

“The First
Twenty-Five
Years . . .”

Bloemfontein Progressive Jewish
Congregation
1958-1983

אל נודא עליה:

“O Lord, we stand in awe before thy deeds”

Temple Shalom

Messages from

Our most senior members

Looking back over the twenty-five years since the inception of the Bloemfontein Progressive Jewish Congregation I reflect on the achievements of the Sisterhood. Aspirations of the dedicated founder-members have been realised and should provide an incentive to generations to come.

Enthusiasm and industry enabled us to establish ourselves on a sound foundation. We worked not only for Temple Shalom in particular, ensuring that it be suitably equipped, but also in association with the community in general, gladly assisting other organisations for the common good.

Our beautiful Temple does credit to our small congregation. Through steadfast endeavour the Silver Jubilee milestone has been reached. May the Sisterhood of the future continue in the tradition of that gone before; Sisterhood Means Service, and may Temple Shalom continue to reap the rewards of that Service. My dearest hope lies in the continuity of our organisation. With the ever-present help of the Almighty may this be realised with happiness and prosperity and, above all, in Peace.

ROSE KIBUR, Honorary Life-President Sisterhood Temple Shalom.

It is not given to many to have the honour and privilege, as I have, of serving the community of Temple Shalom over a period of twenty-five years.

Our unanimous decision at the start was that we should build for the future. It is with pride that I can declare that we have indeed fulfilled our hopes in a legacy which we can hand over to future generations.

May they forge ahead as we did, and may they constructively continue in peace, harmony and happiness preparing in turn THEIR legacy for future generations. We ask for the blessings of the Almighty in all our undertakings and thank Him for our productive past.

ISIDORE BREGER.

One of our most junior members

The first thing I notice every Shabbat is the Nair Tamid, the Eternal Light with its red glow, also the Magen David. When the Ark is opened I look at the shining silver on the Torahs and then at the Kiddush-cup and lighted candles. I notice all the different yarmulkes and the soft, silky Talleisim.

On Sukkoth it was different: We had a Lulav and Ethrog and decorations of fruit and vegetables.

I enjoy going to Temple and only get a bit tired when the services are too long.

DAVID McLELLAND, 7 years old.

Editor's Note: In the impression we make on our Youth lies our hope for the future.

1958

THE FIRST COMMITTEE



Back row: Queenie Lieberman, Milton Levey, Rose Kibur, Eric Rosendorff, Sylvia Hofmann, J. Asefowitz.
Front row: Louis Schneider, Reg Hofmann (secretary), Maurice Kibur (president), Les Matisonn (vice-president), Dr. Karl Freund, Maurice Rubin.

ON 27 JULY 1958 the BLOEMFONTEIN GROUP FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM was inaugurated at a Meeting held at the Bloemfontein Hotel. Confident were these pioneers in the belief that Progressive Judaism is relevant to the lives of thinking Jews in present times, and aware that the road to fulfilment would be fraught with difficulties and obstacles. But the determination to forge ahead never wavered in the knowledge that the Progressive way of Judaism is a meaningful Judaism to satisfy those looking beyond the ritualistic approach, retaining as it does the steadfast belief in a Judaism divinely inspired but open to human interpretation. Thus began the Story of Temple Shalom Bloemfontein.

It is a Story of INITIATIVE. Before a suitable venue could be found Services were conducted in private homes. Then, for the next six years the Masonic Thistle Hall was converted into a Jewish place of worship when required: This in itself was no mean task, for not only were Sabbath and Festival requirements provided but also the FIRST BARMITZVAH and FIRST MARRIAGE were solemnised there.

It is a Story of GENEROSITY. Early donations included a Torah, the Ark of the Covenant, a Pointer, a pair of silver candlesticks, a Kiddush-cup, a silver salver; later acquisitions were a Shofar, a pulpit and a second Sefer Torah. Architect- and Builder-fees were at minimal cost. And housed in the new Temple were two Reader's Desks and the Wall of the Ark — given anonymously by request. Personal contributions included embroidered desk-covers and stoves. The lovely Eternal Light designed by MERLE FREUND — also instrumental in the window-format — was a gift of the Jewish ex-Service League. Other Jewish organisations associated themselves with the venture, the Women's Zionist League giving some of the Chairs.

It is a Story of ENDEAVOUR. Early Minutes mention that the inspiration of the Chairman and his sheer resolve to succeed provided a challenge for all to pursue: This refrain echoes and re-echoes through succeeding Chairman's Reports. With the establishment of the SISTERHOOD in NOVEMBER 1958 the road towards the realisation of the dream began to be laid in earnest. Affiliated to the South African Union of Temple Sisterhoods, the National Council of Women, the Union of Jewish Women, Sisterhood from its inception was available to assist with activities if its Jewish sister-organisations and also made itself felt in the community-at-large. The Fifties' Minutes reflect great enthusiasm with emphasis on Fund-raising.

Activities ranged from a puppy-raffling Competition at 2/- a ticket, through a Box-Supper to Braai-, Bowls, and Swimming-evenings — and the ubiquitous Jumble Sale. The first COMMUNAL SEDER hosted

one-hundred-and-ten people. Worthwhile undertakings emerged within and without the immediate community, like a Bottom Drawer to be kept stocked with handwork for eventual sale, ongoing Shabbat Flower-arrangements, Get-Well cards to all Jewish sick. Outside identification was manifested in Transport for Cerebral-Palsied children, fund-raising for Black Children's Feeding Scheme, the Helping Hands group which served National Hospital patients in lay-capacity, with recruits also from outside the Sisterhood including some non-Jewish — a worthy exercise in public relations. Other highlights through the years were Cookery Classes for Children, a Meat-Board Demonstration in the gracious old Fichardt's Tea-Room, a Five-Course Chinese Meal not only demonstrated but also partaken of. A monthly Newsletter TEMPLE SHALOM REVIEW was circularised to all members of the Jewish community and to other Progressive congregations. Cake-sales were a regular booster to funds. All monies were deviated as required: It is Sisterhood's proud boast that the Temple Chairs and the Crockery and Cutlery are tangible evidence of its single-minded activity.

An important Temple commitment was always the provision of Shabbat hospitality to young men stationed at Tempe Military Camp, participation in Service-procedure being encouraged and many homes generously opening their doors to the boys, providing them with the family atmosphere which is so much part of the Shabbat repast.

It is a Story of COURAGE. Those years before even the likelihood of an erf presented itself could have been gloomy indeed: The first mention of the Building Fund shows it standing at £17/4/-. Months later £47/8/- is recorded, augmented by Guess What? A Jumble Sale, what else! Yet the erf was purchased in 1963 at a cost of One Thousand Pounds. When it came to naming the Temple what more appropriate suggestion could there have been than Temple Chutzpah! More realistically is it minuted that the pipe-dream Temple was about to take form through the courageous and untiring effort of the few, and with the help of Almighty God . . .

It is a Story of DEDICATION. Temple Shalom boasts a proud record of providing Services and all other amenities incumbent upon it throughout its existence, on occasion with the assistance of a visiting Rabbi but usually through the good offices of volunteer officiants. In the area of Services lay-Readers have not been found wanting. Hebrew and Judaism classes were available from the beginning — early Minutes note that the teacher protested strongly against being paid for services rendered! In 1962 took place the FIRST CONVERSION; it is interesting to observe that the convert subsequently taught Hebrew in

her home-town. In this bumper year the Group became known as a Congregation. The first Marriage-ceremony was performed in this year. In the following year it was reported that there would be a combined Orthodox/Reform Day of Remembrance Commemoration ceremony. 1963 saw too the commencement of the ARCHIVES, a meticulously annotated photographic record of the history of the Temple.

In JUNE 1964 the purpose of the visiting Rabbi was threefold: To officiate at a Conversion-, a Marriage-, AND a Sod-Turning ceremony. The Temple had arrived. JEFFREY COHEN was the Architect and the Builders his late father PHILIP COHEN and uncle PAT COHEN.

It is a Story of MIRACLES. The erf had been allocated by the Municipality to the Greek community to be used as a place of worship. But, another venue having been purchased by them in the interim, it became possible for us to have the erf at the precise psychological moment of our application. We had foreseen a tough battle, and in our impecunious state we were soon faced with a depressing prognosis: When excavations commenced we were told that costs would escalate as the high-wall plan would demand additional excavation . . . but SOLID ROCK was struck at the exact depth required to accommodate wall-stress. "Dah Yenu!" — all this would surely have been enough to convince even the most die-hard sceptic of Divine intervention. But the foundations had hardly been laid when the builders warned that costly blasting operations were foreseen, to penetrate the rock in order to lay the plumbing-system . . . only to discover that when the pipe-laying area was reached the solid rock ended and work could proceed apace. "Events due to supernatural agency"? What do YOU think?

On 20 JUNE 1965 the Consecration Ceremony of Temple Shalom took place.

It is a Story of MEN and WOMEN — this above all. Miracles are recognised but cannot be depended upon: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves, and the pattern of striving must remain unbroken. MAURICE KIBUR was the First Chairman and subsequently First Life-President; he was the Teacher responsible for the First Conversions and Bar- and Batmitzvah students, senior chorister, lay-Reader, father-figure to many. ROSE KIBUR was First Sisterhood Chairman, First Life-President, Treasurer — then AND now! Yes, we are privileged and grateful to have her steer the craft still, an unbroken record of total identification. Serving with them were First Secretary of the Group Reg Hofmann and First Sisterhood Secretary Miss S. J. Bernstein. Ivy Horwitz was the First Organist. The LEVEY family — "Ouma" Annette, Milton and Gwen were prominent founder-members. J. Asefowitz, the Matisonn family, Laurie Stusser, Louis

Schneider, Ted Musikanth, Anita Touyz, Sylvia Hofmann, Maurice and Ann Rubin, Karl and Esther Freund, Stanley and Ray Kibur, Eric and Maureen Rosendorff, Percy and Ettie Stoller, Eric and Anne Stoller, Alec and Queenie Lieberman, Runa and Dave Goldblatt, Isidore and Rita Breger, Cyril and Sheila Corner figure in early Minutes. Woolfie and Irene Joffa, Issy and Nesta Goldblatt appear among other friends and donors.

Too many of these benefactors are no longer with us: Some we have inevitably lost through their passing — May They Rest In Peace. ESTHER FREUND was the First Hebrew teacher (assisted for a time by ANNE SACKS). KARL FREUND's inestimable contribution, over and above his expert management of the Choir for many years and his service on the Executive, was his priceless Archives of photographed Temple history. ETTIE STOLLER gave of her talents with enthusiasm and industry. RUNA GOLDBLATT, additional to her secretarial contribution, has left for posterity her skilled handcraft in Temple accoutrements. RITA BREGER's exquisite flower-arrangements were matched by her meticulous Minutes of many Meetings.

Sadly for Temple Shalom the LEVEY family followed their children to the U.S.A. All had given yeoman service. "Ouma" inaugurated and pursued regular Shabbat floral-decoration particularly in the Thistle Hall days, and was the most unflagging of Service-participants. GWEN held the Sisterhood Chair; one of her ventures was the Get-Well cards, another Transport for the cerebral-palsied. How many Jumble Sales were held in her garden! MILTON, a driving force behind the establishment of this Congregation, served as both Secretary and Chairman; he also delivered some memorable High Holy Day Addresses. Later SANDRA and GERALD JOFFE were to come to the fore, Sandra a valuable Sisterhood member and Gerald a dedicated lay-reader, also serving on the Executive.

Regrettably we have lost touch with some of our staunchest supporters. Temple Shalom remains ever aware of the immeasurable worth of ALL THOSE, unhappily for whatever reason, no longer working with us. It acknowledges indebtedness.

Of the founder-members there are, happily, still some who continue to keep the flag flying. ISIDORE BREGER succeeded Maurice Kibur as Chairman and has held the office on other occasions; he has also been an assiduous lay-reader. May he long continue to play an active rôle. It was ERIC ROSENDORFF, by virtue of his position on the Bloemfontein City Council, who was instrumental in acquiring the Temple erf. He has served on the Executive since its inception, contributing his expertise in calm and reasoned manner. PERCY

STOLLER was responsible for the original lay-out of the Temple garden. He serves on the Executive and has been a Trustee over many years. STANLEY and RAY KIBUR continue their positive participation, having served as heads of the congregation and always on the Executive. ANNE STOLLER was associated with Black Feeding Scheme and Hospital projects. DAVE GOLDBLATT has held the Chair and serves on the Executive.

Now to the Sixties and later: In 1962 MICHAEL ALSWANG began assisting at Services, the start of an illustrious career, for both Michael and his late wife PEARL became pillars of the Movement. Pearl's Sisterhood Chairman tenures were stamped with her character of gentleness, consideration and kindness. Michael teaches our Bar- and Barmitzvah students and prospective Converts. He must surely hold the record for devoted hours of lay-reading in all weathers and in all states of health. He has held the office of Chairman. He also shoulders the responsibility of the organisation of all religious activities. May he derive constant satisfaction knowing that communal worship is the catalyst binding together a congregation, and he its motivating factor. Before their departure for Cape Town OSCAR and TUBBY COHEN were actively involved in Temple affairs, he in the Chair.

In these years were welcomed the TYLER family, BERT and ROSE, BERNARD and JOEY. Rose has been a regular Sisterhood member. Both Bernard and Joey associate themselves with all facets of Temple up-building, serving in the Chair, Joey also in Secretarial capacity. Bernard's expertise in the field of Sound-engineering has stood us in good stead especially re Tapes of Choral items to enrich our Services. HAROLD and MERTA MELZER add their particular strength, Harold having held for many years — and still holding — the onerous office of Men's Committee Treasurer with the authority which comes of efficiency. Merta has served — and indeed still does whenever required — as Sisterhood Chairman and Secretary. HENRY and ANNETTE DUBOVSKY joined the ranks, he a Trustee, she having served as Sisterhood Secretary and Chairman, Chorister, Organist and Editor of Temple Shalom Review.

BILL and PHYLLIS LEVITT, LEON and JOYCE KARPEL came to us from Thaba Nchu. Phyllis has held the Sisterhood Chair and is active on the Executive. Joyce has fulfilled Secretarial functions and is an Executive member. During the brief stay in Bloemfontein of the KLATZKIN family EDNA served as Sisterhood Chairman.

DECEMBER 1965 is a date to be noted for it was then that HILDA ELLMAN was invited to become Cheder-teacher. Those who have passed through her able hands have a sound lifetime grounding in Hebrew and Judaism. Particularly memorable and praiseworthy are

her Children's Services, with involvement of the youngest through to the most senior of her charges.

And now to the present Congregational head. SAM McLELLAND with quiet background support from his wife PAULINE, ever-ready to do her Sisterhood share, has given of himself with utter sincerity and devotion to duty. With the good of the congregation at heart he has attended National Conference and Johannesburg Administrative Meetings. Particularly in view of the comparatively short time that Sam and Pauline have been with us is it specially commendable that they should already have identified themselves totally with our small group and its needs. No task has been too great, from conducting Services to hosting our student-Rabbi on several occasions — and always with cheerful countenance.

Throughout the history of Temple Shalom there has been splendid co-operation from the South African Union for Progressive Judaism, notably in the provision of Rabbis when requested on special occasions. In earlier years the Reverend BOBBY BRAAK often proved a friend in need. We were honoured to have with us the esteemed late Chief Rabbi Dr. ARTHUR SAUL SUPER. Memorable visits were made by Rabbi ALEC FRIEDMAN and Rabbi NORMAN MENDEL. We have enjoyed contact with rabbis from other congregations: From distant shores Rabbi Dr. S. B. FREEHOF, and nearer home Rabbis MILLER, BENJAMIN, RICHARDS, JACOBS. For the past five years student-Rabbi HILTON ELLIS has lent colour and meaning to our High Holy-day Services, keeping us updated on addenda and variations in the proceedings.

But the doyen of this Temple Shalom in Rabbi Dr. WALTER BLUMENTHAL. From our humble beginnings he has shared our joys and sorrows, encouraged us in despondency, celebrates with us in achievement, officiating at our sad times and our glad times — being always one of us.

Whatever contribution, great or small, has been made towards the sustenance of the Temple in the twenty-five years since its inception is of equal importance:

"Small service is true service while it lasts,
Of humblest friends, bright creature, scorn not one!
The daisy, by the shadow that it casts,
Protects the lingering dewdrop from the sun"

What of the future? In a strife-riven world, with Jewish survival riddled with threats of assimilation and loss of identity, we — an infinitesimal part of the Jewish world — must hold fast to what we believe to be the right way; we must cling to it, substantiate it, fortify it. Our Temple-on-

a-Rock will be a fortress for future generations if we Pray Together and Stay Together, bound by the silver threads emerging from those first twenty-five years: unity of purpose, strength in adversity, Service before Self. Our guideline is in the very name of our house of worship — SHALOM — and in our simple prayer Grant us Peace, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace . . . But the poet tells us that COURAGE is the price that life exacts for granting peace. It is the brightest of those silver threads shining through the past years. May we never let it go, and with it light the path of those to come so that Shalom will encompass the years ahead.

ANNETTE DUBOVSKY.

20 JUNE 1965

