



ELPJC

**TO COMMEMORATE
45 YEARS
OF THE
EAST LONDON PROGRESSIVE
JEWISH CONGREGATION
AND TEMPLE HILLEL**

1955 - 2000

5715 - 5760

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A 'Message to Garcia' line of thought and attitude

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Researched and presented by Manfred J Schwartz - December 1999

The East London Progressive Jewish Congregation-and its History (short as it is)

What better way, can there be, of introducing a new Century and a Millennium as well, than, by issuing a Chronicle pertaining to the East London Progressive Jewish Congregation and the members of Temple Hillel. That the members being part of the existing Jewish community, would, in the main, naturally be drawn from the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, and thus cause a rift of sorts. Even now, in spite of there being two congregations, we are an inter-twined people. Our common heritage and kinsmanship binds us together, while also dividing us in prayer form. Strangely enough 100 years ago, the Jews of S A were also divided. The many English and German Jews, who several years earlier, had come to the Diamond Fields, felt that they were superior to those immigrants (greeners in every way) who had only recently arrived from Russia, Poland and the Baltic States.

It must be remembered that the Eastern European Jews, were still subjected to pogroms far into the 19th Century and the virulent antisemitism has never ever left the breasts of the Russians, and the Poles. Even now at the end of the 20th Century there is still hatred. Is it any wonder that they could never have been as learned or cultured as well as worldly, when compared with the scores of years of emancipation, civic as well as economic freedom, experienced by their Western European counterparts.

Since they were being discriminated against, here in South Africa, and a form of APARTHEID was practiced, they (and their Landsleiten) decided to form their own Bund. Hence the Polish and Russian Union came into being in Kimberley. They were referred to as PARUs. It was not long before this was corrupted to Peruvians, and became a rather derogatory term, applied to anyone not quite as cultured, sophisticated or educated as the generally accepted form of behaviour etc, as practiced by the 'upper class'. Equality of sexes, at that time was not actually accepted, hence the female counterpart was known as a Yente.

Assimilation has taken over, and Sephardi, Askenazi, Orthodox, Reform, Conserative and Liberal Jews have intermarried. We are one People with slightly divergent religious viewpoints. There is, in all groups an overriding loyalty of Klal Yisrael, which transcends all differences. To use the Cliché-- Why! Even some of our best friends belong to other congregations. One of the sages once stated: 'The very strong racial affinity among us, causes us to love our Jewish Race, but dislike individual members of our faith. This is just the reverse of what the other nations feel about us. Although they dislike our Race as a whole, they do not actually dislike in isolated cases, an individual Jew.

Here one must exclude the antisemites who proclaim ' Some of my best friends are Jews.'

The excellent recently published '100 year History of the East London Hebrew Congregation' so ably compiled by Mr S Weintraub, naturally omits members of the Reform Community.

Records in the Archives of the Marriages and Bar Bat Mitzvahs as well as the list of Dearly Departed will remind us, and future generations, that our members also contributed to the development of this City, its environs, and the various cultural activities. All in all. --- East London's communal life, both Religious and Secular.

We must not forget the Industrialists, Merchants, Professionals, Sportsmen, Farmers, Servicemen, Theatrical and other Artists etc., merely that they happened to choose to belong to the Reform. As part of the total Jewish Community, they too, need to be remembered. It is with this in mind, that this record, is published, to act as an addendum to the very fine effort which the East London Orthodox Hebrew Congregation pioneered, thereby incorporating the entire Jewish Population of East London and the Border Region.

1.1. History of the Reform Movement in East London

Almost fifty years ago, it was decided that the time had arrived for the establishment of a Reform Community. The inspiration to establish a Progressive Jewish Congregation in East London was created from the earnest desire of only three families who approached Mr Oscar Cohen to pioneer the Progressive Movement here. Mr Cohen, after consultation with Rabbi Weiler, agreed to proceed with the structuring of a Reform Movement for the Border Area.

It is probable that it was the Kurt Weil, Bert Schwarz and maybe the B A (Ronnie) Levy families that are referred to. At no stage has Mr. Cohen in any documents, revealed who they were. As far back as 1932 the Western Road Synagogue in Port Elizabeth allowed the use of an Organ in some of their services. Probably the first (Orthodox) Synagogue in South Africa to do so. The spiritual head was the enlightened Rev. A Levy, father of B A (Ronnie) Levy. Prior to settling in East London, Mr Cohen had been an active member in Cape Town and thus had a working knowledge of the Reform Movement, also having been a Council Member.

On the 14th September 1955 an inaugural meeting of the East London Progressive Jewish Congregation was held at the Carlton Hotel Cellar, under the chairmanship of Mr O Cohen. Rabbi Ungar together with Mr A Bergman (sec) came especially from Port Elizabeth to attend the meeting. In a most interesting and explanatory address the Rabbi gave full details of what Progressive Judaism really meant, in this modern day and age.

After the tea break, Mr Cohen asked that any prospective members remain, to elect a Committee. About 75 interested people stayed on and nominated and elected the following to serve on the first committee:- Messrs: Oscar Cohen (President)--Jack S Albert.(Sec)--Bert Schwarz--Kurt Weil--Marcus Gell--Paul Hoffman--Ronnie Levy--Bertie Bowman--H Landau--Sigi Landauer--Dr Elkon Jammy--Arthur Wolf--Harry Flash.

As early as the 16th November 1955, Mr O Cohen, the Chairman, called on the ladies to establish a branch of the Sisterhood. No sooner said than done! There and then, the Ladies formed their first committee and got down to fund raising. They have been the backbone of the community, ever since.

On Thursday the 5th January 1956, a meeting was held at the Offices of Louis Arenson, to consider and adopt a Constitution for the formation of the Congregation for Progressive Judaism in East London, and a name for it. The first name considered was Shalom and apparently rejected as the name Hillel Temple, however, was adopted at the meeting of 1st June 1956.

During March 1957 a site was purchased from the E L Municipality for L400stg (R800) Rabbi M C Weiler consecrated the ground on 26th November 1957. The building of the Temple commenced early in February 1958. Messrs B Shapiro and Kaplan were architects. The building Contractor was W van den Bos whose contract to erect the building was accepted at a council meeting dated 12th January 1956.

Whilst the Temple was being erected, services were initially held at the M.O.T.H. Hall in St. Georges Road, and when that building was demolished, services were held at the residence of the Leventhals in St. James Court. The first and second Rosh Hashona Services were held in the SOE Hall in Belgravia Crescent in (early) September 1956 and in (late) September 1957.

The 31st August 1958 had been named as the official opening date for Temple Hillel. The foundation stone was laid by Mr. O Cohen the President of the Congregation. The then, Mayor of East London, Abe Addleson was invited to unveil the stone commemorating the consecration of the ground by Rabbi C M Weiler which had taken place in 1957. Temple Hillel was the ninth Temple to be opened in S A. Some sources claim it to be the sixth. Rabbi Meyer Miller chairman of the Central Ecclesiastical Board of the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism conducted the consecration service for the Temple. In September 1958 the Rosh Hashana Service was held for the first time in the new Temple building. The turnout was such that the curtains were drawn aside and the hall was used as extra accommodation for the multitude of worshippers, and continued like this for several more years.

During 1958 members were advised to withhold donations to the Tahara House Fund, pending the time when burial facilities etc. would become available for the Reform Congregation. It was only in 1961 that the Chevrah Kadisha was established. The Reform Tahara House was housed in Porter Street, and all the equipment was bought for 700 pounds stg and paid for by way of donations. The Schmahman family donated the Cemetery Gates several years later in memory of their Husband and Father, Sasha. (who incidentally as a youth, had fought on the side of the Boers in the Anglo Boer War, one of many Jews to do so, a Century ago.)

The early Presidents were O Cohen, followed by: J S Albert-J Cunard- H Cooper- M Gell - B A Levy -B Schwarz - Kweil - A Wolf - G Weisinger. And currently George Schlachter (who has so ably served the Congregation in various capacities for so very many years) Among the Congregants who served on the committee during the first twenty five years were: - JS Albert - F Baer - B Belonsky - R Belonsky - S Benjamin - H Bergman - I Blumberg - S Blumenthal - Dr Cohen - H Cowan - Dr J Cunard - M Garb - M Gell - H Gell - M Gersowitz - J Gluckman - M Goldblum - L Goldblum - M Hirshberg - I Jacobson - Jellin - R Kann -Koppel-Kozer - A Laden - S Landauer - D Leventhal - S Leventhal - B A Levy - I Lipworth - L Lucka - Jos Lurie - M Mann - Michaelson - P Norman - J Paradise - G Schlachter - I Schmahman - A and M Schneider - B, E, and J Schwarz - Stamreich - J Theron - M Weil-K Weil - A Wolf - G Weisinger.

Regretfully several of the original committee have passed away, while some have emigrated or left East London, the Community is lucky to have Mr. J S Albert still in East London.

In the early years there was a most vibrant, enthusiastic, dedicated and large congregation. From a perusal of the records in the archives the usual few people carried the burden, and their achievements and efforts to organize the great number and variety of social and cultural events and activities were without parallel.

The intriguing fact emerges that each successive decade brings a new band of willing and dedicated individuals, who keep the Congregation together, interested and committed. Over the dozens of years, numbers have fallen drastically, but fortunately there is still an enthusiastic and loyal Congregation. It goes without saying there is, as previously, a small active and unselfish band of do-ers. "Comes the hour, comes the man."

At the May 1959 Council Meeting, final figures of the cost of the Temple were disclosed. In order to keep costs as low as possible, (the total price tag being a fraction under Twenty Thousand Pounds) donations in cash or kind were requested. Carpets, lamps, sefirim torah, kitchen equipment, chairs, curtaining etc. were required to equip the Temple. Initially at each and every meeting the same few members would come forward, offering and constantly delving into their pockets to contribute towards these and any other items needed.

This display of kindness, generosity and unselfish sacrifice, (not everyone was affluent even then), must be cast in stone, for future generations to remember these wonderful people. Maybe some future Historian? might be tempted to undertake a special investigation of the minutes and highlight the tremendous effort made by these openhearted members of the Congregation.

Now 45 years later there are fewer members to carry the burden, so it is probable that their individual efforts might have greater value than those of earlier periods, and definitely more than double the workload. Recently an offer was received by the Committee to sell the Temple Building and Property, but after much consideration, they wisely turned down the offer.

1.2. The South African Union of Temple Sisterhoods

A large and most important section of the Congregation, actually more than 50% consists of the Women in our midst, and many of them take a very active interest in the Sisterhood.

It is always said; - If you want something done, make sure to ask a busy person to do it, for they always manage to manage their time, and get the job done (without excuses)

Similarly, if something important and urgent needs doing, the fact remains that it will be the Woman, (more so than the Man) who will get down to it, and successfully and competently, complete the task. This has been borne out repeatedly, over the many decades.

A perusal of the documents in the archives was a most gratifying experience. The glimpses into the distant past, through the mists of time, disclosed the many and varied efforts and activities

conducted by the Ladies of the Sisterhood. It made interesting reading, with the attendant nostalgia thrown in, of their efforts mainly, and in general, in the area of fund raising.

In all the minutes there is the repetitive theme of shortage of funds, and the constant exhortations to continually generate sufficient income. To even attempt to enumerate and classify the events etc which they organized and undertook would fill volumes.

Some of the names of the ladies who served on the early committees were:

M Albert - P Alswang - D Arenson - R Baer - M Behr - C Bergman - R Blumberg - D Blumenthal - E Blumenthal - U Braak - T Cohen - M Cooper - L Denfield - Fels - K Frankel - H Gell - L Jammy - E Kerbel - S Laundauer - D Leventhal - B Levy - L Lucka - Mankowitz - Miller - R Schmahman - E Schwarz - C Solomon - H Stern - D Sunn - J Theron - K Weil - A Wolf

1.3. The beginning of the Reform Movement

It might be appropriate at this stage to include the following resume of the origins of the Reform Movement by tracing its progress over the last two hundred years.

Commencing in Germany, then to England, Europe and the United States of America and elsewhere before, appearing many scores of years later, in South Africa. With the French and Industrial Revolutions as catalysts, no wonder, Jews too, felt the urge, for change. In their case it was a religious revolution of sorts. The picture of fiercely devoted and loyal Jews, who on being emancipated from the Ghettos, were determined to retain their fellow Jews as co-religionists, and within the Faith.

The aim for enlightenment could only be realized by liberalizing their orthodox traditions, the updating of ancient ideas and values, and rejecting archaic laws and customs. These are worthy of note and approbation. Earlier in this century, it was maintained that there would be; - **No third generation of Reform Jews.** They would have been assimilated and no longer of the Jewish Faith. How differently have things turned out to be, now almost 100 years later.

With the liberal attitude of acceptance, displayed towards those who wish to enter the Jewish Faith, the myriads of Convertees are proof positive, that Reform has been instrumental in generating a religious fervour which also spins off onto the born Jew. Throughout the ages the inflow of non-Jews, by way of intermarriage etc., has tended to considerably strengthen the Jewish Race. This amalgam of Peoples and Cultures has given the Jews the stamina and resilience that it has always displayed.

The concentrating of commitment, skills, hardiness, talent, and diversity of cultures, togetherwith the injunctions contained in the Torah and adhered to, have contributed to the Jews having very high standards of morality, social behaviour, ethics and love of learning and achievement.

This form of Judaism tends to have many young adherents, who attend services, tailored specifically to keep the attention and interest of their young and very young children.

Children are the future congregants, and so are catered for suitably.

The excitement and enjoyment shows on the happy little faces, as they sing, recite and participate (the Kiddush wine) in selected portions of the service, thus going to the Temple, nowadays is not the boring, endless series of prayers in a foreign language, which the older generations endured in their extreme youth.

For thousands of years the single enduring memory however, that remains, for one's entire life, is usually the musical side, the heart rending ancient melodies, the Chazonis (like the music of Angels), that some 'operatic' Cantors are able to manage. Most congregations adhere to these lingering traditional tunes and songs of praise, which continue to be so much part of the services. Dress reform too, has contributed to encouraging attendances, especially in the hot climates.

1.4. History of the Reform Movement in South and Southern Africa

According to an article by Rabbi Walter Blumenthal in the Golden Jubilee Commemoration Journal, (1981) celebrating the 50 years of Progressive Judaism in South Africa, the first steps toward establishing a Reform Movement, were taken on 11th Sept 1929. Prof A Z Idelsohn from Cincinnati, on a family visit, urged his brother Jerry (of Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra fame) to try to establish a group to implement Reform Judaism in Johannesburg. In 1930 such an informal group came into being.

On the 26th June 1931, the S A Jewish Religious Union for Liberal Judaism was established and a few meetings and services were held till 8th August 1933 when Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler responded to a call and arrived in Johannesburg. He took steps to establish a Congregation, the first in Southern Africa. This resulted in the **Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation**, which came into being in 1933. A commission of enquiry was set up in 1973 to determine 'who' founded the Progressive movement in Johannesburg. Dr. Freed stated that the question, as to who was the actual founder was, was not an easy one to answer, for it is necessary to distinguish between such terms as founder, initiator, and first Rabbi.

It is therefore that the date of 16th June 1931 which is considered as the date when the **Progressive Jewish Movement** was formally established. The Jewish Religious Union became the S A J R U for Liberal Judaism until 1940. For the next four years it was the South African Union of Reform Judaism. By the end of 1944 the movement had grown from one congregation to three, assuming the title 'The S A Union for Progressive Judaism.'

In 1957 the movement became known as S A U P J.

In 1945 the Central Ecclesiastical Board came into being.

In 1950 the S A Council of Progressive Jewish Education came into being.

In 1951 the S A U of Temple Sisterhoods was established.

Founding dates of some of the earlier congregations are:

1933	JIRC and built it's first Temple Isreal in 1953 36
1944	Temple Isreal Greenpoint and Springs (and District)
1945	Temple Shalom N E Johannesburg
1951	Pretoria and Port Elizabeth
1952	Germiston
1954	Temple Emmanuel Johannesburg
1955	Temple Hillel East London
1956	Temple Israel Wynberg- Beth Ann amalgamated with Emmanuel
1956	Bulawayo (amalgamated with Orthodox in 1977)
1957	Bloemfontein
1960	Klerksdorp
1965 – 1979	Beth El (independent)
1977	The Youth Movement Magiddim was established nationally

1.6 List of Burials and Cremations

We record, in proud Memory and Respect our members who have passed away. May Their Dear Souls Rest in Peace – Everlastingly.

Robert Rubinstein	1881 – 1962	
Max Schmidt	08 05 1962	74 years old
Eric Fels	05 01 1963	
Dolly Blementhal	02 06 1963	
Iisdor Cooper	24 11 1963	36 years old
Josef Max Slade	27 04 1964	
August Stuhler	16 05 1881 – 06 01 1965	
Hedwig Stuhler	23 11 1887 – 17 04 1972	
Max Alperstein	28 08 1915 – 12 03 1965	
Lenchen Rosendorff	21 01 1965	
Morris Kazerson	13 05 1996	64 years old
Louis Goldblum	01 09 1900 – 13 07 1965	
Sarah Goldblum	23 06 1908 – 20 03 1975	
Alfred Hoffman	08 07 1966	
Joseph Denfield	15 12 1911 – 30 06 1967	
Aaron Toubkin	24 09 1970	
Annie Cowen	15 06 1972	
Ralph Berstein	06 02 1917 – 08 08 1972	
Rozel Schmidt	21 01 1973	75 years old
Sofy Solomon	30 06 1973	78 years old
Sigi Landau	18 07 1910 – 29 09 1978	
Sofie Landau	17 02 1914 – 05 01 1995	
Jacob Maurice Sunn	18 08 1974	
Marquis Durbach	25 12 1907 – 18 08 1970	
Katherin Bernstein	25 05 1975	
Ogus Freda Leah	13 10 1913 – 25 01 1977	
Dot Cowen	22 05 1977	

Samuel Zacker	19 10 1897 - 03 07 1977	
Miriam Kellman	19 08 1978	
Mossie Wainstein	08 09 1978	
Ann Norman	13 06 1979	
Eileen Blumenthal	10 11 1979	
Isaac Kurt Weil	19 07 1904 - 17 09 1989	
Minnie Schneider	24 02 1984	63 years old
Louis Koppel	22 03 1985	
Isobel Hirshberg	11 06 1991	
Monte Laden	July 1908 - July 1993	
Molly Bryden	29 06 1994	82 years old
Maurice Hirshberg	05 04 1917 - 25 09 1997	
Baby Garish		

Cremations

Barney Rubinstein	1887 - 1963	
Bengy Hyman Woolfson	07 07 1963	
G.B. Berlyn	10 10 1964	90 years
David Gersowitz	15 06 1965	
Harry Edelstein	15 08 1880 - 04 10 1968	
Bertha Slade	24 12 1974	77 years
Alex Schwartz	17 09 1977	81 years
Sally Blumenthal	17 08 1980	

1.7 History of the Reform Movement (Europe and England)

An Overview of Reform Judaism prepared by D B Syme, gives a picture of the beginnings of Reform Judaism, being a liberal and modern expression of an ancient faith. For more than two centuries European rulers had confined the Jewish community and restricted its movement and rights. When the effects of the French Revolution began to be felt across Western Europe, the doors to the Jewish Ghettos swung open. With the advent of their freedom, Jews were abandoning their faith, turning their backs on what they felt was the tyranny of Orthodoxy. Thus Reform Judaism began to take root.

The seeds of Reform had been sown in the eighteenth century by the brilliant philosopher Moses Mendelsohn. He approached Judaism from a rationalistic and universalistic perspective. He translated the Torah into German written in Hebrew characters. Jewish students could now study the sacred text in the vernacular. In 1801 the wealthy German businessman-banker, Israel Jacobson started the first Jewish Free School. Other reforms which he introduced into the schools' religious services were the translation into German of certain prayers. Another reform was decorum at services. His fame spread and in 1810 he built a new synagogue in Zeesen. Its reforms reverberated across Germany. The use of organ-hymns and prayers in German, men and women sitting

together, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, all shocked the traditionalists, but attracted many new members. Thus the first Reform synagogue was instituted.

American Reform Judaism dates back to 1824, when in Charleston, S Carolina, several members broke away from the Congregation Beth Elohim to form the Reform Society of Israelites. When in 1830 they published their own prayer book, de facto, Reform had come to America. By 1871 there were about 50 reform congregations. As German Jewish immigration to the USA began, a large number of reformers took their ideas with them, thus enabling the Reform Movement to gather further strength. By 1840 Reform had spread to England, and was also gaining ground in Hungary and Austria. At various conferences changes were taking place, to prayers, riding on the Sabbath, and the shortening of certain holidays, and so on. During the following 50 years radical changes had occurred in the American Jewish Community.

In 1885 the Jewish population was 300,000 mainly of Western Europe extraction, whereas by 1935 there were about 4.5 million of which three-quarters were now from Eastern Europe. They were more traditional in their orientation with a greater respect for ritual observation. The Reform Movement had by now grown to almost 300 congregations, 400 Rabbis and about 250,000 members. The leaders felt that the principles be examined, in the light of modern life and the meaningful expression of contemporary Jews. (Quoted from James G. Heller, Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work and Thought, New York: 1965, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. 64-24340)

Modern Tendencies: One source (Encarta Encyclopedia) quotes as follows: The civil emancipation of European Jewry, a process complicated by lingering anti-Jewish sentiment, evoked different reformulations of Judaism in western and Eastern Europe. In the west (particularly in Germany) Judaism was reformulated as a religious confession like modern Protestantism. The German Reform movement abandoned the hope of a return to Zion (the Jewish homeland), shortened and aestheticized the worship service, emphasized sermons in the vernacular, and rejected as archaic much Jewish law and custom. The Reform rabbi took on many of the roles of the Protestant minister.

Early Reform theologians such as Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim, influenced by the German philosophers Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel, emphasized ethics and a belief in human progress. Right-wing Reformers, led by Zacharias Frankel, favored the retention of Hebrew and more traditional customs. Modern Orthodoxy, championed by Samson R. Hirsch in opposition to the Reformers, sought a blend of traditional Judaism and modern learning. In Eastern Europe, where Jews formed a large and distinctive social group, modernization of Judaism took the form of cultural and ethnic nationalism.

Like the other resurgent national movements in the east, the Jewish movement emphasized the revitalization of the national language (Hebrew; later also Yiddish) and the creation of a modern, secular literature and culture. Zionism, the movement to create a modern Jewish society in the ancient homeland, took firm hold in Eastern Europe after its initial formulations by Leo Pinsker in Russia and Theodor Herzl in Austria. Zionism was a secular ideology but it powerfully evoked and was rooted in traditional Judaic messianism, and it ultimately led to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.