

From the Chair (Insert pic of chair)

What is a synagogue for? In the prayer for the congregation we say every Shabbat morning, we allude to the traditional three-fold purpose of a synagogue: to enable its members to meet, to study and to pray. I have already said several times that I see my role as Chair as facilitating those three activities. Anything else, such as finance, building management etc., is done to enable the three key activities to occur.

Which of the three activities is most important to you? I imagine each of our members weights each of them differently.

'Meeting' covers social activities, and our community has tried different ways of organising social activities over the years. We do not currently have a Social Committee, but several ideas are in the pipeline for making some things happen in the medium term. One thought is to revive the notion of having one major fundraising event per year. Other ideas for one-off events are circulating, more will be revealed when they have firmed up. One debate has always been whether our social activities should have a Jewish theme, or whether people enjoy meeting together with their fellow-congregants to just do something social. Any feedback will be gratefully received.

Studying is always an interesting one to me. I am a studying addict, so always struggle to understand those (in fact the majority) who aren't. In December I made my annual trip to Limmud, and attended sessions on topics including: the vowels and punctuation in Hebrew; meanings we can find in the Torah stories about Abraham, Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael, and the implications for Jewish-Arab relations; traditional Jewish ideas about death and funerals, and implications for what makes a 'fitting funeral'; intercultural dialogue in Jerusalem, including Jewish/Palestinian dialogue, and gay/Charedi dialogue. What's not to like? But I know some people are put off the concept of study, by thinking it will be too intellectual for them, meaning either too difficult, or too abstract, or too irrelevant. One reason I am enjoying some of Student Rabbis Tanya Sakhnovich's interactive sermons, is that she is engaging the whole community in text study in a relatively non-threatening way. Again I would be very interested in any thoughts you have on topics you would like to study/discuss.

And finally praying... Several study sessions could be devoted to the notion of prayer. What do you do when you pray? What are you 'supposed' to be thinking/feeling/paying attention to? Another thing I have enjoyed about Tanya's services is her attention to the spiritual experience she tries to create for us, or invite us into. She has talked to us about prayer as spiritual work, and invited us to engage with it in that way.

We have plans for a communal event for Shavuot, on Thursday the 28th of May, which will include a service, a social event and some study/discussion, so put the date in your diary, more details to follow.

Best wishes to all

Susan King
March 2009

