that he had moral qualms about my doing.

When we were children, I remember him once challenging me to tell him one time when he had forbidden me to do something. I replied: "Only if you can tell me one time I have done something you did not want me to do." That is how we have always worked and still do.

So I asked him about becoming "a Tory" because I wanted to be sure that he felt it was not a betrayal of our social, liberal values. I know he would never betray those.

Is not every father's aim to be a hero to his children? In which case, I think my father should feel fulfilled.

LUDWIK FINKELSTEIN was born in Lvov, Poland in 1929. He is an engineering scientist, a Professor Emeritus of Measurement and Instrumentation at City University London, and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering. After partial retirement Professor Finkelstein has combined organised talmud torah with research in engineering science. He studies, in particular, aspects of Eastern European Jewry. He is Research Fellow in Jewish History & Thought at Leo Baeck College of which he is an alumnus. He is married to Mirjam, nee Wiener, and they have three children, Anthony, Professor of Software Systems Engineering and Head of Computer Science at University College London, Tanara, Director of the UK Border Agency Programme, and Daniel. They also have eight grandchildren. They live in Hendon and are long-standing members of Hendon Reform Synagogue.

DANIEL FINKELSTEIN was born in 1962 and is a former Director of the Conservative Party Research Department and a former parliamentary candidate. He is Associate Editor and Chief Leader Writer of The Times. His interest in statistics emerges in his regular Fink Tank column in The Times on Saturday where he regularly and correctly predicts that West Ham will lose. He is himself a Chelsea supporter and is bringing up his three sons in that faith. He, and his wife Nicola are also members of Hendon Reform Synagogue.
THE POST-MODERN RABBI

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah

The post-modern Rabbi
Like her Christian counter-part is a
Multi-tasker
Minister-Pastor-Counsellor-Priest
Servant of the community
And
Spiritual Leader
Juggler extraordinaire
Rallying the remnant and the
wayfarers
From week to week
Conducting the cycle of sacred
celebrations
From year to year
Sacralising the liminal moments of life
From birth to death

But that is not all
Teacher – by definition
(Enhanced – and regularly updated –
by new technologies)
Curator of the Jewish heritage
Guardian of the collective memory
Keeper of the prophetic vision
Builder of bridges to
Span the wilderness
Agent of
Redemption

Never bankrupt
Nor redundant
At least
Not yet
She does a steady trade
(On the side) in
Anxiety
Anguish
Disenchantment
Despair
All the loss-leaders for
One price

The post-modern Rabbi
Dedicated disciple of the
School of meaning-making
Post-1933 – and 1938
Contains fissures
Absorbs the abyss
Like all survivors
Standing on one leg
‘The rest is commentary
Go and learn’

RABBI ELIZABETH TIKVAH SARAH
is Rabbi of Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue and a distinguished feminist thinker and writer.

LETTERS

ALLIANCE

Sir

A VERY ORDINARY LAY
member of The Liberal Jewish Synagogue I endorse the letter from Neville Sassienne (Manna Spring 2009), and recall Rabbi Weiner when he gave a sermon at the LJS recently saying that he viewed it would not be far off before the Reform and Liberal Movements would combine into one unit and he was certainly in favour.

After 25 years let us hope that with reasoning and goodwill, and bearing in mind the credit crunch has put all charitable organisations in a position to cut back on expenses, we can look forward to a positive meeting between these two organisations to form an alliance, however loose the final interpretation might be.

Neil Levitt
London

MAY I REFER TO THE ARTICLE
“Do not sit on me. I am NOT a chair”, which appeared in the winter edition of your magazine.

I agree absolutely with Linda Kann in her objection to being called “Chair”. As a life-long fighter for female recognition, both in the synagogue and outside it, I recognise the need for that kind of wording in the 50’s and 60’s, but we have gone beyond that. We now know that a man or a woman can be a Prime Minister, and a man or a woman can be a nurse. The person who chairs a meeting, male, female or neuter, or any permutation of the three, should be called the chairman; a person who delivers the post should be a postman. At a recent meeting of the Board of Deputies, I suggested that the person chairing a meeting should be referred to as the Chairman. Not only was there general agreement, but three women who were chairmen of various organisations also spoke in favour.

When the Bible tells us that “whoever sheds man’s blood shall pay the price”, it does not mean that you can kill a woman with impunity. The word “man” obviously means a human being, not a male person. The examples are too numerous to quote, and the inference too simple to need explanation.

I was chairman of an organisation for many years, and all the members knew that I preferred to be called Madam Chairman. On one occasion we had a visitor who called me chairlady. I politely mentioned that I preferred to be addressed as Madam Chairman, but when he spoke again (there is one at every meeting), he again said chairlady. I then said, “Sir, there is only one circumstance in which you would need to differentiate between a male and female chairman, and that is not going to happen at a meeting of the Wanstead Jewish Literary Society.”

Mrs Renee Bravo
London
A

DEEP SPLIT CURRENTLY divides this nation. It revolves around the considerable personality of our deputy prime minister, Lord Mandelson. To every non-Jew he is a Jew. To every Jew, he is a guy, a non-Jew. And the fact that he bears a Jewish surname is as relevant as is Fitz, the name of his dog. For as every Jew knows, and every non-Jew struggles to understand, Jewish descent comes through the mother. And his mother is the grand-daughter of Herbert Morrison, one of the giants of the post-war Attlee government who did not have one drop of Jewish blood in his gussey veins - nor did his two wives. But Lord Peter is known by his surname, as are most of us, and that is a poorly anglicised version of a mediaeval German Jewish name - Mendelssohn, son of Mendel. And Mendel in turn is a name that slipped into German and Polish Jewish life in the Middle Ages, or just thereafter. It has no Hebrew roots and is utterly Ashkenazi. You will not find one Sephardi called Mendel. And so welcome to the Adas Yisroel, Peter. All you still need is a dip, a snip and a friendly chat with three rabbis.

HENCE, BY THE WAY, comes the widely spread view that Mandelson can never be prime minister? True, he is a member of the House of Lords. And the last member of that House to be prime minister was an earlier Marquess of Salisbury, who died in 1902. But there is no law to prevent it, the practice is just a currently convenient convention. There is, in addition, the obstacle that life peerages, such as the one held by Mandelson, cannot be renounced. That is easily changed. All it needs is a bill with one clause. And that could be through both Houses of Parliament within two days. So whatever the generous odds currently offered by William Hill, I still would not bet on it.

MONG MY MANY DISABILITIES is a disease for which a cure has yet to be found. Its Latin name escapes me, its English equivalent is roughly "joining things". So to my astonishment, I find myself a fee-paying member of the Mendelssohn Society, devoted to the works and memory of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. He was the German composer who fell in love with Scotland, wrote a symphony about it and a tuneful overture, "Fingal's Cave", about the Hebrides islands. His grandfather, Moses, was one of the most famous European Jews of all time. He gained immortality as the pioneer of Jewish emancipation, which as things go in history, is only a slight exaggeration. In the society's latest newsletter, it announces an exhibition in Berlin's Protestant Cathedral, arranged by the pupils of the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy non-Jewish grammar school. Its title: "The Mendelssohns, a Prussian Family." Eh? Just a Prussian family?

EVEN IF HE CURBS HIS TONGUE and whips his ideas into line with the current cold international climate, Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, still has to steer his country through one of the most choppy phases of its international history. When it was born, those glorious 61 years ago, both Russia and the United States were vying to support it and so seek to influence its future. The support of the Soviet Union soon went elsewhere, never to return. And in spite of friendly words, Barack Obama is the first United States president for decades who is at best a convenience friend. At the core of his heart there lies an indifference to the Jewish State which has more depth than his smile has width.

ONE OF LIFE'S MORE impenetrable mysteries is the puzzle why a kippah ever wears out. There it sits on my thinning hair, doing nothing all day. And still it begins to look worn. So I rushed to Golders Green one recent Sunday evening to replenish my pockets. The never fading thrill was to find that half mile stretch between the library and the station brimming and humming with Jewish life. And anyone who doubts that there is such a thing need only drive a mile down the road to Cricklewood. There they will find a bustling Broadway without one well waved sheitel or threadbare kippah.

EVEN FOR A RESTLESS SOUL like mine, the urge to travel gets a double edge in summer time. So there I found myself in Prague, next to Auschwitz possibly the most powerful magnet in Europe for Jewish pilgrims. And the Alteuschench vies with the synagogue in Cracow for the cachet of being the oldest house of Jewish worship in Europe. Neither figures in that popular guide to "1,000 Places To See Before You Die." That merely shows the guide's inadequacy. But as one who is used to the simple beauty of England's mediaeval parish churches, and the stunning splendour of our cathedrals, I was possibly slightly less impressed by either building than the members of an American busload were. But I was much more deeply moved. And my tears came close to breaking through the final British male barrier by the realisation that these buildings were museums and monuments. Both had long ceased to be a shul. There are no Jews any more willing to make up a minyan, old fashioned or egalitarian. The Nazis were as thorough in their extermination of the Jews as they were in almost everything - except, happily, in winning the war they started.

THE FLOOD OF COMMENT, from the snide to the vicious, about the arrival of John Bercow on the throne of the House of Commons - I know it is called a chair, but I cannot imagine that giant contraption with built-in loudspeakers at ear-level in my living room - undoubtedly had antisemitic undertones and strident overtones. But the cause was not entirely latent racism bursting into blatant print. Mr Speaker Bercow does seem to have a highly polished capacity to lose friends. What I admire about him is the neat, clean way in which he anglicised his name - just cut the "itz" off Bercowitz.

RABBI WILLIAM WOLFF is the regional Rabbi in North East Germany. He has previously served congregations in Wimbledon, Brighton, Reading, Milton Keynes and Newcastle upon Tyne. He trained at Leo Baeck College, and started in the rabbinate as an assistant to the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn at the West London Synagogue.
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To register your interest or to get an application form please contact us at jewishjourneys@reformjudaism.org.uk or resnicj@gmail.com or call 020 8349 5684

NEW NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

Motzei Shabbat, 12th September at 9:30pm
Slichot Concert, followed by Choral Slichot Service
with the Yuval Singers.
Featuring the world premier of a new multi-media work by talented Israeli composer, Avelalom Caspi and including music performed by acclaimed violinist Serena Leader, Monica Acosta – voice and Rivka Gottlieb – harp.
See www.nnls-masorti.org.uk for further details.

NEW NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

Wednesday 16th September at 8:00pm
Stop the Year! Join journalist and commentator Jonathan Freedland in a look at some of the highs and lows of the past year; with special guests.
Tel: 020 8346 8560
Website: www.nnls-masorti.org.uk

NEW NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

Motzei Shabbat 26th September at 8:30pm
Life’s Journey – Jewish, Muslim and Christian Perspectives
Panel to include: Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg and Dr. Usama Hasan.
Please see our website www.nnls-masorti.org.uk
Tel: 020 8349 8560

NEW NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

Movement for Reform Judaism
Jewish Journeys
A MOROCCAN JEWISH JOURNEY
Thursday 15th - Sunday 25th October 2009
With Jeremy Leigh & Julian Resnick
Where East meets West; Rabat, Meknes, Fes, Merzouga, Quarzazate, the High Atlas, Todra, Marrakech. Magical names, fabulous colours, sounds and smells which form the backdrop to one of the most amazing Jewish Stories from both ancient and modern times. Morocco, once home to a major Jewish community, today a shadow of its former Jewish self….but what a gorgeous, different and sensuous shadow! Cost: £1,520, single supplement £350* Plus flights. To register your interest or to get an application form please contact us at jewishjourneys@reformjudaism.org.uk or resnicj@gmail.com or call 020 8349 5684
*This price includes B&B accommodation in 4 star hotels, all entrances, all programming, 7 dinners and 3 lunches and is based on 25 participants. We reserve the right to add a surcharge if there is a significant devaluing of the pound sterling.

The Sternberg Painters invite you to their
SUMMER EXHIBITION
Every Tuesday 30 committed painters come together to discover and develop their personal visions. The last year has proved to be particularly exciting in the development of their work; an increased understanding of their medium and the workings necessary in creating a painting has given greater depth and vibrancy to the paintings. 15 members of Sternberg Artists will be celebrating their long standing involvement with the art group with a showing of recent works in a series of exhibitions beginning in June 2009 through to September. Oil, Acrylic and Watercolour.
Please contact June Lewis for information and to book viewing – 020 8349 5724
Email june.lewis@manorhousetrust.org.uk

LEO BAECK COLLEGE
Leo Baeck College Diaries and Blank New Year Cards
Our diaries and personal organise inserts run from September 2009 to October 2010 in a week-to-view format including a forward planner. The diary section includes Jewish holiday dates, suggested Torah readings and details of activities at Leo Baeck College. Please note this year the diary is offered in an attractive white cover with blue and orange lettering. Diary £10.99 + p&p. Personal Organiser insert £9.99 +p&p
Please call Lidt on 020 8349 5604 or email Lidt.Ginsberg@lbc.ac.uk for more information.