

In Memory Of  
**Cantor Michael Deutsch OAM**  
**(Meir Naftali Tzvi Ben Elimelech)**  
ז"ל

# Tell

February - April 2011  
Shvat - Nissan 5771



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## Memory and Meaning



Each of us as individuals considers our cycle of life – our birth, the major celebrations such as bar or bat mitzvah or a wedding, and the knowing that death awaits us. We watch the cycle in our families and circle of friends, and through this we understand that there is a difference between the *reality of the event* and our *memory of it*. All we have to do is think of any one of those events we have experienced, and think about how much of it we recall.

We can reflect upon why it is that we recall those specific aspects of the wedding, or tell those stories about the deceased at a eulogy. Slowly, we move further in time from the event, our memory becomes the way that event has meaning in our lives. Ultimately, humans are *meaning makers*.

Just as we do this as individuals, so do we do it as a collective. For example, we as Australians can think of how there were real events when Captain Cook reached Australia or how the ANZAC forces fought at Gallipoli, and we can see how we memorialise these events through Australia Day and Anzac Day. Similarly, as Jews, as we come to the season of Pesach, our oldest festival, followed by the days of Yom HaShoah and Yom HaAtzmaut, we recognise how we as people make meaning out of events both ancient and recent. An aspect of being a Jew is sharing those memories and their meanings.

In ancient times, Pesach was our formative festival. We learn in the book of Shemot, or Exodus, that the month of Nisan, the month in which Pesach occurs, “shall be the first of months for you.” Now most Jews believe Tishrei, in which we celebrate Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, is the beginning of our calendar, but actually we begin the New Year in the seventh month! (If this seems confusing, just think about how in Australia we begin our calendar year in January, and our financial year in July; as Jews we begin our calendar year in the seventh month of Tishrei, and our historical year in the first month of Nisan.) The message is that Pesach is the festival that celebrates our becoming a nation, that leaving as slaves from Egypt for the Promised Land of Israel via the wilderness of Sinai was the event that made us who we are.

The story of Pesach is that a small group of 70, the B’nei Israel, or Children of Israel as we were first known, became a multitude of nearly 2,500,000 people in a few generations (the Torah records 603,500 men between the age of 20 and 55 who left Egypt). After 10 plagues, the Reed Sea parted for us as we walked to freedom. While some Jews believe the historical accuracy of the events as related in the Torah (for which there is no actual evidence, just faith), the events of the Exodus for most of us are shrouded in myth and mystery. But the actual events are not as important as how we remember them, in the same way that who are great-grandfather was is in a sense lost to the reality of time, while he lives on in the stories we pass down through the generations.

For thousands of years we have been reciting the story of Pesach, as four times in the Torah we are told to recite the events of Pesach to our children. These four passages form the basis of the four children in the Haggadah, and it is the Haggadah, that dictates how we remember Pesach (just read the first fifteen chapters of Exodus and compare that to the story of the Haggadah.) The tight structure of the Haggadah has its basis in the Mishnah, the first authoritative text of our sages written after the destruction of the Second Temple. Over the next 1,000 years, the text of the Haggadah developed, and even in our times new Haggadot are written with various commentaries and emendations to make the text continually meaningful, even as well follow its basic structure. The story takes us from degradation (slavery and idolatry) to exaltation (freedom and the ability to serve God, the being that enables and permeates life.)

Ultimately, to know our story is to know this essential teaching: first we were oppressed, and in our liberation from oppression we have been called to end oppression among all humanity in our service of the Creator and creation. This message is told time and again regarding many mitzvot (commandments or obligations) in the Torah – *you shall do “such and so” because you were slaves in Egypt...* When we sing Kiddush on Shabbat evening, we acknowledge Shabbat not just as a memory of creation, but also as a memory of our exodus from Egypt. Thus, Pesach becomes our crucial formative event – teaching us that since we are all part of the same creation, we all have the right to be free and the concomitant obligation to bring freedom through justice and compassion. Whatever happened thousands of years ago when we left Egypt is not as important as how we remember it and live the memory.

How Pesach has evolved from event to memory lets us know that the two modern commemorations that immediately follow will certainly continue to develop as we move further away from the actual historic event. Yom HaShoah is commemorated on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, 12 days after Pesach; already, just selecting the date for remembering the Shoah showed how we wish to remember those horrific events. The destruction of European Jewry was in Hitler’s mind when he wrote *Mein Kampf*, and began being implemented after he took power in 1933 with Nuremberg Laws promulgated in 1935, Kristalnacht occurring in 1938, the Wanasee Conference in 1941, and the genocide soon thereafter – over the next four years, six million Jews were murdered. In other words, there was no specific date for the commemoration to occur.

The international community has chosen January 27<sup>th</sup>, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz, as the day to commemorate the events of the Shoah. Orthodox Judaism favoured Tisha B’Av, the ninth day of the month of Av, that commemorates the horrific destruction of the First and Second Temples, as the appropriate day to commemorate the Shoah. Yet, as an act of the Knesset of Israel, the 27<sup>th</sup> of Nisan was chosen and the date specifically called “Yom HaShoah v’HaGevurah” – the day of (remembering) the Shoah and the heroism. The specific heroism recalled is the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which occurred in the days of Pesach – and thus the month of Nisan being selected

for Yom HaShoah.

We are still too close to the events of the Shoah to know how it will be commemorated by generations to come, especially after the survivors and those fortunate to have met them are no longer living. Currently, we have a general format in which we have a testimony from one or more survivors, the recitation of the memorial prayer and kaddish, and a message of hope for the future. Further details about how we will commemorate Yom HaShoah this year in the community are found on page 13, along with a testimonial from a Ruth Rack, whose words were delivered at Kristallnacht, an event she witnessed and survived. Meanwhile, in our time, liturgy for services guiding us as how we will remember the Shoah (not only focusing on the murder of so many, but also on the heroism of those among the nations who hid and saved Jews as well as the way in so many Jews bravely resisted against all odds, both physically and spiritually) are being written and developed. Hundreds of years from now, the Shoah too will no longer be an event of the present, but a memory gathering meaning.

Similarly too Yom HaAtzmaut, the celebration of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948, corresponding to the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar 5708. It reads in part:

“WE DECLARE that, with effect from the moment of the termination of the Mandate being tonight, the eve of Sabbath, the 6th Iyar, 5708 (15th May, 1948), until the establishment of the elected, regular authorities of the State in accordance with the Constitution which shall be adopted by the Elected Constituent Assembly

not later than the 1st October 1948, the People's Council shall act as a Provisional Council of State, and its executive organ, the People's Administration, shall be the Provisional Government of the Jewish State, to be called "Israel".

“THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

At this time, we do not know how we will celebrate Israel's Independence in years to come; currently, it takes the form of a communal party and gathering, with no clear liturgy yet developed. Much depends on how the State of Israel continues to develop, and how its relationship with the Diaspora unfolds.

In any event, over this upcoming season of celebration and commemoration, may we all partake in the days that focus us a people on the meaning of our memory. In short, it is to honour those who have suffered and to continue to work to alleviate suffering in our world. This is the task to which we have dedicated ourselves, from the time of Pesach, through the rebirth of Israel after the Shoah.

*Rabbi Jeffrey B Kamins*



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## CHALLENGING TIMES: *Politics, Democracy & Human Rights in Israel*



**Professor Itzhak Galnoor**

6 - 7.30pm, Monday 14 February 2011, Emanuel Synagogue

Please join us for a discussion with Itzhak Galnoor, Professor of Political Science at Hebrew University, Senior Research Fellow at the Van Leer Institute, New Israel Fund board member and Chair of the SHATIL Committee. Professor Galnoor will speak about the current socio-political climate in Israel, the recent push to investigate the country's human rights groups, and what hopes remain for Israel's democratic future.

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## Cantor Michael Deutsch OAM (Meir Naftali Tzvi Ben Elimelech) ז"ל



While Cantor Michael Deutsch had been suffering from failing health the last few years at the Montefiore Home in Hunter's Hill, the strength of his presence was always felt, his last visit to Emanuel Synagogue when we honoured him as Khattan Bereshit at Simchat Torah in 2009. His passing leaves sadness in our community as large as his legacy. Because Jewish funerals

are held so quickly, many did not know of his death until after he had been buried. Following are excerpts of words of tribute offered by Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio, Rabbi Brian Fox, Joseph Toltz, Cantor George Mordecai and Michael's daughter Irene.

Cantor Michael Deutsch was an incredible man, a gift to all who were blessed to know him. Michael was a person who touched lives, he brought goodness, beauty and love into the world, boundless and limitless love, arms always open wide, to embrace and protect, to soothe and comfort, to guide and nurture, to bless. And those hands, big, beautiful hands which had turned the pages of holy books, touched the scrolls of parchment caressed by generations of his family, hands which toiled in the camps, worked until they were raw, hands which saved his life and tried to stem the tide of hate in the world. Big, strong hands which gently cradled babies, brushing them with the touch of the angels, hands which rested on the shoulders of thousands of bar mitzvah boys as they stood at the Torah, infusing them with strength and the wisdom of the ages, hands which grasped the arms of students, tapping and gently urging them forward with their learning, hands which were always filled with sweets and treats for the beloved children, hands which rested on the heads of brides and grooms, surrounding them with blessings, holy words, holy touch. Hands which held ours, hands which clasped ours as we cried tears of sorrow, comforting, healing hands. Hands which brought holiness into our world, hands which touched us with something magical, hands which channeled the essence of the man, the mensch, the beautiful soul shining within, the holy light that he brought to the world.

Michael was born in Verbo which was then the Czech Republic and he joined the chain of generations of his family to be cantors. Music was in his soul, it was part of the essence of who he was. When Michael was only four years old he led the service with his father, already a shining talent, a channel through which the angels would sing. Michael's father was a cantor and the family moved often in his younger years, travelling to whichever communities his father was posted. Eventually they settled in Nyiregyhaza Hungary where Michael's father was the head cantor and shochet. Michael admired and loved his father and the two cut a fine figure walking to shule together in matching suits and canes, sharing the beauty of tradition and the joy of singing together.

But Michael's carefree youth would be cut cruelly short with the arrival of the Holocaust. The savagery, brutality and horror that Michael witnessed and experienced was indescribable. He saw his father led to his death. His beloved sister Oronko, who was pregnant, was murdered and her children cruelly slaughtered. And through it all, Michael carried on, strong and determined to survive. Despite injuries and illnesses, he clutched on to hope and life and he brought others with him. He sang in the camp to lift the spirits of those around him, transporting them to a world beyond the darkness and hate, to the times of goodness and joy. He led prayer services, using his gifts to elevate those around him, to bring them life.

After the war was over, Michael made his way home to find that over 100 immediate members of the Deutsch family had been murdered. He and his beloved mother were the only survivors. How he managed to move forward into life again was testament to his indomitable spirit, his beautiful soul and the nature and essence of who he was. In humanity's darkest hour, he remained a shining beacon of hope and love. But post war Hungary was a harsh and oppressive environment and Michael wanted a different and better life for himself and his family. He applied to come to Australia, obtained a visa and set sail with people who would be friends for life, to create a future away from the hurt and suffering. In Sydney he was together with Ella, his cousin, one of the few members of his extended family to survive and with whom, along with her family, he was very close. They supported and cared for one another like brother and sister.

When Michael arrived in Sydney, one of the first places he discovered was Bondi Beach. It was love at first sight. When he cast his eyes over the vast ocean and the white sands, he knew he was home. From that moment, after all his wanderings, he found his home (place) and he became the most proud Australian. And he became a legend on Bondi Beach, jogging, running, swimming or walking, he knew everyone and they knew him. He soaked up the air, the freedom and the beauty and shed its light back to all those around him. He sang as he exercised, he sang in the showers and he connected with people from all walks of life, brushing them with a little of that special Michael Magic. And today the flag at the North Bondi Surf Club flies at half mast in his honour.



Life in Australia however was not all about Bondi Beach, Michael had work to do and he set about finding employment and learning English. The latter he did by reading comic books because they had pictures to guide him and he found employment in a number of places working on the docks, using his strength to carry alone what would usually take



three men, working in a glass factory with the Spink family and in sales with the Casparis. And it was there that a chance encounter changed Michael's and our community's lives forever. Michael was in a goods lift, singing as always, and someone outside the lift heard the most magical voice singing Jewish music. The person determined to find the source of the angelic voice and he followed the goods lift, running up the stairs so he would not escape. When the

lift opened, out came Michael. In astonishment the man asked him how he had such an incredible voice and what on earth he was doing in a goods lift. Michael explained that he was a cantor but doing whatever work he could to support himself and enable him to bring his family to join him in Australia. The person was from Temple Emanuel and brought him immediately to his home and Rabbi Brash, and Michael sang. In that moment, he began what would be more than 50 years of devoted and loving service to Temple Emanuel and the Sydney Jewish community.

Rabbi Brian Fox wrote, "Cantor Michael Deutsch was the most extraordinary human being I have ever known. A giant of a man who could be so gentle. A silent prayer who could be so grand! Meir Naftoli Tzvi ben Elimelech had more yiddishkeit in his little finger than many greater than he have in their whole bodies. He lived Judaism. He exuded Jewish values. He exemplified what it means to be a Jew. Michael was from the *kleine shtetl* of Nyiregyhaza but was never defined by a *shtetl* mentality. He was so proud of being recognised: from Premiers of NSW to Attorney Generals: everyone great and small was Michael's *chaver*."

"It was in the Pulpit that Michael truly excelled. He was a genius of *chazanut*. His was not a sweet sound, but it was a big sound. He may not have been note perfect but he certainly was note worthy. His *hashkivaynu* was second to none. He happily shared it with other *chazanim*: few could measure up to his grandeur. His *Avinu Malkaynu* soared to the heavens.. But no one will forget his *Kol Nidrei*. His *chaver* John Saunders who shared Michael's coat on the way to Australia loved to say 'I come to shul only to hear Michael's *Kol Nidrei*'."

"Michael simply loved everyone. His hugs. His big wet kisses. His memory of your face even if he didn't remember your name: all of that was Michael. Each year I got Michael to tell his experience in the Holocaust. We would all weep: he lost his adored Sister and many many members of his family. "How could you sing in the camp?" someone would ask Michael. And he would answer "I sang in my mother's womb and no Hitler on earth would stop me!" "Where was God Cantor Deutsch: where was God?" And without a hint of embarrassment he would say "God was crying with us all in the Holocaust".

"Meir Naftoli Tzvi ben Elimelech we weep at your death as we rejoiced in your life. Tzolosh we loved your humour and your wholesale destruction of the English language. Cantor Michael Deutsch we stand to honour your presence: for

the likes of you we never expect to meet again."

Joseph Toltz wrote, "The passing of the Reverend Michael Deutsch OAM marks the passing of an era for Sydney Jewry. He was the last of the great wave of ministers who arrived just before the war or post war to grace the pulpits of Sydney's synagogues, and serve our rapidly changing Jewish population. These men enriched our communities with sophisticated, cosmopolitan sensibilities, and served with dedication and grace in a strange land.

"Many tributes today will recount Michael's history and involvement in the community - the ever-present role he played in officiating in all manner of life cycle events, his countless devotion to the Temple, his interfaith work, his musical work in the greater community, his dignified public presence as a survivor of the Shoah, and an early spokesperson for survivors. When I started along his path, serving as officiant at life-cycle events, the question first posed to me was always 'Var iz Daitch?' That was the extent of his presence.

Cantor George Mordecai wrote, "Cantor Michael Deutsch was a mentor, teacher, friend and had one of the most outstanding voices in the cantorate. I had the honour and pleasure of listening to Michael every Friday night and Shabbat morning for many years. I marvelled at his passion and vocal range, but more than that at his ability to embody and articulate the essence of the Jewish experience through his exceptional artistry. The power of his voice and subtlety of his cantorial style would move me, often to tears. But Michael was more than just a great voice. He had the love and respect of every one who knew him because he was a *mensch* in the true sense of the word. He had overcome tremendous obstacles in his life, surviving the Nazi murderers and thugs to bring his beautiful voice and loving energy to so many."

### **Cantor Michael Deutsch Memorial and Tribute Service**

**A tribute service for Cantor Deutsch will be held in November.**



It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Ruth Deutsch, beloved wife and mother, on Tuesday the 25th of January.

Our thoughts are with the Deutsch family at this time.



There is a record of an interesting discussion in the Talmud. A group of rabbis were sitting together and one raised the question: "which is better, study or action?" Rabbi Tarfon said "action is better!" Rabbi Akiva disagreed saying that study was far more important. The others who were present agreed with Rabbi Akiva, they said "study is more important because it leads to action." (Bab Talmud Kiddushin 40B) It is impossible, according to this

text, to study Judaism without being moved to action. All of the Torah, all of the texts encourage us to learn, but not for the sake of learning alone, we learn in order to do. We are called upon to be participants in healing the world. We are taught that God created this magnificent world for us to dwell in, but left it to us to perfect creation. It is our duty and imperative to alleviate suffering, to work to change the world for the better, to reach out to those in need. And it is not enough to wait for the opportunities to change the world to come to us, we must go out and find them. It is no excuse to say that "we did not know" or "we did not realize." The Torah says: "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof" "justice, justice shall you pursue." It does not tell us to sit around and wait until a moment arrives to make a difference we are called upon to be active seekers of opportunities to bring healing to those around us. We are challenged to go out and find injustice and make it right.

Rabbi David Saperstein the Director of the Religious Action Centre said: "The core of our insight [as Reform Jews] is that serious Jewish study inevitably leads to the soup kitchen; that serious prayer, among other vital things, is a way of preparing to do battle with injustice, that social justice without being grounded in text, without a sense of God's presence, is ephemeral and unsustainable. The heart of the argument is that there is no such thing as 'Social Action Judaism,' that the thread of social justice is so authentically and intricately woven into the many-coloured fabric we call Judaism that if you seek to pull that thread out, the entire fabric unravels, that the Judaism that results is distorted, is neutered, is rendered aimless." We are called upon to change the world, to hear the cries for help, to make a difference.

This call is embedded in the very essence of our most sacred text. The Torah begins and ends with acts of loving kindness, with God reaching out to help humanity. In the early passages of Bereishit, God provides clothing to Adam and Eve and at the end of the Torah, God buries Moses. And throughout the Torah itself are numerous exhortations to action, to helping others. There is the constant refrain, to reach out to the orphan, stranger and widow, to remember that we were slaves in Egypt, to remember our degradation and suffering, not merely so we can remember, but so that we can act. So that we constantly work to ensure that nobody else should suffer as we once did. We are called upon to be holy like God: "kedoshim tihiyu ki kadosh ani Adonai" "Be holy because, I, Adonai, am holy." (Lev. 19:2) Our tradition asks: "how is it possible to be holy like God?" The answer: by imitating

God, by behaving towards one another as God does towards us, with acts of lovingkindness. And in the midst of our prayer service we are reminded what those acts are: to heal the sick, console the bereaved, make peace when there is strife, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless, perform acts of lovingkindness and to study Torah because that will lead us to action.

This year we are calling our congregation to action. We are reaching out to you to join us in helping to repair the world, to heal and help in whatever way we can. We are going to revitalize our social justice group, to provide opportunities to put our study and our prayer into action and work to make our corner of the world a little better for us having been in it. There is so much work to be done, so much suffering, so much healing which is needed that at times it seems overwhelming and not worth beginning. But Pirkei Avot (2:16) reminds us "you are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." It is not for each of us to do it all, but we can all do something, however small it seems, and with all our somethings together, we can really do the impossible.

This year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, we are going to participate in "world mitzvah day." This initiative began in Israel with one person. She thought that it would be good to bring people together on one day to perform a mitzvah. Five years later they are reaching out to the world to join in. Last year they had 70,000 volunteers in Israel participating in over 1,000 projects. They used 5,300 gallons of paint to paint clubs, schools, nursing homes, shelters. They planted 100s of gardens, cleaned parks, packaged food for the homeless and they made a huge difference in the lives of so many people, and all because one woman had an idea. We are going to be a part of this amazing day and we are searching for a project which will involve as many congregants as we can, working together to make a difference. So please keep Sunday the third of April free and keep your eyes on our website and your email for more details. If you have any ideas or would like to be involved in the organization of the mitzvah day, please be in touch.

I am also calling upon you now if you are interested in being part of our social justice committee to contact me. I am hoping this year that we can do a number of projects, connected with the festivals, to bring together our prayer and study with action. We will need people with ideas and passion for social justice to help craft our year's events and perhaps to guide one of the projects. Together we will create opportunities for all of us to be involved seeking justice and working towards being a reflection of the Divine. Please contact me if you are interested in being involved and keep your eyes open for the announcement of the social justice meeting date and time on the website and on your email.

Together we can change the world, one small step at a time. Please join me along the path.

*Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio*

## New Year's Resolution?

Would you like to donate more to charities but don't have a lot of time to set up donations? Find it difficult to keep track of your donations at tax time? Maybe **workplace giving** is the answer.

Workplace giving is a simple and effective way to make regular donations to charity. It is a three way partnership between employees, employers and charities where employees donate through regular payroll deductions. In this way even small payroll donations grow to make a big difference. The charity receiving the donation can be chosen either by the employer or the employee. These donations are similar to salary sacrifice in that the donations are made from pre-tax or gross dollars. This means the employee may receive a tax benefit at the time of giving the donation rather than having to wait until the end of the financial year. At the end of the

financial year, the total amounts donated to charities in this way are shown on the individual's PAYG summary so there is no need to keep receipts. If your employer is reluctant to deal with the associated administration, there are organisations such as the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF Australia) who offer a vehicle through which donations can be directed (see [www.cafaustalia.org.au](http://www.cafaustalia.org.au)).

So, keep your New Year's resolution the easy way.

[Don't forget that Emanuel Synagogue have a few tax deductible entities which would benefit from these kinds of donations – call the office for more information].

Fabulous Amazing Purim Spiel Fabulous Amazing Awesome Purim Spiel Fa

# PURIM SPIEL

It's that time of year again! Time to exercise your vocal chords, time to step into your dancing shoes, time to put on make-up, time to light the lights it's time for... the PURIM SPIEL!!! It's community theatre at its riotous best. But community theatre only works with the help of the community and we need you! If you are interested in acting in our spiel, being involved in props, costumes, backstage, lights, anything, please email me. Don't be shy. We can make you a star! World famous! Ok, maybe not world famous, but famous! Ok, so your mother and auntie Yetta will tell all their friends how great you were!

It is heaps of fun and the more the merrier, so send that email now! Go on, you can do it... contact [jninio@emanuel.org.au](mailto:jninio@emanuel.org.au)

And if you want to be an audience member save the date of the spiel, you don't want to be the one person in Sydney to miss out!

Saturday 19 March • Megillah reading and service at 7:30pm • Spiel starts around 9:00pm

## The Barometer of Religiosity?



As a rabbi, I am privileged to have many conversations with people (members of our community, members of other synagogues, friends, people I meet on various occasions such as at a wedding or a funeral) about religion. Each conversation presents its own opportunity and sometimes its own challenge.

I recently spoke with someone, a person not well known to myself or to Lisa, who described

another person in the Jewish community as clearly being “more religious than me.” I offered a challenge in return saying, “I’m not quite sure how we go about assessing how one particular Jew is more religious or more Jewish than someone else or even if there’s benefit in doing so.” This person made a passing comment how people in the Lubavitch world are “clearly *more religious*.”

In many of these conversations, I must admit that I find open discussion an uphill struggle. It usually takes me a few moments to get around the sentiment that so many people think I work for Temple Emanuel (nb: an organisation that has not existed since 2007!). I try to present other perspectives, including acknowledging Emanuel Synagogue’s strengths as a vibrant and viable Jewish community, and a leading synagogue in Sydney. But when the conversation returns to the subject of one’s religiosity, I find that most people still associate such a concept with Lubavitch.

Two of the most widespread comments regarding religion that I hear are an acknowledgment of Lubavitch as a “religious” organisation, or a particular ease with which one admits, “I’m not religious.” I often find the expression, “I’m not religious,” to be a conversation-stopper, as if to say that in regards to religion, a person is *either religious* or *they are not religious*. There is so much more to the conversation though. The subject of one’s religiosity, where they find meaning in their Jewish observance, what makes them tick as an individual, where they find connection to community is colourful, rich, and makes for an inviting discussion because it reveals a person’s passions, their spiritual essence. And each person’s definition of their religiosity is bound to be different – and there is often beauty to be unearthed in those differences. In our religion, I find myself amazed by the colours and shades of personal and communal expression. Like a vibrant painting, there are so many layers and depths of meaning to explore and interpret.

Jewish definition, especially self-definition, begins with each of us. Instead of defining ourselves with an expression such as, “I’m not this” or “I’m not that,” we can feel empowered to define ourselves positively, by who we are, and by what we do, expressing how we wish to grow. I so rarely hear someone speak positively about their Jewish identity. I so rarely hear people say, “I try to

be an honest person. I care deeply about the needs of others and do my best to respond when someone asks me for help. I respect the environment, people, animals and world in which I live and am part of efforts to preserve nature and minimise waste. I take time with my family on Friday night to celebrate Shabbat at home. We have a seder every year. I’m reading an interesting Jewish book. I try to pray or engage spiritually on a regular basis. I’m making donations to Jewish charities to help support the community.” It seems so much easier to say, “I’m not religious,” yet each of these ideas represents a “religious” Jewish practise or obligation. It seems so much easier to decline conversation, rather than speak positively about the ways in which we engage with Judaism and the world around us.

In the scientific world, a barometer is used to measure atmospheric pressure. An average barometric reading is around 30 (29.92) and if the number rises closer to 31, fine weather conditions can be expected, while if the number drops closer to 29, cloudy and wet weather can be expected. In this day and age though, I am not convinced that there is an appropriate barometer through which we gauge one’s religiosity. If we see someone keeping Shabbat walking to synagogue they are more of a “31” while if we see someone driving to synagogue, they are more of a “29?” Why does the concept of religiosity so often depend upon what one person sees another person doing, rather than what any particular person thinks in their mind or feels in their heart? After all, how do we assess what a person feels in his/her heart? Why in conversation are we willing to define ourselves by “what we’re not” rather than by the values and ideals that we cherish?

It is easy to perceive particular members of the community, through dress and outward appearance, as perhaps “being more religious,” but I would argue that such appearances, while meaningful to those who engage in them are merely demonstrative of “ritual observance.” Living as a Jew involves ritual observance, but it also involves much, much more. As a congregation, and as a living, vibrant community, we seek to practise a Judaism which adds meaning to our lives and inspires us to make a positive difference in the world around us. We must seek to identify the positive Jewish values by which we live. If we are to be a light unto the nations, we first need to light the way for ourselves, our families, and our own community – and such action comes through the light of positive self-definition.

*Rabbi Paul Jacobson*

## Community Harbourview: Judaism from a New Perspective

Harbourview is a new initiative connecting adults in their 20s and 30s to the beauty, brilliance, and vibrancy of Jewish life. We believe that Judaism is dynamic, alive with potential and possibility. We create opportunities to share the warmth of Jewish experiences in community with others, seeking Jewish meaning from a variety of vantage points.

Harbourview is:

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**Egalitarian** All of our activities, services, and learning opportunities promote equality for women and men, helping us to approach our Judaism with a contemporary outlook.

**Engaging** Our programmes engage our participants where they are, providing opportunities for in-depth discussion, and discovering ways where our Judaism invites us to make a tangible difference in our community and world.



**Harbourview**  
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## The Australian Association of Jewish Studies

The Australian Association of Jewish Studies is hosting its 23rd Annual Conference on the theme of Religion and Politics on the 13th and 14th of February 2011. For the first time it will be held in Canberra at the National Jewish Memorial Centre, 31 National Circuit, Forrest.

The AAJS Conference and the Australian Journal of Jewish Studies provides a forum for tertiary academics, Jewish educators, researchers, students and others devoted to the study of Jewish life, thought and culture. This year Professor Fania Oz-Salzberger from Monash University and the University of Haifa will give the keynote address on the Hebraic Roots of Modern Political Thought: The Philosophers' Politicized Bible. Other topics to be discussed by leading academics include: The Arts: Jewish and Zionist Identities, The Clash of Fundamentalism and Modernity, Jewish Life in the Roman Period, Turn of the Century: Emancipation in Crisis, The Restoration, The Australian Story, Religion and Politics: Global Implications, The Bible in Dispute: Politics and Interpretations, From the Pale to Glasnost, Two Peoples: Two Histories? and Dwelling in the Shadows: When Trauma Speaks. There will also be a presentation by Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP as well as a satirical piece on Human Rights by David Knoll AM.

Visit [www.aajs.org.au/](http://www.aajs.org.au/) for more information or to register. All are welcome!

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## Top UPJ Award For Emanuel Synagogue Stalwart



Geoffrey Cowen

At the Annual Conference of the Union for Progressive Judaism held in November 2002 the Vatik Award was created in order to honour past presidents of congregations and affiliate organisations who had continued to give excellent service and make a valuable contribution to their community and the wider community.

At the recent biennial conference dinner held in Parliament House, Canberra former Emanuel Synagogue President and Treasurer, Geoffrey Cowen was announced as recipient of this prestigious award.

“The nominee must have shown continued service to his/her community, or any other in the Union, for at least five years after standing down as president” said UPJ President, David Robinson “as well as showing outstanding commitment to Judaism outside of their own congregation/affiliate organisation”.

“There is no question that Geoffrey is a suitable and most deserving recipient of this award” continued Robinson “and I look forward to visiting Emanuel Synagogue to make the formal presentation to him on the Shabbat of April 16 of this year.”

Geoffrey Cowen was Synagogue President from 1981-1983; Treasurer 1974-1978; Vice President 1978-1981); and has been a Life member since 1988.

A quiet contributor Geoffrey has spent enormous times creating the instruments and forming the financial institutions that allow people to make tax-deductible contributions for synagogue development and this has become the model for charitable trusts for other congregations.

He also helped initiate and has been driving force behind

a trust fund whose asset base has grown with his astute guidance into a fund that has been able to provide significant annual gifts to both Emanuel School and Emanuel Synagogue support them and enable them to expand programs to youth and young adults.

“This extraordinary trust fund will continue to allow our synagogue to grow” said Senior Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins. “Geoffrey has combined foresight with hard work, modestly working for the community for over 30 years, spending hundreds of hours annually to ensure the well being of Progressive Judaism in New South Wales. His voluntary work in creating the Temple Benevolent Fund and TE Properties has been for the purpose of assisting the Progressive institutions of NSW: Emanuel Synagogue, Emanuel School, the Board of Progressive Jewish Education and North Shore Temple Emanuel”.

“Geoffrey was the youngest of the synagogue presidents, giving extraordinary time when he had young children, and not ceasing in his commitment since. He is always available to help and also searching for opportunities to give creatively and respond to those in need, whether individuals or organisations. We are delighted that he has been honoured in this way by our movement and I very much look forward to the special presentation on April 16.”



**Are you looking for ways to help your community?**

**Have some spare time?**

**Give us a call - we'd love to have you as part of our wonderful volunteer team.**

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## Kristallnacht Commemoration

As Yom Hashoah approaches, we take time to remember the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust and the events surrounding it.

Ruth Rack was 10 years old on Kristallnacht in November 1938 when Jewish homes and businesses in Germany were ransacked and looted. In one night, 1,350 Jewish synagogues were burnt to the ground or destroyed; over 91 Jews were killed; 30,000 Jews were thrown into concentration camps; 7,000 Jewish businesses were destroyed; and thousands of Jewish homes were ransacked.

Ruth is a longstanding member of our choir, sharing her beautiful voice with us since 1964. She spoke at the Jewish Board of Deputies community Kristallnacht commemoration.

In this moving account she speaks of her time as a young girl in Germany and the events that followed this 'Night of Broken Glass'.

"When I stand in front of an audience, I want to sing!

However, tonight my thoughts return to my childhood in Leipzig, Germany - that centre of culture famous for Wagner, Göthe's Faust, Bach, Mendelssohn and others.

At the turn of the last century around 1900, my young grandparents and my mother, left their home near Krakow, Poland to settle in Leipzig, because my grandfather wanted "to raise his family in a civilised society!"

They had 16 children. Eleven were living when I was born and they were my aunties, uncles and little cousins numbering some thirty people born and living in Germany.

28 October 1938 they were among the Jews of Polish origin who were deported to Poland. At that time I was ten years old and not aware of their fate. I think, my parents did not tell me what had happened to them to protect me. It is only with hindsight that I now know the details of their sudden deportation. Somehow - on 28 October 1938 - we had escaped the net.

I was born into a warm Jewish orthodox family: my father was Chazan of the Synagogue and I was the adored baby of four children. Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938 was a cold, grey morning. I was ten years old and got up as usual to go to school. The school building was desolate, papers and books were strewn in the streets. There was an eerie silence and no children, although it was a school day. The chill of the morning matched the spasm of alarm which seized my stomach as I grasped the danger of the situation of a Jewish girl alone outside the Jewish school which has been attacked by the Nazis. Somehow I reached home.

Quickly through the heavy front door, up the four storeys to the top and through our own carved door. Once inside, peace and security: my parents were at home, with my



brother and sisters. I raised the alarm and my father quickly dressed and gathered us together in the living room. He formed a plan to leave our home before it was attacked, not to mention ourselves. The thought of being dragged away or beaten or worse was not expressed, although we all knew very well what could happen.

"We are Jewish and, if we are caught on the way to the Polish Consulate, we will not deny this. We will never pretend and hide our religion – we are proud to be what we are" he said. I remember feeling grown up because he did not try to shield me by hiding the truth but trusted me to share whatever was to befall us all. I was fully prepared to be brave.

He told us of his plan to walk in pairs, within sight of each other but far enough apart to prevent the whole family being wiped out if one pair was attacked: my teenaged sisters were to lead, followed by my mother and me and, bringing up the rear, my brother and father.

He warned us not to look to the left or the right or make ourselves in any way conspicuous – not to run, not to panic, just unobtrusively keep going until we arrived at our destination, the Polish Consulate – where we would seek refuge.

I do not know how long the journey from our home to the consulate lasted, but what we saw on the way was a nightmare and is engraved on my mind forever. There were wild crowds of jeering people everywhere, among them the woman who ran the local corner grocery store, the one who sold me lollies by the single piece. I used to like those green acid drops shaped like a flat leaf. She had bright red cheeks, and I thought they looked like nice red apples. I liked her and she used to invite us children to her house at Christmas time and we made lead soldiers out of molten metal and played games together with her children. In friendship my mother used to send special foods appropriate for each festival – matzos for Pesach, honey cake for Rosh Hashana and cheesecake for Shavuot. They enjoyed the Jewish foods and I believed that we were special friends. I was deeply hurt and humiliated to see the horrible hostility on her face and to hear her yelling obscenities at us with the rest of the hostile German crowd. There was a venerable old man in a dark suit and coat on the ground, being dragged by the beard and beaten by a group of Nazis in black boots. Nearby a black car was

turned on the roof and it looked as though the German driver was getting a vicious bashing too.

Shops owned by Jews were smashed in and looted. Windows were empty: glass was everywhere. There were violent crowds growing thicker and the smell of smoke.

Suddenly we reached the synagogue, the centre of our life, where my father was cantor, in FLAMES! My heart sank but my mother tugged at my hand and we walked on, outwardly unconcerned, inwardly in turmoil.

As we came to the worst mob of all, shouting and very dangerous, we saw that they were surrounding the grounds of the Polish Consulate. The atmosphere and the November day matched the grey, numb fear which gripped me as we pushed into that hostile crowd. My mother whispered: "Yell with them", and I found myself shouting the same poisonous words they were directing at us. We moved further and further towards the wire gate leading into consular grounds. As soon as we reached the gate, we positioned ourselves so that we could slip in when it was slightly opened from inside without allowing the mob to follow as well. My mother led me into what we hoped would be our sanctuary – away from the immediate danger of the streets.

As relief at having "arrived" flooded my body and the immense anxiety pressed my brain, I passed out...

I must have been unconscious for a long time. My first memory on regaining consciousness was the touch of cold concrete underneath and of feeling very, very cold. As through a cloud, I heard my mother's voice saying... "Can't you see the child is ill?"

She was appealing for a blanket or coat or something warm and I don't remember if she succeeded or not. I do remember lying inside a building with crowds of Jewish people outside, all seeking refuge as we were, and they were sort of stunned, standing around aimless, silent, without food and very unwelcome.

Several days must have passed, of which I only remember a feeling of being trapped, overwhelmed by deep anxiety and fear of worse to come. I do not remember the actual events leading to our arrival back home. It was unreal like the movements in a nightmare. This was the worst day of my life. I was badly traumatised and still have no memory of the following six months.

At home, the carved, walnut front door had been smashed with an axe. I imagined what would have happened to our bodies if we had been inside when they axed that door! Every piece of cut crystal, the beautiful chandeliers, whole Dresden china collection were smashed to pieces. There were strips of white fabric torn from Shabbat cloths and used, we presumed, as bandages as there was blood everywhere. My father joked that it served the Nazis right and he hoped they did a good job cutting themselves. Those were the last words I ever heard my father speak.

With our home in ruins, the school attacked, the synagogue

burned and Jewish business centres looted, our life was shattered. Dr Göbbles was ranting on the airwaves, bank accounts were cut off, school not allowed to resume, businesses closed. Now the only path was to get out of Germany. The mad rush to leave the country gained momentum.

Worst of all, people were disappearing, some said to have jumped from windows, but we knew they had been pushed. Names of friends and relatives who continued to go missing, day after day, were spoken of in whispers. The fear was relentless. My father vanished. Where was I when he was taken to Sachsenhausen CC?

My Uncle Joseph Borg was a Zionist leader in Germany and later a founding member of the first Israeli Knesset in which he served for 38 years. At the 11th hour, as the gates were closing, thanks to his support and assistance, my mother was able to put me on the last Kindertransport out of Leipzig. I never saw my parents again. My father was murdered in Sachsenhausen 1940. My mother I learned later was a slave labourer in Leipzig until 1942 when she was deported with the last Jews of Leipzig to Belsec Poland, where they were all shot on arrival.

In wartime England, from the age of 11, I grew up alone, with strangers, dislocated, isolated from the family and Jewish community. My teenage years, instead of being fun, were haunted by nightmares and tormented by worry: not knowing what was happening to them all in Europe – there was no closure and I was denied honest grieving. The separation was cruel. I prayed and there were times I would have preferred to share her fate – even to die but to be together. It was the end of my childhood.

For several decades, I was unable to share with anyone, the traumatic experiences and effects of Kristallnacht. It is a comfort to know that now it is widely acknowledged and commemorated worldwide.

I have always understood that my parents lovingly sacrificed their lives to save their four children and we all survived.

Thanks to them, I stand here to-day a mother, grandmother and a woman able to take a meaningful place in the community."

## Communal Yom Hashoah Commemorations

### Sunday 1 May Board of Deputies

- Shoah Remembrance Memorial Service. Rookwood.
- Eastern Suburbs Communal Shoah Ceremony.

### Monday 2 May Board of Deputies

- North Shore Communal Shoah Ceremony

## Brian Sherman on Eating Animals

An edited version of Brian Sherman's address at the synagogue recently - a discussion of Jonathan Safran Foer's book, 'Eating Animals'.

To begin I would like to share some words from Jewish writer and Nobel Laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91), who wrote in Yiddish. Bashevis Singer was one of the most powerful pro-animal voices of the twentieth century. I note that most of the main characters in his works either are vegetarians, become vegetarians, or think about becoming vegetarians.

Bashevis Singer wrote:

"The longer I am a vegetarian, the more I feel how wrong it is to kill animals and eat them. I think that eating meat or fish is a denial of all ideals, even of all religions. How can we pray to God for mercy if we ourselves have no mercy? How can we speak of right and justice if we take an innocent creature and shed its blood? Every kind of killing seems to me savage and I find no justification for it."

Bashevis Singer continues:

"We know now, as we have always known instinctively, that animals can suffer as much as human beings. Their emotions and their sensitivity are often stronger than those of a human being. Various philosophers and religious leaders tried to convince their disciples and followers that animals are nothing more than machines without a soul, without feelings. However, anyone who has ever lived with an animal--be it a dog, bird or even a mouse--knows that this theory is a brazen lie, invented to justify cruelty."

Many of us here have shared the experience of reading Jewish-American writer Jonathan Safran Foer's highly-lauded book, *Eating Animals*. For me, this book was a moving experience. It confirmed my own strongly held conviction that what we do to the sentient beings that we farm for food, matters. And the welfare of these beings matters in a profound, ethical sense.

As the book begins Foer is a new father, and with the fervour of a first time parent he wants to examine what's best for baby. In particular, he wishes to make an informed decision as to whether he should feed his child meat. He goes on a journey of discovery into the ethical choices we make when we choose what we do and do not eat.

Foer brings to light in unsparing detail the methods of production of meat, almost all of which takes place on factory farms, the endemic mistreatment of animals and of workers, the damaging effects of animal agribusiness on the environment, and the health implications of dietary choices. On the last point, he elaborates the view of leading authorities that a vegetarian diet is suitable for all stages of life.

As we know, Foer ultimately makes a powerful and heartfelt case against 'eating animals', in particular those abused in intensive confinement on factory farms.

More broadly, he makes the point that while some free-



Brian Sherman AM

range farmers and family-owned slaughterhouses try to do their best for the animals, ethical meat is not a reality, but merely a "promissory note".

The background against which Foer writes is his strong sense of Jewishness. He pays special regard to the values instilled through his deep familial and cultural connections, especially to his kosher grandmother.

Foer learnt within his family's Jewish tradition that food serves two parallel purposes: it nourishes and it helps you remember. The latter relates to his experiences of stories told amongst family while meals were eaten. These stories bind the family together, bind the family to others and position food as being, to quote Foer, "about us – our history and our values".

You may recall the anecdotes that frame his personal quest. There is the narrative of his devoted grandmother, a survivor of Nazism and its depravities, continually pressing food on young Foer and his brothers, as if nourishment were not just a symbol of her familial love, but a panacea against all worldly ills.

And there is the pivotal story of his grandmother's flight from war-torn Europe. Starving and on the run from the Nazis, she refuses the pig meat offered by a kindly farmer. When her grandson asks why, she simply replies, "if nothing matters, there's nothing to save".

This interweaving of a food choice with one's deepest values sets the moral compass for Foer's own journey.

Throughout the book, he touches on the relationship of Judaism to the animals we eat.

Foer speaks of the compassion for animals at the core of Jewish thinking, a beautiful feature of Jewish tradition that made him proud to be a Jewish child, and continues to make him proud. Jewish tradition holds that if humans absolutely must eat animals, we should do so humanely, with respect and with humility. The animals we eat should not be subject to suffering, either in their lives or in their

slaughter.

This is the prohibition against ‘tza’ar ba’alei hayyim’, or causing pain to one of God’s living creatures.

For example, the laws of kosher slaughter reflect a deep reverence for the welfare of animals. Kosher slaughter was traditionally performed by a person who has received special education and instruction. He kills the animal with a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a sharp knife. When performed properly, traditional kosher slaughter appears all but painless and quickly renders the animal unconscious.

As Foer points out, however, the development of large-scale factory farming means that the animal has led a life of deprivation and misery even before he or she meets the end at the abattoir. And modern, industrialised and mechanised methods of killing, including kosher slaughter, all but guarantee that the sacred code of tza’ar ba’alei hayyim is violated.

Foer speaks of the shocking abuses of animals uncovered at the world’s largest Kosher slaughterhouse (Agriprocessors in Iowa). Once exposed, the company’s treatment of animals was widely condemned in the strongest terms by Jewish leaders internationally.

The president of the Rabbinical Assembly of the Conservative Movement sent a message to his rabbis

asserting that “when a company purporting to be kosher violates the prohibition against tza’ar ba’alei hayyim, causing pain to one of God’s living creatures, that company must answer to the Jewish community, and ultimately, to God”.

The Orthodox chair of the Talmud Department at Israel’s Bar Ilan University eloquently protested that, “any plant performing [such types of kosher slaughter] is guilty of *hillul hashem* – the desecration of God’s name.”


Foer believes that the horrific abuses uncovered at Agriprocessors are systemic – a necessary feature of the modern animal-industrial complex. Such practices will continue unabated as long as factory farming and industrial-scale slaughter dominate. He asks:

“In our world – not the shepherd-and-flock world of the Bible, but our world in which animals are treated legally and socially as commodities – is it even possible to eat meat without ‘causing pain to one of God’s living creatures’, to avoid... ‘the desecration of God’s name’? Has the very concept of kosher meat, become a contradiction in terms?”

At the end of his moral and existential quest into ‘eating animals’, Foer’s decision is clear. Little Foer Junior will not eat meat.

*To be continued in the next Tell.....*

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### Netzer Machane Dinosaur proves a roaring success!

The past 2 weeks in Netzer Sydney can be summed up as nothing less than exhilarating, with both Junior and Federal Senior camp bringing excitement and memorable experiences to those that would otherwise have to endure yet another dull summer holidays were it not for camp. The camps consisted of a combination of stimulating chinuch (educational) activities ranging in topics such as tikkun olam, leadership, youth movements, israel and progressive Judaism, and kef (fun) activities such as a lake party, water ropes course, hiking, disco, slip'n'slide and even a 'survivor' style campout for the oldest group. The chanichim (campers) were absolutely phenomenal with their inspiring ruach (spirit) and enthusiasm, and we can't wait to see them again on Winter Camp 2011 (dates to be confirmed) but hopefully sooner, at Netzer meetings and events throughout the term, after the camp reunion of course!

Here are a few things some chanichim had to say about

their Netzer camp experiences

"Netzer was like nothing I could have ever imagined. The energy was amazing, the people were amazing and I had a great time. If you asked me what my favourite part of the camp was, I would have to say everything!"  
 – Danny Martin, Year 9.

"My favourite kef program was Hebrew and Israeli cooking chug and Shabbat chuggim and I really enjoyed Seudah Shlishit on shabbat. The Madrichim were pretty incredible, funny and very committed to the group."  
 – Eliza Mc'Carroll, Year 12.

"Netzer literally blew my mind. I can't do it justice in this short space, it is something you must experience. The energy is ridiculous, from both chanichim and madrichim, and the absurdity of it all is overpowering."  
 – Eden Brender Year 11





“There was nothing bad about Netzer it was just the coolest camp ever. Everyone was so energetic and wanting to learn. I met so many new friends and the madrichim were amazing!”  
 – Gabi Stricker-Phelps Year 6

really enjoyed our last full day, as there was a jumping castle and a jelly bath. The mads were really nice and helpful, which made camp even better! I hope next camp is just as fun.”  
 – Rachel Stanton Year 8

“Netzer is an awesome organization and is a really fun experience. If you like getting dirty ,having fun and being with Jewish friends then Netzer is the place for you. “  
 – Morgan Baynash Year 7

“Quite amazing meeting new people, having lots of fun all at the same time, getting dirty, and going crazy, singing as loud as we can. By the way this is nothing like school camp very different, and much much more fun trust me!! “  
 – Mili Haber, Year 7

“Every morning everybody was full of energy and spirit. We chanted in our loudest voices. Everyone was friends with everyone. The programs were amazing and everybody really got into them. The effort the madrichim and organizers put into this camp was incredible. NETZER is a great camp. “  
 – Aviv Dekel, Year 8

“Machane Dinosaurus was so amazing! I have been to many camps in the past but this camp was definitely the best. I



## Our Bnei Mitzvah



**Name:** Elizabeth Baral  
**School:** SCEGGS Darlinghurst  
**Hobbies:** Reading and doing puzzles  
**Pets:** 3 cats (Jake, Peg & Pushkin) and frogs.  
**Dislikes:** Bananas

My favourite TV show is *Doctor Who*, but I also enjoy watching *Merlin* and *Masterchef Australia*. I don't know what career I want to

have, but I like the idea of becoming a vet. I also play the piano and my favourite sport is polevault although I also enjoy other parts of tracks and field, gymnastics and soccer.

In class we helped a charity to give children vital heart surgeries and at my school we've given things to multiple charities.

I will remember the support given to me by family and friends as well as the wonderful Saturdays I've spent with Scott, my great uncle and teacher.



**Name:** Cameron Morris-Mikardo  
**School:** Cranbrook  
**Hobbies:** Cycling  
**Social Work:** Red Shield Appeal

In my spare time I like to go on Facebook, hang out with friends or go riding my bike. My favourite subject at school would probably be

maths. When I am older I would like to be an architect or an engineer.

What I will remember about my Bar Mitzvah is the hard work and preparation.



**Name:** Thomas Hughes  
**School:** Rose Bay Secondary College  
**Hobbies:** Hockey and martial arts  
**Pets:** One dog 'Owen'  
**Dislikes:** None

My favourite TV programme is a British comedy *My Family*. I have a variety of interested outside of school including choir, hockey for UNSW, ji do kwan and kayaking. At school my favourite subjects are English, music, maths, science and PDHPE. For my future career I would like to become a journalist

and also a novelist.

During the time of studying for my Bar Mitzvah I have been involved in a charity for a school for street in Nairobi, Kenya. I have helped to raise \$4000 towards books and uniforms for the children. As I grow up I would like to become more involved with charities for the treatment and cure of HIV AIDS as well continuing to support charities that give opportunities for young people in the third world so that they can live their lives to the fullest.

From my time spent preparing for my bar mitzvah I will most remember my tutor Kim Gottlieb and how much support and help he has given me plus great chocolates at the end of each lesson.



**Name:** Jesse Morris  
**School:** Sydney Grammar  
**Hobbies:** Reading, listening to music, facebooking, fencing, violin  
**Dislikes:** mushrooms and Latin

My favourite T.V show is *Mythbusters*, closely followed by *Man vs. Wild*. My passion in terms of sport is Fencing. I do it as often as I can and I find it physically

and mentally challenging. Out of my school subjects my favourite is history because I like learning about the past. I don't follow a particular band but I like the music that Pendulum releases. I also play the violin.

I have not been involved with any charity or social work but I think that work done by charities such as the Fred Hollows Foundation is important because it helps impoverished communities who require medical aid.

I've spent many hours learning Hebrew with my teacher and I've learnt that there is a lot of history to learn about this ancient Jewish culture.



**Name:** Jake Apps  
**School:** Waverley College  
**Hobbies:** Surfing, swimming

I'm a really sporty person and especially love surfing. In winter I enjoy playing rugby which I have played since I was 5 years old. I also like playing league and am a big roosters supporter. In my spare time I love to 'mix' music. My ideal career would

be to become a builder and work as a dj at parties on the weekends (I am planning to start the dj work soon). My favourite subject at school is PE and my least favourite is

definitely maths! My good mate is Tom Kurz who goes to my school and recently did his bar mitzvah too.

At school we have lots of opportunities to get involved in social justice activities. I feel especially sad about homeless people and would like to think I could help out with the problem of homelessness when I am older.

I enjoyed spending time with my mum each night for the past year as I practised my hebrew. She always sat with me to make sure I did it properly. We always had lots of laughs together. Irit, my tutor, and Rabbi Kamins were also both so great and helpful. I know my grandpa Dave who is no longer with us would have been very proud of me doing my bar mitzvah so thinking about that makes it very special.



**Name:** Rebecca Szabo  
**School:** Ascham

**Hobbies:** I like to read, especially my Harry Potter books and the Tomorrow When the War Began series. I also love to catch up with all my friends on Facebook. Going to Netzer camps is one of my favourite holiday activities.

**Pets:** I currently have 2 cats named Timmy and Trixie.

They are brother and sister, but you'd never guess that from looking at them.

**Dislikes:** I dislike having to do my homework, mainly Maths; and getting up early for school.

in the fashion industry. I love to be creative and put together great outfits. If fashion doesn't work out, then I might like to be a teacher. My favourite school subjects would have to be D&T (design and technology), German and French. It is really tough to choose my favourite TV show out of The Simpsons, Neighbours, Seinfeld and The Big Bang Theory.

My main concern is mistreatment of animals. I really support the RSPCA and will make a donation to them after my Bat mitzvah.

The person I will remember the most from my Bat mitzvah is my wonderful, amazing, absolutely brilliant teacher Irit. Without her, my Bat mitzvah wouldn't have been able to happen. Irit has always been patient and encouraged me. She helped me believe that I could do it. I hope I'll always be friends with Irit.

My idea of a future career would probably be somewhere

# What's On

february – april 2011

shvat – nissan 5771

- Our Community
- Services
- Spiritual
- Festivals
- Childrens Education
- Children and Family
- Adult Education
- Arts and Culture
- Shabbat Dinners
- Special Events

## Take a look at **What's On**

Your comprehensive guide to everything that is going at Emanuel Synagogue from February to April

All the details of our great programming and events in one easy booklet!

- Our Community • Services • Spiritual
- Festivals • Childrens Education
- Children and Family • Adult Education
- Shabbat Dinners • Special Events

## Yes – but....

A number of events in Israel have appeared to be positive responses to discriminatory behaviour by right-wing and Orthodox groups. However, in almost every case, what remains is a “yes but...” which reveals that the problems have not been resolved and that the threat to the democratic nature of Israeli society and the relationship with Jewish communities around the world continues.

Thanks to the work of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Jewish Agency chairman, Natan Sharansky, the controversial proposed changes to the Law of Conversion has been “placed on hold” for a further 6 months and we commend them for this achievement. However, we still need to ask why the Knesset is going to consider such divisive and discriminatory legislation at all.

Last week we were able to celebrate that the Israeli High Court officially abolished the so-called “mehadrin” (sex segregated) bus lines operated by the national carrier, Egged following a petition from our own Israel Religious Action Centre (IRAC). It is now clear that the decision will not be fully implemented and many women will still be intimidated enough to only sit in the rear of the bus. It also doesn't address that there are increasing number of sex segregated public facilities, including health centres, conferences, public areas and even tours as a result of pressure from the ultra-orthodox minority.

In December 2010 a number of State-employed rabbis signed a petition calling on Israelis not to lease property to non-Jews. This was followed by a letter signed by 30 rabbis' wives, calling on Jewish girls not to work in a place or have any social contact, with non-Jews. Although the original petition, which effectively invalidates the Declaration of Independence, was condemned by the Prime Minister and others no action was taken against the rabbis; the State continues to pay them; and they continue to have control of matters such as determining who is a Jew; conversion; marriage; and burials.

And this month one of the latest iPhone ‘apps’ to be released provides direct contact with the Kotel in Jerusalem – but only the men's section. Among those in the other section are the ‘Women of the Wall’, including one of the leaders, Anat Hoffman who is now on bail and threatened with imprisonment because she carried a Sefer torah in the vicinity of the Wall.

“Israeli society is falling into a deep, dark pit of racism and xenophobia,” said Rabbi Gilad Kariv, Head of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, when reflecting on these and other recent incidents threatening the democratic nature of the country.

Recently elected Chairman of the Council of Progressive Rabbis in Australia, New Zealand and Asia, Rabbi Gary Robuck commented on the petition signed by numerous Orthodox rabbis telling people not to lease property to non-Jews saying “When those who represent the official rabbinic leadership of the State of Israel express such positions, we are distressed by this Chillul HaShem, desecration of God's name. This degradation of the Torah threatens both Israel and our own communities.”

Rabbi Robuck described this as a threat to the unity of Israel and Diaspora communities and called on the rabbis in Israel “For the sake of our people, our Torah, and Israel, we beseech you to take a strong public stand and oppose those who misrepresent our tradition” as well as issuing a “call to action” by the local rabbis and leadership, as well as to each person who cares about Israel as a democratic and inclusive society, to be prepared to speak out.

Notwithstanding the concern some of these issues give rise to, there are clear indications that many previously apathetic members of Israeli society are realizing that they need to become aware and to take action in order to guarantee that Israel is a fully democratic society for all of its residents and citizens. It is also heartening to know that at the forefront of this campaign is the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ).

The IMPJ, as part of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, receives funds from us via the UIA Progressive Trust in order to continue its work in receiving and absorbing refugees and migrants to Israel. This in turn frees funds that allow the Israel Religious Action Centre, headed by Anat Hoffman, to maintain the campaign for religious and social freedom. It is hoped that over the coming weeks, as the UIA campaign commences, that members of the Progressive and Conservative movements will increase their support for Israel and, in particular, designate their donation to the “UIA Progressive Trust” in order to help create the democratic and inclusive Jewish State dreamed of by its founders; described in the Declaration of Independence; and desired by Jews around the world, especially in Israel.

*Steve Denenberg*



Armed with hats and sunblock the Emanuel Synagogue office spent a summers afternoon trying their hands at lawn bowls at the end of last year.



## The Development of Jewish Humour

**“I do not know of another people that makes fun to such a degree of its own character.” Sigmund Freud**

Conrad Hyers (American writer, lecturer and Presbyterian minister) sees the comedic voice as bridging the gap between the experience of everyday life and the cosmic nature of God. He writes that the jester, like all figures of comic nature, “reminds us of the essential awkwardness of the human condition, an awkwardness that is only intensified in the religious situation.” Hyers continues that “the awkwardness that is portrayed on a more trivial plan in the endless pratfalls of the clown, the predicaments of the comic hero, or the confusion of the fool reaches its climax as we attempt to deal with matters of ultimate concern.”<sup>1</sup>

The question of the relationship between comedy and religion is an interesting one. The proliferation of Jewish jokes, humorous stories and American Jewish sitcoms (The Nanny, Seinfeld etc), as well as the countless Jewish comedians (the Marx Brothers, Milton Berle etc) begs the question - What makes humor Jewish?

There are certain characteristics that stand out as common to much of Jewish humor. Jewish humor, laughs at authority and blurs boundaries, such as those between sacred and secular or Jew and non-Jew. In Jewish humor, the unquestioned authority of the sacred is questioned, the superior status of the holy is bracketed, and the distance between the sacred and the profane is minimised. It also displays a fascination with language and (often twisted) reasoning. And, not surprisingly, Jewish humor often played the role of coping mechanism. With the anti-Semitism, poverty, and uncertainties that we have faced throughout so much of our history, there often seemed little to do but laugh. So we did. And we are still reaping the benefits of the humor that was produced. “For a few moments, under the spell of laughter, the whole man is completely and gloriously alive: body, mind and soul vibrate in unison. The mind flings open its doors and windows ... its furls and secret places are ventilated and sweetened. For a few moments the victim feels complete liberty and reconciliation with himself and with the whole of creation.”<sup>2</sup>

Jewish people have long been seeing the humour in different situations. In the Book of Genesis, Sarah laughed when she heard that she was going to have a child at the age of 89 (Abraham was nearly 100). A unique aspect of the relationship between God and the Jewish people is that it is often fractious. “More than people of any other religious tradition, Jews have argued with God.”<sup>3</sup> The relationship is seasoned with irony. The fact that the Jewish people who are considered to be the “Chosen People”, have been living for generations under perilous conditions, resulted in a unique and pervasive sense of life’s incongruities.

<sup>1</sup>Hyers, Conrad. *The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic*. Holy Laughter. Seabury 1969.

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong, Martin. *Laughing: An essay*. New York: Harper and Brothers., 1928

<sup>3</sup>Berger, Peter. *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of the Human Experience*. New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1997.

**Dear God, for five thousand years now we have been Your chosen people. Enough! Choose another one now!**

**From the diary of a Jew in occupied Romania<sup>4</sup>**

The Talmud has many incidents of humour and repartee and even speaks of God laughing. In the Talmud (Bava Metzia, 49), the rabbis were debating whether or not a certain type of oven was ritually clean. Rabbi Eliezer called on heavenly signs to support his opinion. “If I am right, then let this tree move 400 cubits,” and it did. Several further signs demanded by Rabbi Eliezer were also fulfilled. Finally Rabbi Joshua arose and declared that the “Torah is not in heaven,” i.e. the Law is no longer decided on the strength of heavenly manifestations. The power of legal decision is in the hands of human sages, not of God. In the Talmud’s story, God watched the debate, laughed and said, “My children have overcome me.” God’s smile is not an expression of hostility or vengefulness. It was an expression of joy and love that people were coming into their own even though it meant some sharing of His divine power. That smile of God, which lavished love and encouragement on human beings, gave strength and support to humans in crisis. Such humor is not prompted by anxiety or hostility. It is an expression of humanity and wisdom. The Talmud describes a situation in which God admitted that He made a “mistake.” The Talmud explains the meaning of God’s reply [as to His name] to Moses in Exodus, “I Will Be What I Will Be.” God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites that, I shall be with them in this servitude just as I will be with them in other servitudes. Moses told God: They have enough troubles now; You do not have to tell them about future troubles. God agreed with Moses and instructed Moses to tell the Israelites: “I Will Be has sent me”.

Throughout most of the last 2000 years of history, the Jewish people have lived as outsiders within other cultures. During this time, the Jewish culture developed a peculiar relationship to comedy, and this relationship helped the Jews survive a long series of tragedies “through the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms and expulsions the wandering Jew never left his sense of humor behind”.<sup>5</sup> Laughter and joking allow people to take their minds off distress, granting them temporary freedom.

**When you tell a peasant a joke he laughs three times – once when you tell it, once when you explain it, and once when he understands it.**

**When you tell a land owner a joke he laughs twice – once when you tell it and once when you explain it – he’ll never understand it.**

**When you tell a military officer a joke he laughs only once – when you tell it – he’ll never let you explain it and of course he doesn’t understand it.**

**But when you tell a Jew a joke, he tells you that he’s heard it already – and besides, you’re telling it wrong.**

<sup>4</sup>Dorien, Emile. *The Quality of Mercy; A Romanian Diary 1937 – 1944*. The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982.

<sup>5</sup>Lipman, Steve. *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humour during the Holocaust*. Northvale: Jason Aronson. 1991

Classical Jewish humor shares certain features with every other type of humor. But in its highest manifestations, it expresses faith and confidence in a loving God. During the medieval period, the humor was institutionalized in Jewish communal customs, perhaps most famously in Purim shpiels which continue today in Jewish communities across the globe.

If joking is a form of alleviating tension, and if tension runs high among the Jews, then one can see how joking might become a Jewish sport.

**Four Europeans go hiking together, and get frightfully lost. First they run out of food, then they run out of water.**

**“I’m so thirsty,” says the Englishman. “I must have tea.”**

**“I’m so thirsty, says the Frenchman. “I must have wine.”**

**“I’m so thirsty,” says the German. “I must have beer.”**

**“I’m so thirsty,” says the Jew. “I must have diabetes.”**

What was the genesis of this turn to the humorous? Theorists offered a parade of hypotheses. Jewish humor is all about coping: Jews were miserable, and laughter kept them going. Jewish psychologists further deconstructed Jewish humor as introjections of this external hostility. Humor gave a form of protest against their lives, their families, and their pain. Other commentators suggested the Jewish jest is a survival tactic: By altering one's perspective, the Jew can accept the unsympathetic world for what it was.

## From the Board

A number of us attended the UPJ conference in Canberra in November. It was a great opportunity to meet and chat to leaders and members of other synagogues in Australasia. We can say that Emanuel is very fortunate, by comparison with other communities, by reason of the size of our membership and access to resources. We are one of the big brothers or sisters. Nevertheless we can always learn from others. One area we might be able to do this is technology. There are very exciting initiatives in that area. We have a Facebook page, and most communication is now by email. Our website has many resources on it, and is improving all the time. One day we might all be praying by “I phone” app, or subsequent technology not even thought of yet. If anyone is interested in the role technology can play in our services or activities, please be in touch.

Elsewhere in this edition is the edited text of a speech by Brian Sherman delivered here late last year. It is very interesting, particularly relating to the question of cruelty to animals as it relates to Jewish values. Our campus is vegetarian. An initiative we are about to launch is evening cooking classes, which we hope will be of interest both as an educational, social and or cultural experience, but also so that those attending our weekly “pot luck” Shabbat dinners can be assured the ingredients are fully kosher.

At the board meetings in November and December we dealt with a number of other issues including the following:

**“Want to alleviate your big-time worries? Put on a tighter shoe.”**  
**Yiddish proverb.**

Repression requires the renunciation of enjoyment we would get from yielding to our impulses, and jokes provide a momentary means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving the fun that was lost. Joking releases aggression that would otherwise have no safe outlet of expression. Joking creates a community of shared culture and values through a therapeutic discharge of laughter.

The American Jewish writer Saul Bellow calls “characteristically Jewish” a story in which laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations between the two. Jewish humour at its best leaves you wondering whether the laughter has really satisfied you or made you more nervous. In other words, it leaves you wondering whether Jewish humour is therapeutic, or whether it stirs up anxieties to a higher level.

I wish you all a Year of Laughter.

*Sandy Hollis*  
*Director of Education*

- The layout and style of new seats for the main sanctuary
- The strategic planning process, which we hope will result in a 5 year strategic plan for the synagogue to be shared with members in the first or second quarter of the year
- Ongoing discussion to bring the plans for the redevelopment to a launch date before the High Holidays this year
- Plans for enhancement of our musical programme, including hopefully retaining a new staff member as Shaliach Tzibbur and Youth Director
- The listening campaign
- Succession planning for the board – please be in touch if this is of interest to you ahead of our AGM set for May 2011.
- The budget for 2011

2011 promises to be an exciting but challenging year, as we look to supporting the rabbis and staff in all their initiatives. One of these I hope will be a major dinner mid year, about which you will hear more soon.

## It's An Ill Wind...

The decision by Ehud Barak and four other members of the Israeli Cabinet to resign from the Labour Party and form a new party Atzmaut (Independence) will have a number of interesting repercussions in Israel and around the Jewish world.

On the surface the demise of the political party that founded and ruled the State of Israel is a sad event. However, for anyone who has followed the ups and downs of Israeli politics for any length of time the news is greeted with a sigh of relief and a cheer that the now moribund and defunct party will die, hopefully to be replaced by something that is in the true image of the Centre-left, peace-seeking, democratic and egalitarian Party that was the Labour Party.

According to Ha'Aretz reporter Bradley Burston this is just one of 10 pieces of good news to come out of Israel recently that should inspire those who dream of a democratic and egalitarian Jewish State to "Don't give up" (see Ha'Aretz of 17 January 2011). The reasons for this optimism include the fact that Avigdor Lieberman may be arrested soon for fraud, taking bribes and money laundering; His Party may be thrown out of the ruling Coalition, thereby opening the way for a Coalition to include Kadima, the one Party truly pushing for peace negotiations.

Burston also feels that the recent series of discriminatory behaviour by the Ultra-Orthodox rabbis has made many Israelis realise that they cannot be trusted to determine the religious life of the country; that the behaviour of the right-wing settlers is not supported by the majority of Israelis; and that the success of Stuxnet in incapacitating the Iranian nuclear programme all come together to give hope for a new peace initiative without the dread threat of a nuclear attack hanging over it.

Within the world of Zionist politics – where we (through



Israelis protest at a pro-democracy rally in Tel Aviv, January 15, 2011. Photo by: Tal Cohen

our ARZA organisation) are currently part of the strongest coalition – the fallout from the collapse of the Labour Party, which is also part of the ARZENU coalition, has yet to be felt. However, it too may present an opportunity for the various groups who are looking for a democratic, egalitarian, pluralistic and peaceful Israel to come together. At this time, Merkaz (representing the Masorti movement), and the Centrist Kadima Party are in a different coalition from ARZENU, even though many of their views – including matters such as the Conversion Law; gender segregation; the domination of the Ultra-Orthodox rabbinate; and the need for serious peace negotiations – are exactly aligned. It is possible that the new political landscape in Israel and the Zionist world will lead to a shake-up that will allow a new progressive force to emerge that will put Israel back on track with regard to being the democratic and inclusive Jewish State dreamed of by its founders and sought by the majority of Jews around the world, including Israel.

As they say "it's an ill wind that blows nobody some good".... Let's hope!

*Steve Denenberg*

## A Letter From Karen Lewis - Life's Door

Life's Door is an organization based in Israel that addresses the issues of serious and life threatening illness, end of life, loss and bereavement.

We have now established a branch of the organisation in Australia and hope to share these important programs and services.

The mission of Life's Door is to transform the experience of facing life-threatening illness from one of anguish and confusion to one that encourages collaboration and growth for patients, families and professionals.

Life's Door was started by 2 Americans, Professor Benjamin Corn, a professor of Oncology and his wife Phyllis Dvora Corn, an occupational therapist and family and marriage therapist. The pain and isolation that the Corn's saw in the lives of patients and families prompted the couple to explore the importance of emotional and spiritual support and to develop programs that support patients and their

families and train professionals in this area.

We are now building a core group of people in Australia, professionals and lay leaders, who care about the issues of helping deal with serious and life threatening illness, end of life and bereavement. We plan to arrange an initial video conference in January to think together on next steps which could include offering workshops and retreats for patients and their families, doctors, clergy and others who work with illness and end of life.

I have seen the Corn's work first hand, they are an amazing couple that have changed the lives of so many people facing illness. We are hopeful that you will agree to join this exciting initiative.

For more details about the organisation, please see [www.lifesdoor.org](http://www.lifesdoor.org)

If you are interested in being involved please contact me at [klewis@012.net.il](mailto:klewis@012.net.il)

*Proudly Supported by the  
Emanuel Synagogue Cultural Fund*

*Chazzan  
Robert Esformes  
A Concert of  
Hebrew Psalms  
& Ladino Love Songs*

**Sunday 3 April, 4:00pm - 6:00pm**  
**\$30 Members, \$35 Non-members**  
**Bookings: 9328 7833**

Synagogue cantor, concert performer, spiritual counsellor, meditation teacher and Jewish educator. Robert travels widely, offering artist/scholar programs, Shabbatons, workshops on Jewish music and meditation, retreat experiences, ecumenical events and individual spiritual direction. His knowledge of Ladino (Spanish/Jewish) music is renowned. In addition to his music, he has significant experience in a range of meditation and spiritual practices.



**Chazzan Robert Esformes Programme**

**Friday 1 April – Monday 11 April**

**More information contact Kim on 0408 652 394 or Edna on 0416 780 787**

**Further details on [www.emanuel.org.au](http://www.emanuel.org.au)**

**Bookings: 9328 7833**

**Full programme: \$290 members, \$330 non-members**

**Kabbalat Shabbat:** Friday 1 April, 6:30 – 7:30pm

**Renewal Service (and pot luck vegetarian lunch):** Saturday 2 April, 10:00am – 12:00pm

**Weaving the Threads Shabbaton:** Saturday 2 April, 2:00pm – 5:00pm, \$50 members, \$55 non-members

**A Concert of Hebrew Psalms & Ladino Love Songs:** Sunday 3 April, 4:00pm, \$25 members, \$30 non-members

**Jewish Meditation Practice:** Wednesday 6 April, 7:30pm – 9:00pm, \$10 donation requested

**Kabbalah Tree of Life:** Thursday 7 April, 7:00pm – 9:30pm, \$45 members, \$50 non-members

**Non-residential Weekend Retreat:** 9 & 10 April, 10:00am – 4:00pm, \$160 members, \$180 non-members

**Sacred Voice Workshop:** Monday 11 April, 7:00pm – 9:30pm, \$40 members, \$45 non-members