



Message from the UPJ president

Roger Mendelson

This is my final report as UPJ President, so it is an appropriate time to look back, and also forward to the future.

Achievements

When I took over as President, there had been little preparation, because Stephen Freeman, the previous President, had to resign unexpectedly due to serious medical issues faced by Rebecca, his partner.

At that stage, there were few executive members who were staying on, so I was faced with building a new team.

At the same time, the extensive strategic review had been completed and the outcome was that Steve Denenberg retired as Executive Director.

Va'ad structure

One of my first steps was to establish the Va'ad structure. The Va'ad comprises the office bearers and Jocelyn Robuck, the Executive Officer. The intention was that the Va'ad would meet more regularly and deal with operational issues and would refer matters of policy and principle to the full Executive.

An inhibiting factor we face is that our Executive comprises people from across our region. and so meetings are online and across different time zones.

Movement Rabbi

An outcome of the strategic review was that there was a consistent view expressed that we would benefit from having a Movement Rabbi. The Executive took this on board and defined the position, provided a budget allocation for it, advertised it and ultimately appointed Rabbi Fred Morgan for a three-year term.

Rabbi Morgan retired from the position at the end of his term, in March 2019 and at this stage the Executive has made no arrangements to replace him. We wish to thank Rabbi Morgan for the support and advice he provided, as well as the active hands-on role he played with congregations.

Budget

At the time I took over, the budget was in deficit, due essentially to the cost of employing an Executive Director. Since that time, we have been operating on small surpluses.

I wish to thank Sally Castle, our Treasurer, for ensuring that we operate on a financially sound basis.



Our budget covers an allowance for various grants we make, including to several rabbinic students studying at the Hebrew Union College; we provide some financial support to them on the basis that they will hopefully return to our region.

The UPJ also supports Netzer with \$30,000 per year (\$10K for Outreach, \$10K for Admin and \$10K for Shnat).

UIA Progressive Appeal

A significant function we carry out is to raise funds in partnership with the UIA. Funds go into the UIA Progressive Appeal and are ultimately allocated to complying programs operated by the WUPJ (our roof body) and also support several organisations in Israel.

We normally raise just under \$1 million annually, but this year was exceptional, with the sum of \$1.2 million raised.

A refinement has been the appointment of Joint Appeal Chairs in both Sydney and Melbourne. In Sydney, we had David Knoll and Alan Obrart, and the Melbourne Chairs were Brian Samuel and Philip Bliss. The largest increase in donations in total came from Sydney, but Melbourne has a larger number of smaller donors. In particular, we are very grateful to a small number of Sydney donors who very generously support the Appeal.

Machzor

A major project we took on about four years ago was to develop our own Machzor, specifically for our region. *Mishkan T'Shuvah* was introduced for High Holy Days in 2019. This was a massive undertaking for us and also for the Editorial Team. It was based on the CCAR version for North America, but with major changes.

The Editorial Team was led by Rabbis John Levi and Jonathan Keren-Black, and comprised Rabbis Kim Ettlinger, Jacqueline Ninio, Cantor Michel Laloum and Dr Linda Stern. We are grateful for the amazing result they achieved.

Biennial

Our last biennial was held in Melbourne in November 2018.

By all accounts, it was one of the most successful we have held. Total registered attendance was 166 people;

46 additional people attended day sessions and/or one or more of the evening functions.

I wish to especially thank Dr Rob Sward, who served as the Biennial Chair, for doing an inspiring job, and Rabbi Larry Hoffman for being our Scholar-in Residence, leading many challenging debates.

Moetzah (The Council of Progressive Rabbis in Australia, New Zealand and Asia)

Our relationship with the Moetzah has strengthened over the last several years.



In particular, with the retirement of Rabbi Fred Morgan as our Movement Rabbi, the Chair of the Moetzah, Rabbi David Kunin of Tokyo, has become more actively involved with the UPJ and partially filled the void which was left.

I believe that the relationship we have with the Rabbonim is constructive and healthy, and there is a clear line drawn between the roles of lay leadership and professional leadership.

Ambassadors

The Ambassadorial program has further developed over the past 12 months.

Active groups are: Outreach, Rabbinic Placements and Public Affairs. In each case, they are at the embryonic stage. However, we have established that there is a group of senior members of our Movement who are prepared to contribute their time and expertise, and the challenge for us is to develop this further and manage it so that it becomes self-sustaining.

ARZA

We have a close relationship with ARZA and, following the strategic review, a line was drawn between our respective roles.

Following the retirement of Steve Denenberg as ARZA President in November 2019, I wish to thank him personally and on behalf of the UPJ for the work he has done in keeping ARZA functioning and being an effective medium for harnessing Progressive votes for the World Zionist Conference. I also wish Helen Shardey all the best as she takes on the role as incoming President of ARZA.

Asia

The Asian communities have developed well over the past year. The fact that the Chair of the Moetzah serves the Jewish Community of Japan is an indication of how closely we are working.

The Asian communities held a conference in Singapore in January 2019, and Jocelyn Robuck attended on behalf of the UPJ. Rabbi Fred Morgan led Yom Kippur and associated services in Rangoon this year.

Associate Professor Josh Keller is joining the UPJ Executive. Josh lived for many years in Singapore and has now moved to Sydney. He is the embryonic UPJ Ambassador to Asia.

New Zealand

We were delighted that the contingent of New Zealanders at the Melbourne Biennial was by far the largest ever. This did not happen by chance; Paul Blaschke from Wellington was a member of the Biennial Planning Committee and was largely responsible for this excellent outcome.

The New Zealand congregations now regularly meet as a group, and Paul Blaschke is providing the link between them and the UPJ, for which I wish to thank him.

A concern is that there is still no rabbi based in New Zealand.



Sally Castle, our Treasurer, has moved back to Wellington and will be providing a more direct voice for New Zealand to the UPJ Executive and Va'ad.

Co-Presidency

Following extensive discussions, Brian Samuel and David Knoll have agreed to stand as Co-Presidents of the UPJ.

I am fully in favour of this arrangement because I believe that it harnesses the expertise of two senior members of our Movement. Brian has been my Vice-President for over four years, and I have worked with him in a partnership manner, so that he is fully informed of everything that has gone on over that period. He has also held other senior communal positions in Melbourne. David has held several senior communal positions in Sydney and is well connected in Sydney. Accordingly, the combination of the two will provide a powerful leadership team.

I have found that the presidency takes up at least two full days each working week, plus visits. By sharing the role, the team will be able to allocate tasks between themselves and provide effective leadership.

In addition, over 90 per cent of Progressive Jews in our region live in either Sydney or Melbourne, so this arrangement makes great sense.

I will be involved as Immediate Past-President and will be an ex-officio member of the Executive. I am happy to help out whenever I am asked, but am aware of the need to also step aside to allow space for the new leadership team.

Constitutional Changes

As the UPJ Constitution did not allow for co-sharing of positions, we will be submitting a resolution to amend the Constitution to allow for this. The changes being made are the minimum required in order to enable any of the officer positions to be worked on a job-share basis, but it will be limited to any one position at any time. For example, if there are co-presidents, there can be no other job-share positions.

Considerable thought and energy has been given to drafting the constitutional changes, and approval of this is a requirement to the election of the Co-Presidents.

I would ask that you raise queries about the constitutional changes with either myself, Jocelyn, Brian Samuel (bsamuel@bigpond.net.au) or David Knoll (daviddknoll@gmail.com) well before the AGM, in order that the meeting itself not be sidetracked by discussion of technical issues.

Changes in the Executive Team

Alison Dwyer is standing down as a member of the Executive. I will be presenting a Vatik Award to Ali at the Shabbat Service in Adelaide, and this will be our opportunity to publically thank her for her service to the UPJ.



Sharon Davis will be stepping down as Honorary Secretary, but will be remaining on the Executive as a committee member. We are grateful for this, as Sharon will be able to assist the incoming Honorary Secretary.

Associate Professor Josh Keller is our UPJ Asia Ambassador. He lived for many years in Singapore and now lives in Sydney with his wife and two young children. He will be attending the meetings in Adelaide and has nominated to serve on the Executive Committee.

Professor Larry Lockshin is a past president of Beit Shalom Synagogue in Adelaide, and has nominated for the position of Honorary Secretary. Larry has been involved communally in Adelaide for many years.

Marsha Rosenberg of the Jewish Community of Japan will be standing as an Executive Member, at my invitation. Marsha has extensive communal experience in Japan spanning close to 40 years.

Trevor Creewel of Temple David in Perth is a past president of that synagogue and has carried out a great job as UPJ Ambassador to the Bali community. Trevor has also nominated to join the UPJ Executive Committee.

Helen Shardey is expected to become ARZA President at the ARZA AGM and thus will be stepping down from her position as an Executive Committee Member. However, Helen will continue to be involved, as the ARZA President is an ex-officio member of the UPJ Executive.

All of the above positions we expect to be elected on an uncontested basis.

I am delighted with our intake. It is diverse in terms of gender, experiences and regions and will provide a great base for the incoming Co-Presidents to work with.

Thank you

I thank my entire team. We have worked together collegially and in a positive and friendly way, and I am confident that the UPJ is in excellent shape for the new team to take over.

Brian Samuel became my Vice-President at my invitation at a time when I became President in unexpected circumstances. We have worked cohesively together and I thank him for his support and wish him well in his new role.

A special thanks comes from both me personally and on behalf of the UPJ to Jocelyn Robuck. She has been a veritable rock on whom we have relied: always easy-going, dispensing wise advice, working efficiently and productively, and always with the best interests of the Movement at heart. We are so lucky to have her.

Roger Mendelson