

Greetings

. . . from **Lord Jakobovits** of Regents Park, now Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

24th October 1990

It is a very special pleasure to express my warmest greetings to the Oxford Jewish Congregation on the forthcoming celebration of its 150th Anniversary. Ever since I first visited the community after I assumed my present office in 1967, I developed a particular fondness for what is in many ways a unique Jewish community, principally of course because of its large component of academics and students.

Under the leadership of the late George Silver, the new Synagogue Centre was eventually erected, providing facilities including daily kosher meals for Jewish students in response to a growing demand. Mr Silver's memory will always be honoured.

Oxford is now an important centre of Jewish life, Jewish learning and Jewish scholarship. The Synagogue and its Centre have contributed much to achieve this. The whole of Anglo-Jewry will share the joy and pride to be marked at the milestone reached on the 150th Anniversary, and I wish the Congregation continued success in nurturing intensive Jewish learning and living among congregants and students alike.



*Emeritus Chief Rabbi
Lord Jakobovits*

Greetings

...from **Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks**, then *Chief Rabbi elect of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth*

31st May 1991

Congratulations and blessings on an occasion of collective celebration: the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Jewish community.

You will receive many well deserved tributes. Let me add mine. I still remember with thanks the warmth and hospitality of the Richmond Road centre during what was, for me, a difficult period. In 1970-71 I had registered as a research student at New College, Oxford. I was newly married, so I sought out somewhere for Elaine and myself to live. There was nowhere. At that time, evidently, research students were expected to live in monastic bachelorhood. As I arrived in the university office dealing with accommodation, the last married quarters – a houseboat on the Isis! – had just been taken. So there was no choice. I had to take single lodgings, Elaine stayed in our flat in Cambridge, and during our first year of marriage we were together only at weekends. It was not what the *Torah* prescribed.

But during the week I found friendship and community in Richmond Road, as so many others have done. The synagogue and centre, its services and kosher meals, its lectures and social occasions became for me a second home. And I was reminded of that extraordinary and penetrating remark of the rabbis, that hospitality – making strangers feel at home – is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. The Oxford Congregation was and is part of that ancient Jewish tradition that begins with Abraham and Sarah and their tent where visitors could always find a welcome, a meal and simple human kindness. That is the true mark of the *Shechinah*, and may it always dwell in your midst.

What is the significance of an anniversary? The Hebrew word for year, *shanah*, contains an unusual dual meaning. *Shanah*, or the verb *leshanot*, means both to repeat and change. It signifies that the passing of the years is never mere repetition – it is also renewal. Each year as Jews we experience the same calendrical cycle. We read the same texts. We celebrate the same festivals. But we strive to find in them something new. Striving, we succeed.

Greetings

The traditions of the Oxford Congregation are distinguished. It has sustained itself as a viable and active community for a century and a half at a time when the entire Jewish world has undergone momentous change. It has been host to generations of students and visiting academics and it has managed with grace and tact the sometimes difficult relations between town and gown. My deepest wish and blessing is that this singular moment in the community's history be taken not merely as an occasion for reflecting on the past but as a point of rededication to the future. May it be the beginning of new programmes and activities. May the years to come signal not just repetition but also renewal.

After a hundred and twenty years, the *Torah* says of Moses that his eyes were undimmed and his natural energies unabated. As individuals we cannot aspire to such a fate, but as communities we can. May the vision that inspired the founders of the congregation be undimmed, and may your energies be unabated for many years to come.



Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks

Greetings

*... from **Rabbi John D. Rayner**, Minister Emeritus, Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St. John's Wood, London and Chairman Council of Reform and Liberal Rabbis*

As a Cambridge man, I think it shows a commendable lack of partisanship on my part that I feel an almost equal affection for Oxford! To account for that feeling, I can offer ten reasons: (1) that I like the place; (2) that I have many friends there; (3) that I used to long jump for Emmanuel against Exeter in the days of Roger Bannister; (4) that I appreciate the contribution Oxford scholars have made to human knowledge; (5) that I am aware of the part the city of Oxford has played in Anglo-Jewish history; (6) that I know about the Jewish treasures of the Bodleian; (7) that I admire the Oxford Centre for Post-Graduate Hebrew Studies; (8) that I find the Oxford Synagogue very pleasing; (9) that I have had the honour of being one of its patrons for a number of years; and (10) that it has a unique record of tolerance, in that it has long provided hospitality for a variety of Jewish social, cultural and religious gatherings: Orthodox, Liberal and Reform.

That last point is particularly important during this post-Holocaust age, which makes it a sacred duty to practise inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, and in an increasingly pluralistic community, which demands from us all that we rise to the vision of unity-in-diversity. May the Oxford Jewish Congregation continue to set such an example of generosity of spirit to the Anglo-Jewish Community, and may it flourish for many more centuries in freedom and in peace, in friendship and in creativity.



Rabbi John D. Rayner

Greetings

. . . . from the **Reverend Malcolm Weisman**, Chaplain to the University of Oxford, visiting Minister to small Communities and National Hillel Counsellor

I send greetings to all in the Oxford Community, both town and gown, on this very special celebratory occasion. In many other of our smaller Anglo-Jewish Communities, the festivities marking a centenary or bi-centenary, or, as in this case, a sesquicentennial, are often somewhat muted since the community concerned may have seen better days. It may be celebrating an occasion with more of a nostalgic flavour, dominated by depressing fears for the future.

In the case of Oxford, it must surely be right that this great celebration is dominated not by grim forebodings but by optimism based on the most positive evidence of success and spiritual vitality.

My experience of the Oxford Jewish Community goes back to the heady days of the 1950's when the old Synagogue served both as a place of regular prayer and a canteen for students open on *Shabbat* and Festivals only. Special meals sometimes were supplied at "Long John's Restaurant" run by George Silver.

Subsequently we obtained a regular meal service, which expanded into a house next door to the Synagogue and there we stayed until the early 1970's.

During that period, the small local Community, which was often primarily dependent on university undergraduate support for services, grew in size and commitment and became viable enough to be independent of the undergraduates.

Together, however, with the University community, the town Community then developed a broadly-based congregation which was able to provide an opportunity for its members to learn about Judaism in its widest sense.

I had the privilege, in 1974, of consecrating the present building. Since then, the whole community, town and academic, has set a very special example of tolerance and respect for the whole spectrum of the Jewish experience which, regrettably, is not widely followed in Anglo-Jewry as a whole.

Then and Now

The Community is basically traditional in outlook – reflecting the general religious colour of Anglo-Jewry. Yet it affords – under the same roof – facilities for those who have a preference for a less traditional approach.

Thus, Progressive Services and traditional activities, such as “Roots”, are held in the same building and speakers on Judaism reflect the different Jewish trends to the full. Nor is the stomach neglected. In spite of the obvious financial difficulties, the student restaurant flourishes, and particularly on *Shabbat* and Festivals, it is an important social focal point.

I am very proud to have had a long association with both the Congregation and students in Oxford and very confident that the next 150 years will see even better and greater Jewish activity here.

I therefore have great pleasure in offering all concerned my heartiest congratulations and a big *mazaltov* for this very special event.



Rev. Malcolm Weisman