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NEWSLETTER

קהילת ניצן

KEHILAT NITZAN

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From the Rabbi Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff

As I greet Elul, the month of spiritual preparation for the High Holidays, our family is unpacking boxes and thinking about the possibilities that this new year may bring for our family and extended family: the Kehilat Nitzan community. We have been here in Melbourne for just a few short months and already feel like this is home, thanks to so many wonderful people at KN.

You may already have heard of some of the new programs both Merav and I have either started or will soon be starting, such as Sihot B'Salon and Kruv Nitzanim. I sense some excitement about the new things to come in 5779! We, too, are excited, but I have to tell you... creating new programs is not my primary goal for renewal at KN. Rather, the driving force for all that I intend to do here is *creating relationships*.

To quote Ron Wolfson, author of *The Spirituality of Welcoming and Relational Judaism*, 'There is nothing wrong with programs; every organisation has them. But, if the program designers have given no thought to how the experience will offer participants a deeper connection to each other, with the community and with Judaism itself, then it will likely be another lovely evening, afternoon or morning with little or no lasting impact.'

To illustrate the point, I remember a woman who was a member for some years at my shul and who came to every event, but suddenly quit the synagogue. When asked why she was leaving, she simply replied: 'I came to everything, but never met anybody!'

While other organisations are focused on programs, marketing, branding, labels, logos, clever titles, websites, and smartphone apps, I want us to focus on *people*, on *relationships*! When we create relationships, we are doing something real, lasting, meaningful, something that makes every individual

feel that KN is a home and an extended family, just as my family has been made to feel.

If the goal is not programs, but rather people, relationships and connections, what kind of relationships do we hope to foster and with whom do we seek to connect? We strive for deeper connections to self, family, friends, Jewish living, community, peoplehood, Israel and the world. And, while sometimes surprisingly unmentioned in religious institutions, but massively essential, we strive for our connection to God!

We are a religious communal organisation; we are a faith. We seek to connect to the divine, to the holy – to God, and we do so through our personal relationships. We don't see connections with people as replacing our connection to God, but as a concrete worldly *manifestation* of our connection with God. When we care, when we love, when we act selflessly for the good of others, we are doing *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, and connecting to the sacred, to the divine.

To quote Ron Wolfson once more, 'What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives.'

Shana Tova and looking forward to a year of connecting!

“ It's about people, not programs ”



From the President Zvi Civins

I'm about to write something I haven't written in about a year. Ready? ...
Shanah tovah!

Of course I haven't written these words since last year. We will hear them so often in the coming weeks that they will become habitual, an automatic expression shared with others. They are powerful words but with such frequent usage their power may not be obvious to us. So just what do these two words contain? What can we find in them beyond their equivalent, 'Happy New Year'?

Let me start with 'tovah' – good. Of course we wish each a 'Shanah tovah', a good year filled with good things for us and our family and friends. 'Tovah' though can mean more than simply 'good', and certainly more than 'happy'. During Creation, when God saw that 'It was good', 'good' could not mean 'good as opposed to bad,' for there was nothing to compare with the Creation. Rabbi Eli Munk in his commentary on Creation therefore ascribes to 'tov' the meaning 'in its intended state' – that things are now as they should be.

'Shanah' – year – is obvious, but like 'tov' it too has deeper meanings. Shanah is related to the verb 'to change'. So, taken together, when we say 'Shanah tovah,' we are actually expressing the idea 'have a good change; may you change in the intended way.'

The question then is: what is the 'intended way'? Is there one answer to how you, or I, should live our lives, how we should change ourselves, our goals, our values to some better way that is 'as it should be'? If so, where do we find this? And why only once a year does this idea dominate?

The Internet and media are replete with countless ways to improve just about every aspect of our lives: Ten ways to make new friends, five habits and mind shifts to revitalise your brain, 24 uncomfortable things we should do, even how to make scrambled eggs the correct way, because you've been doing it all wrong! (Really?) If I took all these seriously I'd feel like giving up, as I wouldn't even know where to begin to make a change.

But we don't need new foods, exercises or whatever else to make a positive change to a better state. Judaism affirms that each day is an opportunity to consider our lives, where we are going and why. We are reminded in our daily prayers, amongst many other sources, of 'the obligations without measure' that we should fulfil: honouring parents, comforting mourners, healing the sick, welcoming strangers and more.

Rabbi Sadoff recently presented a Shabbat shiur on 'Wise Ageing'. One of the powerful ideas he shared was that each dawn is the renewal of creation. The sages and our prayers express the idea that with the rising of the sun we are witnessing creation, day after day, and with it the potential for our own personal re-creation.

I am often up before the sun rises, but I'm usually indoors and never stop to really see it. I was fortunate to see the sunrise a few weeks ago in the outback, on the Larapinta Trail, as Marian and I joined Kehilat Nitzan's good friends Gary and Eileen Freed. I hadn't packed my siddur, but seeing the sunrise, having started trekking at 4:30 am, looking out over the vast wilderness, the empty MacDonald Ranges, and slowly seeing valleys, rocks, and trees welcoming the new day was a powerful experience.

Like me, many of us probably don't take the time to stop and see the renewal of creation. Our kids, our jobs, our lives take over. We may want to make a positive change but the routines of simply living deny us this chance to even think about what it is we should do. We have to find the time to do this, but time is difficult to find.

But now, the time is here! As the High Holidays approach, as we renew friendships and acquaintances, recall familiar words and melodies from the mahzor last heard a year ago, as we wish each other 'shanah tovah', let us try to use this time to reflect on our personal 'change to a better, intended state'. Only you can know what it is that you need to do, as only I know what I need to do.

Finally, 'mah tovu', how good is it that we will soon join together in our shul, for the first time with Rabbi Sadoff and Merav who, with our own members, will lead us in song, prayer and reflection. As a community, let us renew our kehilah: come to Shabbat services, attend shiurim, help with Tikkun Olam. However you can, we hope you will help us achieve our kehilah's intended state.



The story of the Kehilat Nitzan piano

Miriam Faine

The piano in the Kehilat Nitzan sanctuary has a plaque that says:

In loving memory of well-known Piano Teacher, LEO SHALIT, and his wife, HALINA, donated by their children, Tony and Barbara

But who was Leo Shalit?

Some Kehilat Nitzan members still remember Leo Shalit as their piano teacher and were very likely to have been taught on this piano, which Leo used for lessons.

Leo Shalit was well known within the Jewish community and beyond as a marvellous teacher. He also gave piano recitals, including on ABC Radio. Leo had learnt from Theodor Leschetizky, a famous Polish pianist who was a pupil of the composer Czerny, who in turn was a pupil of Beethoven. One of his students wrote, 'Leo Shalit was of the old European school; technique and relaxation were most important. He was very strict. I remember I was in awe of him. I still teach my students some of the exercises and technique he had me do. I had other teachers at university,



Leo Shalit



Leo Shalit's piano, donated to Kehilat Nitzan by his family

but they did not leave such a lasting impression.'

Among his most prominent pupils was the renowned pianist Alan Kogosowski, who wrote that Leo Shalit was an 'old-school cultivated European gentleman from Riga, with a distinguished pianistic background and a deep understanding of the piano and its literature, who attended master classes of Rachmaninoff's colleague Alexander Goldenweiser in the inter-war years'.

Leo was a cousin of Kehilat Nitzan member Greg Shalit's father David, and they boarded together in Riga and then in Berlin in the 1930s. David was an engineering student while Leo was studying chemistry, but he gave up his studies to become a professional musician. To earn money, he accompanied silent movies on the piano.

Although David managed to leave Europe just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Leo was not so lucky and survived several concentration camps. After the war, David found Leo and brought him and his wife Halina to Melbourne. Leo was also greatly assisted by the Mushin family, several of whom are Kehilat Nitzan members. When Leo and Halina's children, Barbara and Tony, were clearing their parents' house they asked Greg to find a worthy home for this piano – and that is how it came to Kehilat Nitzan.



Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff blowing the shofar at the Australian Friends of RAMBAM Community Healthy Day, held at Kehilat Nitzan in August



Zehoo: Having fun while learning

Marcie Civins

Now well into our second year, Zehoo has been just as creative, if not even more so, than last year. We have explored the chagim, including making family trees out of felt in honour of Tu B'Shvat, hamentaschen for Purim, and some super-sweet, super-bright, three-colour layered cheesecake for Shavuot. Of course, it isn't all about the food: for Tisha B'Av we rolled up our sleeves and got busy building our own creations in complete silence, then watched as they were knocked down. This led to some very interesting discussions about why we were having such a sombre session.

We created a brand new sign for Zehoo, drawing upon the parashiyot Teruma and Ki Tisa for our inspiration. First we used thirteen different materials to decorate the letters: gold, silver, copper, red, purple, blue, wood, spices, gems, 'goat hair', 'animal skins' (maybe looking very similar to the 'goat hair!') and flax. The olive oil proved a little tricky, so we decided the glue would be an acceptable substitute. Then, after talking about what or where we would find our personal sanctuaries, we made our own half-shekels, and 'donated' them to Kehilat Nitzan, further decorating our sign. This goes nicely with our Aleph Bet posters, with each letter made of a photo of carefully posed Zehoovians.

Our regular, once-per-term tzedakah session supporting the Food Van is as popular as ever. It is magical watching the Zehoovians swing into action, baking goodies to give away, decorating the paper bags as cheerfully as possible, then filling them with the cooled treats. This year the Zehoovians, completely on their own initiative, opted to include some bags of toys and books to go to the clients at the Food Van. They considered how to bundle the items, and there was discussion about what it might be like not to have sweets or toys readily available.

Role-playing has been a recurring feature of Zehoo. Pesach and Purim offer great opportunities and require a wide cast, but Yom Ha'atzmaut was the quiet achiever this year. We mapped out Israel on the ground, then made a plane, packed our bags, and headed off to visit as much as we could fit into the session. We enjoyed felafel, floating in the Dead Sea and visiting the Kotel, before flying back into Melbourne.

Every week we sit down to enjoy some fruit and a book or two. We are very appreciative of the lovely books donated by Kehilat Nitzan members

to increase our library. The Zehoovians also bring in some special books from time to time, including ones from PJ Library (a US-based organisation that sends free Jewish children's books to families across the world every month). The most popular would have to be *Do Unto Otters* by Laurie Keller – it's worth looking for a copy for your own family bookshelf!

With ten regular Zehoovians attending, we have a wonderful, enthusiastic, diverse, smart, friendly group, who are a joy to see in full swing. Zehoo? Zehoo!



Inspired by the Song of Songs

Merav Sadoff Fima

I first encountered the Song of Songs when I was 15 years old and preparing to represent Canada at the International Bible Contest in Israel. I was immediately captivated by its poetic language and beautiful imagery, and intrigued by the prominence of the active female voice exclaiming 'I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise and go about the city, through the streets and marketplace; I will seek him whom my soul loves' (3:1-2).

Reading it as a series of love letters exchanged by King Solomon and his beloved, the Shulamite, I was fascinated by this unusual biblical text that differed so drastically from the hundreds of other chapters we had been assigned to study in preparation for the Bible Contest. I read it over and over again and committed many of its passages to memory.

It was this sacred text, more than any other, that influenced the course of my life many years later, in ways that were unbeknownst to me then. As I had always yearned to return to Israel, the place of my birth, I was inspired by the Song of Songs' descriptions of the Land of Israel – 'The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land; the fig-tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance' (2:12-13) – and made Aliyah as soon as I completed my undergraduate degree in Literature and Art History at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, at the age of 21. Settling in Jerusalem, the setting of the Song of Songs, I worked for five years at the Israel Museum, Israel's largest cultural institution. I believe that the skills I had gained while studying for the Bible Contest as a teenager – attentiveness to linguistic patterns, sensitivity to the rhythm and musicality of the language, and discernment of the covert meaning of complex texts – enabled me to excel in my professional work as an editor and translator of exhibition catalogues and gallery texts.



The Song of Songs also kindled my passion for poetry and helped me find my own literary voice as a young Jewish female writer. Though I have been writing prose fiction in English from a young age and am now pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing at Monash University, consisting of a novel of historical fiction and exegesis, my profound encounter with the Song of Songs has also empowered me to give expression to my singular experiences as a woman, wife and mother in the sacred Hebrew tongue, my verses resonating with the language of the Scriptures while taking on contemporary meaning. Had I not internalised the text so many years before, it would not have resurfaced on the page to give expression to my own poetic musings.

I truly saw the Song of Songs working its magic twelve years after I had the honour of participating in the International Bible Contest. I had enrolled in a short workshop offered by Beit Avi Chai, one of Jerusalem's prime cultural institutions promoting contemporary Jewish culture. The workshop brought together a dozen young poets and aimed to produce poetry inspired by the Song of Songs, based on in-depth study and exploration of the text. Our instructor opened the workshop by encouraging us to live and breathe the Song of Songs for the duration of the workshop; it was indeed marvellous that I met my beloved and got engaged before the final session and performance of the workshop's output.

I was sitting at my desk at the Israel Museum one day when I got a call from a colleague's father – a

member of the International Bible Contest organising committee, who remembered me from the time I was 15 – saying that he was standing in synagogue following morning *minyan* with a young Conservative rabbi who had just returned to Israel from the United States and would like to meet me. He had persuaded him to meet me by telling him that I was a Bible Contest champion and that he had a 'strong feeling' about this. We agreed to meet a week later for a picnic lunch in the Israel Museum's spectacular sculpture garden.

The first sculpture we encountered as we entered the garden was Robert Indiana's AHAVA (LOVE). We paused and the young rabbi told me that, according to the Zohar's interpretation of the Song of Songs, a seminal work of Jewish mysticism, AHAVA constitutes God's most sacred name. After a delightful lunch, which certainly lasted longer than my allocated lunch break, we decided to meet again for another picnic the following week, and so on, until we were engaged five months later.

The poems that I composed during the workshop – all employing the exquisite phrases and motifs of the Song of Songs – reflected our evolving relationship, and found a home in the *birkon* (book of blessings) we designed for our wedding (we just celebrated our fifth anniversary in July). Each Friday night as we sit around the Shabbat table we recite verses from the Song of Songs and from my own poetry to each other as an assertion of our love.

Several years after first encountering the Song of Songs and reading it as an exchange of love letters, I learned that it was included in the biblical canon as an allegory of love between God and the People of Israel. The month of Elul, which we celebrated with the Kehilat Nitzan Women's Rosh Hodesh Group in a wonderful session that included text study and a creative activity, allows us to embrace our reciprocal relationship with the divine, as encapsulated by the verse 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine' (6:3), whose initial Hebrew letters make up the acronym Elul. May this month of Elul bring with it boundless and everlasting love for our family, our community and the Holy One, whose ultimate essence is love.

Commemorating Tisha B'av at Kehilat Nitzan

Sammy Pinkus

It is interesting how being in the presence of others and sharing our emotions brings one hope and strength. This is how I felt when members of many other Melbourne Jewish communities joined us at Kehilat Nitzan to commemorate Tisha B'Av and to remember the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people over the years.

After a sombre, deliberately unmelodic Ma'ariv service led by Rabbi Yonatan, most of the lights were turned off; we lit small candles and sat on the floor. The mood was certainly set. The beautiful haunting melody of *Eicha* was heard as each chapter was sung by different members of all the communities – although by now we were really all one community. Interspersed between each chapter, Merav Sadoff read poetry and community leaders gave insights into the messages of the day.

Afterwards, when we turned on the lights, stood up and extracted ourselves from the rich emotions of *Eicha*, Merav conducted a creative writing session to help us consolidate our feelings. I am not normally a 'creative writing person' but, unexpectedly, it made me feel the emotion of Tisha B'Av more strongly than before. I have always been cognisant of limiting my happiness on Tisha B'Av, but after our time with Merav, I found more depth and hope in my feelings.



Another strong emotion I felt was a sense of connection with those that came before me. Generations of Jews have sat on the floor and mourned the destruction of Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av. To be another link in that chain of tradition gave me a sense of awe, and helped me focus on my current time and place.

In the 1800s, even Napoleon was impressed. Tradition has it that, in Paris, he saw Jews sitting on the ground commemorating Tisha B'Av, and supposedly said, 'If the Jews still mourn the destruction of Jerusalem after so many years, then they will surely merit to see its rebuilding.' And a little over a century after his death, Jews once

again rejoiced in a unified and rebuilt Jerusalem.

For those who have never experienced this part of our tradition, I commend sitting on the floor for Tisha B'Av. There is a beautiful sense of community and support. Tradition has it that the Temple was destroyed due to *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred). But if we continue to share our feelings, reach out to others with a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, and give generously of our time and love (*ahavat chinam* – baseless love), then surely the lessons of Tisha B'Av will be learned. And all of us will merit joyous times ahead!



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An update on KN's education programs

Rhona Rosenberg

Since the recent arrival of Rabbi Sadoff, his wife Merav, and their two young daughters, our education programs at Kehilat Nitzan have been re-energised.

The Rabbi introduced 'Hot Cholent, Spicy Torah' held every second Shabbat morning after the service. This program has attracted many more shule goers to stay on to enjoy the delicious vegetarian gluten-free cholent, and remain to attend the shiur.

Another initiative of Rabbi Sadoff is his outreach discussion sessions titled 'Sichot B'Salon' – ('conversations in the lounge room'). Instead of inviting the community to the shule, these sessions are held in the private homes of Kehilat Nitzan members, who invite a small group of friends, both members and non-members, for a discussion about Jewish issues in a more intimate and casual setting. The topics are chosen ahead of time by the participants. To date, two very successful events have been held: the first on the subject of 'Gender, Judaism and Kabbalah' and the second on 'The Essence of Judaism'.

The Zehoo children's program, held on Sunday mornings during school terms for children in lower primary school, is in its very successful second year. Marcie Civins offers an imaginative and varied program, including a tzedakh project each term. (You can read more about the Zehoo program in this newsletter.)

The B'nei Mitzvah program has been very ably led by Zvi Civins for the last few years. Zvi has now handed over the program to Rabbi Sadoff. Kehilat Nitzan can look forward to many bar/bat mitzvah smachot in the coming months.

The adult program 'Pondering the Parsha' is held every Thursday night, and Stacey Ford organises sessions on 'Contemporary Jewish Issues' every four to six weeks.



The Education Committee of Kehilat Nitzan now includes representatives from every age group. We are considering establishing a post-Zehoo group next year as the first 'Zehoovians' graduate. This after-school program will also be a pre-b'nei mitzvah class. We are also planning a post-b'nei mitzvah group in which the young people themselves will lead the group and decide on their program of activities and events.

The Education Committee has been working hard to develop great ideas for the future. After the High Holidays, we will begin planning programs for next year. If you would like further information about KN's education programs, please contact Rhona Rosenberg at Kehilat Nitzan, phone (03) 9500 0906.

Providing engaging Jewish learning opportunities

Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff

God's counsel endures forever, His heart's intentions are for all generations

עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּמְנוֹחַ
מִחֻשְׁבוֹת לְבוֹ לְדוֹר וָדוֹר

Many of us cherish beautiful memories of our Jewish upbringing and education, whether at home or in synagogue and school. How do we today, within the framework of our Kehilat Nitzan community, educate our children and engage them in our ancient and sacred tradition? This is the million-dollar question being asked everywhere.

We at Kehilat Nitzan are doing our utmost to provide engaging and exciting Jewish learning opportunities for our youth. We have, for example, our very successful Zehoo program run by Marcie Civins, and our tremendous B'nai Mitzvah program run by our President, Zvi Civins, and myself. We share an ultimate aspiration for youth engagement: *continuity of engagement in the synagogue from the*

age of zero all the way through to the end of high school. We are now seeking to implement additional programming in order to achieve this essential goal.

So, what are we doing? Starting at zero! One program that initiates a process of engagement from the youngest ages is called Kruv Nitzanim (brussel sprouts or little cabbages). This program will be held every Friday morning (beginning after the High Holidays) and is meant for babies and toddlers aged 0-4 and their parents and grandparents. It will be run by my wife, Merav, and myself, and includes Hebrew story time, Aleph-Bet Yoga, arts and crafts, and songs to welcome the Shabbat. This program is based on the premise that a connection to Judaism and Jewish education, as well as to the Hebrew language, starts at Kehilat Nitzan at age zero. Let us begin this year with a renewed commitment to engaging, educating and embracing our young people, while doing our duty to pass this beautiful sacred tradition from generation to generation. *M'dor l'dor.*

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Lior, Melanie Attar and family

Jeff Klein and Nicole Potasz and family

David and Simone Krug and family

Alison Marcus

John Rosenbloom and Kathryn Earp

Jeremy and Adele Stowe-Lindner and family

Aaron Walton and Deb Friedman and family

Charlotte Willis and family

MAZAL TOV ON YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Toby Woolfe Lewin
Elinor Gertrude Auster
Rose Stein
Lily Stein
Joel Green
Bella Rubenstein
Jake Joseph
Ruby Burstyner

The following members wish their relatives, friends and the community a happy, healthy new year and well over the fast

Sadoff
Rabbi Yonatan and Merav and family

Civins
Zvi and Marian and family

Corran
Trevor

Ellison
Mark and Odile

Faine-Shalit family

Feiglin
Judy and family

Feldman
Fran and family

Feldman
Vivian and Pam and family

Furstenberg
John and Dalia and family

Goldberg
Esther, Henry and Jeremy

Goldberg
Gabby and Eloise

Korman
Debra, Braham and family

Landau
Georgie, Jim, Anna, Ben, Kara, James and Tahlia

Lynn-Goldberg
Michelle, Jeff, Noah and Nathan

Rosenberg
Bev and John and family

Rosenberg
Rhona
and Shaw Rohan,
Rebecca, Nathan and Asher

Wolkenberg
Tom and Linda Wyse



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