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1876 - 2026

ST JOHN'S WOOD
SYNAGOGUE

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WELCOME

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Dear Reader,

As we gather once again for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we are reminded that the High Holy Days are not only a time for personal reflections, but also an opportunity to listen to and care for one another, and strengthen the bonds that connect us as a community.

This year's Companion has been shaped by a simple aspiration: to bring more of our community into the conversation. Alongside contributions from our rabbinical team, community leaders and inspiring educators, we have invited a broader range of members to share their thoughts, experiences and insights. Their reflections offer different perspectives on faith, identity, family, resilience, belonging and Jewish life.

No single voice can capture the richness of our community. It is through the mosaic of experiences that we gain a deeper understanding of who we are and who we strive to become. We hope that these pages reflect the warmth, diversity and openness that continue to define St John's Wood Synagogue.

Whether you are a long-standing member, a newcomer, or joining us as a guest, we hope you will find something here that resonates with you, challenges you, or inspires you during these most meaningful days of the Jewish year.

May the year ahead bring blessing, renewal, good health and peace for you, your families, the Jewish people and all humanity.

The Editorial Team

THE ST JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE HIGH HOLY DAYS

COMPANION



ST JOHN'S WOOD
SYNAGOGUE



ST JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE IS CELEBRATING

150 YEARS

AT THE CENTRE OF BRITISH JEWRY

Since 1876, our synagogue has been a community hub – a place for prayer, education, welfare programs and social events through times of prosperity and challenge.

Plans for the festivities are still being finalised but please note the following dates in your diaries:

GALA DINNER
Thursday 3 Dec

FESTIVE SHABBAT
Shabbat 4-5 Dec

Special Kabbalat Shabbat & Shacharit services followed by celebratory Kiddush

HAVDALAH & CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING
Motzei-Shabbat 5 Dec

Special musical service celebrating the 150th anniversary of SJWS and the Rabbinic Induction of Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Chai Cohen by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

COMMUNITY SHABBATON
March 2027

Enjoy a meaningful Shabbat together at a beautiful location with a packed program of fun activities, learning, singing, delicious food & much more

Join the celebrations - be part of the history & future of your community!



ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGES

ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

FROM RABBI MENDEL COHEN



Have you ever wondered what a Jew living in St. John's Wood discussed at their *Yom Tov* table in 1875? One might assume it was something like; *"What does it mean to be a Jew in modern Britain, and how long will it last?"* Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister at the time, was Jewish, at least by birth. There was no consideration to attend *shul*, because there wasn't one. The establishment of a *shul* had however been the subject of communal conversation since 1872, and the community debated how to accommodate the *"religious wants of Jewish families residing in St. John's Wood."*



On this very day, Rosh Hashanah 5637, 150 years ago – our *shul* and community – St. John's Wood Synagogue, held its very first services. The day before, Erev Rosh Hashanah, Sunday 17th September 1876, a temporary iron structure was consecrated. It accommodated 250 worshippers and so began the story of the first synagogue founded under the auspices of the United Synagogue.

At the time, it occupied a corner house and grounds on Abbey Road. It was not until February 1880, when sufficient funding had been pledged, that the community resolved to build a permanent synagogue. In 1919, a week before Rosh Hashanah the structure was declared dangerous, the building was closed and services moved off-site. When they rededicated the sanctuary in 1921, the minister, Reverend Harris Price, wrote with pride: *"In many respects the Synagogue set an example of philanthropic activity which has been followed by other Synagogues."*

Reminiscing about those early days in 1956, Rabbi Dr S. Goldman suggested the community was *"thought of as a place of worship on Sabbaths and festivals and little more."* Indeed, at the AGM in 1932, Mr Levay-Lawrence complained, *"The synagogue was not doing anything in the way of social services... there were no social activities connected with it."*

The size of the congregation had grown significantly – from around 50 when it was founded, to 400, and then to over 1,100. Following the Second World War the synagogue faced an impasse. While the congregation and its activities were expanding rapidly the classrooms and social infrastructure of the building no longer met its needs.



In advance of laying the foundation stone for this site on Grove End Road, Rabbi Goldman wrote an essay entitled *From Congregation Toward Community,* in which he observed: *"In a congregation the members meet for public worship; in a community the members are united by common aims, purposes, ideals and activities. As the family is united by the home, so a community needs its home*

which shall be its meeting place and the focal point of all its strivings and efforts." With that vision, they laid the foundation stone of this remarkable building. It was not until 1 September 1964, a week before Rosh Hashanah, that the first services were held on this site.


תהלות לישרי בקהלות

Order of Service

LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE COMMUNAL HALL AND CLASSROOMS

In 1985, celebrating the twenty-first anniversary of this building, the honorary officers mused: *"How long is the active life of a congregation? Some fifty or sixty years is the usual duration, a synagogue taking ten years or so to develop, around thirty to reach its peak and after fifty starting to show signs of decline. The unique feature of the St. John's Wood congregation is that it has maintained its strength and communal activity."*

Do you remember where you were in 1985? I was a toddler in Leeds. Today, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah 5787 - 2026, it is my privilege to welcome you as your Senior Rabbi. I'm excited to lead this vibrant and multifacetted community in this iconic building with, granted, its challenges but equally enormous opportunities. Only two rabbis in the history of this esteemed congregation have been appointed outside the twentieth century the first, Rev. B. Berliner, in 1878; and this year, me. The Torah has not changed, nor will it ever. Judaism has not changed. But the world around us has, and it continues to do so. Now is our time.

It would also be remiss to ignore another significant moment in our local history. Following the High Holy Days in 1998, the BBC ran the headline *"Saatchi synagogue bans 'boring' services,"* announcing the opening of the Saatchi Synagogue in Maida Vale, with its aim of avoiding services that were 'too formal'. The Saatchi Synagogue was later brought under the roof of St. John's Wood Synagogue, Rebbetzen Chai and I had the privilege of serving as its leaders from 2010, with an emphasis on community building, engaging services, education and positive Jewish renewal.

As this brief journey through our history demonstrates, every generation has been called upon to ask the same question: What is our purpose? What does our community need now? How do we ensure that our synagogue continues to fulfil its mission?

Each Rosh Hashanah invites us to take stock of the past, and to think about new beginnings, new hopes, new commitments and new possibilities. It is therefore fitting that as we celebrate our 150th year, we begin asking what the next 150 years should look like.

The classrooms that were built in the 1950s transformed Jewish education for their generation. The sanctuary built in the 1960s reflected the aspirations of its time. Those who came before us invested courageously in the future.

Now it is our turn. Over the coming months, we will be celebrating our 150 year history, and sharing an exciting vision for the future of St. John's Wood Synagogue – not simply improvements to a building, but a renewed investment in people, in learning, in families, in meaningful Jewish experiences and in a campus that inspires future generations to call this place home.

Generations before us believed the future was worth building. Today it is our challenge and our privilege. We welcome you on this journey.

The questions at the *Yom Tov* table haven't changed *"What does it mean to be a Jew in modern Britain, and how long will it last?"* Now the community has its own synagogue to attend, to practice vibrant and steady Judaism.

As we welcome in the New Year, I bless you that Hashem inscribes and seals you, and your dear family, in the book of life, in the book of sustenance and peace.

L'shana Tova U'metukah. Happy new year & well over the fast.

Rabbi Mendel Cohen

ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

FROM REBBETZEN CHAI COHEN



Seventeen years ago, I agreed to move to London for one year.

One year.

That was the deal I made with myself.

I was a young American mum from Los Angeles, with three children under the age of three. Living abroad had never crossed my mind. Yet somehow, there I was, stepping off a plane at Heathrow Airport, wondering what on earth the next twelve months were going to look like.

Those first months were full of little moments that reminded me that I wasn't in California anymore. Learning to drive on the left side of the road was an adventure. Even a trip to the supermarket was different. Back home, Trader Joe's on La Brea gave my children balloons and stickers and somehow made grocery shopping a fun adventure. Sainsbury's was… well, let's just say it took us all a little while to adjust!

But somewhere between navigating my way through the narrow streets of Central London and learning to appreciate a proper cup of tea, I fell in love with this country. Its history, its traditions, its sense of continuity. It is a privilege to live in a city where you can walk past buildings that have stood for centuries. No one was more surprised than me when one year became two. Then five. Then ten. And before I knew it, seventeen.

If I am honest, it wasn't London itself that made this place feel like home. It was the people. Each one of you.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks famously wrote that, "A house is made of bricks, but a home is made by the people who live in it." Every time I hear those words, I think of another verse, one we say in the Yom Kippur prayers.

כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים

"Ki Beiti Beit Tefilah Yikarei Lechol Ha'amim" – Isaiah 56:7

"For My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all peoples."

I've often wondered why the prophet Isaiah chose those words. Surely, he could simply have described it as a place of prayer. Instead, he calls it My House.

Perhaps that is because prayer is only one of the things that happens in a *shul*, a synagogue. Isaiah is teaching us that our *shuls* are meant to be a *Beit*, a home, a place where life happens. Where children first learn to sing *Modeh Ani.* Where families celebrate simchas and find comfort in the face of loss.

Where friendships are formed over *Kiddush*, where Torah is learned after a busy day, where one generation delights in the next, and where people care for one another without ever expecting recognition. That is what transforms a building into a home.

Looking back over the last seventeen years, I realise that this is exactly what St John's Wood Synagogue has become for our family: a home built through a thousand ordinary moments.

Children singing at the top of their voices.

Beautiful *tefillot* that lift our eyes a little higher.

Nursery children bringing smiles to older members, and older members delighting in the energy of the next generation.

Teenagers giving up part of their summer to help younger children have the best week of theirs.

Conversations over *Kiddush* that began as small talk and became friendships that span decades.

Meals quietly delivered to someone who needs them, celebrations shared, and shoulders to lean on when life is difficult.

Those are the moments that build a home.

As we celebrate one hundred and fifty years of St John's Wood Synagogue, I think about all the people who came before us. They didn't just build a beautiful synagogue. They built a *Beit.*

This summer, we travelled back to Los Angeles for my niece's wedding. It was wonderful to be with family and revisit places that hold so many memories. Over the following days, our children all made their way back to London on different flights, while Rabbi Cohen, our baby and I travelled via Venice for a community wedding.

Our children were due to arrive home before we did, just in time for Shabbat. As parents, perhaps we should have been worried. But before I had even started wondering where they would eat their Shabbat lunch, one of our community members had already invited them. No fuss. No need to ask. Just, *"Of course they'll join us."*

Sitting somewhere over the Atlantic, I realised something that would have been unimaginable seventeen years ago. I couldn't wait to land at Heathrow. Not because London has Trader Joe's; it still doesn't. Thankfully, I've found Panzers.

But because landing at Heathrow now means something very different. It means we're home. Home is raising our children in a community where they are never on their own.

As we celebrate one hundred and fifty years of this remarkable community, I hope that every person who walks through our doors this year, whether for the first time or the thousandth, will experience what the prophet Isaiah meant when he called it not simply a place of prayer, but "My House"– *Ki Beiti Beit Tefilah Yikarei Lechol Ha'amim.*

Because a *Beit Tefilah* should be more than a place where we come to pray.

It is a place we call home.

Rebbetzen Chai Cohen



ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

FROM CHAIRMAN MICHAEL ABRAHAM



Each year on Rosh Hashanah, straight after the *Shofar* is blown during the *Musaf* repetition, we proclaim one of the most remarkable phrases in our liturgy:

Hayom Harat Olam – היום הרת עולם

"Today the world is born."

It is a striking idea. The world already exists, and yet Judaism asks us to see this day as a new beginning. No matter what has happened over the past year, no matter how uncertain the future may appear, we are invited to believe that renewal is always possible.

Rabbi Sacks z''l captured this beautifully: *"optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the belief that, together, we can make things better. Optimism is a passive virtue; hope is an active one."* He went on to teach that faith is the courage to live with uncertainty.

Those words have seldom felt more relevant.

The past year has highlighted once again how unpredictable our world can be. The war with Iran reminded us how quickly the hostilities can escalate in the Middle East. Most of us have family and friends in Israel; all of us feel a profound connection to it. Antisemitism now affects Jewish communities across the globe in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago. We continue to pray for peace, for security and for a future in which we can live alongside the other peoples of the world with dignity and hope.

Judaism does not ask us to ignore uncertainty. It asks us to respond to it with faith, with renewed commitment and with hope: to educate our children, strengthen our communities, deepen our Jewish identity and invest in the generations that will follow us. Hope, in Judaism, is something we create together.

Over recent months, St John's Wood Synagogue has entered an exciting new era under the leadership of Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzen Chai Cohen. Although they were already well known and much loved within our community, their appointment as our Senior Rabbinic couple marks a new chapter in the story of our synagogue. As with any significant transition, it inevitably brought a measure of uncertainty, particularly after so many years of the Binstocks' steady leadership.

I am greatly encouraged by the warmth, trust and openness with which our members have engaged with this new beginning. Our new rabbinic team, supported by our

lay leaders, staff and volunteers, have started introducing new initiatives that draw on the many strengths that have long defined this community. Some ideas will flourish immediately; others will evolve over time. That is how it should be. What matters most is the willingness of so many people to share their ideas, to contribute and to shape our future together. Thank you for placing your trust in us and for joining us on this journey.

On a personal note, this summer marked the conclusion of my year of mourning following the passing of my father, of blessed memory. One of Judaism's great insights is that mourning is not only about remembering those we have lost, but also about carrying their values forward into our own lives. As the formal period of mourning came to an end, I found myself reflecting not only on what my father gave me, but on the responsibility and privilege I have to pass those values on to the next generation.

The same is true of our community.

In December we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of St John's Wood Synagogue. There will be time then to reflect on our remarkable history and to honour those whose vision, faith and dedication built this extraordinary community over the past century and a half. Perhaps the greatest tribute we can pay them is to carry on building and sustaining a community that future generations will be proud to inherit.

Communities aren't shaped by grand gestures. They are underpinned by countless quiet acts of kindness and commitment:

welcoming someone new at a service, inviting a family for Shabbat, volunteering our time, supporting someone through a difficult period, studying Torah together or simply deciding to become a little more involved than before. Every one of those acts reinforces the fabric of our community.



As we enter 5787, may we have the courage not just to hope for a better year, but to create one. May we continue to strengthen our Jewish identity, deepen our commitment to one another, support Israel and build a community that honours those who came before us and inspires those who will come after us.

On behalf of the Honorary Officers, I wish you and your families a meaningful, uplifting and inspiring High Holy Day season. May the year ahead bring health, peace and blessing to us all, and may we be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life.

שנה טובה ומתוקה וגמר חתימה טובה

Michael Abraham
Chairman

CHATAN TORAH

MESSAGE FROM JOURDAN RAJWAN



I grew up in the quiet backwaters (at least in Jewish terms) of west London and attended Spanish and Portuguese synagogues until I came to St John's Wood.

I moved to St John's Wood in 2010 with my wife Jessica. On our first Shabbat we came to Saatchi, and during *kiddush* Rabbi Cohen handed us a mojito each – and that was it, we were bought in.

Jessica and I were married in 2012 by Rabbi Cohen and the late Rabbi Lord Sacks, a great honour for us. Since then, we have been regular attendees, first of Saatchi and latterly of St John's Wood Synagogue.

Professionally, I started my career at JLL and then moved to Schroder Investment Management. In 2020 I left the corporate world and moved into property finance, working side by side with my father-in-law and brother-in-law. Three years ago, Jessica who is a solicitor, joined the business.

We have three daughters – Naomi (11), Gabrielle (9) and Leah (5) – who have all attended the nursery at SJW and been fastidious attendees of the Mimi Dwek Hebrew School (MDHS). MDHS has a special affinity for me, as it was named after my late grandmother and founded shortly after she passed away in 2011. It has been an immense joy to see it grow under the incredible stewardship of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Cohen and the amazing directors and teachers, from 15 children to now c.160.

Ten years ago, once we were considered Saatchi regulars, I was asked to help with the charity's finances, and then, post-merger in 2019, joined the Honorary Officer team of St John's Wood Synagogue, which I did until April 2026. It was one of the most surprising and rewarding roles I have taken on, covering building, security, nursery, cheder and YPs, and it gave me a real insight into a truly remarkable community. I was humbled and proud to see the work done by the Rabbinic Team, past and present, the office, the teachers, and the wonderful group of Honorary Officers and volunteers who together make this unique community function and deliver for so many.

Outside of family, work and *shul*, you can usually find me running or in the gym — for the past four years I have been an avid participant in an informal St John's Wood *shul* running club. I have also been involved with Norwood and CST (which is also where Jessica and I met).

Jessica, the girls and I feel truly fortunate to call this community our home. Our thanks go to Rabbi and Rebbetzen Cohen, the Honorary Officers and Office Team, whose quiet work makes St John's Wood Synagogue what it is. We wish everyone a happy, healthy New Year and a joyful Simchat Torah.

Jourdan Rajwan

CHATAN BEREISHIT

MESSAGE FROM RAPHAEL KAIN



My heartfelt gratitude goes to our Honorary Officers and Rabbi Mendel for bestowing this great honour on me, which I am, of course, delighted to receive.

I was born in Germany and grew up in Berlin, where my family still lives, in a traditional Jewish home. My father, a retired dentist, is originally from Budapest, Hungary, and my mother's family is from what was then Poland but is now Ukraine. My grandparents were all Holocaust survivors, and my maternal grandmother (originally from a *shtetl* outside Lvov) is, B"H, still going strong aged 99! Thus my 99.9% Ashkenazi Jewish DNA result from 23andMe did not come as a huge surprise (and I do have a theory for the 0.1% Native American balance).

My wife Fritzi was born in Amsterdam to parents who immigrated from South Africa, while their parents in turn had arrived there from Lithuania (at the turn of the century) and Germany (in the 1930s). Fritzi and I met in London in 2005, got married in Amsterdam in 2007, and joined St John's Wood Synagogue shortly afterwards. Our children, Sammy and Bayla, were born in London and attended Naima Jewish Preparatory School, where we met many of our closest family friends; this community, together with the *shul*, became the foundation for our Jewish and social life in London. Sammy celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* in our shul in 2021, followed by Bayla's *Bat Mitzvah* in 2022. Both of these simchas fell on *Shabbat Vayishlach,* as did my own *Bar Mitzvah* back in Berlin many years ago.

As a family, we are active in the community. I served on the *shul* Council for a couple of years, as well as on the Selection Committee for the Senior Rabbinic leadership, and we support a growing number of Jewish charities and organisations. Both our children have helped with the *shul's* summer camps and learn weekly with Rabbi Nemeth at the JLE. Sammy is also a core member of the pre-*Mincha Shabbat Shiur* and enjoys learning with the youth director Ben, as he did with his predecessor, Rabbi Toby.

Professionally, I started my career in investment banking at Morgan Stanley in Frankfurt, transferred to their London office, and subsequently joined Bear Stearns, spending a total of five years in M&A advisory. I then moved into the hedge fund world, working for a couple of firms before setting up my own business, Samson Rock Capital, in 2019.

Fritzi is a lawyer by training and worked for Allen & Overy in Amsterdam, then moved to New York, and eventually came to London, where she worked as an in-house lawyer before focusing her efforts on raising our family, doing charitable work, and, for several years, co-running a much-loved baking business.

I would like to conclude by thanking the present and past Rabbinic teams, as well as the Honorary Officers, Council members, and countless volunteers, for all they do to make this community a warm and welcoming place for us all.

Wishing you all a joyous Simchat Torah and a blessed and healthy year.

Raphael Kain

ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

FROM BEN AND LEAH FABIAN



If we haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting you, we are Ben and Leah Fabian and we are delighted to have joined St John's Wood Synagogue as your new Youth Directors.

Since arriving in June, we have loved getting to know so many of your wonderful children, teenagers and families. We have been made to feel incredibly welcome, and it has already been such a pleasure to become part of this special community. We look forward to meeting many more of you over the year ahead.

A little about us: Leah grew up in Gibraltar, while Ben grew up in Golders Green. We were married this March, right here in this *shul!* We both spent time studying in Israel, where we developed our passion for Jewish education, creating meaningful experiences for young people and helping every child and teenager feel that *shul* is a place where they truly belong. When we aren't at *shul,* Leah is studying law, while Ben works during the week as a construction project manager.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, we are excited to begin a new year together with the community. We look forward to welcoming families to our programmes and building an exciting calendar filled with learning, friendship, fun and unforgettable experiences.

We aim to create a youth programme in which every young person is excited to come to *shul,* forms lasting friendships, grows in their Jewish identity. Whether through learning, social events, camps or simply spending Shabbat together, we want every child and teenager to feel proud to be part of our incredible community.

Our Rosh Hashanah thought:

On Shavuot, we read the Ten Commandments. The first begins: *"I am Hashem, your G-d."* An obvious question arises: how can this be a commandment when it does not appear to command us to do anything? It sounds like a statement rather than an instruction. What action are we being asked to take?

One beautiful way of understanding these words lies in the expressions "I" and "your". "I" expresses Hashem's constant presence, while "your" expresses His choice of each and every one of us. Whoever we are, wherever we are and whatever point we may have reached, Hashem still chooses us. Even at our lowest moments, He wants a relationship with us.

Rosh Hashanah gives us the opportunity to return that choice and that love. On Rosh Hashanah, we stand together and proclaim that Hashem is King. Through our prayers and the sound of the shofar, we crown Him as King over every part of our lives. In doing so, we say: just as You continue to choose us, we continue to choose You. This is the beautiful dialogue at the heart of our relationship with Hashem.

Whatever the coming year may bring, He will always crown us as His people, and we will always crown Him as our King.

Wishing the entire community a happy, healthy and sweet New Year. We cannot wait to share an exciting year ahead with you all! *Shanah Tovah!*

Ben & Leah Fabian

בס"ד

Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

The Chief Rabbi's Rosh Hashanah Message 5787

In 2025, Netflix released a documentary entitled "Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever." It followed Bryan Johnson, a billionaire entrepreneur who has devoted his life to slowing, and even reversing, the ageing process. His regimen involved aggressive medical treatments, extreme lifestyle disciplines and a vast array of scientific experiments. Yet despite these extraordinary efforts, Johnson was diagnosed this year with autoimmune gastritis, an incurable condition affecting the stomach lining. His story serves as a powerful reminder that even in an age of unprecedented scientific achievement, there remain limits to what human beings can control.

It is human nature to prize certainty. We crave clear answers and cast-iron guarantees wherever possible. Recognising this, the Rambam observed that "there is no joy as great as the resolution of doubt." Whether waiting for a diagnosis, news from a loved one or clarity about the future, most of us would rather live with an answer than a question. By contrast, prolonged uncertainty can leave us feeling vulnerable and anxious.

Our community is no stranger to vulnerability. Over the past year, we have faced terror in our shuls and on our streets, alongside a tidal wave of anti-Jewish hatred across social media, university campuses and beyond. The Hebrew word for doubt, "safek", comes from a root meaning "enough". Doubt should therefore spur us to seek sufficient understanding and perspective to confront the uncertainty before us.

Fascinatingly, the word "doubt" does not appear in the Torah because, even in the most challenging circumstances, God's presence is never absent. This is one of the central messages of Rosh Hashanah, reflected in King Avimelech's observation about Abraham in our New Year Torah reading: "God is with you in everything that you do."

Abraham's life was marked by hardship, upheaval and trial. Yet he achieved greatness because he knew he was in God's hands. A meaningful Jewish life is not necessarily one free from pain or uncertainty, but one in which we find the strength to move forward despite them, and sometimes because of them.

Every morning in our prayers, we say: "Many are the intentions in the human heart, but the will of God will prevail." Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe of the Be'er Yaakov Yeshiva offered a striking interpretation of these words. When we are paralysed by uncertainty and do not know which path lies ahead, God's guidance is contained in the final word of the verse: "Takum". Stand up!

Stand tall as Jews. Be proud of who you are, even when it is difficult. Hold fast to your values, even when they are challenged. Do so knowing that the same God who sustained our ancestors through generations of uncertainty continues to sustain us today.

Not every question will be answered. Not every problem will be solved. But as we enter this Rosh Hashanah, we can face an uncertain future with confidence, faith and pride, knowing that whatever lies ahead, our community will continue to stand strong together.

Valerie joins me in wishing you all a sweet, fulfilling, safe and peaceful New Year.



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

עץ חיים הוא למחזיקים בה · IT IS A TREE OF LIFE FOR THOSE WHO GRASP IT

נשיא המדינה
رئيس الدولة
THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem, September 2026 - Elul 5786

St. John's Wood Synagogue,
London

Dear Friends,

From Jerusalem, I am delighted to send my warmest wishes to the entire St John's Wood Synagogue community as we welcome the new year, 5787. Rosh Hashanah asks us to do something deeply Jewish: to look backward and forward at once. We reflect on the year that has passed, return to the values that anchor us, and summon the hope and courage to begin again.

This year, as St John 's Wood Synagogue marks its 150th anniversary, that call carries particular meaning. For a century and a half, your synagogue has provided generations of Jews with a place to pray, learn, celebrate, mourn and belong. Its endurance is part of the extraordinary story of British Jewry with which my own family history is intimately connected. I take great pride in the knowledge that it was my father, Israel's sixth president, Chaim Herzog's uncle, David Hillman, whose artwork continues to adorn the synagogue's windows one of so many who have offered their creativity and skill toward strengthening the communal architecture that is our greatest resource and blessing.

We enter this new year during a period of profound pain and uncertainty for Israel and Jewish communities around the world. We have been reminded, painfully, of the persistence of hatred. But we have also been reminded of the extraordinary strength of the bonds that connect us – across cities, countries and continents – as one people.

As the shofar sounds once again, may it awaken in all of us our deepest sense of purpose and responsibility. And may the year ahead bring healing to those who are suffering, security to our communities, peace to Israel and our region, and renewed hope to the Jewish people and to all humanity.

Shanna Tovah

Yours Sincerely,

Shalom!

Isaac Herzog
President of the State of Israel

Message from the President of the United Synagogue

The word *teshuva* is often translated as repentance, but its literal meaning is "return".

As we enter the Yamim Noraim, we are challenged to think about what we need to return to: the values we hold dear, the relationships we wish to strengthen and our connection with God.

The past few years have not been easy for British Jews. Since October 7th, much of our communal conversation has understandably centred on antisemitism, security and the challenges we face. Those concerns remain real and require our continued attention.

But Jewish life cannot be defined only by what we are against. It must also be defined by what we are for.

In May, speaking at the Rally Against Antisemitism, I reminded the crowd that British Jews have been rooted in this country for 370 years. We are proud British Jews. We are not going anywhere. We will not be beaten.

I believe that message remains true today. Yet resilience is only part of the story. Part of *teshuva* is a return to Jewish confidence and connection. A return to seeing Judaism not simply as something we inherit, but as something we actively embrace: deepening our understanding of our traditions, celebrating our festivals with joy and ensuring that the next generation grows up with a genuine sense of pride in who they are.

Our response to antisemitism is not only stronger security, but also stronger Jewish life. After all, Jewish life is at its strongest when it is lived.

It is lived around the Shabbat table and in our shuls. It is lived through acts of kindness, learning, friendship and community. Most importantly, it is lived in the countless everyday choices that connect us more deeply to our heritage and our faith.

As we approach the new year, I am continually inspired by the rabbis, rebbetzens, volunteers, staff and members across our communities who bring Jewish life to life every day. Through their dedication, care and commitment, they help ensure that our traditions are not simply inherited but actively lived and passed on.

May 5787 be a year of blessing, growth and renewal for you and your families, for the State of Israel and for Jewish communities everywhere.

Shana tova u'metuka.



Saul Taylor
President, United Synagogue



The United Synagogue

President: Saul Taylor
Treasurer: Tristan Nagler
Chief Executive: Jo Grose

Trustees: Cindy Goldstein, Rachel Hartog, Darren Lewis, Amanda Lyons, Simon Mitchell, Nicola Rosenfelder, Daniel Turner, Jacqui Zinkin

This Rosh Hashanah, we reflect on a year that has tested us, but also one that has demonstrated the extraordinary strength, resilience and vitality of Jewish life in Britain.

Our community has endured the most painful of moments. The terrorist attack at Heaton Park Synagogue claimed the lives of Adrian Daulby z"l and Melvin Cravitz z"l. We also saw a wave of violent attacks including those in Golders Green that left many feeling shaken and anxious.

Yet Judaism teaches us that even in the darkest moments, we must never lose sight of hope. We are a people who rebuild, renew and look forward. As we enter a new year, we do so with confidence in our community, pride in our achievements, and optimism for the future.

Over the past year, the Board of Deputies has worked tirelessly alongside our partners to ensure that British Jews are protected, represented and heard. Since the Heaton Park attack we have worked intensively with government and partner organisations to shape the government response, including through our co-published paper: "After the Heaton Park Attack: Towards a Comprehensive Government Strategy on Antisemitism". Influenced by our advocacy we have seen:

- **Unprecedented investment in Jewish communal security and specialist policing,** helping safeguard our synagogues, schools and communal institutions.
- **Independent reviews of antisemitism in healthcare and schools,** leading to action plans accepted by government, as well as a review of public order and hate laws.
- **New guidance from police forces and the CPS to speed up prosecutions of antisemitic abuse.**
- **Expanding training on antisemitism** among civil servants, healthcare workers, in education and in other workplaces.
- **New laws to tackle the threat posed by the Iranian regime and its proxies**, including proscription of the regime's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), for which we have long campaigned.

This year has also been one of celebration of British Jewish life, with the Board of Deputies producing Britain's first-ever Jewish Culture Month, showcasing the richness, creativity and diversity of Jewish life across the UK. Thousands of people attended more than 150 events, with leading institutions such as the British Library, The Whitworth, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate and the Southbank Centre joining communities across the country in celebrating Jewish culture and heritage.

I am delighted to share that next year's Jewish Culture Month will run from 6 June to 5 July. We would love to see communities across the country develop exciting plans for events, exhibitions, performances, and learning opportunities.

This has also been a year of innovation in which we have:

- **Launched the Commission on Disability Inclusion,** which will help make Jewish communal life more accessible and welcoming for disabled Jews and their families.
- **Strengthened relationships across faith communities,** including through interfaith initiatives and dialogue.
- **Ensured a strong Jewish voice is heard during local and devolved elections,** with specialist manifestos and hustings, so that the concerns and aspirations of British Jews are heard loudly and clear across the country.
- **Campaigned for the release of all hostages held in Gaza.**

We are also grateful that, since this time last year, all the remaining hostages have finally been released. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone in our community who campaigned so passionately and persistently for their freedom.

As we enter 5787, let us carry forward both remembrance and hope; determination and optimism; resilience and joy. May the coming year bring peace, security and happiness to our community, to Israel, and to all who seek a better future.

Shanah Tovah U'Metukah – wishing you and your family a happy, healthy and sweet New Year.



Phil Rosenberg
President

BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

CST
PROTECTING OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY

Shana Tova

from everyone at CST

Sadly, this last year has shown the importance of security, more so than any other in recent decades. Despite the threats and fears, we have in many ways grown stronger and more resilient.

We have done that together, CST and our Jewish communities. We have done that together because we are one and the same.

All our work is driven by the principles of Community, Security and Trust. It is all made possible by the volunteers who join CST, and the families and friends that encourage them.

So, more than ever before, CST thanks everyone who has helped us and our communities to stand strong in the face of some very difficult challenges.

Please keep supporting us in our efforts. Report antisemitism and suspicious behaviour. Cooperate with our security measures and please ask how you can join our local teams.

CST is almost entirely dependent on charitable donations. With your support, we can all keep protecting our families, friends and communities together.

Wishing everybody a meaningful, safe and peaceful Yamin Tovim.

From all of us at CST,

Mark Gardner

MARK GARDNER MBE
CST CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Rachel Blake

Member of Parliament for the Cities of London and Westminster

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

As we welcome the New Year, I would like to send my warmest wishes to everyone at St John's Wood Synagogue and the wider Jewish community.

This year is particularly special as St John's Wood Synagogue celebrates its 150th anniversary. For generations, the synagogue has been a source of faith, friendship and service, making an invaluable contribution to our local community. It is a privilege to mark this remarkable milestone with you and I feel incredibly lucky to represent you.

Shanah Tovah u'Metukah. May the year bring peace, good health and happiness to you and your loved ones.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Blake

Rachel Blake MP

Cities of London and Westminster



YOUR COMMUNITY



Meet Our Honorary Officers



MICHAEL ABRAHAM

CHAIRMAN



ALIZA WEINSTEIN - PINE

VICE-CHAIR



MICHEL SZNAJER

FINANCIAL REPRESENTATIVE



LUCY COLLINS



PAMELA CRYSTAL



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AVIV HANDLER



DAVID TUCKER

Meet Our Council Members



CAROLINE GILLIS



PHILIP GREEN



SIMONE KLASS



SASCHA KNOBLOCH



ANDREW MAINZ



DAVID MARKS



SACHA NASAN



VANESSA SINAI



JANET WEISZ

Meet Our Team



HAYLEY BARTMAN
COMMUNITY MANAGER



GOLAN COHEN
ADMINISTRATOR



STEPHEN KUTNER
FINANCIAL CONTROLLER



VICTORIA MURAVYOVA
FACILITIES MANAGER



LYNDA DULLOP
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



YUDIT STERLING
DIGITAL GRAPHIC DESIGNER



JOE SOFRANEC
SECURITY



IKILIL AMADOU
SECURITY



JACK WALLER
FACILITIES SUPPORT STAFF



KESHAB PAUDEL
FACILITIES SUPPORT STAFF



KESHAB LUITEL
FACILITIES SUPPORT STAFF



ASHOK REDDY
FACILITIES SUPPORT STAFF

St John's Wood Ladies Guild

AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

The Ladies Guild continues to play a vital role in the life of St John's Wood synagogue, bringing people together through friendship, learning, creativity, and care. Whether through our social events, cultural activities or welfare initiatives, our aim is to ensure that every member of our community feels welcome, supported, and connected.

One of our most important roles is our welfare work. Together Elizabeth Shasha and Lucy Collins look after the welfare of our elderly members. Behind the scenes we keep in regular contact with many of our elderly and more vulnerable people, through phone calls, visits, food deliveries and practical support whenever needed, with the help of our volunteers. Looking ahead we are excited to launch a new project: **Generation Connect**, which will bring the younger and older generations together, to create meaningful relationships and strengthen our community support network for years to come. If you are interested in becoming involved in this initiative, please contact Lucy Collins 07881 838657 or Elizabeth Shasha 07775 601122. We are continuously looking for volunteers to help our welfare team.

The Gillian Burr Luncheon Club also continues to flourish with fortnightly lunches being attended by 30-40 people each time. This year's Chanukah lunch was our biggest yet, welcoming over 80 people, including 20 guests from the Holocaust Survivor Centre. We were entertained beautifully by our nursery children, as well as the wonderful Chazan Steven Leas. The afternoon was made complete by Rabbi Mendel Cohen asking guests to come up and light the menorah. Our Shavuot lunch was equally successful, with over 60 guests and Steven Leas coming to sing for us as an "encore", creating an atmosphere of joy that had everyone joining in.







Alongside our welfare work and lunches, **The Ladies Guild** offers a wide range of activities throughout the year, providing opportunities to learn new skills, enjoy the arts, meet new friends and stay active within our community. From our thriving **Arts Club** and popular **Art Classes** to one of the largest **Bridge Clubs** in the United Synagogue, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

Under the enthusiastic leadership of Caroline Gillis, the Arts Club offers culture, conversation, and inspiration to our community through a fantastic programme of exhibitions, lectures, and social events.

The year began with a lecture and lunch at the *shul,* followed by a visit to the Tate Britain to enjoy the magnificent works of Turner and Constable, and to the V&A Museum to see the incredible designs of Schiaparelli. We then headed to the stunning – and now sold-out – *Queen Elizabeth II: Her Life in Style* exhibition at the King's Gallery, Buckingham Palace.



More than 50 people joined us for a wonderfully entertaining talk by Jonathan Pratt, a familiar face from the BBC's Bargain Hunt Antiques, followed by tea and lively conversation.

Most recently, we welcomed another large audience to hear Richard Aronowitz-Mercer, the acclaimed provenance and restitution specialist. He gave a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the complex and often emotional world of recovering lost artworks, sharing some of the most remarkable cases he has worked on over the past 15 years. The morning concluded with a delicious brunch and plenty to discuss.

The Arts Club is open to everyone, members and non-members alike, men and women of all ages. We have an exciting programme of events coming up and would love to welcome new faces. We're also always delighted to hear your ideas and suggestions for future outings.

Have you ever thought you'd like to learn to paint, but don't know where to start?

Every Tuesday you'll find a thriving art class taking place at shul, organised by Jane Prevezer and run by the Hampstead School of Art. Why not come along on Tuesdays 10-12:15pm and have a chat with our amazing teacher Anat and have your first class free before deciding if you'd like to sign up for the term – 10 lessons for £150. Call Jane Prevezer 07860 649354 for more information and to book your free lesson.

Our weekly Duplicate Bridge sessions continue to go from strength to strength and remain one of the highlights of the week, under the leadership of Janet Weisz. We bring together players of all abilities in a friendly yet competitive environment. The sessions offer an enjoyable afternoon of excellent bridge, companionship, competition, good humour and most importantly a lively tea break where everyone gets a chance to socialise. Regular attendance has continued to grow and there have been many weeks when we have been full to our capacity of 96.

Beyond the bridge itself, these weekly gatherings have become an important social occasion, strengthening friendships and fostering a real sense of community. We are extremely grateful to Matthew, our director, who

oversees the day and whose hard work behind the scenes ensures that things run smoothly every week. He has helped to ensure our weekly Duplicate Bridge is one of the Ladies Guild's most successful and well-supported regular activities at the *shul.* For more information, please contact Janet Weisz 07789 864054.

None of this would be possible without the incredible dedication of our volunteers. Whether organising events, preparing lunches, making welfare calls, delivering meals, running activities or quietly helping behind the scenes, each person gives their time with generosity and kindness. On behalf of the Ladies Guild, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to every volunteer who helps make our community such a warm, welcoming and caring place. Your commitment, enthusiasm and compassion are what enable us to keep supporting one another and ensuring that St John's Wood Synagogue remains a place where everyone feels valued and connected.



Programmes for our Women

One of the greatest joys of the past year has been seeing our women's programme grow.

Our aim has always been to create opportunities for women to learn, connect, be inspired, empowered and enjoy spending time together.













From our **Annual Rosh Hashanah Unity Challah Bake** to our **Simchat Torah Breakfast and Learning, Monday Lunch & Learn**, **Parenting Series** and **Summer Garden Shmoozes** with their relaxed atmosphere, the programme has brought together women of all ages and stages in our community.



One of the highlights of the year was our evening with Sarah Jossel and Jessica Diner. It was such a fun evening, full of laughter, brilliant beauty tips and wonderful conversation. It showed that women's programming can be meaningful while also being relaxed, uplifting and enjoyable.

We are looking forward to another exciting year ahead. Our Annual Rosh Hashanah Unity Challah Bake returns on Sunday 6th September, followed by a full programme of learning and events.



Alongside our Monday Lunch & Learn and new monthly Women's Shabbat morning *Parashah* class, we are looking forward to welcoming inspiring guest speakers, launching our new Faith & Fashion event and creating many more opportunities for women to come together throughout the year.

Whether you come to learn, to meet new friends or simply to enjoy an evening out, I hope you'll join us.



Community Dinners & Events

Throughout the year 5786, our community has come together to celebrate, commemorate and strengthen the bonds that make our synagogue such a warm and welcoming place. It has been a wonderful year of shared experiences, bringing together our regular members alongside many new faces and visitors. We are delighted that people of all ages continue to join us, creating an atmosphere of friendship, belonging and community spirit at every event.

The year began with joyful Rosh Hashanah and Succot dinners, where families and friends gathered to celebrate the *Yamim Noraim* together. Our Simchat Torah celebrations were a particular highlight, with over 600 people joining us to dance, sing and rejoice with the Torah in a truly unforgettable display of community unity.







We were honoured to hold our Annual Remembrance Service, welcoming local MPs, councillors and distinguished guests, together with synagogue members whose own service – or that of their family members – in the Armed Forces and other vital wartime roles was remembered with gratitude and respect. It was a moving occasion that reflected our commitment to remembering those who made such significant sacrifices.

This year also marked several special milestones within our community. We hosted a heartfelt Farewell Shabbat Dinner in honour of Rabbi Toby and Bracha Weiniger, expressing our gratitude for their dedication and wishing them every success for the future.






We were privileged to honour Dayan and Rebbetzin Rachie Binstock with a memorable Celebratory Shabbat, to recognise more than three decades of inspirational leadership, wisdom, teaching and pastoral care. The weekend included a beautiful Musical *Kabbalat Shabbat* in shul, a special Women's *Kabbalat Shabbat* led by Rebbetzin Rachie Binstock and her family, a Friday Night Dinner attended by 280 guests, a festive Kiddush, and a joyful *Melave Malka,* attended by Chief Rabbi Mirvis, *dayanim, rabbonim* and other dignitaries, with many paying fitting tributes to their remarkable contribution to our community.

Our Chanukah Party brought together families for an afternoon of celebration and fun, while our public Chanukah Candle Lighting on St John's Wood High Street proudly shared the light and message of Chanukah with the wider community.

At Pesach, many members and guests joined our communal *Seder*, experiencing together the traditions and inspiration of the Festival of Freedom. Our Shavuot Dinner once again provided an opportunity for learning, celebration and fellowship as we marked the giving of the *Torah.*







One of the most heartwarming occasions of the year was our annual Baby Blessing, where we celebrated the newest members of our community. It was a joyful opportunity to welcome babies born during the past year and to share in the happiness of their families as we looked towards the future with hope and pride.







Each event throughout the year has reflected the warmth, inclusivity and vibrant spirit of our community. Whether celebrating our festivals, marking important occasions, honouring distinguished individuals or simply enjoying time together around the table. These gatherings continue to strengthen the friendships and connections that make our synagogue such a special place.

For the year ahead, we are excited to continue building on this wonderful sense of community and look forward to celebrating many more memorable occasions together. This being the year of our 150th anniversary, there will be even more communal highlights and festivities to look forward to.













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More than a Shul

A YEAR OF INSPIRATION, CELEBRATION AND COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

Over the past year, St John's Wood Synagogue has once again demonstrated why it is regarded as one of the most vibrant and welcoming communal venues in the UK. In addition to being a welcoming, inspirational and spiritual place of prayer, the *shul* has become a hub where our community comes together to learn and reflect, celebrate, support one another and engage with some of the most significant voices shaping Jewish life today.

The breadth and quality of events hosted throughout the year have been truly remarkable, attracting distinguished speakers, internationally acclaimed performers, leading charities and organisations, and members of our community of every generation.

Among the year's highlights was an outstanding programme of events in partnership with UJIA, including an inspiring evening with Eli Sharabi, whose extraordinary story touched everyone in attendance; a moving concert by



renowned Chazan Netanel Hershtik, presented with the Jewish Music Institute; and a truly memorable Lord Sacks event, to launch the new *Chumash* with his commentaries, featuring Rachel Goldberg-Polin and Jon Polin in conversation with former Ambassador of Israel Daniel Taub. Their powerful reflections on resilience, courage and unity deeply resonated with all of us. Ben-Gurion University hosted an inspiring event with Noa Argamani for her first visit to the UK. Noa being known the world over, we are very grateful to have had the opportunity to hear her heartbreaking story in person.

The *shul* also welcomed celebrated Israeli singer Ishai Ribo, whose music brought together hundreds of people for an uplifting evening of spirituality and emotion.

We were privileged to host AWIS with acclaimed author and commentator Douglas Murray, who offered thought-provoking insights into some of the defining issues facing Israel and the Jewish community today. Equally engaging was the Lira Winston Fellowships event, where Ben Winston and Claudia Winkleman shared fascinating perspectives on creativity, leadership and opportunity.



The *shul* has also continued to welcome a wide range of communal organisations and charities. WIZO held several successful events, including Rebecca Sieff Day, the ever-popular Literary Lunch, and, in partnership with St John's Wood Synagogue, Diary of a Beauty Editor with Sarah Jossel, all of which attracted enthusiastic audiences.

Other notable occasions included UJIA's Operation Entebbe event with Noam Tamir, the youngest officer to take part in the rescue mission, to mark the *50th anniversary of*



Operation Entebbe; the Jewish Care Woman of Distinction Lunch, Jnetics Annual Dinner; Camp Simcha's Annual Dinner; events for Tel Aviv University and the Technion, including a memorable evening with Jake Wallis-Simons and the Shalva Annual Dinner.

The programme of events shows no signs of slowing down. Next month, St John's Wood Synagogue is proud to host JNF UK's live screening of Sagui Dekel-Chen's deeply moving concert from Kibbutz Nir Oz. After surviving 498 days in captivity in Gaza, Sagui will perform songs he composed during his imprisonment – music that became a source of hope and resilience throughout his ordeal. Joined by leading Israeli artists, fellow freed hostages and bereaved families, this promises to be an unforgettable evening of remembrance, emotion and healing.



While these headline events have brought outstanding speakers and performers through our doors, they represent just one part of the life at the *shul.* Throughout the year we have also hosted numerous communal and private Friday night dinners, welcoming many hundreds of guests to experience the warmth, hospitality and unique atmosphere of St John's Wood Synagogue. Alongside these have been beautiful weddings, joyous *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* celebrations and countless family *simchas*, each creating treasured memories within our wonderful community.

What makes all of these occasions so special is not only the calibre of the speakers and performers, but the venue itself. St John's Wood Synagogue offers an exceptional setting that combines elegance with warmth, creating an atmosphere equally suited to intimate conversations, concerts, lectures, gala dinners, Shabbat meals, weddings, *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* celebrations and major communal gatherings. Visitors consistently comment on the exceptional quality of the events, the welcoming environment and the sense that this is a place where meaningful connections are made.

Looking back over the past year, there is every reason to feel proud of what has been achieved. The extraordinary variety of events reflects not only the versatility of our venue but also the vibrancy of our community and the dedication of the clergy, staff, volunteers and event organisers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make every occasion such a success. As our programme continues to grow, St John's Wood Synagogue is increasingly recognised as one of London's premier venues for Jewish communal life.

If you are looking for a prestigious, welcoming and versatile venue for a lecture, concert, fundraising dinner, conference, celebration or community event – or if you are planning a wedding, a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah,* or another family *simcha* – we would be delighted to welcome you to St John's Wood Synagogue. We look forward to building on another exceptional year by continuing to open our doors to organisations, speakers, families and guests from across the Jewish community and beyond.

Here's to another year of learning, celebrating, supporting one another and creating memories together at the heart of our community.

Open Your Hand

TZEDAKAH AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

"If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers… you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him… sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking… and the Lord, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavours."
(Deuteronomy 15).

Caring for those in need is woven into the very fabric of a Jewish community. Indeed, one of the true measures of a community is not only how we celebrate together, but how we care for those who are struggling.

Every community has people who need support. Just around the corner may be someone who needs help. For some, it is a temporary difficulty: an unexpected bill, a period without work or the mounting costs of a festival. Others find themselves stuck in a more difficult cycle and need ongoing assistance. Sometimes the need is food on the table; sometimes it is to help with basic household expenses; and sometimes it is simply the dignity of being able to celebrate a *Yom Tov* properly.

At St John's Wood, we take great pride in quietly and confidentially supporting members of our community through our dedicated Tzedakah Fund.

Over the past year, our communal Tzedakah Fund distributed £7,000 in shopping funds and gift cards, paid more than £2,500 towards utility and essential household bills, and provided £10,000 in bursaries towards membership, *Cheder,* nursery and other communal programmes. We have helped provide food and free meals for Rosh Hashanah and Seder night, supported families through the costs of marrying children and burying loved ones, and stepped in when urgent bills simply could not be met. We also work closely with charities across the wider Jewish community to ensure that, wherever possible, no one falls through the gaps.

This year, our Kol Nidrei Appeal will support our internal Tzedakah Fund, enabling us to continue this vital work of looking after 'our own'. The Tzedakah Fund allows you to give anonymously whilst having a profound and personal impact on people's lives – the most beautiful way of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of giving *tzedakah.* At the very moment we ask Hashem in our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers to bless us with a year of life, health and sustenance, we commit ourselves to helping provide dignity, support and sustenance to those who need it.

For further details on how to donate, or if you, or someone you know, needs our help, please speak confidentially to Rabbi Mendel Cohen (07772 612661), Lucy Collins (07881 838657) or Jeremy Amias (07867 186168).

Thank you for inviting me as a guest to the Shul Seder night, it felt like I was with family, and it was because you are my extended family.

Jewish education is necessary, but we could not afford it, and appreciate the support we received in bursaries.

Thank you for helping me with a gift card to Kosher Kingdom, I can shop for Pesach with dignity.

Youth Programmes

We have been part of the St John's Wood community for only a few months, yet it has already been a privilege to get to know so many wonderful children, teenagers and families. We have loved experiencing the warmth and enthusiasm of our young people and helping create programmes that bring them together.

It is amazing to see both familiar and new faces every Shabbat morning. The synagogue is filled with the sounds of children learning, *davening* and enjoying themselves through our vibrant children's services, led by our *madrichim* whose commitment creates a welcoming and engaging atmosphere each week. We are incredibly grateful to Musia Cohen, Gabriella Abraham, Maya Crystal, Allegra Crystal and Lyla Loftus for all that they have done! We have continued the success of our *Anim Zemirot* Club for boys aged 5-almost 13, empowering them to take an active role in the synagogue and lead parts of the service.







Alongside this, our *Mussaf Minyan* in the Carter Club has provided older children and teenagers with an engaging and meaningful space to participate in the service. Our Shabbat morning Girls' *Shiur* followed with our new Coffee & Matcha Club have become wonderful opportunities for older teens to connect with friends, engage in thoughtful discussions, learn and strengthen their Jewish identity in welcoming environment.

Learning programmes for the boys on Shabbat and a weekday evening were a particular hit. Good food and, most importantly, a good dose of Talmudic debate to really bring *Torah* thought to life. It was impressive to see the group grapple with the intricacies of *Torah* wisdom to ultimately own their intellectual achievement.



For our younger members, *Bnei* in the Wood has continued throughout the summer on Shabbat afternoons, welcoming children from Reception Year 6 for games, activities and plenty of fun, excellently run by our community's own teenage *madrichim*.

This summer, we were proud to run another fantastic Summer Camp, packed with exciting trips, creative activities and inspiring Jewish programming. With the help of our outstanding international counsellors, the camp provided an unforgettable experience filled with friendship, learning and fun for all who attended.

Our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* Programme has brought together young people for engaging and educational sessions that have combined meaningful Jewish learning about the responsibilities of becoming a Jewish adult alongside enjoyable activities, helping prepare them for this important milestone. We've had thought provoking sessions on Israel, interactive *Tefillin* workshops for the boys and a *Challah* bake finale. We are excited to continue developing this flagship programme together with Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzen Chai in the year ahead.

Before the summer break, we hosted a Community Youth Lunch, bringing together our teenagers in a relaxed atmosphere to celebrate another successful year of youth programming and connection.







Among the most memorable highlights was the Graduation Dinner, which we were honoured to co-host with Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzen Chai, celebrating our graduating Year 13's as they prepare for the next stage of their journey. It was a beautiful evening, and we wish each of them every success and happiness in the years ahead, while hoping to stay in touch with each of them.

Looking ahead, we are energised for the programme over the coming year. We aim to launch a wide range of new initiatives for every age group, including *Motzei Shabbat* programmes, girls' activities, year-group trips and social events, weekly learning opportunities, the continued expansion of our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* programme, and many more exciting events. We look forward to continuing to build a vibrant, welcoming and inspiring youth community where every child and teenager is excited to participate.



Summer Camp

My favourite thing about summer camp are the songs. I like the activities, the trips and most importantly friends.

The counsellors think of good activities and are really funny. They are from America and they teach us new games and chants. My favourite ones are Arga Flaga and Button Factory, mummy has banned me from singing them at home.

There are different bunks. This year there was a girl bunk and boy bunk. There were no boys to annoy us, which was incredible. There were 14 girls in my bunk which made it lots of fun and we all made new friends.

I would like to thank all the councillors for making it so much fun. Next year I've told Mummy and Daddy to not book our summer holiday during camp, so I can do all of it.

– Blair Lyons



Some more great entries for you to enjoy!




Rafael



Ella, Age 12



Benjamin, Age 4

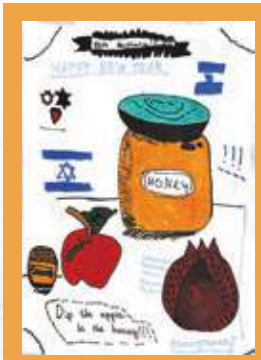


Mika, Age 9


Poppy, Age 10



Leah, Age 6



Leonardo, Age 10



Sadie, Age 9



Naomie, Age 12



Celine Chaya, Age 5


Bahia, Age 9

Young Professionals

THE SANCTUARY OF OPEN DOORS: THREE YEARS OF CONNECTION

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l used to tell a story about the very first *Sukkah* he built as a newlywed. Lacking carpentry skills, he hastily nailed a few pieces of hardboard together against the back wall of his house while his friend built a magnificent, freestanding architectural masterpiece in his backyard. That year, a massive storm hit on the second night of the *Chag.* The next morning, the friend's elaborate *Sukkah* had completely blown down, while Rabbi Sacks' humble shack stood perfectly intact. Looking at the single nail holding it together, his friend smiled and said: "Yours, which was very rough and ready, is joined to something solid, to the wall of your house. And even if there's only one nail joining you to something solid and immovable, then all the winds in the world won't blow you away... That nail is faith."

This story captures the vision we, **Shifra and Nadav Hacham**, brought with us when we arrived from Israel three years ago to become the Young Professional Community Directors. We understood that serving the Young Professional community required not only to engage with the winds of modern life and embrace the fast-paced, transient vibes of London Jewish life, but also, importantly, that it couldn't stand isolated and needed to be firmly anchored to the permanent walls of the wider St John's Wood Shul. We believed that these intergenerational connections would provide the foundation for Jewish continuity, resilience, and belonging.

Yet a strong foundation alone is not enough. Rabbi Lord Sacks also taught that the deepest joy comes from a home with its doors open to others.

Over these past three years, both our own home and this *Shul* have opened their doors wide, creating spaces where friendships were formed, Shabbat tables expanded, and people found a place they could belong to.

Rooted in the strength of this community, what began as cozy gatherings in our flat has grown into a flourishing community that has welcomed over 2,000 different people to our events, with more than 300 young professionals becoming regulars at our soul services and tables. This expansion extended far beyond our immediate demographic, enriching the entire congregation. Through key strategic partnerships, we positioned St John's Wood as a central hub, proudly launching the SJW Ulpan Programme that serves all ages and Hebrew levels across the wider community. We also brought generations together for special communal moments each year on Simchat Torah and Yom Ha'atzmaout, where hundreds of people across all ages gathered and celebrated together.

It has been a remarkable journey and, as we find our way back to Israel, we are especially happy and proud of the way several community members have stepped forward to carry this work into the future. **We are thrilled to introduce Sacha Nasan, Arianna Arbib, Romy Wulfsohn, and Eva Harouni-James, who will be picking up right where we leave off.** Thank you all for opening your homes and your hearts to us, for your constant care for us and our family in Israel, and for being the first home of our firstborn son, Netzer. It has been our distinct honor and privilege.

For more information on the Young Professional Community Programme:
yp@shulinthewood.com




SACHA NASAN


ROMY WULFSOHN


EVA HAROUNI-JAMES

Kindergarten in the Wood

"Educate a child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it." – Proverbs, Mishlei, 22:6

At Kindergarten in the Wood, this timeless teaching lies at the heart of everything we do. We recognise that every child is unique, with their own strengths, interests and potential. Our role is to nurture each child according to their individual needs, helping them develop the confidence, resilience and love of learning that will remain with them throughout their lives.

Kindergarten in the Wood is a warm, nurturing nursery where Jewish life, heritage and values are gently woven into each day by specialist teachers. As an integral part of our synagogue community, the nursery is a trusted, joyful space for both *shul* families and the wider neighbourhood.

Our nursery has continued to flourish and now proudly welcomes 52 children across our beautifully resourced classrooms. This remarkable growth has been made possible through the trust and support of our families, alongside the many recommendations and referrals from members of our community who have shared their positive experiences with others. We are incredibly proud to be a nursery that families choose and enthusiastically recommend.

Our early years approach is rooted in care, creativity and connection. We offer a bespoke curriculum that incorporates the statutory EYFS framework, thoughtfully enriched through the principles of Reggio Emilia and Montessori. This unique blend supports every aspect of a child's development academically, emotionally, socially and spiritually while nurturing curiosity, independence, resilience and a lifelong love of learning.

Over the past year we have further enhanced our curriculum through a wide range of enriching extracurricular experiences. Children enjoy weekly music lessons, ballet classes, sports sessions, soft play, Forest School, and our much-loved Shabbat celebrations. These experiences not only broaden children's learning and development but also foster a deep sense of belonging, helping every child develop a proud and positive Jewish identity in a joyful and meaningful way.

At Kindergarten in the Wood, we believe that a nursery should be created for the community and by the community. While we place great importance on nurturing friendships between the children, we are equally passionate about building lasting connections between families. Through our strong parent partnerships, an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA), family events, celebrations and community gatherings throughout the year, parents have many opportunities to meet, support one another and develop friendships that continue long after their children have left the nursery. These relationships help create a genuine sense of community that is at the heart of everything we do.

We are especially proud of our bespoke curriculum, which strives not only for academic excellence but also places equal importance on emotional wellbeing. Our carefully planned Emotional Wellbeing Curriculum helps children develop confidence, resilience, empathy, self-regulation and positive relationships. By supporting children's emotional development alongside their academic learning, we ensure they are equipped with the skills they need to flourish throughout their education and beyond.

We prepare children for the 4+ assessments with care and confidence, ensuring they are ready for the next stage of their education wherever they go. Our pupils have gone on to schools including Naima JPS, North West London Jewish

Day School, Arnold House, Sarum Hall, Queen's College and many others, leaving Kindergarten in the Wood with the confidence, independence and readiness that come from a strong, nurturing foundation.

As our nursery continues to grow, we remain committed to maintaining the warm, family-centred ethos that has always defined Kindergarten in the Wood. Every child is known, valued and celebrated as an individual, and every family becomes part of a vibrant, caring community where lifelong friendships, cherished memories and a strong Jewish identity begin.

What Our Families Say:

The greatest reflection of our nursery is the experiences of the families who entrust us with their children. We are incredibly proud of the relationships we build and are humbled by the kind words shared by our parents.

Jessica has absolutely flourished during her time at your nursery, and I can't thank you and the whole team enough. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all the love, care, and support you've shown her. It has been so reassuring to know she has been in such wonderful hands, and we will always be grateful for everything you've done for her.

We are so grateful to this community for everything they've done for Levi and us, and for really treating him like family and loving him so much.

Ray has had such a great time at the nursery over the past two years, and we are so grateful for everything.

These heartfelt testimonials capture what Kindergarten in the Wood strives to provide every day: a nurturing environment where children flourish, families feel supported and a true sense of community is created. We are immensely proud that so many of our new families come to us through personal recommendations, reflecting the trust and lasting relationships we build with every child and parent who becomes part of our nursery family.













Mimi Dwek Hebrew School

A DECADE OF GROWING JEWISH HEARTS AND MINDS

This year marked a particularly meaningful milestone for the Mimi Dwek Hebrew School: our tenth anniversary. Founded in 2014 in loving memory of Mimi bat Oro ל"ז, the school has grown from a small group of children of parents with a shared vision into one of Central London's most vibrant centres of Jewish learning. This year, more than 125 children attend our Sunday and Tuesday programmes, our largest enrolment to date.

Over the past decade, our mission has remained constant: to instil a love of Judaism and equip every child with the confidence and skills to make it a meaningful part of their lives. Through our innovative Hebrew reading programme, an engaging Judaic Studies curriculum and a dedicated teaching team, our pupils acquire far more than knowledge. They develop a sense of belonging, pride in their heritage and friendships that often last well beyond their Hebrew School years.

The real magic of Mimi Dwek Hebrew School lies in the experiences we share. Jewish learning comes alive through the festivals we celebrate together, the traditions we explore and the memories we create. This year, pupils baked *matzah* before Pesach and took part in a beautiful mock Seder, which brought the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (Exodus) vividly to life. Lag BaOmer saw the children gather around the barbecue to toast marshmallows and make s'mores, while our much-loved Friday Night Dinner gave them the opportunity to lead *Kabbalat Shabbat* with confidence before their families and the wider community.

The year ended with our Awards Ceremony, where we recognised not only academic achievement but also kindness, commitment, enthusiasm and personal growth. Nothing gives us greater satisfaction than seeing our pupils mature year by year. Jewish education is about much more than Hebrew or classroom learning. It nurtures confident young Jews who feel connected to their heritage and eager to play an active role in Jewish life.

As we celebrate this tenth anniversary, we look back with gratitude for all that has been achieved while always looking forward with excitement to the years ahead. We thank our dedicated staff, supportive parents and the wider community for the partnership that has made this remarkable journey possible.

May the next decade bring the same sense of joy, curiosity and pride, as many more children discover the richness of Jewish life and learning.

For information about enrolment:
shulinthewood.com/hs
hs@shulinthewood.com

Shalom L'Kulam

LEARNING HEBREW IN ST JOHN'S WOOD'S ULPAN WITH REUVEN VAZAN

Our Hebrew journey began in October 2024, thanks to the dedication and support of Nadav and Shifra Hacham, whose efforts made it possible to establish these classes. Since then, we have been learning Hebrew from the very beginning, combining practical conversation skills with grammar, reading, writing, and a variety of engaging topics, including newspapers, everyday situations, Israeli slang, and interactive games. The aim has always been to build confidence while making learning enjoyable, especially for those considering making *Aliyah* or wishing to strengthen their connection with Israel and the Hebrew language. It is also a great opportunity to improve our Hebrew reading skills and understanding of our daily prayers.

We are delighted that the classes continue to grow, and we currently have space for up to 15 students. New students are always very welcome. **To enrol, please call the Shul office - 020 7286 3838.**

Our students really enjoy our Sunday and Tuesday classes, as clearly speaks from these testimonies:



Sunday morning Ivrit classes 10-12 with Reuven at the shul are always the highlight of the week. He makes learning Hebrew such a pleasure. He is an excellent teacher. The class is so friendly and unintimidating. We have learned so much in a year. I would recommend the class to anyone who might be planning Aliyah or even just wants to feel more connected to Israel. Come and join us!!

– Dan

Born in London with an Israeli father and spending a lot of time in Israel, I had always failed to crack my Hebrew speaking. When the Ulpan was presented to me, I had to give it a go. Now, after two years I have a basic (really very basic) conversational level, but more importantly, this has given me the confidence to try and speak when I am in Israel. The class is always very lively and great fun. The teacher Reuven is a wonderful teacher (and a great person too) and it has been a real pleasure to learn with him and other students for the past two years.

– Jourdan

I planned to make Aliyah even before the first class last year and I eventually made Aliyah during the second year of classes. The classes (our wonderful teacher Reuven) really put me in good stead and taught us a good foundation which has sped up my learning in Israel. Making Aliyah wasn't the only motivating factor. I personally feel Hebrew is the language that connects all Jews around the world, both in and outside of Israel (especially in recent times) and is a fundamental skill we should all have. It's also been helpful for me in my Torah and Talmudic studies as well as to understand more in Jewish life generally.

The communal feel and getting to know people from the synagogue who I had seen but never properly met; the good blend of structured learning according to the textbook and conversational practice; getting to know our teacher Reuven who has been very patient with us particularly when we have struggled! I 200% recommend this class to anyone thinking about joining in the upcoming year.

– Nathan

MAKE ST JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE YOUR JEWISH HOME



"The highest form of individualism is to join a community." – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

We are delighted to welcome you to St John's Wood Synagogue! Whether you are accompanying family or friends, live locally, have children in our Nursery or Hebrew School, or are visiting us for the first time, we hope that the time you spend with us over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will be meaningful, inspiring and uplifting.

The *Yamim Noraim* remind us that Judaism is not only about the moments we spend together in prayer, but also about being part of a community throughout the year – celebrating our joys, supporting us through life's challenges, helping us grow in our Jewish identity, and creating lifelong friendships.

We hope that, over the coming days, you will find that St John's Wood Synagogue is a place where you feel at home and where you will choose to become a member.

2026/5787 is a particularly special year for our community. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of St John's Wood Synagogue, we are also beginning an exciting new chapter under the leadership of Senior Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzen Chai Cohen. We would love to welcome you as a member as we honour our proud history and build confidently for the future.

A Special 150th Anniversary Membership Offer

Membership is about so much more than High Holy Day services. Throughout the year, you will enjoy inspiring learning, beautiful Shabbat and *Yom Tov* services, family and youth programmes, social events, communal dinners, pastoral support, and the friendship and belonging that come from being part of a thriving Jewish community.

As you browse this Companion, you will discover the breadth of life at St John's Wood Synagogue: weekly *shiurim* and classes, women's programmes, Young Professionals' events, children's activities, fortnightly lunches for senior members, volunteering opportunities, cultural events, and so much more.

Members also benefit from preferential rates for many of our events throughout the year, together with discounted fees for our Nursery and Hebrew School, making membership valuable for individuals, couples and families alike.

For so many of our members, St John's Wood Synagogue has become a home away from home. We would love it to become yours too.

To mark our 150th anniversary, we are pleased to offer special introductory membership rates with up to 35% discount for those joining our community for the first time:

FAMILIES	SINGLES	YOUNG ADULTS (21-30)
£750	**£350**	**£70**

If you have purchased a High Holy Day visitor ticket, you have already made your first investment in becoming part of our community.

You Have Already Taken the First Step
Join St John's Wood Synagogue by 31 October 2026 and we will deduct the full cost of your High Holy Day visitor ticket from your first year's membership subscription.

It's our way of saying thank you for spending the *Yamim Noraim* with us and making it even easier to make St John's Wood your Jewish home.

Being a member means enjoying year-round opportunities to connect, learn, celebrate, and belong within a warm and vibrant Jewish community.

We hope this is the beginning of a lasting connection with St John's Wood Synagogue, and we look forward to welcoming you throughout the year ahead.



VOICES FROM OUR MEMBERS



TRADITION, RENEWAL & THE POWER OF MUSIC

MARC TEMERLIES, INTERVIEWED BY SYLVIA ABRAHAM



For almost thirty years, the music of Marc Temerlies and the Neimah Singers has helped define the atmosphere of the High Holy Days at St John's Wood Synagogue. Their melodies accompany some of the most solemn and uplifting moments of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the preceding *Selichot* service.

Given his long-standing relationship with our community, Marc wouldn't see himself as a 'visiting' performer, and is keen that the choir isn't regarded that way either. That said, he doesn't take issue with being considered a 'performer'. *"I'm not scared of the word 'performance', because I associate performance with high standards of music. We can be inspired by listening just as much as we can be inspired by joining in."*

For Marc, however, the purpose of that music is always to deepen the congregation's connection to the prayers. Marc was born and brought up in Hove, near Brighton, in a family with a strong love of music. He began learning the piano at the age of six and progressed quickly. A professional career was seriously considered as he gave recitals, performed piano concertos with orchestras and studied under Alexander Kelly at the Royal Academy of Music.

As Marc puts it, however, *"the glamour of chartered accountancy proved too hard to resist."*

His Jewish musical education began with an early and unexpected St John's Wood connection. Marc was taught for his *Bar Mitzvah,* and later instructed in *nusach* and *davening*, by Chazan Mark Hertzberg, who had served as *chazan* of our Synagogue from the 1930s until the 1970s before retiring to Brighton.

Marc moved to London in 1992, where he then formed a close friendship with our former *chazan*, Moshe Haschel. Marc, then a singer in the Shabbaton Choir, established the New Finchley Choir at Kinloss together with Chazan Haschel. This later became the Neimah Singers and when Chazan Haschel was appointed at St John's Wood in 1997, the choir came with him.

Marc describes those formative years as a genuine partnership. He and Chazan Haschel were *"like brothers"* as they assembled much of the music that now forms the St John's Wood High Holy Days experience.

"We really transformed the services", says Marc. *"Many melodies that now feel thoroughly traditional were new to the community in 1997 and not immediately loved by all."*

Over the years, the choir's repertoire has broadened as it remains important to find a balance between continuity and renewal. Alongside formal Western European choral compositions and traditional Eastern European Chazanut,

Marc has introduced more Chassidic melodies and *niggunim*, including accessible tunes through which the congregation can participate.

"But a long day cannot consist of only one type of music," he explains. *"If we would sing only Chassidic melodies, people would become bored with that too. Variety is important, so we include also more modern music, even pop songs."*

Marc sees his own position as conductor not as that of an authoritarian leader but as an accompanist to the Chazan.

"The chazan leads the service. He makes the final decision about what we sing, how fast or slow it should be and what atmosphere we are trying to create. I view myself as the accompanist, and the choir and community follow his lead."

His partnership now with Chazan Avreimy Kirshenbaum is therefore central. Marc speaks warmly of Avreimy's rare combination of qualities: a beautiful voice, a profound understanding of the prayers and *nusach*, and exceptional musicianship.

"His driving force is to present the music in a way that gives the kehilah a means of connecting to it," Marc says. *"There are different moments in the service that demand majesty, simcha, seriousness or reverence. He is sensitive to all of these."*

Because the community principally encounters Chazan Avreimy during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we naturally see his most solemn side.

"He is a very fun person," Marc says, *"but when he stands on the bimah on Yom Kippur, the solemnity comes from his respect for the occasion. The day requires that sense of majesty."*

Certain melodies, Marc believes, should remain untouched. The traditional *nusach* of the first night of Rosh Hashanah is one.

"If you walked into an Ashkenazi synagogue anywhere in the world on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, that is the melody you would hear. It distinguishes this day from every other day. It is like the curtain rising on the season, almost like a coronation, as we proclaim Hashem as King. The music brings us to this moment, while it also plays on our memory, taking us back to sitting in shul with our parents."



Another defining moment is *Unetaneh Tokef*. The version sung at St John's Wood draws on older traditions and was assembled by Marc's late father-in-law, Chazan Naftali Hershtik, together with Raymond Goldstein.

"It is so dramatic and descriptive! You can imagine each person passing before Hashem, like sheep before a shepherd, receiving judgment one after another. The music connects us to the words."

The ideal, he says, is not for the choir to sing while the congregation remains detached.

"There is silence in shul because people are connected. Then they begin to hum the familiar melodies. That is the ideal: not that we are singing on our own and everyone is merely listening, but that the music draws everyone into the atmosphere of devotion."

The final *Kaddish* at the end of *Neilah* is equally irreplaceable.

"When you have the whole kehilah singing at full force, the sound is incredible. People are hungry, of course, but it goes beyond hunger. Everyone feels that this is the finale, there is that sense of release."

Last year, the prayers took on an intensely personal meaning for Marc. His son Shlomzi, who as a little boy had sung with the choir at St John's Wood, was serving with the IDF in Gaza. Marc stood in the safety and beauty of our synagogue while his son faced danger, the extent of which we can only imagine. *"It was very tough, but I felt deeply supported by the community. All the love and positive energy my family and I received meant a lot."*

Although Marc and his family made *aliyah* in 2006, his connection to the shul remains very strong. He highlighted the 30 years of great cooperation and continued friendship he has enjoyed with Dayan Binstock and Rebbetzin Rachie.



Now, Marc and the choir begin a new chapter of their remarkable story in our shul with Rabbi Mendel Cohen. Marc is excited about the new partnership with a rabbi who has great energy and fresh ideas. Together, they intend to make the services more inclusive and accessible, while protecting the *nusach* and melodies that give the *Yamim Noraim* their distinctive character.

"Every year, we sit down with the Rabbi and the Chazan to tweak and change the service. The music and style must reflect people's needs today, helping them to connect and become involved." That may be the essence of Marc's contribution to St John's Wood: honouring what previous generations handed down, while ensuring that the prayers continue to speak to the generations now filling the seats.

As he looks forward to returning with his family this year, his hope is simple: that the community will once again listen, participate and sing together.

"We are very proud to be part of this amazing community," he says, *"and we are looking forward to hearing everybody sing."*

THE *CHUTZPADIK* ARTIST

BY ANDREW RENTON



You couldn't write a history of art without its Jews. The artists, curators, academics, collectors, patrons, dealers. But things have changed over the past three years. Jewish artists have increasingly felt marginalised, ghosted, and simply excluded from the conversation. Jewish names have been removed from museum walls. And those of us who participate in the art world have at the very least been forced to watch their step, mind their language and sometimes struggle to have a voice at all. Despite this, in my work as a curator, academic and consultant in the field, the challenges I have faced have only served to make my thinking and practice all the more Jewish.

The irony couldn't be more profound. Surely, art is exactly where freedom of expression is a given? But it has taken some time to learn how to articulate the complex position in which we find ourselves. And so I wonder, in times of crisis, if art comes before words? As much as art takes time itself, it also has the power to anticipate nuanced understanding, even if this cannot yet be verbalised. Art can put us in the place where we encounter a condition that we can't yet articulate. It is a strange space, and I would argue it is an ethical space, where we as the viewers will have to take responsibility for the artworks we encounter as much as the artists who made them. And it is a responsibility that even comes ahead of understanding. So often with art the penny drops much later.

In other words, artists help us understand who and where we are. Jewish artists even more so. And they don't need to be making pictures of Jewish subjects to be proposing a Jewish perspective. While we tend to think of Chagall, for example, as the quintessential Jewish artist, with his dreamlike images of the *shtetl,* he produced a body of work that is as much about testing the limits of several painterly genres or movements as it is about himself and a Jewish legacy. He's Cubist, Symbolist, Surrealist, Fauvist, but somehow, never fully bound to any one movement. What makes his work Jewish is that he never really belongs. The insiders' outsider.

And I think about Philip Guston, who abandoned that (very Jewish) tradition of abstraction in favour of figuration. It was a deeply ethical move. In those troubling paintings, Guston said that it was himself behind the Klan hood. The images evoke fear, with direct allusion to the hatred of his times. But I think of a trembling Guston hidden inside his own image.



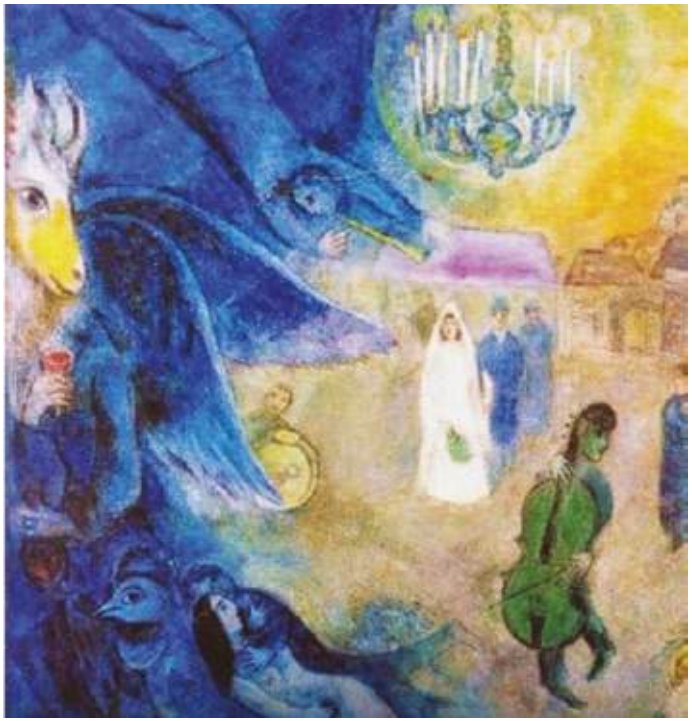
It is as if Guston questions himself: dare I stay hidden and unaccountable? How can I take responsibility in relation to what I am witnessing around me?

Jewish art is often produced from a position that is simultaneously inside and outside established cultures, histories and artistic traditions. It inhabits existing forms while questioning them from within. Rather than announcing certainty, it embraces complexity, multiple perspectives and unresolved identities. The resulting work is less concerned with illustrating Jewish experience than with testing the limits of belonging itself.

One recent exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Melbourne struck the perfect tone for our critical times. The show was called *Chutzpah,* and presented artists with defiant optimism, proposing a practice for today. We might think of artistic *chutzpah* as the act of making space where none previously existed. An emotional land grab; the creation of a place from which one can invent and argue at once. It's the familiar joke about the Jew stranded on a desert island who builds two synagogues – one for prayer and another he would never set foot in. But that joke is no joke. *Chutzpah* lies not in the certainty of opinion but in the desire to establish the conditions in which disagreement can exist.



The *chutzpadik* artist inhabits a restless, questioning disposition; an imaginative practice of testing boundaries, claiming space and refusing easy resolution. Perhaps this is why Jewish art remains so difficult to define. It continually unsettles inherited categories, asking not what Jewish art looks like, but how identities are negotiated and transformed. Jewishness becomes less a subject than a method. A restless and fundamentally *chutzpadik* practice, challenging the cultural spaces where it must fight to participate.



Andrew Renton is an art curator and Professor of Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London.

CRISES IN FAITH

BY KEITH BRESLAUER



In the whirlwind of our family's continued weddings and graduations, as busy as we are, I realised we needed to stop and say thank you to Hashem.

When was the last time your faith was tested? Not theoretically. Not in a shiur. I mean: when did life put you in a place, where the only thing you can ask, was the question, *"Hashem, Are You There?"*

This led me to reflect on Crises of Faith, not as an abstract theological problem, but as the actual experience of being a Jew, in a world that is challenging. I want to lean on two giants: Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, and I want to share a few moments from my own life where I learned something.

The title of the Rav's great essay on suffering takes its name from a verse in *Shir HaShirim*:

קול דודי דופק, פתחי לי...

"The voice of My Beloved knocks: open for Me..."

The Rav reads this as the sound of Hashem knocking at the door of history, and at the door of every Jewish life, in moments of crisis. The question is not whether the knock comes. The question is whether we open the door.

There is a deep instinct, when something terrible happens, to ask one word: *Why?*

Why did this happen to me? Why now?

Rav Soloveitchik, in *Kol Dodi Dofek* – delivered on Yom Ha'atzmaut in 1956, eleven years after the Shoah, said something startling. He said that "why" is the wrong question. Not because it's disrespectful. Because it is unanswerable. We are finite. We cannot see the whole picture. To stand in the rubble, and demand a theological explanation is, the Rav teaches, to misunderstand what suffering is for.

The Rav writes:

היסורים באים לרומם את האדם, לטהר ולקדש את רוחו...לזכך את נפשו ולהרחיב את אפקיו.

"Afflictions come to elevate a person, to purify and sanctify his spirit... to refine his soul and to broaden his horizons."

And then this striking line:

הסובל חוטא חטא חמור אם יתן לצרתו ללכת לאבוד ולהשאר בלי תכלית ומשמעות.

"The sufferer commits a grave sin if he allows his troubles to go to waste and remain without purpose or meaning."

So the Rav replaces the question. Instead of *lamah – why* did this happen? – he says we must ask: *mah – what* now? What does this demand of me?

About eleven years ago, I was on a mountain. We were skiing in serious terrain back country in Italy, and a 350-metre-wide avalanche was triggered by a group above us and came down on my team of five. I was buried under a meter of snow for around thirty minutes. In this incredible accident, one of my team, Luis, only 28, was sadly killed. Later, I had the unimaginable task of bringing his body back to his parents.

I want to tell you about those thirty minutes under the snow.

When you're buried, especially with this amount of snow, the snow sets like concrete. You cannot move. You cannot move your chest enough to take a full breath. You don't know if anyone is coming. You don't know if anyone else of your team survived. You are alone in a way you have never been alone before.

What was amazing to me in hindsight was the first thing that came into my head was not why this is happening but what to do? It was two prayers.

The first:

שמע קולנו ה' אלהינו, חוס ורחם עלינו, וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפלתנו.
"Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d, have pity and compassion on us, and accept our prayer with mercy and favour."

And the second:

מודים אנחנו לך, שאתה הוא ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו לעולם ועד, צור חיינו, מגן ישענו אתה הוא לדור ודור.
"We give thanks to You, for You are Hashem our G-d and G-d of our fathers forever, Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation, You are He from generation to generation."

Think about that combination. Hear me and thank you. This relaxed me. I became calm. I figured out I had oxygen in the snow. Even though at one point I thought I could see something coming to me in the darkness, I realised I could breathe from the snow, and exhale into my jacket to keep the carbon dioxide away from my face – and I survived.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch has a remarkable comment on a moment when *Bnei Yisrael* are trapped at the *Yam Suf.* The Egyptians are closing in. There is nowhere to run. And Moshe says to them:

אל תיראו, התיצבו וראו את ישועת ה' אשר יעשה לכם היום.
"Do not fear; stand firm and see the salvation of Hashem which He will perform for you today."

Hirsch reads *hityatz'vu* – "stand firm" – as the precise spiritual posture of a person at the end of their own resources. You have done what you can do. There is nothing left to do. And so you stand, expectantly, knowing that the next move is not yours – it is Hashem's.

That is *bitachon.* Not magical thinking. Not the false promise that if you trust enough, nothing bad will happen. *Bitachon* is the capacity to say: I have done what I can do, and now I stand and wait, and whatever comes from this, is from Hashem.

Under the snow, I had nothing else. I could not dig. I could

not call out so anyone could hear. I could not move. And what came up from somewhere deeper than thought was: *Shema Koleinu. Modim Anachnu Lach. Hashem is here.*

They dug me out. Then they thought my guide was lost. He wasn't, I found him. The other friend who was buried was also saved. The day still ended in incredible tragedy, and I carry that. But that thirty minutes under the snow was not a thirty minutes of doubt. It was, strangely, the most certain I have ever been.

A few years later – different setting, same lesson.

I was training and climbing indoors. I fell about six meters onto concrete. I broke my spine, my pelvis, my sacrum. I was lying there, looking up, unable to move.

Same two prayers. *Shema Koleinu. Modim Anachnu Lach.*

Notice the root of *Modim*. It does not only mean thank. It also means acknowledge. It is the same root as *Yehudah* – the name from which we get the word Jew. To be *Yehudi* is, at its essence, to be one who acknowledges. Not "thank You for the good stuff." I acknowledge that You are here. Right now. In this. Whatever this is.

The promise of *bitachon* is not that the snow won't bury you, or that the fall won't break your back, or that the diagnosis won't come, or that the deal won't fail. The promise is that *you are not alone in it.*

And here is what I learned lying on that concrete: the prayers we say every day, sometimes without thinking, are not just liturgy. They are infrastructure. They are the spiritual muscle memory that shows up when nothing else can. If you don't say *Modim* – thank you – regularly, it will not be there on the day you need it most. That is, I think, what Hirsch meant when he taught – throughout his commentary – that the *mitzvot* are not separate from real life. They are the training for real life.

I want to tell you about a third crisis – and this one is harder for me to talk about, because unlike the snow and the concrete, this one doesn't have a clean ending.

About nineteen years ago, I was Chairman of this Shul, SJW. It was right before the *Yomim Noraim.* The community was preparing for the holiest days of the year, and as Chairman, I had a hundred things to handle.

And then I got a phone call from my father in New York. He was sick. The diagnosis was bad. I needed to come immediately.

I got on the next plane. I sat by his bedside. I met with his doctors. And from that hospital room, between conversations with the medical team, I was on the phone with my fellow Honorary Officers planning the *Chagim,* back here.

At a certain point, my father could no longer speak. But his mind was clear, and he made it absolutely clear to me, without words, what he wanted me to do. He wanted me to fly back. To lead the *kehillah* through the Y*omim Noraim.* To do my duty to the community and to Hashem.

My father, Joel Breslauer, *zichrono livracha,* was a *baal teshuva.* He came to *Yiddishkeit* not by inheritance but by

choice. He built the infrastructure of faith in our family from the ground up. He was a follower of Rav Hirsch. He gave me the prayers I have been telling you about tonight. And at the end of his life, with the strength he had left, what he insisted on was: go and do the avodah.



Fire Island, New York
August 2005

So I did. I flew back. I led the davening through Yom Kippur. I called New York after *Ne'ilah.* By then he had gone into a coma. I flew straight back. He passed a few days later.

I asked myself why. Not "why is he sick" – I knew that question had no answer.

But why was the right thing, the thing he himself was asking of me, to be five thousand miles away during his last days?

My father had no doubt. He was clear. He had the certainty of a *baal teshuva* who had built his whole life on the conviction that *avodah* – service – comes before everything, including your own grief.

I wasn't as certain. And I have to tell you: *that uncertainty perhaps still lingers in me, nineteen years later.*

I want to draw on the Rav again, because I think this is the deepest thing in *Kol Dodi Dofek.* The Rav does not promise that *mah* – "what now" – gives you peace. He promises it gives you direction. There is a difference. Sometimes you do the right thing and you still carry the *lamah* – the why – for the rest of your life.

What my father taught me, in his last clear moments, was not how to feel. It was what to do. He was teaching me that the covenant doesn't wait for your emotions to catch up. *Avodah* is not contingent on certainty. It is contingent on what you owe.

And I think this is what Rav Hirsch means when he insists that the *mitzvot* are not separate from real life – they are the framework that holds you upright when your own emotional resources have run out. My father did not tell me to feel a certain way at his bedside. He told me to *get on the plane.* And the doing carried me when the feeling could not.

I still ask the *lamah.* I think I always will. But I have come to believe that the asking and the doing can live in the same Jewish heart. And that, maybe, is the most honest definition of faith I know.

Now I want to switch terrain entirely. From a mountain to business.

2008. The global financial crisis. I run an investment business – Patron Capital – and we were in serious trouble. We had lost significant money. We needed to raise capital to survive. We tried. We didn't raise enough. We couldn't make payroll.

And then a door opened. Three investors from the Middle East came forward, ready to put in the money we needed. The deal would have saved the business. But there were clauses. Specifically, clauses against doing business with Israel.

We had a choice. Take the money and survive. Or reject the money – and almost certainly go bankrupt.

We rejected the money.

I'd love to tell you it felt courageous in the moment. It didn't. It felt like watching your career and the livelihoods of the people you employ disappear because of a principle. I had partners, families, mortgages, real people depending on this. And we were saying no to the only deal in town.

This is exactly the territory the Rav describes in *The Lonely Man of Faith.* He distinguishes two archetypes from the two creation stories in *Bereishit:* Adam I – the productive, majestic, achieving self, made *b'tzelem Elokim* in order to *kivshuha,* to conquer the world:

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה
"Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it."

And Adam II – the covenantal self, the one Hashem places in the garden *l'avdah u'l'shamrah, "to serve it and to guard it"* (*Bereishit* 2:15). Adam I builds. Adam II belongs – to a covenant, to a story, to a People.

In that boardroom, every Adam I argument said: take the money. Survive. Live to fight another day. But Adam II said: there are things I will not do, even to survive.

The story has a good ending. The investors came back. They dropped the clauses. The deal went through. The business survived and has grown.

But here is what I have to tell you honestly, and what I think the Rav would insist on: the rightness of the decision did not depend on the good ending. If they had walked away, and we had gone under, the decision would still have been right. The covenant came first. The outcome came after. This is what my father taught me at his bedside: *avodah* is not contingent on outcome.

And that, I think, is the deepest lesson of Yaakov *Avinu* wrestling at the *Yabbok*. Alone, at night, with everything to lose:

ויותר יעקב לבדו, ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר.
"And Yaakov was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn."

And then, after the struggle, the new name:

לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל.
"No longer shall your name be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have wrestled with G-d and with men, and have prevailed."

Rav Hirsch points out that Yaakov does not win because he overpowers. He wins because he will not let go. He says to his opponent:

לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני.
"I will not let you go unless you bless me."

He limps for the rest of his life. The blessing and the limp come from the same encounter. That is faith. You don't come out of a real crisis of faith unscathed. You come out limping. I have my physical and mental scars, but you come out with a new name – stronger, better, and with the ability to continue to grow.

So I want to bring this back to you. To the young professionals here, building careers. To the older couples who have already lived through more than one crisis. To the families with kids in this room, who are watching how the adults respond to hard things and learning, whether we know it or not, what faith looks like.

The Rav's framework, from *Kol Dodi Dofek*, gives us three moves.

First: Stop asking *lamah* as a demand for explanation. We are too small to see the whole picture, and asking that way will eat you alive. Some *lamahs* we will carry our whole lives – and that is honest, that is human, that is allowed.

Second: Ask *mah*. The Rav teaches that we move from the *b'rit goral* – the covenant of fate, the suffering we did not choose – into the *b'rit ye'ud* – the covenant of destiny, the life we build in response. Fate is what happens to you. Destiny is what you make of it.

Third – and this is the Hirsch piece: build the infrastructure now, in the easy times, so that the prayers and the principles are there when you need them. *Shema Koleinu* on an ordinary day is the reason *Shema Koleinu* shows up under a meter of snow. And the father who teaches his son to daven on a regular day is the same father who, at the end, can ask that son to get on a plane and lead a *kehillah* – and the son will know how.

I have been buried in snow. I have been broken on concrete. I have stood at my father's bedside and gotten on a plane because he, *zichrono livracha,* would have wanted me to do. I have sat in a boardroom watching what I built nearly collapse because we wouldn't compromise on Israel. And in every one of those moments – the personal and the professional, the physical and the financial, the moments of clarity and the moments where I still ask *lamah* – what was there was not a theological argument. It was two prayers, the teachings of a father, and a refusal to let go.

That, I believe, is what it means to be called *Yisrael:*

כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל.
"For you have wrestled with G-d and with men, and have prevailed."

Not one who avoids the wrestling. Not one who wins without limping. One who stays in the fight, holds onto the covenant, and walks away changed.

May we all, when our moment comes, and it will come, for each of us, find that the prayer is already on our lips, the principles our parents and teachers gave us are already in our bones, and the One we are calling out to is already listening.

MY CONNECTION TO THE TORAH

BY ROSIE FEINGOLD



When I first thought about my connection to the *Torah,* I realised my answer would have been very different a few years ago. I used to think *Torah* was mainly about learning more, understanding more and doing more. While all of that still matters, over the past few years, and especially since marrying my husband Matt and building our home together, I have come to see *Torah* less as something you know, and more as something you live your way into.

Marriage has taught me that the things which shape us most are rarely the dramatic moments. It's built through the quieter ones: making dinner together, supporting one another after difficult days, and learning how to create a shared home. Matt and I came into marriage with different traditions and *minhagim* (customs), and we have been learning how to build something that feels authentic to both of us. It reminded me that the most meaningful things are often built one small step at a time.

With this, I have come to appreciate that Judaism isn't sustained only by dramatic spiritual moments, but by the quieter work of consistency, care and building. That's how my own connection to *Torah* has grown: not through one defining transformation, but through small choices made over time. Keeping Shabbat in a way that felt meaningful and sustainable taught me that growth doesn't have to happen all at once. Sometimes it's simply about taking the next step.

A phrase by Tanya White has stayed with me. She describes Judaism as "summoned becoming." I love that idea because it reminds me that we aren't expected to become everything at once. We're simply invited to keep becoming who we're meant to be.

As a woman, that resonates deeply. So much of women's Jewish experience has always been the quiet work of building Jewish life: creating homes, establishing rhythms and passing on values.

Before *Matan Torah* (the giving of the *Torah*), Hashem tells Moshe, *"Ko tomar l'Beit Yaakov"* (so shall you say to the House of Jacob). *Chazal* (the Sages) explains that *Beit Yaakov* refers to the women, who were addressed first at *Sinai.* I used to think of the term "ladies first" as just a polite social custom, but in Judaism it reflects something much deeper. Before *Torah* could be transmitted outward, it first needed people who could carry it into everyday life – into our homes, relationships and ordinary routines, step-by-step.

Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Chai have also been a huge part of my journey. Through their warmth and the community they have created, Judaism has become something I genuinely love living. I don't come to shul because I 'should' but because I really enjoy the community, the familiar faces and the feeling of belonging.

Increasingly, Judaism feels less like arriving somewhere and more like learning how to navigate. As a doctor, I often experience that navigation. *Halachically, pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) always comes first. But emotionally, it can still feel complicated living in both worlds at once. There are moments when I leave a Friday night meal to go into the hospital, or when Shabbat doesn't look the way I imagined I wanted it to look. And I think part of becoming an adult Jew is realising that *Torah* isn't always lived in perfect conditions.

And that feels very familiar to me. At this stage in my life, I definitely don't feel like I've arrived spiritually. If anything, I feel more aware than ever of how much I'm still figuring out.

The words of *Pirkei Avot* have become an anchor for me: *"Lo alecha hamelacha ligmor, v'lo ata ben chorin l'hibatel mimena"* – it is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to walk away from it. That, I think, is my connection to *Torah:* not that I have arrived, but that *Torah* keeps inviting me to keep growing.

THE DIVINE WITHIN

BY REMI MENNESSON

The *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* teaches, *"With ten utterances the world was created."* According to Jewish tradition, the Hebrew letters are not merely symbols but the very building blocks through which the world was created. This is why the Hebrew language is considered so unique: its words often reveal something of the inner essence of what they describe.

Take, for example, the Hebrew word for human being, אדם (adam), we have אב (father), אם (mother), together (א=1, ב=2, ד =4) they combine to make דם (blood), add the letter א, representing the Divine One, and you have adam the human, blood animated by the Divine presence.

By contrast, the animal in Hebrew is בהמה which is composed of בה (within) and מה (what), its nature is already complete within itself. It is a being whose essence is contained within its immediate nature, its drives, senses, and instincts. The *Talmud* in *Baba Kama* says *"an ox that is one day old is called an ox"* the ox is defined by its nature, it is an ox immediately because it belongs to that category. The word *adam* (אדם) also derives from *adamah* (אדמה, earth). Just as a seed hidden in the earth grows into fruit, so the essence of the human being is to bring what lies hidden within, taking it from potential into actuality.

On this potential, I would encourage the reader to pause and ask himself the question of who am I? Am I my past, what I have achieved so far in my life? The past does not exist anymore, am I my future? It is not there, am I my day-to-day occupation, do I identify with what I spent a few years studying at university? I suspect that many readers will have the word Jew/Jewish in their answers to this question.

This existential question lies at the heart of the *Tanya,* which teaches that every human being possesses both a Divine soul and an animal soul, engaged in a constant inner struggle. This approach has helped me come to a realisation that we have been created in G-d's image, we have a Divine soul in us which needs space to express itself. This is, I believe, what is behind the reactions we have witnessed from many freed Israeli hostages from Gaza. Held under inhuman conditions, many of the hostages coming from very secular environments spoke about a connection to G-d and at times the *Torah* or *Mitzvot* in the tunnels and after. In such terrible circumstances, when every ordinary source of comfort and identity is stripped away, many discovered a spiritual depth that had perhaps always been present. The Divine soul, long overshadowed by everyday concerns, found room to express itself.

The Divine soul ultimately points to a reality that cannot be fully understood, for our Sages teach that G-d's essence cannot be comprehended, no thought can grasp it. The Divine belongs to a dimension beyond time and space and cannot be fully explained or rationalised. Yet simply becoming aware that we possess a Divine soul changes the way I experience life's journey.

Perhaps the real question is not whether we possess a Divine soul, for the *Tanya* teaches that we all do, but whether we live with an awareness of it. The question then becomes whether we allow that awareness to shape our choices, striving each day to reflect something of G-d's kindness, compassion and justice in the way we relate to others. In doing so, we bring into actuality what has always existed within us in potential.

REFLECTIONS ON THE STORY OF RUTH

BY SHARON EREIRA



The story of Ruth has always resonated deeply with me, especially at Shavuot, when we read her story alongside the celebration of receiving the *Torah.* Shavuot is not only about revelation, but about acceptance, the choice to live by the values and teachings of Judaism. In that sense, Ruth feels like the embodiment of Shavuot itself.

Ruth was not born into the Jewish people, yet she made a conscious and courageous decision to join them. After experiencing loss and uncertainty, she remained steadfastly loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi, declaring, *"Where you go, I will go; your people shall be my people, and your G-d my G-d."* These words express not only love, but deep commitment to a people, a faith, and a way of life. Ruth's journey is one of humility, resilience, and quiet strength. She did not seek recognition, yet through her actions she became a foundational figure in Jewish history.

What moves me most is that Ruth chose this path. Her connection to Judaism was not assumed; it was embraced with intention. Her story reminds me that being Jewish is not only about identity, but about how we live the values we uphold and the choices we make each day.

I feel this strongly in my own life. Being Jewish shapes how I think, how I relate to others, and how I conduct myself.It is reflected in my relationships with family and friends, where loyalty is central. Like Ruth's unwavering devotion to Naomi, I try to be someone who is dependable, who stands by the people I love and who values those bonds above everything.

Judaism also gives me a profound sense of belonging. It is my identity, my community, and the lens through which I see the world. This connection is most deeply felt through community, in both joyful and difficult times. Whether celebrating festivals, Shabbat, or family occasions, there is a sense of continuity that grounds me. In challenging moments, that same community offers comfort and strength. Like Ruth, who bound her life to Naomi's, I find belonging through connection.

Kindness and humility are values that guide me daily. Judaism teaches not only how to live, but how to treat others with compassion, dignity, and awareness of our shared humanity. These principles are especially important in my role as a Justice of the Peace. In the courtroom, I encounter people at vulnerable moments in their lives. I aim to approach each person with fairness and also with empathy, recognising that everyone has a story. Justice, for me, must be balanced with understanding and humanity.

My Judaism is not separate from my actions, it is their foundation. It reminds me to listen carefully, judge thoughtfully, and treat each person with respect. Like Ruth, who entered a new world with humility and grace, I try to carry those qualities into all areas of my life.

Shavuot reminds us that the *Torah* is not something we received only once, but something we continue to receive through our choices and actions. It is both a gift and a responsibility, shaping not only what we believe, but how we behave and build our communities.

Ruth's story is a powerful reminder of that ongoing commitment. Like the Jewish people at *Sinai,* she chose to embrace a new way of life with courage and sincerity. Her example inspires me to live with loyalty, act with kindness, and approach the world with humility. It reminds me that belonging is not only inherited, but something we actively create through the lives we lead.

REFLECTIONS ON YONAH'S VOYAGE & HIDDEN MESSAGES

BY AXELLE SZNAJER



Admittedly, for a long time, I overlooked the story of Yonah, the only prophet whose message is relayed through a narrative with a defined plot, intrigues, good guys and bad guys, and a somewhat "happy ending". A tale of repentance and of the immature refusal to follow G-d's order by a whining man didn't exactly appeal to me. The message seemed self-explanatory; and yet, there is more to this story than meets the eye, especially given the prominence of Yonah's journey in our Yom Kippur afternoon service.

I therefore decided to embark on a discovery myself, looking for a deeper significance of Yonah's voyage. Three themes caught my attention: the time Yonah spent in the belly of the fish; the underlying reason for Yonah's refusal to carry G-d's words; and the deeper meaning of Yonah's voyage under the sea.

A time to recalibrate

Yonah spent three days (and three nights) in the belly of the fish, a period that is often associated with the time required for our brain to rewire itself, process new information to break habits and invite a different way of thinking. In several other *Torah* stories there are references to the significance of this three-day period, both leading to positive or negative outcomes, such as:

- the *Akedah* story (*Torah sedra* portion read on Rosh Hashanah) when Abraham went on a three-day journey to reach Mount *Moriah* to sacrifice his son Isaac, reflecting and reaffirming his commitment to follow G-d's words;
- the receiving of the *Torah* when the Israelites spent three days preparing themselves beforehand on Mount *Sinai;*
- the story of Purim when Esther and the people of Shushan fasted for three days and three nights before she went to see the King;
- and the story of Passover when Pharaoh changed his mind after three days and decided to go after the Israelites who had fled into the desert.

These are just a few biblical examples of how a three-day period can impact our thinking and habits. There is a fascinating article from David Strayer PhD, Professor of Cognitive and Neural Sciences at the University of Utah, who performed a number of experiments and talked about a similar phenomenon of the brain needing three days to recalibrate its senses. He concluded that this time allows for the pre-frontal cortex (the brain's central command centre) to review and adapt its reflection and deductive process. The three-days Yonah spent in the belly of the fish is therefore no surprise and coincides well with the time our brain needs for further reflection.

The courage to forgive the stranger

Yonah is not the first to argue with G-d. There are many examples of reluctant prophets, some of the most famous ones being Moses *("who am I that I should go to Pharaoh")* and Jeremiah *("but I am just a child")*. The difference here is that Yonah is not just arguing with the request to be G-d's spokesperson but more importantly arguing with the purpose of His request. Yonah knows that the inhabitants of Nineveh were later going to be responsible for the destruction of the Temple. This is why he strongly objects to the idea of giving them the opportunity to repent and possibly receive forgiveness for their (present and future) sins. The deeper message here is that G-d judges us based on who we are at a specific moment and on our willingness to question ourselves and address our wrongdoings at a point in time. If we show a true and authentic openness to repent and reconsider our actions, we have a window to appeal to G-d and refocus on the "true north". Perhaps this is also a message to invite us to reflect on the benefit and importance of "living in the moment" and to not be overly preoccupied with what the future could be. "One day at a time" as my wise mother would often tell me.

If we take this one step further, we also learn that Yonah's struggles with G-d's message relates to the fact that he has to carry out a message of forgiveness and repentance to people who are intrinsically different from him, who are living a life of debauchery in a society that is at the opposite of where he comes from. Forgiving the stranger, the one that is different from oneself, the one we don't understand and whose behaviours we can't comprehend is much harder than forgiving the one "like us".

Yonah is not faced with the challenge of having to forgive people who are like him but to forgive those who are diametrically opposed to his approach to life. As I reflect on this task which admittedly can be difficult at times, perhaps it is not just our ability to forgive the stranger that is most rewarding, but also the efforts we make and the process we go through as we strive to do so. Learning to step back, suspend our judgement and question what we deem to be irrevocable truths can be laborious but also incredibly fulfilling.

Finding wholeness

Finally let's consider Yonah's voyage under the sea and his reflective journey to emerge a different man, a rounder and perhaps wiser human being.



Let me take you on a small detour to set a broader context. Verse two of the Ten Commandments relates to the prohibition to have idols and the Torah goes at length to specify what constitutes idolatry, namely *"everything*

that is in heaven above, in the earth beneath and in the water beneath the earth". Each of these aspects (sky, earth, sea) constitutes a source of potential idol worship. The sky and its planet, through the world of astronomy, pure matter and scientific richness, is often associated with smarts, intellect, analytical reasoning; something that we know Yonah possessed (Yonah son of Amittai from the Hebrew word "*emet*" which means the truth). The earth through its terrestrial wonders is often associated with materiality, the economic ways of life, wealth and physical possessions; something that Yonah had as well, as we know that he paid himself to charter the entire boat that took him away from Nineveh. The sea is associated with our unconsciousness, our emotions, our feelings, our self-awareness, our darker thoughts, our passions and inner voices; something that Yonah didn't know. He was aware of his own world as we outlined above, but his wisdom was confined to his familiar environment. He lacked the ability to carry out a deeper introspection into his inner self, face his own demons and learn to overcome them. He knew how to win minds but not how to conquer hearts, he had IQ (smarts and intellect) but no EQ (emotional intelligence). This is why he needed the voyage under the sea, as an opportunity to get in touch with another side of his true self and be able to recognise what could constitute a source of idolatry for him and others.

Interestingly, when the fish is first mentioned, the chronicle refers to it as *"dag"* (masculine) but when it swallows Yonah, it becomes *"daga"* in its female version and when it spits Yonah out, it reverts to being called *"dag"*, his masculine self. Numerous studies have shown that women often possess a deeper level of sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and an acute level of empathy and social perceptiveness, with a heightened capacity to process emotions with greater nuance and self-reflection. This general concept can also be found in the Talmud that describes women as possessing *"binah yeteirah",* an "additional measure of understanding", a concept traditionally associated with heightened intuition, emotional insight, and sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics. This goes to show that Yonah is wrapped in femininity throughout his entire undersea journey which is aimed at helping him get in touch with his more emotive and sensitive side so that he emerges as a transformed yet more rounder individual. The journey under the sea was not an escape from his mission, but the path through which Yonah became complete. In discovering the world beneath the surface, Yonah finally discovered the missing part of himself, uniting intellect and emotion, truth and compassion. Wholeness came when Yonah learned that wisdom is measured not only by what we know, but also by what we feel and understand within.

As I look back on Yonah's journey, I am struck by how much it mirrors our own. We all need moments of retreat to reassess our path, the humility to extend compassion beyond the boundaries of our comfort zone, and the courage to discover unexplored parts of ourselves; for it is through this process that we move closer to becoming whole and fulfilling our destiny.

SHARING YOUR SIMCHA WITH THE COMMUNITY



Our synagogue is a place where we come together to celebrate, learn, support one another, and mark meaningful milestones that enrich Jewish life.

Throughout the year, we offer a wide range of activities and events that bring our community together across all ages and stages of life as well as strengthen our connection to Hashem, to *Torah*, and to one another. One of our greatest joys is welcoming new babies into our community. A baby naming ceremony is a beautiful opportunity to celebrate new life, surround families with love and blessings, and formally welcome a child into the covenant and warmth of the Jewish community.

Below is an example of words of joy from proud parents on the occasion of their baby naming ceremony: **Naming Ceremony Zeved H'abat – Rachel Elkayam, daughter of Sean Nordqvist Elkayam & Ellen Elkayam (26 April 2026 / 8 Iyar 5786)**

In *Parashat Kedoshim* – the *Torah* commands *ואהבת לרעך כמוך – "love your fellow as yourself."* Rashi, in his commentary on this *pasuk*, cites Rabbi Akiva's ruling that this is a fundamental principle of the Torah – *"זה כלל גדול בתורה"* (this is a great principle of the Torah).

Our daughter's name is Rachel Karin. I'd like to start by addressing the name Rachel and how it might connect to the *pasuk* we read today.

Rachel's story in the *Torah* is read by the *Midrash* as the supreme example of *"ahavat re'a"* (love of one's fellow) taken to an almost impossible extreme: she gave Leah the *simanim* (signs) so that Leah would not be humiliated on the wedding night.

In doing so Rachel sacrificed her own marriage, her own life's desire, out of love and compassion for her sister.

It is said that a person's eulogy is written in the lives of those they touched. On that note, ladies and gentlemen, please also allow me to tell you about another Rachel born in Iraq in 1929, who at an early age emigrated to (what we today know as) Israel with her family. That woman was my grandmother – of blessed memory – some would call her the family matriarch, but I knew her simply as Savta Rachel.

Savta Rachel was a woman who dedicated her life to others through good deeds with conviction. She gave birth to eight, but was unfortunately only able to raise seven children, as one child perished at birth, an event which shaped her determination for the rest of her life.

She was the kind of woman who would always find a reason to make a new friend and to spread joy and show compassion to the people around her. Now, with many grandchildren and a growing army of great-grandchildren, you can imagine the family tree that she managed to branch in her 94 years of life.

Her love of Israel never wavered. In my conversations with her in her final years, she would always end with the same question: *"When are you and Ellen moving to Israel?"* Notice she said when, not if – because for her, living in Israel was not a choice. It was simply a fact of life.

Our daughter's second name, Karin, comes from my mother-in-law, Ellen's mum. It is tradition in Ellen's Swedish family to honour grandparents with names, but giving the name Karin to our daughter was so natural, because if there are three words I would use to describe Karin it would be: kindness, generosity and integrity.

So tying this all together: when our daughter is old enough to be interested about the origin of her name, I will proudly tell her: "You are named after your great-grandmother and grandmother."

Two strong women who embodied ואהבת לרעך כמוך – who showed boundless compassion to friends and neighbours, who loved and cared for their family with everything they had, and whose love for Israel never faltered. We named you with the hope that you will carry their legacy forward.



HIGH HOLY DAYS INSPIRATIONAL THOUGHTS

SHANA TOVA FROM DAYAN BINSTOCK

EMERITUS RABBI OF ST JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE



Friends, this is a poignant moment for me. This is the thirtieth occasion I have addressed you on Rosh Hashanah. As you know, I will be retiring at the end of February as Senior Rabbi of this community.

It has been the greatest privilege to serve this exceptional congregation for nearly three decades together with my wife, Rachie. You have become our extended family, and we have shared in your joys and sorrows, just as you have shared in ours. Our children have grown up amongst you and have cherished being part of this diverse and engaging community. We have felt honoured to guide you on your Jewish journey – and we have learned so much from you in the process.

So let us reflect together. I'm sure that many of you, like me, are deeply worried for the future: the future of Israel, the future of Anglo Jewry, the future for Jews across the world.

The UK government's recent announcement of the recognition of a Palestinian State is simply the latest in a series of almost daily developments seeking to isolate Israel – in trade, in academia, in the arts, in sport and on campus. *Kol hakavod* to the individuals and organisations – some from this community – who are providing much-needed help to our Jewish students. Yet despite this, the situation they are facing has never been as bad.

So how do we approach Rosh Hashanah, and a new year, under these circumstances?

What does our tradition tell us about this day that can give us hope in these challenging times?

Our core rabbinic text, the *Mishnah*, composed almost two thousand years ago, tells us that on Rosh Hashanah, the whole world passes before G-d for assessment. It is *Yom HaDin* – the Day of Judgement – for us, for Israel, and for all humanity.

The great nineteenth century Chassidic master, the *Sfat Emet,* (Yehudah Arye Leib Alter of Gur, 1847-1905), describes a biblical episode that gives a remarkable perspective to this judgement.

The *Torah* tells us that our ancestor Jacob left his parents' home, fearing that his brother Esau would kill him. Now, twenty-two years later, he is returning, when he hears that Esau is on his way to meet him with a force of four hundred men. Jacob, says the Bible, was "very afraid and distressed". Jacob becomes a whirlwind of activity. He dispatches emissaries with gifts of flocks and herds, hoping to appease his brother. He prays to G-d for protection. He divides his camp into two, so that if one is destroyed the other may survive. Jacob's hyperactivity is not only pragmatic, covering all the options. It is also a measure of the stress he is under.

He realises that reconnecting with his brother, Esau, will be the defining crisis of his life. The *Torah* then presents us with a mysterious drama.

That night, Jacob was left alone "and a man wrestled with him till daybreak." Who was the man? The text does not say. It is the sages who elaborate and say that the adversary was no ordinary man but in fact was the guardian angel of Esau.

The *Torah* does not tell us when this confrontation occurred, but the *Sfat Emet*, basing himself on kabbalistic sources, teaches that it took place on the night of Rosh Hashanah.

And if we think about it, we can well understand why. Throughout history, Jacob's wrestling has underpinned our experience of Rosh Hashanah.

How is that the case? Let us go back to the *Mishnah.* On Rosh Hashanah, it is not only we, the Jewish people, who face judgement – but all the nations of the world as well. They are judged not only in respect of their own national destiny, but also in relation to us, the Jewish people. The forces of Esau against whom Jacob was wrestling, represent the arguments the world raises against us. The question is posed: By what right do the Jewish people survive? What claim do they have to life, to G-d's blessing, to history?

And so, said the *Sfat Emet,* Jacob's night-long wrestling match, represents our challenge on Rosh Hashanah. We, the children of Israel, stand before G-d, often wrestling with forces beyond our control – and sometimes with forces within ourselves – never knowing how the struggle will end.

Yet, there is a remarkable life-lesson to be drawn here, but before I share it with you, allow me to digress a moment.

Since October 7th 2023, a phrase I often hear is: *"If only Rabbi Lord Sacks was alive. What would he have said? What words of support would he have found for us".*

But Lord Rabbi Sacks did say it. In one of his most significant essays, he writes that Jacob teaches us what it is to be a Jew. In the moment of his greatest trial, wrestling with the angel, exhausted and in pain, Jacob says to the angel: *לא אשלחך כיאם־ברכתני* – *"I will not let you go until you bless me."* Within every crisis, says Lord Rabbi Sacks, lies the possibility of blessing.

That, surely, is our cry on Rosh Hashanah. We say to G-d: yes, we are tested; yes, we are judged; yes, we wrestle with fear, with failure, with our own mortality. But we will not let this day, this trial, this struggle pass until it yields blessing.

Rabbi Sacks, of blessed memory, saw in Jacob's words the essence of Jewish courage. We do not deny the night. We do not pretend the wrestling is not painful – that we are not scarred. After all, Jacob emerged from the struggle limping. But he also emerged blessed, renamed, transformed. He was given a new name, *Yisrael,* ISRAEL – *ki sarita im Elohim ve'im anashim vatuchal* – literally, the one who wrestles with G-d and man and prevails. And that became our name. *Bnei Yisrael,* the Children of Israel. We are the people who wrestle.

Friends, this year the Jewish people are once again in a long, dark night of struggle. In Israel, our brothers and sisters face a ruthless enemy that callously exploits the lives of innocents, even children, to shield its operations. Our hostages are still languishing in tunnels beneath Gaza.

Around the world, Jews face pressure, criticism, hostility, antisemitism. Here in Britain, many of us feel the weight of it personally. We know what it is to wrestle with the angel of Esau.

And yet Jacob teaches us: do not let go. Hang in there until there is blessing. We have the capacity to extract blessing from the most existential crises.



And if we look, despite the pain, we indeed see blessing. For Israel, the blessing is the astonishing resilience of its people – their courage, their grit, their refusal to surrender to despair. And their incredible ability to innovate. Witness Israel's announcement of its new Iron Beam laser air defence system – a remarkable military innovation that can neutralise incoming missiles and rockets at the speed of light. Israel is the first country in the world to have developed this.

For diaspora Jewry, the blessing is the clarity that comes from crisis – the strength of Jewish identity, the rediscovery of pride, the deepening of community. Despite the challenges on campus, enrolments at J-Soc are at record levels as more students are identifying as Jewish than ever before.

And at a personal level, the blessing may be the knowledge that our own trials – be they illness, loss, uncertainty, loneliness, caregiving, financial strain – can also be sources of growth, compassion, faith, and renewed life.

Jacob emerged with a limp. And so do we. The limp reminds us that blessing does not erase pain.

To be Israel is not to have an easy life. It is to have a meaningful life. And it is to know that even in the darkest night, we can wrestle our way to dawn – and in that dawn, there is blessing.

So, on this Rosh Hashanah, let us be true to our name.

We shall be Israel!
We shall wrestle, emboldened with faith.
We shall wrestle, fortified with courage.
We shall wrestle, strengthened with hope.

And let us say:
We will not let go of our people.
We will not let go of our faith.
We will not let go of our G-d.

And may it be G-d's will that from this place of struggle, Israel and the Jewish people emerge into the dawn of blessing, of life, of renewal, and of peace.

Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu, ve'al kol Yisrael. Ve'imru: Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dayan Binstock on the first day of Rosh Hashanah 5786, 2025, St John's Wood Synagogue.

WHY DID G-D CREATE US?

BY RABBANIT SALLY MAYER, ROSH MIDRASHA, MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM



Why did G-d create us? From time to time, this question arises, especially around the the *Yamim Nora'im* (The High Holy Days), as we remember the creation of the world and take stock of our relationship with Hashem. Perhaps one answer lies in a brief, beautiful passage in the *Talmud* that states six facts about human beings, three ways in which humans are similar to G-d's ministering angels, and three ways in which we are similar to animals. We are like angels in that we have intelligence, we walk upright, and we speak the "holy language," Hebrew; we are like animals in that we eat and drink, reproduce, and must eliminate waste as the animals do.

This simple passage carries a profound message for us. Hashem's angels are heavenly beings, with no physical bodies, no temptations, and no free will. They follow G-d's commands perfectly, as a robot would carry out its programmed mission. Animals, on the other hand, are purely physical; they act on instinct and have no commandments. There is no expectation that they will behave in any other way, no moral choices that they face. We human beings are unique. We are physical and limited, like the animals, and yet we have intelligence and holiness, like the angels. We are a unique creation, suspended between heaven and earth, pulled toward both.

How are we meant to manage this dichotomy within us? Some would argue that our challenge is to push away the physical, placed within us merely to distract and tempt us; indulge only what we must and focus on the spiritual. I'd like to suggest that we are meant to elevate the physical, to take the same actions that we share with animals and to do them differently. We eat and drink like the animals, but we eat kosher food, make blessings beforehand and afterward, and ideally even eat for the sake of Heaven – not only for enjoyment but also to strengthen ourselves for the important goals we are accomplishing. We reproduce like animals, but our union is meant to be sanctified and elevated, circumscribed by *halakha* (Jewish law) and an opportunity to give to one's partner. It is not merely a physical act. We eliminate waste as animals do, but in a private and dignified manner, and we even make the blessing *asher yatzar* after that action.

It seems that Hashem created people to stand up to the unique challenge of being human: to synthesize the physical and the spiritual, not to deny the physical or even to severely limit it, but even more challenging, to use the physical in our service of G-d. A moving *piyyut* from Yom Kippur, *Asher Eimatecha,* ascribed to Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir, expresses this idea. It poetically describes the perfect service of the angels,but emphasizes Hashem's preference for imperfect human praise. We are blessed with the challenge and opportunity to take the physical and make it holy, by refining our relationships, channeling our desires, and serving G-d as only we have the capacity to do. Hashem loves and appreciates our ability to synthesize the physical and the spiritual, despite – and because – we are imperfect.

HOW TO USE AI (AND HOW NOT TO USE IT)

BY DR. MOSHE KOPPEL



Although AI has many applications, for most people it refers to large language models (LLMs) such as GPT, Claude or Gemini. These models respond to "prompts" formulated by users, asking them to answer questions, perform tasks like translation and editing, or even solve difficult problems in science, mathematics or *Torah.*

Although most users barely scratch the surface of these tools' abilities, anyone can appreciate their benefits. They put information at our fingertips and remove the drudgery from necessary but boring tasks.

Still, we need to be cognizant of the price we pay for this convenience. To understand what that price is, consider another commonly used AI app: the navigation tool Waze.



Waze is so terrific that nobody who uses it can imagine living without it. Which, in a sense, is exactly the problem. To put it bluntly, as a result of Waze, many of us have become tourists in our own cities.

We follow the blue line and arrive on time, but if the battery dies, we are lost. We may have reached our destination, but we never learned the way.

LLMs are Waze for the mind. They solve all kinds of problems quickly. But if we use them without discipline, the muscles we need to think to work through a difficulty and actually own the answer begin to atrophy.

Can we use AI to get to our destination without forgetting how to navigate?

The Generational Divide

For clarity, let's focus on two common uses of AI: summarizing and explaining difficult texts, and writing up our own thoughts on a topic.

If you've spent decades cracking your teeth on difficult texts before ChatGPT existed, you are probably fine. You already learned how to think the hard way. For you, AI is a convenience. You are using a crutch, but you have functional legs; you're just resting them.

The real concern is the next generation. A student who

never has to sweat over a *Tosafot* isn't just saving time; he is skipping the very process that makes the material his. When the answer arrives before the question has even fully formed in his mind, he remains a consumer of *Torah* rather than an owner.

These tools are useful, and the walls of the *beit midrash* have always been porous. But they must be disciplined. AI should be treated as a *shamash,* a servant who handles logistics, not as a Rav. The *shamash* isn't the teacher. He's the one who unlocks the door, arranges the benches and sets out the books. That is the proper role for AI.

Nobody gets credit for wasting an hour on a hard abbreviation. If you are stuck on a *sugya* (a discussion/topic in the Gemara) because you can't decipher an acronym or translate an obscure Aramaic term, use whatever tools are available. Clear the technical obstacles out of the way so you can actually learn.

AI is very good at giving you the big picture. It has read everything, which means it knows who is arguing with whom. Ask it, "Who disagrees with Rashi here?" or "What are the standard approaches to timers on Shabbat?" It will map out the positions, distinguish the strict from the lenient, and identify the fault lines. That can save hours of hunting. You are free to contemplate the arguments rather than search for them.

In short, use the machine to find the sources. Then close the laptop and read them.

Clearing the Barriers

The problem with AI is that it can be too smooth. It produces confident summaries that hide the mess. But *Torah* is the mess, the arguments, the contradictions, the tensions that do not resolve neatly.



We learned this the hard way at Dicta, my AI group in Jerusalem. We built a tool that functions like a halachic answering machine: You ask a question in plain language, and the system processes the literature and generates a response. It is technically very clever and it is a mistake.

It became clear that many users treated the tool like a vending machine: insert a coin (question), receive a product (answer). Too often, they weren't looking at the sources at all. They were outsourcing understanding.

As a result, we removed the conclusion from the next version. The new system assembles the applicable sources, links directly to the relevant passages, highlights the key lines, and stops. The judgment is yours. We made that change for a reason that goes beyond interface design. It's about the nature of *pesak* (a *halachic* ruling). There is a temptation to ask these models for a ruling because they're so capable. In many cases, AI can make a reasonable guess at what Rabbi Moshe Feinstein might say because it has, effectively, digested the response of Iggerot Moshe.

But a *pesak* isn't a statistical prediction. A computer can tell you that a ruling hinges on whether the pot was hot or the food was solid. It can't see the family standing in the kitchen or weigh the financial loss against the spiritual cost in that particular home. It has no skin in the game.

Real scholars rely on *shimush* (apprenticeship). A *posek* (*halachic* decisor) brings a lifetime of watching how his own teachers navigated the gap between the text and lived reality. You get that from serving a master, not from processing data.

And even if most of us are never going to be issuing *halachic* rulings ourselves, we won't learn how to be good Jews solely from a one-size-fits-all oracle. We learn from teachers, from our community and from wrestling with the texts on our own.

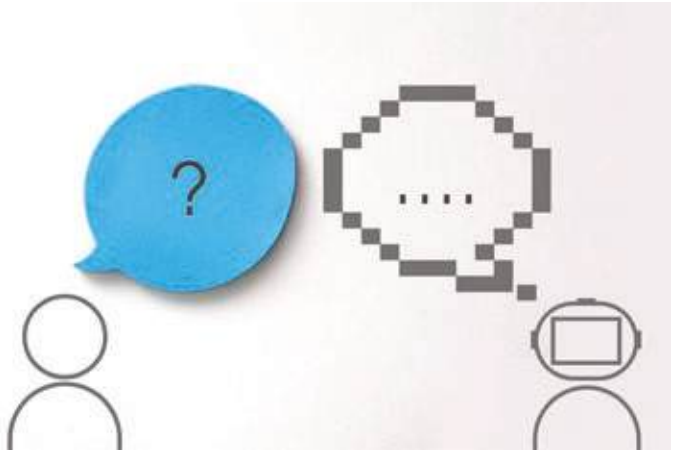
Putting Together Your Own Ideas

If a machine writes your *devar Torah,* you haven't acquired *Torah*; you've rented it.

This principle extends beyond *Torah.*

We live in an age in which generating fluent, persuasive text is essentially free. This makes it very easy to be lazy. Using AI to draft emails, summarize news, or plan your finances often saves time and is almost inevitable. But be careful not to let the machine take over your thinking. If you have an LLM help you draft a text, you need to then question every assumption, verify every claim and ensure it hasn't misrepresented your views by which time you might discover that you'd have been better off just drafting the whole thing from scratch yourself in the first place.

In short, treat AI output like a rumor in *shul*: possibly true and possibly useful, but you better think twice before you pass it on. Use it to turn an outline into a draft, then edit ruthlessly. If you can't spot the errors in the output, you aren't competent to use the tool for that task.



We are moving from an era of searching to an era of generating. Fluent answers are now a keystroke away, and it's tempting to skip the slow parts. But the slow parts are where you actually form and test your own thoughts. That only happens if you do the work.

Let AI speed up the drudgery. The learning is on you.

Dr. Moshe Koppel is a computer scientist, Talmud scholar and political activist. He is a professor emeritus of computer science at Bar-Ilan University and a prolific author of academic articles and books on Jewish thought, computer science, economics, political science and other disciplines. He is the founding director of Kohelet, a conservative-libertarian think tank in Israel, and he advises members of the Knesset on legislative matters.

WHY WE FAST ON YOM KIPPUR: REVERSE BIOLOGY

Man consists of a body and a soul; a physical envelope of flesh, blood, sinew and bone, inhabited and vitalized by a spiritual force described by the Chassidic masters as "literally a part of G-d above."

Common wisdom has it that spirit is loftier than matter, and the soul holier (i.e. closer to the Divine) than the body. This conception seems to be borne out by the fact that Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the day on which we achieve the height of intimacy with G-d, is ordained by the *Torah* as a fast day. This is a day on which we seemingly abandon the body and its needs to devote ourselves exclusively to the spiritual activities of repentance and prayer.



In truth, however, a fast day brings about a deeper, rather than more distant, relationship with the body. When a person eats, he is nourished by the food and drink he ingests. On a fast day, vitality comes from the body itself, from energy stored in its cells. In other words, on less holy days, it is an outside force (the energy in one's food and drink) that keeps body and soul together; on Yom Kippur, the union of body and soul derives from the body itself.

Yom Kippur thus offers a taste of the culminant state of creation known as the "World to Come." The *Talmud* tells us that "in the World to Come, there is neither eating nor drinking", a statement that is sometimes understood to imply that in its ultimate and most perfect state, creation is wholly spiritual, devoid of bodies and all things physical.

Kabbalistic and Chassidic teaching, however, describe the World to Come as a world in which the physical dimension of existence is not abrogated, but is preserved and elevated. The fact that there is "neither eating or drinking" in the World to Come is not due to an absence of bodies and physical life, but to the fact that in this future world, "the soul will be nourished by the body" itself, and the symbiosis of matter and spirit that is man will not require any outside sources of nutrition to sustain it.

Two Vehicles

The physical and the spiritual are both creations of G-d. Both were brought into being by Him out of utter nothingness, and each bears the imprint of its Creator in the particular qualities that define it.

The spiritual, with its intangibility and its transcendence of time and space, reflects the infinity and sublimity of G-d. The spiritual is also naturally submissive, readily acknowledging its subservience to a higher truth. It is these qualities that make the spiritual "holy" and a vehicle of relationship with G-d.

The physical, on the other hand, is tactual, egocentric and immanent, qualities that brand it "mundane" rather than holy, that mark it as an obfuscation, rather than a revelation, of the divine truth. For the unequivocal "I am" of the physical belies the truth that "there is none else besides Him", that G-d is the sole source and end of all existence.

Ultimately, however, everything comes from G-d; every feature of His every creation has its source in Him and serves to reveal His truth. So on a deeper level, the very qualities that make the physical "unholy" are the qualities that make it the most sacred and G-dly of G-d's creations. For what is the "I am" of the physical if not an echo of the unequivocal being of G-d? What is the tactility of the physical if not an intimation of the absoluteness of His reality? What is the "selfishness" of the physical if not an offshoot, however remote, of the exclusivity of the Divine expressed in the axiom "There is none else besides Him"?

Today, the physical world shows us only its most superficial face, in which the divine characteristics stamped in it are corrupted as a concealment, rather than a revelation, of G-dliness. Today, when the physical object conveys to us "I am," it bespeaks not the reality of G-d but an independent, self-sufficient existence that challenges, rather than reiterates, the divine truth.

But in the World to Come, the product of the labor of a hundred generations to sanctify the material world toward a G-dly end, the true face of the physical will come to light.

In the World to Come, the physical will be no less a vehicle of divinity than the spiritual. In fact, in many respects, it will surpass the spiritual as a conveyor of G- dliness. For while the spiritual expresses various divine characteristics - G-d's infinity, transcendence, etc. – the physical expresses the being of G-d.

Today, the body must look to the soul as its moral guide, as its source of awareness and appreciation of all things divine. But in the World to Come, "the soul will be nourished by the body." The physical body will be a source of divine awareness and identification that is loftier than the soul's own spiritual vision.

Yom Kippur is a taste of this future world of reverse biology. It is thus a day on which we are "sustained by hunger," deriving our sustenance from the body itself. On this holiest of days, the body becomes a source of life and nurture rather than its recipient.

Source: The Meaningful Life – Based on an address by the Rebbe, Erev Yom Kippur 5750. This article is an excerpt from Inside Time, a groundbreaking three-volume book set about the meaning and messages of the Hebrew calendar.

LETTER 9: MAKING A BLESSING OVER LIFE

BY RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS



SARA, DAVID, Yom Kippur is the day on which we give a reckoning of our life, remembering how short life is, and how important it is, therefore, to live it well. "Teach us to number our days", says the Psalm, "that we may get a heart of wisdom".

What we know we can lose, we learn to cherish. That's why the Jewish people at the dawn of its history suffered slavery so that ever after they would value freedom and fight for it. It's why Abraham had to come almost to the point of losing his child, so that Jews would love and cherish children. Those lessons were so deep – burned into our collective unconscious – that they've lasted for thousands of years.

It's no small thing that on the holiest day of the Jewish year we think about the possibility of death, so that for the rest of the year we will love life. Jews are the people who more than any other see G-d in life – this life, down here on earth.

Many other religions didn't do this. They thought that G-d was to be found in life-after-death, or in a monastic retreat, or in mystical ecstasy. For them the holy was somewhere else. For us the holy is in the here-and-now. The Jewish toast is le-chayim, "To life". Moses' great command was *Uvacharta va-chayyim,* "choose life". From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur we pray: *"Remember us for life, King who delights in life, and write us in the Book of Life for Your sake, G-d of life".*

To find G-d you don't need to climb mountains, cross oceans or travel to a fabled land. G-d is in the breath we breathe, the acts we do, the prayers we say, the love we give. G-d, vaster than the universe, is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Our first prayer every morning is *Modeh Ani, "I thank You, living and eternal King, who has restored my soul in mercy".* Thank You, G-d, for giving me back my life.

The whole of Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted: the thanks we say in our prayers, the blessings we make over every pleasure, the way *kashrut* turns eating into a holy act and the laws of Jewish family life sanctify the act of love. Shabbat stops us from travelling through life so fast that we never get to enjoy the view.

The financial crash should teach us something. You can invest in the stock exchange, but the market can crash. You can invest in a house, but prices can fall. You can follow secular trends but they can deceive and disappoint and leave you counting the cost. The best investment is in a life well lived, a life of meaning and principle and purpose, if possible framed by a happy marriage, a warm and embracing family, and a strong and supportive community.

Judaism helps us find these things. It sanctifies our families and homes. It gives us values to share with our children. As a way of life, it's been tested for longer than any other. As a source of wisdom, it is unparalleled in its depth and breadth.

Judaism gives us roots to keep us grounded and wings to help us fly. *Mitzvot* train us in healthful habits of the heart. Prayer is the renewable energy of the soul, and faith is its satellite navigation system. Every blessing we make is a way of saying Yes to life. G-d is the G-d of life and Judaism is the religion of life.



Throughout history the pendulum has swung between two kinds of society: puritanical cultures that distrust pleasure, and hedonistic cultures that worship it. We do something better than either: we sanctify pleasure, taking our most physical drives and dedicating them to G-d. There are many faiths throughout the world, but none that has led a tiny people for so long, so profoundly, to find joy in life.

And yes, life can be hard and full of the possibility of loss, pain, disappointment and grief. But the solution is not to avoid taking risks. It is to cultivate the things that give us strength: the love of family and friends, the support of a community, the habit of prayer that allows us to lean on G-d, and the faith that G-d has faith in us, forgiving our faults and giving us the strength, after every failure, to begin again.

Judaism was the first religion in history to place love at the heart of the spiritual life: Love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. Love your neighbour. Love the stranger. The greatest love song in all religious literature is *Shir ha-Shirim,* The Song of Songs.

And what we love most – because that is where G-d is to be found – is life itself. That is our greatest strength. It enabled our ancestors to survive every persecution. It helped Holocaust survivors to survive. It gave the Jewish people the courage to rebuild the land and state of Israel. That's why our greatest prayer on this day of days is: *"Write us in the Book of Life".* We don't ask for wealth or fame, stardom or success. We don't pray to be spared trials and tribulations. We just ask for life.

That is what Judaism is: a life of love and a love of life. All the rest is commentary.

(Extract from "Letters to the next generation", Reflections from Yom Kippur)

SHALOM FOR CHARLOTTE

BY SIVAN RAHAV-MEIR





"Have they heard about Charlotte in Israel?", asked one of my readers in New York this past week, and asked that I write about one of the most discussed incidents that recently occurred in the Jewish community there:

Charlotte Herzberg, an eight-year-old girl from Monsey, New York, was riding her bicycle near her house when she was struck by and killed by a car. The driver of the car, who immediately took responsibility for this tragic accident, was the best friend of Charlotte's father, Yudi.

"At that moment, my wife and I understood that we were facing a tremendous challenge and test," Yudi said in his eulogy for his daughter. *"My best friend did not do this deliberately — it was a terrible accident – and we would not allow this tragedy to tear us apart. Satan was testing us. He wanted to show that our beautiful neighbourhood couldn't handle machlokes (dispute). But the Satan underestimated us. We were going to prove him wrong."*

Yudi and his wife were determined that their tragedy should be used as an impetus to promote unity and peace among the Jewish people.

The next day, when members of the community paid a shiva call to the family, they were moved to see Yudi and his best friend – the driver who struck Charlotte – embracing, crying and literally holding one another up, while Chumi, Charlotte's mother, and the driver's wife also held each other and sobbed.

Before the *shiva* was over, Charlotte's family launched a campaign called "Shalom for Charlotte," an initiative "encouraging every member of *Klal Yisroel* to forgive, to forget, and to move on." The bereaved family is urging people to reach out to friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues in order to repair relationships by letting go of grudges and resentments, and then to share their story with them.

At the time of this writing, 2383 stories from 42 countries have already been posted on their website. We can all choose to cast blame and hold on to our grievances, says the family, but instead we ask you to *"take the pledge and make shalom for Charlotte. Bring more shalom into the world and help bring Moshiach."*

And the stories are incredible: two brothers who hadn't spoken to each other for years began to speak again; business partners who hadn't spoken for three months, cleared the air and began to restore their relationship; a synagogue that could have been torn apart by this tragedy joined this campaign; parents who were estranged from their child, sent him a text saying, *"We're thinking about you and we hope that everything is okay"* and received a response from him for the first time.

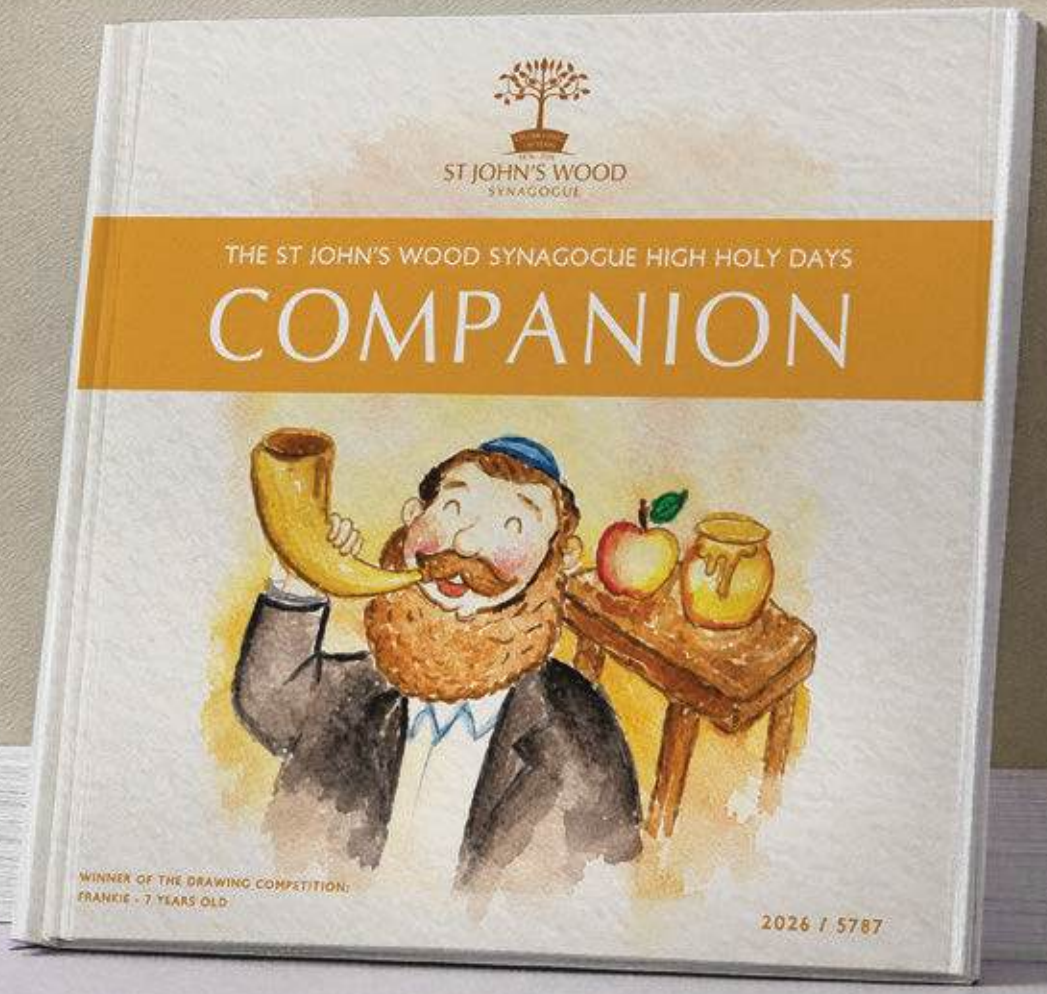
During the period of The Three Weeks there is much talk about *ahavat chinam* (unconditional love). When there were "only" 500 stories posted on the "Shalom for Charlotte" website, Rabbi Elya Brudny, one of the prominent Rabbis in American Jewry, gave a class, in which he said: "I could give many classes about the importance of cultivating peace in the community and of refining one's character. But these days we are witnessing a live lesson in front of our eyes. There are tremendous people living among us who are asking us to raise ourselves higher."

Have you heard about Charlotte? asked my reader from New York. I hope that now more people have heard this story, and they will join the family's campaign.
You can join here:
shalomforcharlotte.com



Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem. She works for Israel TV news, writes a column for Yediot Aharonot newspaper, and hosts a weekly radio show on Galei Zahal (Army Radio). Her lectures on the weekly Torah portion are attended by hundreds and the live broadcast attracts thousands more listeners throughout the world.

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(Nursery - Year 7)

ABOUT US

Since 2014, Mimi Dwek Hebrew School has become a trend-setting Jewish educational experience for children from Nursery to year 7. Through interactive classes and exclusive Hebrew-reading methodologies, our dynamic dedicated staff provide outstanding Judaic and Hebrew language studies. We passionately believe that your child's experience of Jewish learning should be fun, upbeat, inspiring, and interactive. With a high attendance rate, we ensure that your child will enjoy coming and have a positive attitude toward the sessions. Central to your child's Jewish identity is social interaction and community, we aim to integrate your child into Synagogue community and events.

We are excited to be extending our offering on Sunday to include all age groups, Nursery - Year 7. (Subject to demand)

We have special dates in the diary including our Friday night dinner, featuring a Kabbalat Shabbat led by the children which is always a highlight.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

NURSERY

This offering ensuring the tender development stage is covered we are offering a hands-on sensory and musical class.

RECEPTION

Our reception class provides a creative environment for children to learn the Aleph-Bet, about festivals, Prayer and Jewish songs.

YEARS 1-7

Our curriculum goals and outcomes ensure that the students are engaged, intellectually stimulated and creatively expressing a strong sense of knowledge and love of Judaism. Specialty areas include: The Jewish Home, Jewish Heroes, Jewish Life Cycle and Tefilah-prayer.

GCSE YEARS 9-10

Our GCSE AQA Jewish Studies syllabus begins another two-year course, on Sundays, this September. For students in year 9 or year 10. The program offers an understanding to all aspects of Jewish learning, as well as debates in theological and contemporary issues. Students also acquire skills in essay writing and taking exams.

INFORMATION & REGISTRATION

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Jill, Eden's mum

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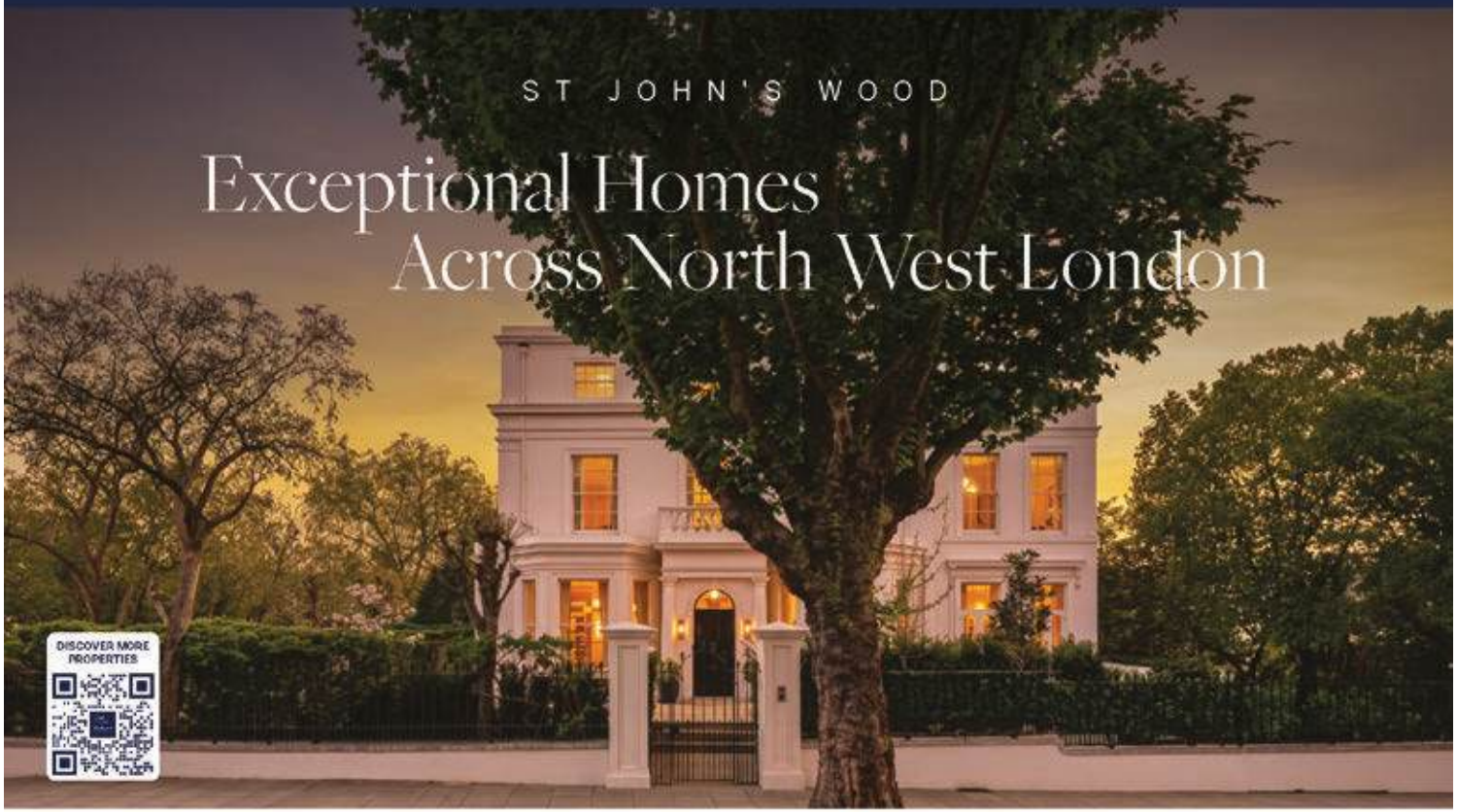
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Warwick Avenue, Little Venice

£ 23,500,000	7,700+ sq.ft.	5
Price	Size	Beds

Overlooking the Regent's Canal, this Grade II listed villa has been comprehensively rebuilt behind its period façade. Grand reception rooms and a conservatory sit alongside a substantial family kitchen, while a newly excavated lower floor contains a 15-metre swimming pool, gym, steam room and Jacuzzi. The house also has several gardens and terraces, a separate studio and gated parking for two cars. Clifton Road, the canal towpath and the cafés of Little Venice are all close by.

Hamilton Drive, St John's Wood

£ 9,750,000	6,041 sq.ft.	4
Price	Size	Beds

Set within a discreet gated development close to St John's Wood High Street, this contemporary townhouse is arranged over five floors connected by a private lift. The kitchen and dining room opens directly onto the garden, with a separate formal reception room on the floor above. Four bedroom suites are joined by a study, cinema and gym. There is also comfort cooling, a concierge, CCTV and secure underground parking for two cars.



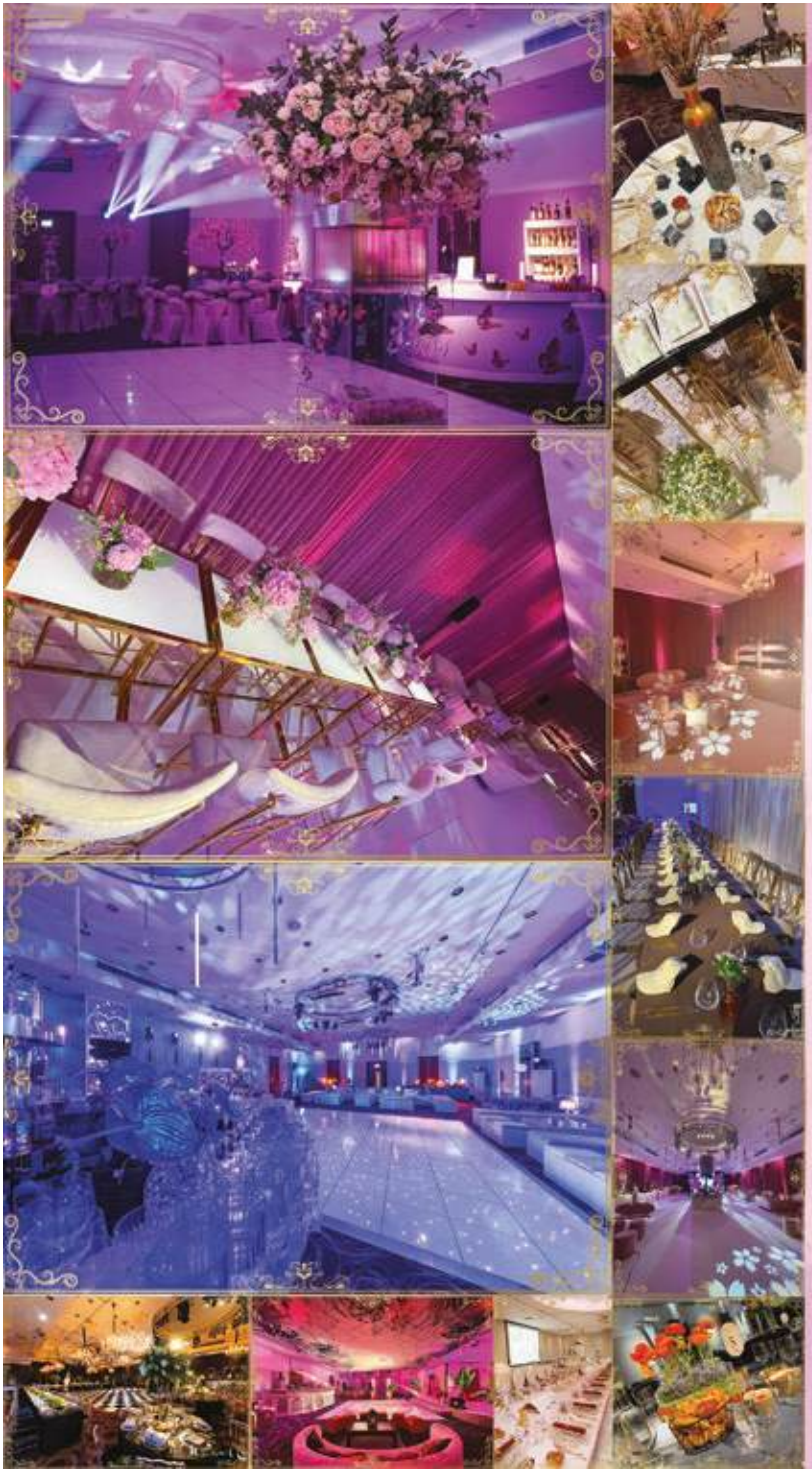


Elm Tree Road, St John's Wood

£ 6,950,000	3,802 sq.ft.	5
Price	Size	Beds

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THE STRATEGY GAP

You Have the Experts. But Who Is Connecting the Whole Picture?

What my work has taught me about information, responsibility and seeing a life, and a year, as a whole.

By Tal Stav



TAL STAV
CREATOR OF THE A.P.E.X. METHOD™

THE PARADOX OF ACCESS

One lesson from my work has stayed with me: access to expertise does not always create clarity.

Many leaders I work with already have excellent doctors, specialists and trainers. They undergo medical checks, follow training plans and collect more health data than ever.

Yet when I ask who is looking across all of it, the answer is less clear.

Each expert may be right within their field. But a person does not experience health in separate departments. Poor sleep changes appetite and training. Travel disrupts routines. Work pressure affects recovery. Sound medical advice may still be difficult to apply within the reality of someone's life.

The most important insight may sit between reports, in the relationships between them.

SILOS OVER SYNERGY

I once assumed that more information would naturally lead to better decisions. I no longer believe that. More data can create an impression of certainty while the overall picture remains fragmented. Sometimes the problem is not what we lack, but that no one is responsible for connecting what we know.

This is why I use artificial intelligence. It helps me organise information, compare different periods and notice relationships otherwise hidden. I value it not for answers, but for better questions: What changed? What keeps repeating? Which signals conflict? What might be missing?

But I do not confuse recognising a pattern with understanding a person.

AI may notice that late dinners coincide with poorer sleep. It cannot know that dinner is the only uninterrupted hour someone spends with their family. Nor can it decide which priority matters most, what change is realistic or when to involve a doctor. That requires context, conversation and human judgement.

UNIFIED STRATEGY

That distinction feels particularly relevant at Rosh Hashanah.

We can look back at individual moments: an achievement, a disappointment, a promise kept or postponed and treat each separately. But the High Holy Days ask us to step back and consider the pattern they form.

How have our work, health, relationships and values affected one another? Where have we received plenty of advice but lacked clear direction? Which good intention have we repeated without ever turning it into consistent action?

These are questions I ask in my work, but they are also questions I ask myself.

> "Access to expertise is not the same as clarity. Clarity requires someone willing to see the whole picture."

Coordination, I have come to believe, is not administration. It is a form of attention, and attention is a form of responsibility.

As the new year begins, perhaps the question is not what else to add. It is what already belongs together, who is helping us see it, and what we are prepared to do next.

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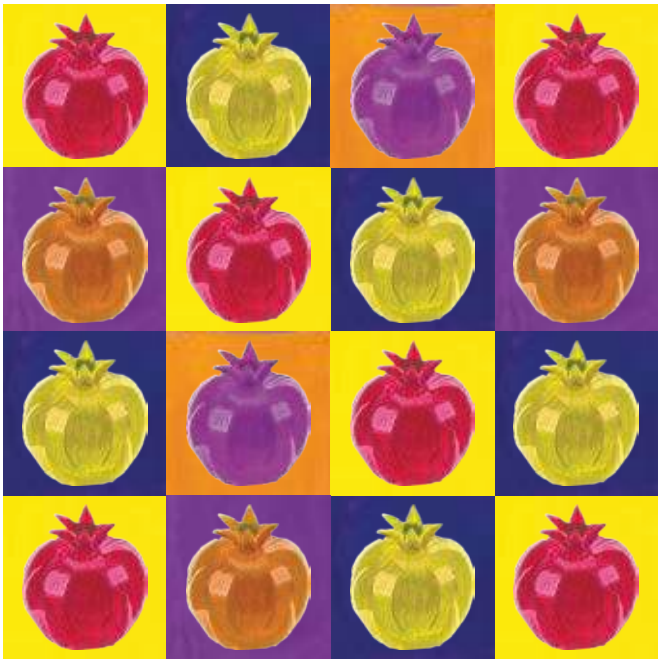


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londoninformation@beauchampestates.com
www.beauchampestates.com

THE Organizer

LESS STRESS • SAVE TIME • LOVE YOUR HOME

FEELING OVERWHELMED BY YOUR HOME?

- Constantly tidying but never finished?
- Moving home?
- Downsizing?
- Do you know where everything is?
- Does your home feel harder to manage than it should?

Creating calm, organised homes with practical systems that save time and reduce stress.

ORGANISE & DECLUTTER
Clear the clutter and create calm in every room.

MOVING SUPPORT
I can help with packing, unpacking and setting up your new home.

DOWNSIZING ASSISTANCE
Sort, decide and downsize with confidence and compassion.

SMART SYSTEMS
Practical systems that are easy to maintain and made for you.

Settle In Faster. Stress Less.

Free Initial Consultation

Esther
– THE ORGANIZER –

07976 770 443
ESTHERTHEORGANIZER
ESTHER@THEORGANIZER.CO.UK



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FOR PESACH & ALL YEAR

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ANY AGE, ANY STAGE

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07814831897

NEED HELP WITH HOMEWORK?
I can help you understand and succeed.

LOOKING TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING?
Take your skills to the next level.

WANT TO FEEL MORE CONFIDENT?
Build confidence and enjoy your learning.

- HOMEWORK HELP
- REVISION
- ADVANCED LEARNING
- REFERENCES AVAILABLE



SUPPORT • GROW • SUCCEED



CAMERON BAUM HOLLANDER

Wishing you a good Yom Tov from Cameron Baum Hollander!!!

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Tal Stav

IF THIS RESONATES WITH YOU

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Scan to learn how I work and whether this private advisory could be right for you.

All enquiries are treated in complete confidence.



TAL STAV
Private Health Advisor to Founders, CEOs & Senior Executives
Creator of The A.P.E.X. Method™

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