

Kesher Israel Board Meeting Minutes – February 13, 2005

Attendees: Natasha Rosenstock, Rabbi Freundel, Roz Singer, Jerry Chapman, Gary Winters, Al Altschul, Debbie Rogal, David Barak, Jonathan Frenkel, Leon Weiseltier, Elanit Rothschild, Evonne Marzouk, Baruch Fellner, Heather Zomer, David Sloan

1. Nursery School Discussion

The board discussed the status of the nursery school and the congregational meeting held on this topic. Gary said that there was a wide range of opinion among the congregation, and a sense that the Bayit II may be a “square peg for a round hole” of the nursery school.

Currently, the building has been rented out to a couple for 13 months. This covers the loan, tax, utilities, insurance, etc. for that time. We had a one month lag between when the property was purchased and when the rental began. Mortgage costs for that month were paid out of the new money raised for the project.

Gary said that the decision on whether to move forward will be driven by whether we can raise the money for the project. We will push forward with raising money, zoning, and looking for staff, and if we pass these hurdles, the project will move forward.

Heather Zomer asked about the support of the community in taking on such a big project. She expressed concern at taking on a big project if people will not want to send their children to the school, and if the school is not to be run the way the places their children are currently being sent.

Jonathan Frenkel said that whoever is hired for the school will have a big impact. Right now, our thoughts about the school are based on our imagination. He congratulated Gary for running a good congregational meeting.

Gary said that he sensed that the nursery school committee is thinking about all the important issues, and managing this project more professionally than others in the past. He said that Michael Gelfand has a huge amount of work to do in raising money. We will need to reconsider if we do not get the money commitments we need by the end of the year.

Rabbi Freundel asked when the director will come on board. This is critical for public perception. David Barak answered that the director should be hired 6-9 months before the school is opened, and that we should start looking 12 months before. The goal would be to hire the director more than half-time by December 2005 or January 2006. We would introduce the candidates in a communal meeting.

Gary said that there is a tremendous demand in this area for a school, even if not all Kesher families send their children.

We need to learn the lesson of the mikvah and maintain some contact with the congregation, monthly, about the status of this project.

A question was asked about the congregational assessment. Gary answered that our hope is that the congregational assessment would be the final part of the amount raised. \$1K over 3 years may be too much, and next fall is too soon. We will fundraise independently of the assessment, and make a decision on this as needed.

The point of no return for this project is December 2005, in order to open Fall 2006. By then, we need a builder engaged, architectural plans, and a director.

Baruch Fellner said that the zoning approval is the first step and there is no sense moving forward until this is confirmed.

2. Financial Report

It was noted that our disbursements exceeded our revenue this month. This is to be expected since this is not an income-generating month. Our budget for general contributions is lagging. Our dues line item is doing great for the year, as we have taken in about 30 new members. Aliyot donations are high this year. We are doing well this year so far, and will aggressively pursue Kol Nidre and dues commitments later in the year. It is critical to collect this money.

3. Fundraiser

The Maybergs have chosen not to be honorees this year, and the 3/27 proposed date is not going to work. The alternative is something smaller scale, to raise \$20-25K, after Pesach and closer to Shavuot.

Jonathan Frenkel said that a friend of Tova's family is a Jewish magician who gives a performance in good taste. His performance costs over \$1000. We could sell tickets to see him as part of a fundraiser.

David Sloan suggested two different fundraising events, one that would be a concert or show, and one that would be a learning event, a capstone activity for the rabbinic intern. Others could also come from New York to participate in a Yom Iyun. The goal is to have an event that people will sponsor at the \$500-750 level, so that we can raise \$25K. A big name could garner attendance at a Yom Iyun.

A magician event and Yom Iyun event could raise money and neither would be a lot of work. The magic event could include learning about Jewish views on magic. It is important that a show event make money. Previously the shul held an event with the Miami Boys Choir, and though it had high attendance, the costs were so high that little money was made.

Natasha Rosenstock said that the Sisterhood had been discussing doing a concert with a cellist and concert pianist, who are willing to donate their time. We would need a location with a piano and good acoustics. We could get people outside the board to help with the event, such as Amy Kauffman.

The Yom Iyun could be during Sefira, and the concert could be post Shavuot. Natasha, Roz, and Gary will talk to Amy. There should be a committee to crunch the numbers and make sure the events will be worth doing.

4. Discussion about the OU

Rabbi Freundel had a discussion with Rabbi Weinreb while in New York about rejoining the OU. Rabbi Weinreb said that no one involved in the problems of several years ago is around anymore. He provided a list of names and resumes of new people. There is a new president, and an ombudsman has been established. The OU regards this as an issue in the past. They are willing to meet with us as part of their mission on 3/6-7. They are not going to release a report. The OU interns are a help to our community and many become future members.

We were the only synagogue to leave the OU. Now that there has been a huge turnover, how long are we to stay out of the organization? Since the OU is a synagogue organization, it is for the board to decide. Rabbi Freundel said that the OU is not going to beg us to come back.

Baruch Fellner said that this is the same report we got from Rabbi Weinreb before. The question is, were those complicit punished? He believes that, except for being removed from their positions, they got off “scot-free.” They have not admitted their sins.

Gary asked what more the organization can do, beyond purging their leadership, which they have done 3 times.

Jonathan Frenkel asked if we have any points of leverage that we can use with them. Baruch said that leverage is not the point, the point is that they should take responsibility.

Natasha Rosenstock suggested that we rejoin the OU to “keep an eye on them.”

Roz Singer asked if there was a public apology, or acknowledgement to the victims. Baruch answered that they put out a statement in lawyer language and set up a hotline. Some individuals have apologized, but there has not been a formal apology from the organization.

It was asked what we gain by going back to the OU. Rabbi Freundel said that the OU strength is in its representation, and we get the benefit of being part of a larger community. Debbie Rogal said that Keshet is sometimes seen as being outside other organizations and the greater DC community, and being part of the OU helps us. We also get OU updates, policy statements, and kashrut alerts.

It was agreed that we would seek a time to meet with them, and once we meet with them, we should vote.

5. Administrator salary

There was a confidential discussion regarding the administrator’s salary.

6. Gabbai Appointments

The gabbai appointments are 2-year terms starting in July. Because of the birth of the Sloan twins and Josh Milner moving, we are down two gabbaim. The gabbaim have recommended Rami Genauer and Sholom Nelson to fill the spots at least until July.

Baruch Fellner said that Rabbi Freundel should select the gabbaim. It was clarified that these are the rabbi's recommendations, but that the board makes the decision.

The board accepted the new gabbaim with a vote of 11 in favor and one abstention.

7. Website Update

We have had some concerns about getting the website up to date. It was suggested to find someone whose only Keshet job is to manage the website. The current website manager enjoys the job, so it was suggested to find another person who can help. We will look for another person to help.

8. Mikvah Update

The Mikvah is filling up. The Mikvah committee has reconstituted the board and begun mikvah lady training. There will be a report at the next meeting.

We have instituted a policy to keep the back doors of the synagogue closed during Shabbat, to give privacy to women using the Mikvah. It was suggested to have the doors closed only during erev Shabbat and allow them to be used on Shabbat day. We agreed to try this.

9. Refurbishment of the Shul

We have set up an account for the project, and a donor is committed to put money in. We will get estimates for the project, broken down by element. A question was asked if the minyanim will need to be displaced. It is not clear if this will need to happen. Perhaps the carpet and seats can be done a section at a time.

10. Fundraiser for Israel's Environment

Evonne Marzouk presented a project proposed by the Green Group, to raise funds with JNF for the Nahal Alexander, a river in Northern Israel. The project would seek to raise \$25K over 3-5 years for the river. This is an opportunity for summer programming, as well.

This project was accepted with the unanimous sense of the board. It was also suggested that the congregation and Welfare Fund could make symbolic contributions. Baruch Fellner expressed his support for this project and encouraged other board members to contribute to this project.

11. Additional Items

It was requested that 1 out of 4 of the board meetings be held on a weeknight, perhaps Tuesday nights.

It was noted that Josh and Anna London had donated a new shtender for the Bayit.