

# קול מבשר

## Kol MevaSer

A PUBLICATION OF THE KEMP MILL SYNAGOGUE



## Twenty-Five Years of KMS: A Tribute to Rabbi Bieler and Dr. Joan Bieler

by Mel Plotinsky

To the strains of Duke Ellington's classic *Take the A Train*, close to 400 members and friends of KMS found themselves transported, on the evening of March 15, to an alternate reality adorned with the Yankees' iconic pinstripes, something that looked a lot like the Empire State Building, a street-sign that claimed to be at the intersection of Broadway and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, and a hot-dog stand dispensing actual hot dogs and topped by a red-and-yellow umbrella that would have been more at home on the sidewalks of New York than in the spacious lobby of Beth Sholom Congregation on Seven Locks Road in Potomac.

That we were in Beth Sholom at all is a part of the story, because the occasion was the KMS Annual Banquet in honor of our congregation's Silver Anniversary, and of the crucial contributions to our formation and growth of Rabbi Bieler and Dr. Joan Bieler. The Banquet had originally been planned for KMS's newly-renovated social hall, but reservations had hardly been opened before they had to be closed because of over-subscription—a measure, it can hardly be doubted, of our respect and affection for the Rabbi and Joanie. When it became clear that many more people earnestly desired to join in paying tribute to them, the Banquet Committee moved swiftly to secure the larger space at our sister congregation in Potomac. And to the casual eye, even that larger space seemed to be strained by the crowd that eventually filled it.

Credit for a bold solution to the space problem, and for much, much more, goes to the members of the Banquet Committee—Deborah Chasan-Sloan, Alana Isenberg, Michelle



and Jonathan Schneck, and Hope Taragin—and the more than fifty KMS members whose hard work and meticulous preparation helped make the complex program run smoothly. The beautiful and very thick banquet journal, designed by Lori Tolchin and available online at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/images.shulcloud.com/376/uploads/Banquet\\_2015/](https://s3.amazonaws.com/images.shulcloud.com/376/uploads/Banquet_2015/kms_journal15vol.pdf)

[kms\\_journal15vol.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/images.shulcloud.com/376/uploads/Banquet_2015/kms_journal15vol.pdf), contained the customary commercial ads and some pages dedicated to the history of KMS, but owed most of its bulk to page after page of glowing tribute to the evening's honorees.

In addition to the Rabbi and Joanie, the evening featured our three youth honorees—Adina Israel, Natan Siegel, and Eliana Tuchman. Their accomplishments—as documented in the banquet journal and expanded upon by Rabbi Daniel Moses, who made the presen-

tation of the youth awards—and the importance we place upon recognizing them, confirm that we have practiced and are continuing to practice one of the founding principles of our congregation, as it was enunciated in the

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FROM THE RABBI

## Hallel:

# Part of the Haggada or a Theological Formality?

by R. Yaakov Bieler, Spring 5775



The manner in which Jews today fulfill the Mitzva of recounting the Exodus from Egypt on the night of Pesach,<sup>1</sup> is by reciting, discussing and explaining the contents of the Haggada. However, one quickly recognizes that the contents of the Haggada are not entirely devoted to the story of the Exodus. It would appear that everything that comes after the summary statement beginning with “Lefichach Anachnu Chayavim LeHodot, LeHallel, LeShabeach, LeFa’er...” (Therefore we are obligated to give thanks, to praise, to extoll, to enhance...) constitutes material different in kind from what has preceded.

An analogy could be drawn from the daily Silent Devotion, where the thirteen middle blessings that are called “Bakasha” (request) are “bookended” by three opening blessings of “Shevach” (praise) and three concluding blessings of “Hoda’a” (thanksgiving). The essence of the prayer appears to be the many requests that the pray-er directs to Hashem; words of praise and thanksgiving are altogether appropriate, but not necessarily considered the focal point of and consequently essential for the Amida.<sup>2</sup>

So how should we consider the parts of the Haggada that immediately follow the paragraph beginning “Lefichach,” i.e., Hallel, blessings over various ritual foods, Grace after meals, praises and songs? Should we assume that the literal Mitzva of “Sipur Yitziat Mitzrayim” is completed not even halfway through the evening’s recitations, or is there another lens through which we should view the concluding sections of the Haggada?

According to R. Moshe Shternbach,<sup>3</sup> RaMBaM in *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Mitzva #157 suggests a counterintuitive and significant approach to this question:

The 157<sup>th</sup> Mitzva is that we are Commanded to recount the Exodus from Egypt on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, at the beginning of the night, in accordance with the fluency of the one doing the telling. And however much one adds to the telling and expands the topics by embellishing a) that which HaShem Did on our behalves, b) what the Egyptians did to us in terms of the burdens and the violence, c) how HaShem Avenged us by Punishing them, and d) by *thanking Him, Blessed Be He, for all of*

*the Compassion that He Extended to us*, will be so much the better...<sup>4</sup>

An earlier source<sup>5</sup> also suggesting that of the later portions of the Haggada, at least formal Hallel is part of the Mitzva of retelling the Exodus, is RaShI’s commentary on Pesachim 36a, d.h. SheOnin. The Talmud is discussing the implications of the descriptive biblical terminology for Matza (Devarim 16:3), “Lechem Oni”<sup>6</sup>

R. Akiva? — “The fact that we read it ‘Oni’ [is explained] in accordance with Shmuel’s [dictum]. For Shmuel said: ‘Bread of ‘Oni’ [means] bread over which many words are recited [‘Onin’].”

RaShI:

That we recite over it [the Lechem Oni] the complete Hallel, and recite over it the Haggada.

Not only does RaShI include Hallel among the things that are to be recited over the Matza, but he even mentions Hallel *before* the Haggada of retelling the Exodus itself!

One aspect of Mitzva observance raised by both RaShI and RaMBaM in their approaches to Hallel on the Seder night, is that with regard to Commandments that focus on aspects of our Jewish past,<sup>7</sup> we must distinguish between factual history and its meaning and interpretation. The Mitzva to recount the events surrounding our leaving Egypt is apparently not an end in itself, but rather intended to ultimately engender powerful feelings and expressions of gratitude towards HaShem. Especially according to RaMBaM, who uses the language of “Commandment/obligation,” such feelings are not optional. While such an approach raises the ubiquitous question regarding how can a person be Commanded to *feel* something,<sup>8,9</sup> the presence or absence of such a sensibility nevertheless serves minimally as a potent litmus test of the extent to which we

*continued on page 14*

### Further Reading

Some of Rabbi Bieler's Divrei Torah, along with podcasts of some of his Shiurim, are available at the synagogue website. To access this material, go to [www.kmsynagogue.org](http://www.kmsynagogue.org) and move your cursor to “Rabbi” on the left-hand side of the home page.

Mission Statement we adopted in 1990. Reprinted in the banquet journal and in the sidebar on the facing page, the Mission Statement in its entirety is dramatic testimony to how forcefully Rabbi Bieler has kept us faithful to the goals we set for ourselves twenty-five years ago.

Although many of those who attended the banquet testified that their prevailing feeling was sadness at our impending loss of Rabbi Bieler to retirement, the evening's very extensive program—ably presided over by Jonathan Schneck, who kept things moving naturally and without any sense that we were being rushed—aimed for lightheartedness, and even at times for comedy. Plainly in the latter category was a video based on the Rabbi's custom of rising at the conclusion of a bar or bat Mitzvah's D'var Torah in order, as he puts it, to "add a few words." In the video we see and hear the best-known utterances of such great figures as Lou Gehrig, Neil Armstrong, John F. Kennedy, and David Ben Gurion. To each of their speeches the Rabbi, played by himself, then "adds a few words."

In a more sober vein, the three Bieler children who live in the New York area (and who had to drive back to that area after the banquet) shared their memories of growing up in a rabbinic household. Their dominant impression appeared to be a mixture of present pride, and a recollection of the deprivations that are part of living in a home in which, as they said, "the shul came first," and the whole family was expected to take satisfaction from the enormous contributions their efforts and sacrifices were making to the community. This loving and revealing presentation was followed by a video tribute from Avi, the youngest of the Bieler children, who lives in Israel.

A still more sober note was struck by a video in which the Rabbi and Joanie told the story of their move from New York to Kemp Mill (they had trouble sleeping at first because there was too little noise) for purposes that had nothing to do with a synagogue that at that time did not exist. The process that moved him, partly against his will, from his career as an educator to a second career as a congregational rabbi, was described by Rabbi Bieler, and also from another perspective by Jackie Rozmaryn, the first president of KMS.

Our current president, Benny Berkowitz, began the evening by announcing a project, to be led by Rebekah Rasooly, that

will be particularly dear to Rabbi Bieler's heart. The daring plan is for our congregation to read the entire Tanach as a community, with each of us taking as few or as many psukim as we're comfortable with, and recording our comments on the passages we've read. The comments will be bound into a book to be presented to the Rabbi at a Siyum on Shavuot. The signup sheet, available at the shul's website, contains clickable references to Rabbi Bieler's own commentaries on each of the psukim.

It was, however, the D'var Torah, delivered by Rabbi Ira Kosowsky, a member of KMS and a popular teacher at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, that came closest to expressing our debt to Rabbi Bieler, and how much we will miss him. Addressing the Rabbi directly, Rabbi Kosowsky declared, "You have guided us through the zenith of our life cycles and comforted us at the absolute nadir of our lows. You have quietly made sure that no one feels abandoned in times of need, maintaining regular communication after people have suffered loss, remaining a guiding light in terrible darkness." Of the Rabbi's influence on the younger members of the community, he said, "You studied with each of our **בני מצוה** and used humor, depth and breadth, demonstrating quite clearly that your inner teacher has never retired."

Speaking of the Rabbi's influence on all our lives, Rabbi Kosowsky continued, "We have pushed ourselves more in learning, in expression, in method and methodology, in practice and in leadership, because we strive to live up to the example you set for us." And he concluded, "You have shown us in learning, teaching, observance and **חסד**, modesty and leadership the true meaning of **וַעֲשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטוֹב בְּעֵינֵי ה'** [the words emblazoned on our Aron Kodesh]: 'and you shall do right and good in the eyes of the Lord.' You have been and will always be our teacher, our friend, our confidant—our *Rabbi*."

Among the countless tributes in the banquet journal there was one that occurred so frequently as to become the journal's theme, and that was the wish that the Rabbi and Joanie may continue to go "m'chayil l'chayil," from strength to strength. As the program ended and we walked out into the bracing air of a mid-March evening, we must all have hoped that KMS too would go from strength to strength. But we were aware that one source of our strength would soon be gone from us.

And that he is irreplaceable.





All our photos of the Annual Banquet are by Marc Engelhart, and are printed here by his permission.



The Bieler Family



Natan Siegel, Adina Israel, and Eliana Tuchman, the youth honorees

## Original KMS Mission Statement 1990

The Kemp Mill Synagogue aspires to contribute to the development of a close-knit, vibrant, socially and politically aware Orthodox Jewish community that will be exemplary in every way possible.

Recognizing that the needs of individual members of any congregation are varied and often unique, it is the objective of the congregation to provide numerous activities that will not only address diverse concerns, but will do so in an inspiring, challenging, meaningful and sophisticated manner.

At the same time, the Synagogue hopes to forge a sense of shared goals among its congregants, including:

- 1) Engaging in serious and heart-felt prayer,
- 2) Making regular and thoughtful Torah study a vital part of the religious experience of both men and women,
- 3) Aspiring to living totally Halachic and traditional Jewish lives as we look to gain from the positive aspects of as well as contribute to society at large,
- 4) Fostering means by which our children can come to view the Synagogue as a second home and a place in which they enjoy spending time,
- 5) Encouraging the sort of communal warmth that will openly embrace all members of the Jewish community whenever they are in our midst, be they relatives, visitors, newcomers, and the like,
- 6) Desiring to be informed of and actively involved in confronting the challenges facing the local as well as the general worldwide Jewish community,
- 7) Openly demonstrating concern for public affairs in both the Jewish and general world arenas.

The fulfillment and realization of these goals will result from the willingness of as many individuals as possible to contribute of their time, expertise, and cooperation in the congregation's activities. The Synagogue can provide numerous avenues for individual fulfillment and religious development for as many individuals as possible. It also will allow for our membership to truly be "involved", i.e., to actively and significantly contribute to the Synagogue's programming, direction and evolution.



The Youth Choir





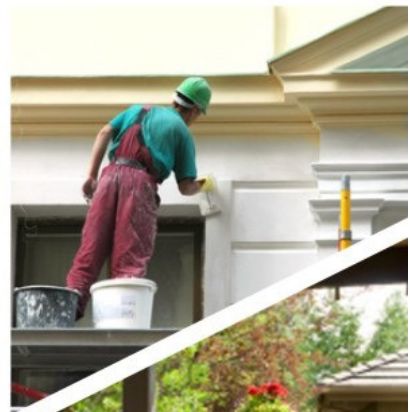
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Community Celebration

by Benny Berkowitz



**T**he Spring is an exciting time of renewal as we look forward to the upcoming year and the warmer days of summer. Although the secular calendar changes in the middle of the winter, it is only in the springtime that we start feeling the beginning of a new yearly cycle with the warmer days and flowers blooming.

The Jewish calendar calls Nissan, the month within which we celebrate the holiday of Passover, the first month of the year. The months of the year are not referred to by name, but rather by number in the Torah. Passover occurs in the first month of the year, reflecting the position of the holiday at the beginning of the monthly cycle for the year.

The Jews spent many years in Egypt, developing as a nation, people and community. As we enter the spring each year, we celebrate the transition the Jews made as they prepared for and left Egypt to enter the next phase of their development. Before embarking on their journey, the Jews celebrated as a community. The commandment to eat the Passover sacrifice was given to the Jews.

This commandment was unique in that because of the large amount of food in each animal that was required to be eaten, large groups of Jews needed to come together to celebrate. A single individual or small group would not be enough to eat the Passover offering, so larger groups of families and friends came together on the first Passover to celebrate. The celebrations were a time of giving thanks to God as they approached the redemption from Egypt.

Even in future generations, when the Jews came to Jerusalem

for Passover, it was necessary to eat the Passover seder in a large group. As we know, the eating of the Passover sacrifice served as the final course or dessert of the meal. Other portions served as the main course for the evening. Consequently, the seder meals required many people to completely eat from the Passover offering as the offering only served as the final item eaten in the large celebration. The recitation of Hallel still accompanies the seder meals as we thank God for all we have.

As a community, we have been fortunate to grow over the past quarter of a century and we are close to embarking on a new journey together. We have grown from a small group

to the large and vibrant community that we have today. Similarly, the Jews traveled down to Egypt as the house of Yaakov, but grew from this small group into a strong nation. Before leaving Egypt, the Jews gathered to celebrate at the Passover seder.

Just like the Jews in Egypt, it is appropriate for us to spend time celebrating as a community at this time. We are fortunate to have had Rabbi Yaakov and Joanie Bieler with us for the first 25 years of KMS. Their leadership has helped us maintain and grow the community. KMS, our

“house of Yaakov,” is a strong and vibrant

community because of the sacrifice that Rabbi Yaakov and Joanie Bieler have made. Together we celebrate them at our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, giving thanks for all they have done on our community’s behalf. It is fitting that we celebrate and thank them in a large gathering similar to the feast that occurred in Egypt at this time of the year.

Mazel tov to the Bielers on their recent family simchas, and we look forward to continuing to hear about the growth of their family in the future.



At the Annual Banquet

**The current issue of *Kol MevaSer* is always available for reading or downloading at [www.kmsynagogue.org](http://www.kmsynagogue.org). Click on "Kol MevaSer" on the left side of the home page.**

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# Saying Kaddish

by Laura Margulies

Although it seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon in the Orthodox community for women to say Kaddish in shul for a deceased relative, women have been saying it for at least the past 70 years. Before my father, David Jacobs, z"l, died this past May, my uncle, a former pulpit rabbi, told me that when he was a young rabbi, almost 70 years ago, a member of his shul passed away leaving two daughters. The daughters asked him if they could say Kaddish for their father. My uncle asked his rabbi, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, if this was permissible and was told that they could indeed say Kaddish with a minyan.

Because so much of my father's life revolved around davening, I decided the best way to honor his memory was by going to minyan every morning, afternoon and evening and saying Kaddish for him. Even though I am currently saying Kaddish with a minyan, I must join a man saying it, as it is impermissible for me to say it alone. The men have been very considerate, and wherever I have gone to daven, be it at KMS, at the Ring House in Rockville, at a shul in Boca Raton, in

New Jersey, or elsewhere, someone in the men's section will notice my presence and say Kaddish, even if he has no chiyuv, so that I can join him.

When I first started saying Kaddish, I found it difficult to say the words out loud as my sadness was so overwhelming that I could barely say the words above a whisper. Tears would stream down my face with every *Yisgadal Viyiskadash*. I would say the words, but in reality I could not believe it was my voice saying this prayer. Being unfamiliar with Aramaic, I found the words difficult to pronounce and I needed to concentrate to read each word correctly. Now, after many months, I can say the prayer by heart and out loud, but the sadness has not dissipated.

Attending minyan every day can be challenging. Once Daylight Saving Time ended, so I could no longer get to KMS for mincha, I needed to find a mincha minyan closer to my office. At [www.godaven.com](http://www.godaven.com), you can type in the zip code of your position and find the closest minyan. I found a mincha minyan near my office at the Ring House, and they welcomed

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## Providing Warmth and Support for At-Risk Children in Akko

by Naftali Reznikovich

During the Yamim Noraim, KMS members generously gave tzedakah to support Garin Ometz Akko—a modern Orthodox community in the northern city of Akko, whose members seek to strengthen the city through their chesed, community-building, education programs, and Torah activities. In each issue of Kol MevaSer this year, we are highlighting a different aspect of the Garin's work in Akko, all of which are being supported, in part, by our collective tzedakah. The KMS Israel Committee hopes that every KMS member will feel connected to and proud of the Garin's accomplishments. Please contact Ina Lerman to learn more about opportunities to volunteer in Akko during your next trip to Israel. In this issue, we are highlighting one of the services for at-risk children.



whose most important natural resource is its people, this achievement gap will create cycles of poverty and affect the future quality of life of all citizens. The members of Garin Ometz Akko know the importance of addressing this gap in

a holistic way: working with the education and welfare departments in Akko, with the parents, and with other community organizations, the Garin seeks to create better educational opportunities for the children from the most difficult family situations. Members of Garin Ometz Akko operate four *Batei Cham* (Warm Homes), After School Centers for 6-12 year olds from

families in distress. Together with the Garin's Big Brother, Safe Home, and Camp Programs, the Garin serves hundreds of local children with social and educational difficulties, children from families in distress who need an educational framework after school, as well as dozens of teens at risk of dropping out of school.

Israel's education system struggles to address the large and growing achievement gaps between children from high and low socio-economic backgrounds. In a country



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"The children come to a warm, supportive framework, with educational activities organized and led by experienced educators and counselors. The children also receive a hot meal—for some of the children this is the only hot meal they get during the day," says Gilad, who coordinates the Garin's After School Center Program.

The Centers are staffed by a coordinator, social workers, professional counselors, teachers, and many volunteers. The activities offered include private and small-group academic reinforcement (using advanced aids such as educational software), help with homework, and enrichment activities on a variety of topics such as culture, art, and Jewish values.

The children are referred to the After School Program by Akko's welfare department, and most participants come from poor families. Some of the children are new immigrants, or have only one parent, or are part of families with many children. Most of the children have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, cognitive gaps, and socio-emotional problems for which the schools, their families and close surroundings cannot currently provide a solution.

Gilad describes the challenges facing some of the children. David\* is one of the program's participants. His father is in drug rehab, and his mother, who suffers from many health problems, is having a hard time raising him. Eitan, following

his parents' divorce, lives with his father whose work keeps him out of the home all day. Chaim's single mom raises his five siblings and copes with many economic hardships. "When I come to the After School Center, I feel that I have a home. There's someone who cares what I learned, and what I did," says Alex. "I especially like the cooking class, and the outdoor games."

Beyond the walls of the Center, the program includes guidance workshops for the parents, home visits by the staff, camp and special activities during school holidays and vacations, and field trips. "The situations we help children cope with are complex," says Gilad, "but the dedicated staff manages to give these wonderful children a sense of a warm, welcoming home—a safe place where they can develop and learn, stay off the street and avoid negative influences. We appreciate any assistance for the Centers, to keep advancing the children, offering an equal opportunity to all, and above everything else, to continue offering a real warm and welcoming home, a *Bayit Cham*."



[The author is a member of Garin Ometz Akko]

\*Names in this paragraph have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants.



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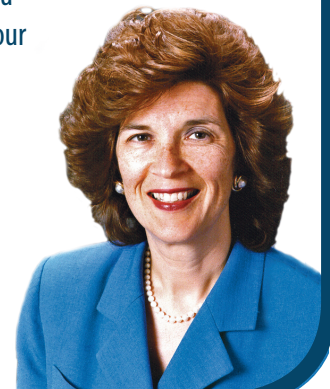
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*Rabbi, continued from page 3*

have fulfilled the Mitzva of whether the Exodus is making a meaningful religious impression upon us.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the attitude and sensibility with which we rejoice via Hallel, the aspects of the various aspects of the Yom Tov meal,<sup>11</sup> and the concluding praises and songs, serve as a referendum on our fulfilling “Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim.”

A second implication of the comments of RaShI and RaMBaM, which applies to a far broader swath of Commandments than only those dealing with Jewish history, is a concern for “Ta’amei HaMitzvot.” In the paradigmatic case of the Pesach Seder, the contents of the Haggada demonstrate as they relate to the centerpiece of the Seder, the festive meal, an approach to Mitzvot in general. R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik,<sup>12</sup> ZaTzaL, writes,

The Seder is the *prototype* of the Se’uda, the meal, a subject with which the Halacha has always been concerned. It is the Se’uda *par excellence*; all the elements that make the Seder an exalted experience are already present in the Halachic definition of the everyday Se’uda.

The Rav goes on to discuss<sup>13</sup> how Halacha seeks to raise the act of eating from an animalistic activity, by involving God in every aspect of the experience. Man involves God in his eating according to Halacha in four key dimensions whereby

he distinguishes his food consumption from that of animals: a) he carefully selects which foods he eats; b) he is capable of appreciating the truly miraculous manner by which he is able to provide his body with nutrition;;c) rather than eating in seclusion, man seeks companionship on these occasions; and d) man can understand the eating process in terms beyond the simple physiological act itself.

It certainly would be possible to approach the food-related Mitzvot of the Seder evening simply in behavioristic terms. The Tora, Rabbinic legislation and long-standing ethnic custom<sup>14</sup> call upon us to eat and drink, in addition to a festive meal, certain foods at various points throughout the evening. But Hallel, even to a greater extent than the standard blessings of Birchat HaMazon and “Al HaGefen,” puts all of this eating and drinking into a context, i.e., provides a “Ta’am” to the various Mitzvot, of explicitly “involving God in our eating.” Hallel then constitutes not only an acknowledgement of our miraculous redemption from Egypt, but also an expression of appreciation to HaShem for our present-day ability to celebrate this event by eating and drinking joyfully together.<sup>15</sup>

When we recite Hallel this year at our Seder tables, let us keep in mind RaShI and RaMBaM’s insightful comments that potentially can profoundly enhance our Pesach experience.

*Chag Kasher VeSameach!*

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Shemot 13:8

“VeHigadeta” [And you shall tell] your son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord Did for me when I came out of Egypt.

<sup>2</sup>Berachot 34a

For R. Chanina said: “In the first ones he resembles a servant who is addressing praise to his master; in the middle ones he resembles a servant who is requesting largess from his master; in the last ones he resembles a servant who has received a largess from his master and takes his leave.

The servant would not have occasion to be offering praise and thanksgiving if he did not have requests to make.

<sup>3</sup>*Moadim U’Zemanim HaShalem*, Vol. 3, *Yerushalaim*, 5731, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>A similar position is assumed by the *Sefer HaChinuch* in Mitzva #21.

<sup>5</sup>RaMBaM: 1135-1204; RaShI: 1040-1105.

<sup>6</sup>Alternate interpretations for the term recorded in the Talmud are:

R. Yose HaGalili: The exclusion of Ma’aser Sheini for producing Matza Shel Mitzva, understanding “Oni” as a reference to “Aninut,” thereby excluding Ma’aser Sheini, which cannot be eaten during the state of mourning.

R. Akiva himself: The exclusion of Matza to which wine, oil or honey has been added, understanding “Oni” as a reference to “Aniyut,” i.e., poverty. A poor person would not be able to afford luxurious Matza.

<sup>7</sup>In addition to the observance of Pesach, other positive historical commemorations include Shabbat, Shavuot, Yom HaKippurim, Sukkot, Chanuka and Purim.

<sup>8</sup>Other Commandments about which the same question can be posed are, e.g., Shemot 20:12—“Honor your father and your mother...; Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>“Do not covet your friend’s house, his wife, his male and female servants, his ox, his donkey and anything else that he may possess; VaYikra 19:17-8—“You shall not hate your brother in your heart... You shall not... bear any grudge against the children of your people, but 3) you shall love your neighbor as yourself...”

<sup>9</sup>It occurs to me that an individual who has experienced traumatic events in his life might find it difficult to truly feel gratitude to HaShem, given what s/he has gone through. Would such a person be considered an “Ones” (someone who acts under duress) and therefore qualifies for the rule “Ones Rachmana Patrei” (those under duress are exempted by God), or is there an expectation for him to try to assert “mind over matter”?

<sup>10</sup>The founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh, R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, ZaTzaL (September 1924 – February 7, 1995) offered the following parable to explain the section of the Haggada wherein it is stated, “The more time that one devotes to telling the story of the Exodus, the more praiseworthy it is”:

Once a number of passengers on a ship were in danger of losing their lives due to a severe storm. They promised that should they survive, they would gather each year to commemorate the event. They were saved, but only a select group carried out the promise. Those who

subsequently had successful, happy lives were determined to gather together and collectively express their thankfulness; others who had not experienced comparable success and fulfillment, were not interested in attending.

Comparably, said the Rosh Yeshiva, if one truly appreciates his Jewish life, he will find as many ways as possible, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to articulate those feelings of appreciation for God’s Role in the Exodus. One such context is the Pesach Seder.

<sup>11</sup>The Kotzker Rebbe (Menachem Mendel Morgensztern 1787–1859) posed and answered the following question: The Haggada calls for reciting the first two paragraphs of Hallel (Tehillim 113-4) prior to the Seuda, while the conclusion of this prayer of praise (Ibid. 115-8) are read afterwards. Doesn’t the Festive Meal constitute an inappropriate interruption in the prayer? The Kotzker evocatively explained: the challenge posed by the Seder meal is to conduct it in such a manner that rather than an interruption, it serves as a continuation of the praises being directed at the Divine.

Aside from the homiletic creativity inherent in the Rebbe’s approach, his answer contains practical implications for the Seudat Mitzva that impact the topics of our conversation, the manner in which we utter requisite blessings, and our body language and overall attitude towards the food being consumed.

<sup>12</sup>“An Exalted Evening: The Seder Night,” in *Festival of Freedom: Essays on Pesach and the Haggada*, Ktav, Jersey City, NJ, 2006, pp. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-7.

<sup>14</sup>There are numerous customs developed among different Jewish communities in different parts of the world that have been institutionalized by those affiliated with the various groups. Such customs include: the type of Matzot, the species of Karpas and Maror, the recipe for Charoset, the color of the wine, the consumption of hard-boiled eggs, etc.

<sup>15</sup>Such an approach to Hallel naturally invites the question of why we don’t recite Hallel every time we have occasion to eat, either together or individually. Wouldn’t this be yet another means by which we acknowledge God’s involvement in our lives and a redemption of our act of eating, turning it into a religious occasion? Yet the Talmud states,

Shabbat 118b

A Master said: “He who reads Hallel every day blasphemes and reproaches [the Divine Name].

Apparently, whereas Birchot HaMazon and other forms of blessings of thanks and acknowledgement are not thought to run the risk of over-exposure and therefore trivialization, Hallel was reserved for special occasions. However, other aspects of the Seder can and should be extended to daily eating experiences: e.g., eating in a group, making sure to eat bread or something grain-based so that a significant final blessing can be recited, sharing a Dvar Tora, appreciating food and drink via Berachot Rishonot as something provided by the Divine, etc.



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# 2014 Was a Busy Year for the Building Committee

by Ron Murch

**T**he KMS Building Committee's accomplishments during 2014 spanned many critical domains, including renovation of the social hall, resolution of issues involving water and termite damage, and ongoing maintenance and miscellaneous repairs.



The Committee's official charge reads: "The Building Committee works with the Executive Director to oversee the care, maintenance, and operation of the synagogue's physical plant. The Committee provides guidance in the purchasing of equipment and related services ... works with the Executive Director to ensure proper contracted repair work ... recommends prioritized capital projects for the physical plant in connection with preparing the House Budget." Additionally, the Committee, consisting of Ron Murch and Roy Pinchot, worked closely with the Executive Director over the past year on budgeting and planning for upkeep and capital improvements. Last but not least, Allison and the Committee inspect the building frequently and make minor repairs to avoid having to pay for repair services.

## SOCIAL HALL RENOVATION

Winter and spring of last year were a most interesting and challenging time for the Committee. The shul was planning to renovate the social hall but there was a slight problem—water damage and mildew inside the east wall had to be remedied first. The first question: where was the water coming from? We called in several contractors and concluded that the water damage was due to leakage from the gutters and downspouts, and cracks in the external facing of the east wall.

We selected a contractor to do the repairs and, meanwhile, began to solicit bids from flooring and soundproofing contractors as well as a sound expert for the renovations. We met with at least three contractors for every aspect of the renovation, which sometimes meant two or three such meetings a week. Pesach presented a challenge, with the social hall being an active construction area, but, then again, we weren't going to use the social hall for Kiddush anyway. In the end everything was completed by the beginning of July.

## ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS IN 2014

In addition to the renovation of the social hall, the water

fountain on the first floor was replaced, the office was painted, air-lock doors were installed outside the social hall, new chairs were purchased, and the toilet paper dispensers were replaced in all the bathrooms. Outside the building, the trees in front of the shul, the playground fence, and the fence by the water catchment were replaced. And of course, there were the ongoing repairs such as changing light bulbs, tightening loose hardware on the pews, setting lights during the change of seasons and the like.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2015

Thanks to a generous anonymous donor, the front doors are scheduled to be stripped and painted some time this spring. We are also keeping an eye on the possibility of roof repairs and monitoring the health of the HVAC units, which are approaching the end of their lifespans. One intriguing possibility the Executive Director and the Committee are exploring is the installation of solar panels. We have had preliminary discussions with a contractor who made an initial assessment showing that this is feasible. We will continue to study this option.

## HIGHLIGHT (LITERALLY) OF THE YEAR, OR, "THE GREAT ERUV MYSTERY"

The eruv cord over the parking lot was getting snapped week after week, requiring the intrepid Committee to diagnose and solve the problem. Eventually Roy discovered that, rather than birds or pranksters, the culprit was the refuse truck that emptied the dumpster every week. To avoid further eruv disruptions, the cord needed to be raised to a height of at least 25 feet. One cold spring morning last year, Roy was perched high on a ladder (held by Ron) leaning against a rather fragile upright pole. Roy and the pole swayed in the wind (sorry, Ginger) as he raised the eruv.

## AND, FINALLY:

The Committee welcomes any interested volunteers! Contact Ron or Roy for more information.





# Cast Your Vote for the 37<sup>th</sup> World Zionist Congress

by Ina Lerman

**O**n April 30, 2015, voting will end for the World Zionist Congress, which dispenses almost a billion dollars to programs, educational initiatives and aid in Israel. The decisions of how and what are funded are made through the elections.

Simply put, the more votes a party receives, the stronger the party's ability is to direct funding to organizations that support its mission. By paying \$10 every single Jew gets a vote in an election that may set the course for Israel's future. Go to <https://www.myvoteourisrael.com/Home/Register> to register and vote. There is a \$10 registration fee to participate (\$5 if you are 18-30 years of age).

Established in 1897, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) is often called the "Parliament of the Jewish people." It was convened by Theodor Herzl in Basel to bring about the establishment of the Jewish State. Today the WZO is a global organization supported by the Jewish National Fund, the Jew-

ish Agency for Israel, the United Jewish Appeal and the Government of Israel.

Every four to five years, the World Zionist Congress convenes in Jerusalem to set budgets and policies for major organizations that spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year on Jewish education, social services, urban renewal, and rural settlements in Israel. Israeli citizens are represented in the elections through political parties in Israel; world Jews are represented through international Zionist organizations to which they belong. The American delegation holds 145 out of the 500 congress seats. Eleven slates are competing for seats in this year's American elections, representing a full spectrum of Zionism in America. You can review all of the platforms and learn which organizations are affiliated with each slate at <https://www.myvoteourisrael.com/>.

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my attendance (as opposed to one minyan that would not allow women). As soon as I arrive, one of the men takes a screen from the back of the room and puts it in a corner for me. Their age and concern for me remind me of my father and it has become a very meaningful place for me to daven. My latest challenge has been just getting to shul in one piece. In January I slipped on ice in the shul's parking lot and broke a finger. I am hopeful that these last few months will be uneventful.

When you are saying Kaddish, little gestures and comments become very meaningful. Once I was davening in a shul in New Jersey, and there was just one other woman there. She was sitting at the other end of the room, but when I started saying Kaddish she came over to me and stood next to me so I could hear her answer *Amen*. I was feeling particularly lonely and sad that morning, but her movement toward me was very comforting and made me feel less dejected. Another time in

a different shul a woman came over to me after davening and said that she saw me saying Kaddish and hoped the neshamah of the person for whom I was saying it would have an aliyah. I was deeply touched by both women's remarks and kindness.

Now that I have been going to shul on a regular basis, I have come to appreciate my father's intense devotion to going to shul to daven every day. There is a certain camaraderie between the members of the minyan. We experience together all the joy and sorrow life has to offer. We are there when a father names his child and we are there when another member has a yahrtzeit. Being part of a minyan is perhaps Hashem's way of letting you know that you are not alone: whether you are experiencing great joy or great sadness, there is a community of people who will always be there to share these experiences with you. For all these insights I feel even closer to my father and appreciate better why davening and shul life were such a vital part of his life.



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## More Views of Our Annual Banquet

photos by Marc Engelhart







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*A CORRECTION*

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Our listing of Bernice Albert's donation in our last issue should have read "In Honor of Menahem Herman's kindness." We regret the error.



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