

## From the Rabbi Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff

My family and I were honoured to be a part of the celebratory event at Kehilat Nitzan, held on the occasion of its milestone 20th anniversary and my induction as rabbi of the congregation.

I congratulate this pioneering community for having the vision and courage to establish and sustain Melbourne's only Masorti/Conservative congregation for the past two decades. We came all the way from Israel to join this sacred community and have been received with open arms. We hope and pray that our community will go from strength to strength.

In the weeks prior to my induction, we read a series of four Torah portions addressing the construction of the Mishkan, the tabernacle, in the desert. A remarkable element of the Mishkan is the Ark of the Covenant, surmounted by the Cherubim, winged humanlike creatures, who spread their wings toward heaven. The midrash tells us that although they normally faced each other (וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָיו), at times of dissent or strife they would turn away from one another. This allegory illustrates the ultimate purpose of the sanctuary, the sacred space.

According to the Zohar's interpretation of Parashat Terumah, the Mishkan was



intended to serve as a sanctuary of love ("היכל אהבה"). This interpretation conceives of the Mishkan as a representation of the divine as the essence of love. Indeed, the Zohar tells us that the four letters of the word אהבה crown and support the Kadosh Baruch Hu.

Since meeting my bashert six years ago under the AHAVA sculpture in the Israel Museum's sculpture garden in Jerusalem, my life has changed dramatically. The love between myself and my spouse Merav, and of our two beautiful daughters Tiferet and Maayan, is something I never imagined possible. We have worked to extend this love to our congregation and community. This experience of love has shaped my vision for a kehillah based on connection and loving relationships

with God and with human beings. This approach is reflected in our observance of mitzvot and sees these acts as a manifestation of covenantal love (ברית) rather than as an expression of the fear of God's coercive power and retribution.

We should always strive for our sanctuary, our synagogue Kehilat Nitzan, to be a Temple of Love. One of the most basic human needs is to love and to be loved by the divine above and the divine in others. Love is about connection and connection is about 'seeing people', as embodied by the Cherubim who faced one another. In order to actualise this love, we must remove the obstacles that stand in our way: pettiness, rivalry, jealousy, judgment.

My vision for our Masorti kehillah seeks to maintain our focus on connection – both with God and with those created in God's image (בצלם אלהים) – while promoting an egalitarian, pluralistic, inclusive traditional practice and commitment to halakha.

May we be blessed with the ability to see the divine in others and to find something to love in each and every individual, so that together we can form a strong and united community, shining that love upon the entire world. Chag Pesach Kasher v' Sameach; a happy and kosher Passover to all!

# President's remarks at Rabbi Sadoff's induction



I feel very privileged to stand here in front of so many members, friends, and special guests who have come to Kehilat Nitzan to witness the induction of Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff as the rabbi of our kehilah. I welcome you all and thank you for coming.

Over the last two days we have been celebrating the induction of Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff and the 20th anniversary of the very first Masorti/Conservative service held in Melbourne. Twenty years on, Kehilat Nitzan is still the only Masorti shul in Melbourne, spiritual home to about 250 families.

We were a shul without a rabbi for two years, but under the guidance of our gabbai Sammy Pinkus, and with an enthusiastic team of volunteers, Kehilat Nitzan held services every Shabbat and Yom tov, boys and girls celebrated their bar and bat mitzvahs, Purim and Chanukah parties were enjoyable, and the religious cycle of the kehilah continued. We became used to not having a spiritual leader, and it was only after Rabbi Yonatan had been here for a short while that we realised just how much we had been missing. There is a palpable feeling of renewal in the shul since we welcomed Rabbi Yonatan, his *ezer kenegdo* Merav, and their two gorgeous daughters Tiferet and Maayan.

Most of the renewal is attributable

to Rabbi Yonatan. For instance, the kitchen looks completely different from that of even four months ago. With considerable help from Alison Marcus and her team of helpers, the kitchen was cleaned up, rabbi took the decision to make it dairy only, and he kashered the kitchen. This may seem a trifling issue, but it is all part of the bigger plan for the future of our kehilah. Hospitality is at the core of Jewish life and the refurbished kitchen will play a big part in offering hospitality to our members and hopefully in attracting new members.

Rabbi Sadoff was given the brief to help grow the Masorti movement in Melbourne in general and Kehilat Nitzan in particular. He firmly believes in religious inclusiveness and, to that end, he has extended the hand of friendship and collegiality to rabbis and lay people in the wider Melbourne Jewish community. In the near future, we hope that Kehilat Nitzan will host events where Progressive, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews can share in Jewish learning together.

Of course a rabbi's main task is to be the spiritual leader of their congregation. If you have not attended a Shabbat morning service for a while, you will notice quite a few new practices which Rabbi Yonatan has initiated. These range from explanations of sections of the service to blessing the children at the end, just before Adon Olam. The Rabbi is available to settle questions of halacha as he is very learned in this area, and he is now sanctioned by the State of Victoria to solemnise weddings.

I believe that the heart of any congregation is its children. It is always amazing to me that at the end of Neilah on Yom Kippur, a multitude of children seems to materialise from nowhere as they come in procession with their candles. Where are they for the rest of the year? We are now focusing on attracting some of those children

into the shul with new, innovative educational programs. Rabbi Yonatan, together with Merav, runs a Friday morning program called K'ruv Nitzanim for children from birth to the age of four. Miriam Faine offers Peulot, a Shabbat children's program every first and third Shabbat of the month. Marcie Civins engages primary-age children up to Year Four every Sunday morning in a program she devised called Zehoo. Keshet, a new program that commenced this year, is aimed at children too old for Zehoo but too young for the b'nei mitzvah program. This was the initiative of Zvi Civins and he and Rabbi Yonatan team teach both the Keshet and b'nei mitzvah children every Wednesday afternoon.

While our main focus is on children, we have certainly not forgotten our older members, and in the near future we will be organising events for seniors to include guest speakers and cultural activities.

Two groups who have not received a lot of attention are the post-b'nei mitzvah youth and young single adults. In the past Kehilat Nitzan had shlichim from Israel and we would love for that to happen again. Another alternative would be to have a local young person to be a youth leader. Our main impediment to the realisation of this objective is a lack of funds, but we hope to be able to address this in the future.

Nothing would happen at Kehilat Nitzan without our hardworking volunteers. They include the team led by John Rosenberg who carried out the search for a Rabbi, the team led by Zvi Civins and Mark Sokolski who arranged the smooth transition for Rabbi Sadoff and his family into Melbourne, the team led by Jo Silver who created the memento booklet for the rabbi's induction and the 20th anniversary of Kehilat Nitzan, and the team led by Alison Marcus who arranged the catering for the weekend of celebratory events. Finally, I am privileged to lead a team, the Kehilat Nitzan Board, which is the most harmonious, hardworking, supportive group of chaverim I have ever worked with. I thank you all.

# Introducing new Kehilat Nitzan Board members



## **Alison Marcus**

I returned to Melbourne from Adelaide just a year ago after 28 years away. I decided to make Melbourne my home again as all three of my children are ensconced here. Since my arrival I have been living a somewhat itinerant life as a slightly upmarket 'bag lady' – a long story about the perils of buying off-the-plan!

I was very involved in the Adelaide Jewish community and have come from a background of shul self-sufficiency. With this mindset, it was a small step for me to volunteer to join the Kehilat Nitzan cholent roster, and from there my involvement with hospitality at Kehilat Nitzan continued to grow. I have enjoyed my time in the Kehilat Nitzan kitchen and meeting people on the Kiddush roster.

In the last few months I have been blessed with the arrival of two new grandsons, and I am looking forward to many visits to Caulfield Park with them. Some of my time is still taken up with work, so with work, my grandchildren, and my involvement in Kehilat Nitzan, my life is quite full.



## **Jo Silver**

I have been with Kehilat Nitzan since my boys were little and happily played beneath the chairs at B'nei Brith House where the shul was then holding services.

I currently manage corporate planning and performance for Maribyrnong City Council. I studied prosthetics and orthotics and have held leadership roles in pharmaceuticals, outdoor education, advocacy, and community development. I am passionate and energetic and love building organisations and influencing and advocating for social justice and equity.

As a project manager for the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV), I developed programs in pastoral care, GLBTI support, child protection, and member services. I was proud to bring together rabbis from across the Adass, Orthodox, Conservative, and Liberal spectrum, especially in child protection training that I rolled out to members.

Through my work with the JCCV, I held board positions with the Jewish Christian Muslim Association, Online Hate Prevention Institute, Spiritual Care Victoria, and the Marian and Kurt Lippmann Foundation.

I am married to Steve Silver, have two lovely boys – James, 16, and Aidan, 15 – and two dogs. My favourite things? Walking at the beach and camping.

# Passover: cleaning out hametz

## **Rabbi Shmuel (Richie) Lewis**

The prohibition of *hametz* is unique – even to own a small amount is to transgress, and it is forbidden to all Jews to have any benefit from *hametz* that was Jewish-owned during Pesach. The Torah itself annuls all Jewish ownership of *hametz* on Pesach: the only halachic meaning of a Jew keeping it in his possession is that he thereby transgresses the prohibition of not retaining it. This has given rise to many symbolic interpretations – *hametz* is the *yetzer hara*, for instance, which we must eliminate entirely to become true servants of G-d.

A side benefit of the requirements of cleaning out all one's *hametz* is that one will inspect everything one owns. The care we take to maintain our possessions can become a kind of bondage, they may become ends for us rather than means. As Hillel says in Avot 2:7: 'One who increases possessions increases worry.' Checking all the objects one owns to see if any *hametz* found its way into them can reset our relationship to them, if needed.

One way to see whether one is in bondage to one's possessions is to examine one's willingness to give of them. 'True generosity,' Descartes wrote, 'consists in knowing that nothing truly belongs to me but the freedom to dispose of it and a constant resolution to use that freedom well.' This suggests that we relate to our material possessions as to our soul – as a trust to be looked after and to be used appropriately, not as an object of absolute ownership to do with as we please. As we check our possessions, one by one, let's look to see what kind of *yetzer* may have gotten into our relationship with them. As one of my favourite moral philosopher's wrote: 'We can give only what we possess and only on condition of not being possessed by what we own.'

*This article was first published on the website of the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem,*  
<https://www.conservativeyeshiva.org>.

# Rabbi Mauricio Balter: helping communities find their Jewish 'home'

Ruth Mushin



When Masorti Olami and Merkaz Olami (its Zionist arm) were searching for a new executive director, Rabbi Mauricio Balter had no intention of applying. He had been a congregational rabbi for 34 years and loved this role. Born in Uruguay, he had served congregations in Argentina and Israel, most recently at Kehilat Eshel Avraham in Be'er Sheva. However, on Erev Rosh Hashanah 2016, as he was preparing for the High Holidays, he received a call from a colleague who suggested that he may be the right person for the position. At first, Rabbi Balter declined on the grounds that he was not American – unlike the previous two occupants of the position – but his colleague argued that this was precisely why he could bring something different to the role. So, with his wife's agreement, he decided to apply. After an exhaustive interview process involving 42 candidates, Rabbi Balter was offered the position.

Rabbi Balter accepted the position because he believes in the importance of the role of Masorti Olami in developing a strong worldwide Masorti movement. He is pluralistic in his outlook and stresses that Masorti is not the only way, but he says, 'We are in a world where the extremes are becoming stronger and stronger, and the Masorti movement brings a different perception – that you can be a traditionalist and a religious person

in a world of science and technology. This is a good balance.'

Before taking up his role, Rabbi Balter thought he knew about Judaism around the world, but his experience of the past 18 months has taught him that there is still much to learn. One of his goals is to visit as many communities as possible because he believes that only by meeting people face-to-face can you really learn about them and make better decisions about their communities. He cited the Masorti community in Melbourne as an example. Before visiting recently for the community's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the induction of Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff, he had heard about Kehilat Nitzan from Masorti Olami Board member John Furstenberg. However, by spending time with the community he gained a deeper understanding and experienced the energy of the minyan.

Two very different communities are currently the focus of the work of Masorti Olami: Ukraine and Uganda. Ukraine is the first community in Europe to which Masorti Olami, in partnership with the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, sent a rabbi ten years ago. Ten years later, there are three major Masorti communities – in Kiev, Odessa and Kharkov – and three smaller *chavurot*. The Chabad and Reform movements also have a presence in Ukraine, but there is no competition between the various streams of Judaism.

The Abayudaya community in Uganda, comprising between 1,500 and 2,000 Jews, will soon be celebrating 100 years of Judaism. Its origins are fascinating, beginning with a priest wanting to convert the tribe to Christianity. However, when the tribal leader studied the Christian texts, he concluded that he was not interested in the 'copy' but wanted to investigate the 'original'. As a result, he and his community began to study and practise Judaism. Until the 1990s, it was a very religious and highly observant community but its members had never formally converted to Judaism. When they discovered this requirement, they approached a Masorti rabbi in Los Angeles and a team of five rabbis came to convert the whole tribe. Gershom Sizomu, a young community member, then returned with the rabbis to the rabbinical seminary in Los Angeles. Rabbi Sizomu is now the congregational rabbi of the Abayudaya community, which has a large school and he leads a full Masorti Jewish life.

Both the communities of Ukraine and Uganda are poor, not only from a Jewish perspective, but economically as well, and it is a priority of Masorti Olami to support them. In addition, new Masorti communities are being established around the world, including in Spain, Argentina, and Poland.

Although Rabbi Balter sometimes misses the position of congregational rabbi and the involvement in the daily life of congregants, he now has the opportunity to bring his congregational experience to his current role helping hundreds of communities 'find their home in Judaism'. He says, 'I love people, I love the Jewish people and I love the Masorti movement, so I have the opportunity to help people to become involved in Judaism and to open another door for them.' Masorti Olami is in good hands!



# Induction of Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff

On Sunday 10 March, members of Kehilat Nitzan, together with rabbis and community leaders from Melbourne and interstate, came together to celebrate the induction of Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff and the 20th anniversary of the congregation. The festivities were introduced by president Rhona Rosenberg, compered by Board member Jo Silver and lead by Rabbi Mauricio Balter, executive director of Masorti Olmai and Mercaz Olami. Rabbi Sadoff was inducted by Rabbi Rafi Kaiserblueth of Emmanuel Synagogue in Sydney.



# Kehilat Nitzan celebrates 20 years

## John Rosenberg

Kehilat Nitzan held its first service on 13 March 1999 at the Kadimah Hall in Elsternwick. Since that time we have grown into a well established and highly successful Masorti Jewish community with our own synagogue building, a full-time rabbi and a membership of about 250 families.

In outlining some of the early history of the minyan, I must begin with a little of my history because, in many ways, the establishment of Kehilat Nitzan in Melbourne is an accident of my movements around Australia.

I was brought up in a largely secular family, but with strong Jewish roots. Following my bar mitzvah at Temple Beth Israel, I was very involved in the Progressive movement and later joined the Board of Leo Baeck Centre, a Reform congregation in Melbourne. After a move to Newcastle, I became President of Newcastle Hebrew Congregation, a long-established orthodox congregation.

As is the life of an academic, in 1991 we moved to Sydney where I attended services at the then Temple Emanuel. However, I was not comfortable with the organ, the choir and the use of English. Fortunately, Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, then the assistant rabbi, was about to start a Monday morning minyan based on the Conservative/Masorti movement. Although I knew nothing about Masorti, I attended the minyan and loved it, becoming part of the group which established a parallel Shabbat morning Masorti service at Temple Emanuel. This has grown and is now a major part of that synagogue. Rabbi Kamins is now the senior rabbi and I sincerely thank him for introducing me to Masorti Judaism. In many ways, he is responsible for the establishment of Kehilat Nitzan.

In 1997 we returned to Melbourne and I found myself with no shule to go to. My good friends Claire and Itzik Yossef,



who had been involved in the Sydney minyan, had also moved to Melbourne and their daughter, Emily, was due to have her bat mitzvah in May 1999. Around October 1998 we decided that we needed to start a Masorti minyan in Melbourne. A small article was published in the *Australian Jewish News* and 41 people attended a meeting.

After six months of planning, we held our first service on 13 March, 1999, Shabbat Vayakhel-Pekudei, using a Sefer Torah generously loaned by Temple Emanuel in Sydney. A number of people from Temple Emanuel attended that Shabbat service and helped to make it a memorable occasion.

Vayakhel-Pekudei is about the making of the Mishkan, where Moses re-iterates to the people the commandment to observe Shabbat and the people donate materials to build the Mishkan in such abundance that they are asked to stop. Little did we realise then that it was such an appropriate Shabbat on which to start a new shule.

Some of our initial committee wanted to name the shule 'Melbourne Conservative Synagogue', but Itzik and I were determined that it should have a modern Hebrew name representing something new and something that would grow. After much deliberation, Itzik came up with the idea of a 'nitzan' – the bud of a flower and the rest, as they say, is history!

In May 1999 Emily Yossef had her bat mitzvah, the first of our b'nei mitzvah,

and it was a most memorable occasion.

Those early days were not easy, as we had few people who could daven and we struggled on many occasions. Some who led services were quite uncomfortable in this role, but without their dedication and support the kehilah would not have survived.

The Pratt Foundation provided a grant which allowed us to bring Rabbi Ehud Bandel to Australia in 1999 to conduct our first Yom Tovim services. I believe that this was critical to our success and continuity and we thank the Foundation for its generosity.

In 2000 we became an incorporated association. Office bearers on our first Board were: President John Rosenberg, Vice President Marilyn Gross, Secretary Alan Collins and Treasurer Howard Arber. Board members were Naomi Alba, Peter Cebon, Jim Landau, Amir Morris, Michelle Greenwood and Itzik Yossef. Many of those people are still actively involved in Kehilat Nitzan.

The newsletter we published in the early days was compiled by my wife, Bev Rosenberg, and edited by the inimitable Alan Collins. My children folded and put the newsletters into envelopes and I thank them and Bev for all of their support over the years.

Alan Collins was a wonderful man who contributed so much to this minyan in so many ways. He developed the slogan we used on advertisements for many years that stated: 'At Kehilat Nitzan you don't

have to say good-bye at the door'. He is greatly missed, as is Kingsley Winikoff, who helped so much with the services. We still use the Torah reading sheets that Kingsley prepared.

We have three Sefer Torahs: the one on loan from Kehilat Emanuel in Sydney, the Kempler Torah donated by Jeffrey Kempler and family, and the Curtis Torah donated by Steve and Melody Curtis and family. These were extremely generous gifts and they are greatly appreciated.

Our most significant single gift was from Greg Shalit and Miriam Faine, whose donation of our building made possible something I had never imagined in my wildest dreams! It gave us a permanent home and we thank them for their generosity. We must also acknowledge the many members and friends who donated at a level far beyond our expectations to enable our wonderful building to be renovated.

Following a period during which we had an amazing array of visiting rabbis, we have been blessed with three wonderful and different rabbis – Rabbi Ehud Bandel, Rabbi Adam Stein, and our current rabbi, Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff. Each has provided exceptional leadership, support and service to Kehilat Nitzan, and all been supported by the wonderful staff in our office.

Finally, I must thank all the volunteers who have led services, served on the Board and committees, helped with catering and organising functions, and provided service and support in so many ways. Kehilat Nitzan would not have been such a successful community without you.

I firmly believe that Kehilat Nitzan offers a unique communal experience in Melbourne and I am confident that we will continue to grow and prosper in the future.



# Education programs for children of all ages



Kehilat Nitzan is committed to providing engaging and stimulating learning opportunities for all children, and in the past three years the educational opportunities for children have quadrupled at Kehilat Nitzan.

For many years we have had a very successful b'nei mitzvah program. This was first led by shlichim from the Masorti movement who were providing informal education at Bialik College. Kids met with the shlichim at their home after school and enjoyed learning a range of topics, regardless of which school, Jewish or not, they regularly attended. The program then turned to weekly informal sessions at the synagogue. Initially, Zvi Civins led these sessions, which also saw the wonderful assistance of Kehilat Nitzan post-b'nei students. The sessions are now led by Rabbi Yonatan Sadoff with Zvi's assistance.

Two years ago, Marcie Civins started Zehoo, a Sunday morning program for children from prep to Year Three. Marcie provides a rich mix of stories, games, crafts, and tzedakah projects for the kids.

Last year, Rabbi Sadoff and Merav began K'ruv Nitzanim on Friday mornings. This is for babies and toddlers, and is a wonderful way to experience welcoming Shabbat with song, challah and much more. And fortnightly on Shabbat, Miriam Faine offers Peulot, a program for children aged from two to eleven years old that includes stories, games, songs and tefilot.

We most recently began Keshet, an after-school program for children from Year Four to pre-b'nei mitzvah age. The

group meets with Zvi at the same time as the b'nei class. This enables Rabbi Sadoff and Zvi to combine the two groups for some of the time, to work with individual students, and for the students to learn together despite the difference in their ages.

But there is still much more to do! We plan to develop post b'nei mitzvah programs for teens to encourage participants to continue to develop their service and prayer skills so that they can take active roles in our services as our newest young Jewish adults. We also plan to provide social programs so that our youth can get together with other Jewish youth and make friends in the community.

Although there certainly is no lack of Jewish day schools and other educational programs for children in Jewish Melbourne, what makes our programs unique and so important is that we provide all of our programs in a Masorti context. The children do more than learn: they experience learning in their spiritual home, our synagogue. They develop a strong bond with the physical Masorti environment and when they come with their family for services and festivals they truly do 'feel at home'. They pray and celebrate together, experiencing and appreciating the way traditional Judaism is expressed in our modern context – the Masorti way. Also, for children in government schools, we are their sole source of Jewish education.

There is much still to do, but we can be proud of what has been achieved in a short time.

# Purim in pictures



## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Gene Melzack  
Brad Prezant and  
Marie Menard and family

## MAZAL TOV ON YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Jem Attar  
Guss David  
Evan Delanoy  
Zoitsa Diakoumis  
Max Klein  
Zohar Schwartzbord  
Elias Walton

## MAZAL TOV ON YOUR MARRIAGE

Susie Goldman and Peter Jarny  
Lauren Ross and Nathan Cohen



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