

OPINION

Collective transformation

BY RABBI AARON
GOLDSTEIN

At Rosh Hashanah, every Jew stands before open gates for we are Am Yisrael – the People of Israel. Even those who remain at home or have gone to work cannot escape the fact that it is Rosh Hashanah, just as they cannot escape being Jewish.

The past few years have seen the opening of many new gates for British Jews to develop their understanding of who they are. The Jewish Community Centre in London has enriched the cultural life of many and bolstered existing Jewish cultural organisation and events. Mitzvah Day and the Jewish Social Action Hub have supported a plethora of small organisations and individuals, to place tikkun olam at the heart of their Jewish identity. The thriving education programmes of organisations such as the London School of Jewish Studies, have sought to offer new opportunities for Jewish learning. Limmud, jeneration, Moische House, tent: the meeting place, and Wandering Jews are examples of year-round, post-denominational experiences for Jews to explore their Jewish identity in a new social environment; and JCOS signals a desire to open gates for all Jewish children to develop their Jewish identity together.

So where does that leave the 'traditional' gates of Judaism, our synagogues? From time to time, there are radical new models of synagogue life. In the coming Jewish year, 5770, we celebrate 200 years of Progressive Judaism in Europe. In the 1960s the seeds of the Masorti Movement in the UK were sown. However, most synagogues in the UK have become 'traditional' in the sense that they have ceased to innovate. Thought and movement has slowed: for some even stagnated. In a time of religious indifference, we need a radical transformation, not in the form of a new movement but in the structure and programmes of our synagogues, to reflect the new realities that face Anglo-Jewry. Remaining as they are is not an option. Those that do will die out but those with vision and courage will succeed and grow.

Open gates of transformation allow assumptions to be challenged. Synagogues often assume that their mere existence demands the attendance of Jews. Unaffiliated Jews harbour many false (but some justified) assumptions about the synagogue. It takes courage to move forward and to communicate with those who are 'blamed' for not coming to shul. Guilt is not a good, long-term marketing tool for synagogues.

Why should a rabbi write this seemingly unspiritual piece for Rosh Hashanah? Surely it should be a management consultant or a Jewish professional leader? I write this, because we need reminding that we have potential to be visionaries in our day and yet, we are also the guardians of commandments that include more 'thou shalt not' than 'thou shalt do.' We rabbis have choices to make as we stand before God's open gates at Rosh Hashanah. Let us emphasise what Jews can do rather than what they can't.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, we should remind ourselves that UK Jewry is a Jewish community of communities. It actually always was such but it is now more obvious than ever. Our challenge is to allow our hearts and minds to be opened just as the gates over the High Holy days are open to us all, to conceive transformation that insures the gates of Am Yisrael are truly open year round, for the exploration & celebration of Judaism, for all our communities of Jews.

Shana Tova.

• Rabbi Aaron Goldstein is the senior minister at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue

Feeling a little fried as we approach 5770

BY ZEDDY
LAWRENCE

And so we march inexorably towards Rosh Hashanah. In less than 48 hours time it will be 5770 and most, if not all, of us will find ourselves in shul repenting our sins and listening to the wise words of our rabbis. Needless to say, my own teachings could hardly compare with the sermons these learned ministers will deliver from their pulpits. But if you'll permit me I shall endeavour to enlighten you with some spiritual sentiments of my own.

The basis of my New Year lesson will be gematria – the mystical Jewish discipline which ascribes numerical values to letters and words and finds significance and meaning in the resulting figures... or something like that.

Now I don't profess to be an expert. In fact, I don't even profess to be an amateur so just in case you're new to this column

and are expecting some fascinating Talmudic insight, I better warn you this is about as bogus as Derren Brown's lottery prediction. Well, apart from the fact that he got it right but let's not split hairs otherwise my vaguely topical reference won't work.

Anyway, to business. Gematria and the new year. Actually, another apology before we start. To keep things simple, or more to the point because frankly I don't know any better, I'm going to use English letters rather than Hebrew letters so from a strictly halachic perspective, there's no value in any of this, so the Chief Rabbi needn't be alarmed that I'm jostling for his job.

Enough of the preamble

though and on with the show. Gematria and the new year. Or 5770 as it will be come Friday evening. Now then, if we take each of the numbers in the year and see which letter of the alphabet it corresponds to, that's to say five is the fifth letter seven is the seventh letter, and 0 obviously is no letter, we end up in a situation where 5770 actually spells 'egg'.

Let's delve one step further and add up all the numbers, five plus seven plus seven plus zero. What do we get? I'll tell you, 19. And with the 19th letter of the alphabet being an 's', we can pretty much say for certain that taken as a whole 5770 is the year of the eggs.

What does this mean? How do eggs relate to what the year has in store for us? Well, I suggest the best thing to do is take the current year, 5769, work out what that spells and then see if there's any relationship between the resulting word and

the year just gone.

So think back. Is there anything that's happened to you since last Rosh Hashanah that you've thought was particularly 'eggy'? Have you been in any situations where you were inspired by 'eggy'? Or perhaps you're feeling a little 'eggy' now?

Exactly, or under the circumstances, egg-sactly. Unless we were to embark on a debate about whether Rabbi Akiva liked toasted soldiers with his soft boiled eggs or if Hillel preferred his eggs poached or scrambled, the whole 'eggy' debacle proves there's precious little merit to my methods of Gematria or indeed anything I've written in this week's column.

In fact, all I can do to make any of this worthwhile is bid you all a Shanah Tova. Have a sweet and happy new year... or as we in the egg fraternity say, may everything you wish for come your way sunny side up.

“There's precious little merit here unless we embark on a debate about whether Hillel preferred his eggs poached or scrambled”



A whole new year in a whole new country

BY PAULA
COHEN

Sitting in my garden, drinking mint tea, I am wondering how I managed to end up here, in Israel, on a mountain just outside of the capital. Scunthorpe to Jerusalem isn't your everyday travel route!

Born in Scunthorpe, I am an English Jewish convert, married to an Israeli, Gaby, born in Jerusalem. Together, we have four gorgeous children. Talia, seven, Arielle, five, Sar-el, three, and Oriah, two. We have lived in London for the past 10 years. We are both full-time parents but I am also a jewellery designer and Gaby has just completed his MA in Behaviour Analysis. Life was fun, chaotic and enjoyable. However, it wasn't 'home' and we always felt that London wasn't forever.

Our decision to make aliyah was an easy one in hindsight. We had always talked about living in Israel when the time was right and Gaby

left the final decision, of when to go, with me. The turning point came two years ago when after our summer holiday in the Holy Land, I wasn't ready to go home, I wanted to stay. We decided in summer 2009 we would make aliyah and began the process as soon as we returned home.

We contacted the Jewish Agency. As well as taking care of all the paperwork they provided a place to answer many questions we had. We decided to join the olim group along with 102 other immigrants. It was the best decision we made. Coinciding with the agency's 80th birthday, the aliyah flight of summer 2009 was expected to be something special. And it certainly was.

I couldn't possibly begin to tell you all the amazing things that we experienced but, put simply, 'VIP' doesn't do justice to how we were treated.

Perhaps the highlight was the

presentation ceremony at the Kotel where we collected our Tudat Zeut and became Israeli citizens. This marked a very special moment. Oh, and the after party too was quite something!

We have arrived in Israel with the best possible start. And for that reason, I would like to dedicate this column to every single person that assisted with our aliyah – the Jewish Agency, UJIA, Ebenezer and the Ministry of Absorption in Israel and the UK.

Of the other olim we met many amazing people, all making aliyah for their own reasons, no two the same, but all with a positiveness and zest for the future that I admire and respect. I know that the State of Israel can only be a better place for having these people here.

As for us, the future is unknown,

and I find that quite exciting. In the long term, we plan to build our home over the next year, which will no doubt furnish me with many interesting stories. In the shorter term though, I am studying the language and, of course, we have to ensure that the children settle well into their new schools and nurseries. They're looking forward to them with great enthusiasm.

I have no doubt and I'm under no illusion that many challenges lie ahead. We have a list of contact numbers for every eventuality from finding a dentist to finding a job. The only thing I am missing is a pizza delivery number. Once that's taken care of, I am sorted!

I know that a week in Israel isn't like a week anywhere else in the world and I'm sure I will have many stories to share with you. For now though, I must dash. I have some borekas in the oven and a hungry family to feed.

“I've got contact numbers for everything here in Israel, except someone to deliver pizzas. Once I have that I'll be sorted”