

חֻקַּת בַּלַּק

CHUKAT BALAK

In loving memory of Harav Yitzhak Yoel ben Shlomo Halevi



Volume 32 | #41

4 July 2020
12 Tammuz 5780

Shabbat ends:

London 10:24pm
Sheffield 10.56pm
Edinburgh 11.24pm
Birmingham 10.39pm
Jerusalem 8.31pm

The fast of

17 Tammuz is on
9th July. It starts at
11.2am and ends at
10.14pm
(London times)

Please look regularly at the social media and websites of the US, Tribe and your community for ongoing updates relating to Coronavirus as well as educational programming and community support.

You do not need to sign into Facebook to access the US Facebook page. The US Coronavirus Helpline is on 020 8343 5696.

May God bless us and the whole world.

Artscroll p.838
Haftarah p.1189

Hertz p.652
Haftarah p.682

Soncino p.898
Haftarah p.929

Daf Hashavua

"How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Israel!"
(Bemidbar 22:5)

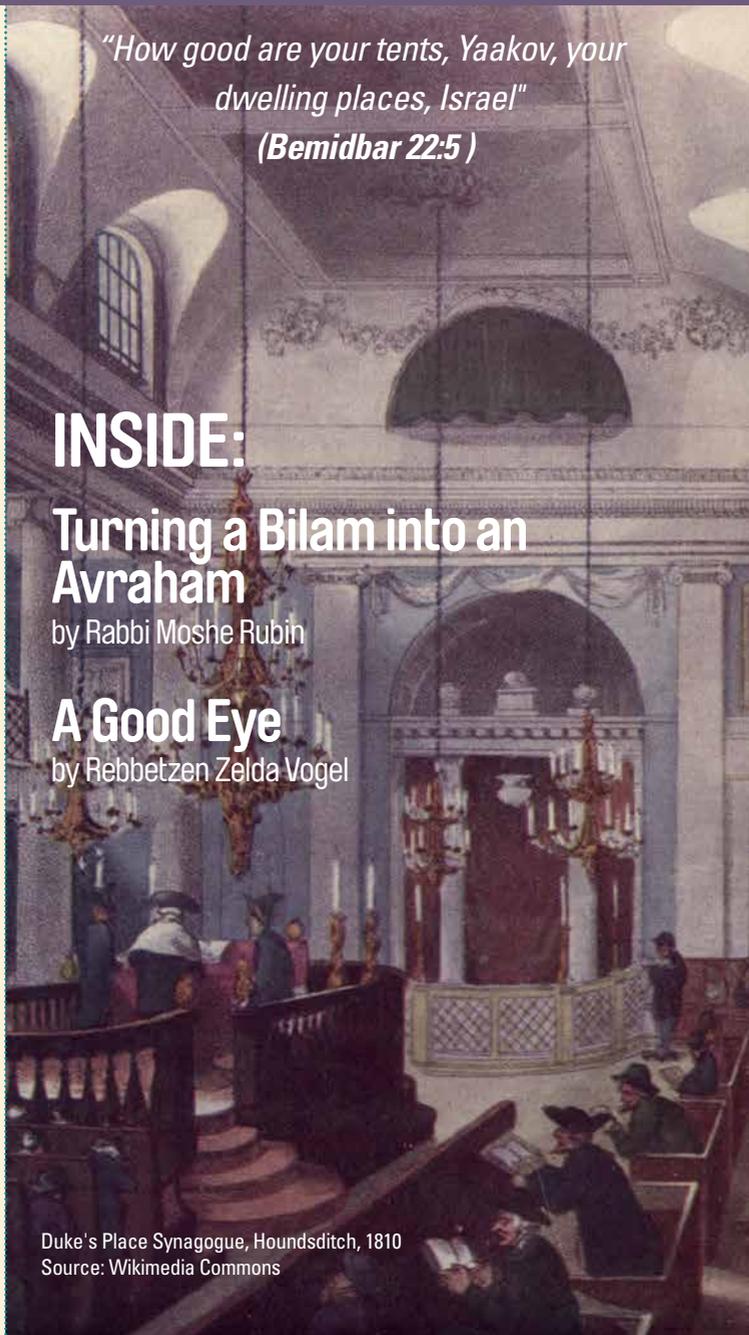
INSIDE:

Turning a Bilam into an Avraham

by Rabbi Moshe Rubin

A Good Eye

by Rebetzen Zelda Vogel



Duke's Place Synagogue, Houndsditch, 1810
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Sidra breakdown

חַקַּת בַּלָּק
Chukat Balak

6th & 7th Sidrot in:

בְּמִדְבָּר

Bemidbar

By Numbers:

191 verses
2,700 words
10,027 letters

Headlines:

Moses hits the rock, Bilam's talking donkey



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by US Living & Learning together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

Editor-in-Chief: Rabbi Baruch Davis

Editorial and Production Team:

Rabbi Daniel Sturgess,
Rabbi Michael Laitner,
Rebbetzen Nechama Davis,
Joanna Rose

Available also via email US website
www.theus.org.uk ©United Synagogue

To sponsor Daf Hashavua please contact Danielle Fox on 020 8343 6261, or dfox@theus.org.uk

If you have any comments or questions regarding Daf Hashavua please email landl@theus.org.uk

Turning a Bilam into an Avraham

By Rabbi Moshe Rubin,
Giffnock & Newlands Hebrew Congregation



Many people are students of Siri or Alexa, the 'smart home' assistants. The other day

I even heard my children asking Siri to tell them a joke! It seems that Siri can teach us science, maths or grammar almost to degree level!

However the one thing Siri cannot teach us is how to be a mench, usually translated as a 'decent person'.

The first Rebbe of Gur Chassidim, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (1799-1866),

often referred to as the 'Chidushei Harim' after one of his works, could not understand why his followers, his talmidim, had chosen him as their teacher when they could have chosen a far greater teacher - Avraham Avinu.

The Rebbe would quote the Mishna in Pirkei Avot, (5:22, pg. 560 in the green siddur), which teaches that whoever possesses the following three traits are of the talmidim of Avraham - a generous eye, a modest demeanour and a humble soul.

In loving memory of Chaya Rachel bat Moshe Ben-tzion

Sidra Summary

1st Aliya (Kohen) – Bemidbar 19:1 - 20:6

God tells Moshe and Aharon to teach the nation the laws of the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah). The unblemished animal, which has never had a yoke upon it, is to be given to Elazar, Aharon's son, who must slaughter it outside the camp. It is then to be burned by a different Kohen, who must also throw some cedar wood, hyssop and crimson thread into the fire. Both he and Elazar will become ritually impure (tameh) through this preparatory process. In contrast, the ashes of the Heifer, when mixed with water, are used to purify someone who has become tameh through coming into contact with a corpse. After the ashes are mixed with water, a ritually pure person (tahor) sprinkles the mixture on the tameh person, using a bundle of hyssop. By doing so, the one who sprinkles becomes tameh. The Israelites come to the wilderness of Tsin, where Miriam, Moshe and Aharon's sister, dies. The people complain that they have no water and would have been better off staying in Egypt.

2nd Aliya (Sheini) – 20:7-21

God tells Moshe to take his staff and speak to a rock in front of the nation, after which water will emerge from the rock. However, Moshe strikes the rock twice (instead of speaking to it). Although the rock then produces abundant water, God tells

He saw homes where there was respect and where there were not prying eyes between neighbours



However the Mishna also gives us another, surprising option to choose as our 'rebbe'. It offers us Bilaam! That's right, our nemesis and arch enemy as detailed in the second of this week's two sidrot.

As the Mishna continues, an evil eye, an arrogant demeanour and an insatiable soul are attributes of the talmidim of Bilaam, the opposite of Avraham's talmidim.

A talmid is more than just a student gaining information from their teacher; for that we can use Siri and Alexa. A talmid is someone who also learns a moral and ethical code from their teacher. We know that Avraham and

Sara travelled everywhere to teach the word of God but what really left an impression on their students was their behaviour, such as Avraham's boldness in saving Lot when he was taken captive in the War of the Kings. And, of course, Avraham's passionate prayers for the people of Sodom & Gemoroh, despite their wicked behaviour.

What a contrast this is with Bilaam who, even when God forces him to bless the Jews, does so with such reluctance that, as the Talmud teaches us, all his blessings turn out to be curses. How could this be? Because at the heart of all those blessings was an

evil eye, an arrogant demeanour and a greedy soul.

However, the Talmud also says that, even though all of Bilaam's blessings turned out to be curses, there was one exception, the one that we say every morning as we enter shul, 'Mah Tovu... how beautiful are your tents Jacob your dwelling place Israel.' (Bemidbar 24:5).

What was different about this blessing?

Bilam, we are taught, looked directly into the Israelite homes. What he saw inspired him so much that he could not stop himself from saying the beautiful blessing of Mah Tovu. He saw homes where there was respect and where there were not prying eyes between neighbours.

The different attributes of each tribe were valued; each respected the other and the mutual opportunity to thrive. . How could this sight not inspire Bilaam to bless the Jews? For a brief moment Bilaam also became a student of Avraham.

Particularly now, when we are still restricted despite the easing of some lockdown provisions, we should also aspire to be a talmid of Avraham.

Moshe and Aharon that they will not enter the Land.

Point to Consider: *Why was Aharon also punished if he did not strike the rock? (20:12)*

3rd Aliya (Shelishi) – 20:22-21:20

Moshe sends messengers to the king of Edom, asking him to allow the Israelites to travel from Kadesh through his land. Despite Moshe's assurances that they will not take any of his resources, Edom refuses and comes out to threaten the Israelites militarily. The Israelites turn away. The nation travels from Kadesh to Mount Hor. Upon God's command, Moshe, Aharon and Elazar ascend Mount Hor. Elazar dons Aharon's special Kohen Gadol (High Priest) garments, after which Aharon dies. The nation mourns Aharon's death for 30 days. Israel is attacked by the Canaanites and defeats them. After the nation travels on, the people again become thirsty for water. After complaining, many people are killed by a plague of serpents. Moshe prays for those who have been bitten but have not yet died. God tells him to fashion a

copper snake, which miraculously heals anyone who looks at it. The nation comes to the border of Moab, where they find a well. They compose a song about the well.

4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 21:21-22:12

After denying the Israelites the right to pass through his land, the king of Sichon wages war against them. The Israelites defeat him, before defeating Og, the mighty king of Bashan, who had also attacked them.

Point to Consider: *Why did God have to tell Moshe not to fear Og? (see Rashi to 21:34)*

5th Aliya (Kohen) – Bemidbar 22:13-38

Balak, the king of Moab, having seen that the Israelites defeated the Amorites, is afraid that they will plot against him. Balak sends emissaries to Midian, to Bilam the son of Be'or, asking him to curse the Israelites. Bilam tells Balak's emissaries to stay the night, to give him time to see how God will instruct him. God appears to Bilam at night and

A Good Eye

by Rebbetzen Zelda Vogel, Ealing Synagogue



You are out at a function and meet a person who needs a lift. Would you go far out of your way to assist? Your neighbour is desperate. Do you extend the hand of friendship at the expense of a day's work and loss of earnings?

The next time you are faced with such dilemmas, think of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer).

The sidra of Chukat opens with a description of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, whose ashes were combined in a potion that was sprinkled on an impure person to purify him (Bemidbar 19:1-9). This is a *chok*, a mitzvah seemingly without a rationale. Ritual purity, *taharah*, is a spiritual condition that has nothing to do with personal hygiene.

The preparation of these ashes required an act of selflessness. Remarkably, anyone involved in this process of purification, actually became impure as a result!

There are a variety of ways through which a person contracts impurity, all somehow relating to death. Primary

among these is contact with a deceased person.

While attending a funeral is a mitzvah of the highest nature, in so doing, a person becomes ritually impure. We therefore learn that some mitzvot apparently come at a spiritual cost to ourselves, but we do it since it is a *chok*, part of God's will.

We see that in the spiritual realm, we sometimes put ourselves out for a mitzvah even though we may suffer spiritually. This certainly applies in our material lives and the extent to which we put ourselves out for others.

Elsewhere in the sidra (21:5), other creatures are mentioned, the snakes that bit the people who spoke badly about the manna. This punishment was to teach us how destructive is the sin of *Lashon Hara*, disparaging speech.

"Words are like arrows and smoldering coals", says the Psalmist.

... one who works on respecting others and eradicating negativity, becomes a naturally loving person.

Like arrows, explains the Midrash, if a person stands in one place and his words can wreak havoc on another's life miles away, like coal, whose outer surface has been extinguished but whose interior remains aflame. Malicious words continue to work their damage long after their external effect has dissipated.

One way to tackle *Lashon Hara* is to suppress the temptation to gossip. This is a difficult and continuous struggle. The Baal Hatanya, written by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1812) offers a different technique: one who possesses a good eye (Pirkei Avot 2:13, p. 533 in the green siddur), one who works on respecting others and eradicating negativity, becomes a naturally loving person. Instead of fighting the darkness, he expels it through shining a light in his heart.

From the punishment of the snakes, we learn the importance of using good, positive speech. We can build individuals and the world. We can praise, encourage and give others confidence. From the mitzvah of the Red Heifer, we learn to put ourselves out for others, in matters spiritual and material.

In memory of Yisrael Shmuel ben Yirmaya Yehoshuah

warns him not to travel to Moab to curse the Israelites, who are a blessed nation. Bilam wakes up in the morning and tells Balak's officers that he is unable to go with them, due to God's warning. After they report back to Balak, he sends higher-ranking officers to persuade Bilam. Bilam repeats that he is bound by God's word. God again appears to Bilam at night, telling him that he has permission to go, but that he must do what He instructs him. Bilam saddles his donkey and travels with Balak's officers. God is angered by Bilam's decision and sends an angel to impede him. The donkey sees the angel, who has a drawn sword in his hand. She deviates from the road to

avoid the angel. Bilam, unable to see the angel, hits the donkey. The angel positions himself between two parallel fences. When the donkey moves towards the wall, pressing Bilam's leg against it, Bilam again hits her. The angel then places himself in a narrow part of the path, making it impossible for the donkey to circumvent him. She stops and crouches, causing Bilam to get angry and hit her again. God "opens the mouth of the donkey", who defends her actions. God now "uncovers Bilam's eyes" and he sees the angel. The angel chastises Bilam, who admits his sin and suggests that he returns home. The angel responds that he can continue his journey but must not say

The Hambro' Synagogue

by Simon Goulden, Education Consultant to the United Synagogue



One of the founding communities of the United Synagogue was the Hambro' Synagogue, off Fenchurch Street in the City of London, although its beginnings were anything but united!

The Hambro was founded in 1702 by a wealthy gem dealer, Marcus (or Mordecai) Moses (also known as Marcus Hamburger), who wanted to establish a small beit hamidrash (study hall, also used for prayer) at a house in St. Mary Axe. This was bitterly opposed by the Great Synagogue (the 'mother' synagogue of London Ashkenazi Jewry), which, with the support of the Bevis Marks Synagogue, obtained an injunction from the Court of the Alderman of the City of London against the proposed beit hamidrash.

A further dispute developed regarding the validity of a get (religious divorce document), about which Hamburger had publicly and scathingly criticised the rabbinic authorities; this led to his being excommunicated. The rabbi of the Great Synagogue at that time was Rabbi Aharon Hart, one of the early Chief Rabbis.

Despite this opposition, in 1707,

Hamburger started a shul at his home in Magpie Alley (also called Church Row or Church Passage), off Fenchurch Street. Jochanan Höllischau, Hamburger's family tutor from his youth in Hamburg, was engaged as its rabbi; he dissolved the decree of excommunication. A separate burial ground in Hoxton was also acquired by the congregation.

Unfortunately, the next three quarters of a century did not bring harmonious relationships between the communities, even though they would both eventually agree to become founding communities of the United Synagogue in 1870.

One fascinating story connected to the Hambro' is that of Isaac Valentine. Born in Belgium in 1793, then under Austrian rule, he was brought to London as an infant when his father, Rabbi Nathan Isaac Vallentine of Breslau, was appointed rabbi of the Hambro' Synagogue. Isaac had an eventful youth. As described on the website www.findagrave.com, he was apprenticed to a watchmaker on the Isle of Sheppey who became insane, pressganged into the Royal Navy (perhaps during the Napoleonic Wars) and eventually released through the efforts of the Jews of Canterbury. During a visit to

Belgium, he was knocked to the ground and concussed for failing to take part in a public Christian ritual. He was also involved in the bizarre smuggling of a coffin hidden in a piano case, containing the body of a Mrs Joseph, an English Jewess who had died during a visit to Brussels, and for whom it was feared that a Jewish burial might not otherwise have been possible. 'Eventful' is perhaps an understatement!

When eventually he decided to make London his permanent home, he opened a printing works in Duke Street, becoming the founder of the Jewish Chronicle and of the Almanac bearing his name. This first appeared in 1837 and continued annually for over a century.

He served on the governing bodies of eighteen charities and was the co-founder of five literary and scientific institutions. He died aged 76 years and is buried in the United Synagogue's Lauriston Road Cemetery. The name Valentine continues, as a joint publishing venture of the JC in the 1940s led to the formation of Vallentine Mitchell, the still extant book publisher, which was the first to publish The Diary of Anne Frank, in England in 1952.

In memory of Yehuda ben Yaakov HaCohen

anything other than what God tells him. Balak goes out to greet Bilam on the border of Arnon.

6th Aliya (Shishi) – 22:39-23:26

Bilam and Balak go to a vantage point from where Bilam can see the edge of the Israelite camp. Bilam tells Balak to build him seven altars and give him seven bulls and rams to sacrifice. Balak complies and Bilam sacrifices the animals. God appears to Bilam and tells him what to say. Against his will, Bilam actually blesses the Israelites. Balak is incensed, yet Bilam claims that he is unable to defy God's command.

Point to Consider: *How do we see Bilam trying to emulate the patriarchs? (see Rashi to 23:4)*

7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 23:27-25:9

Balak takes Bilam to a new location in the hope of a better result. Once again, Bilam brings animal offerings. As before, God appears to Bilam, who can only bless, not curse, the Israelites. Balak and Bilam go to a third location. After bringing the offerings to the altar, Bilam sees the encampments of the Israelites and "the spirit of God rests upon him" so that he actually no longer wants to curse them (Rashi). Again Bilam

Balak and the 'Three Weeks'

by Rebbetzen Siobhan Dansky, Cranbrook Synagogue



In Parshat Balak, King Balak of Moab appointed Bilaam to go and curse the Jewish People. Our Sages tell us that Bilaam had genuine powers of prophecy equalling those of Moshe.

Bilaam is described as "the man with the open eye" (Bamidbar 24:3). Further, in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 5:22, p. 560 in the green siddur) it says that those who have an 'evil eye' are among the disciples of Bilaam. Eye - singular.

Seeing with only one eye, monocular vision, reduces the ability to perceive depth, judge distance and it reduces the field of vision by around 20%. In other words, monocular vision prevents a person from truly seeing the whole picture. Perhaps conceptually this means that if we only use one eye, we are unable to make a balanced judgement. We may find ourselves focussing on certain aspects of a person's character - such as one mistake they have made - or their physical make-up - such as their skin colour or gender - due to our inability to see the whole person. Our lack of depth perception may lessen our ability to look deeper and develop empathy and understanding for a person, given their background and emotional state. These factors can easily lead us to disagreement, dislike and even hatred of another.

It can be no accident that this parasha is read in the lead-up to 17th

Tammuz - the beginning of the period of the Three Weeks. We are told that the holy Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred - *sinat chinam*. Sadly, we need only look at the news to see that prejudice and hatred are alive and well in our society today. We hear daily about people who have experienced discrimination based on their skin colour, religion or gender. The antidote to *sinat chinam* is *ahavat chinam* - baseless love - loving another person just because they are another member of the human race, descended from the same root parents of Adam and Eve. When Hashem said, "Let us make man in our image" (Bereshit, 1:26), He did not differentiate according to nationality or race, and did not make it dependant on specific behaviour.

Towards the end of the parasha it is clear that Bilaam has learnt his lesson. He stands on a mountain, over-seeing the entire camp of the Bnei Yisrael

and "Bilaam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes, and the spirit of Hashem was upon him" (Bamidbar 24:2) and then Bilaam blessed the Jewish People. With both eyes open we are able to see each other in full. We can perceive a person's surface level features and behaviour, and also see deeper into their background and way of thinking. We may still see their flaws, but we can also find their "tzelem Elokim", their Godly image, and we can find reason to love and bless. Pirkei Avot (1:4) teaches us "dan et kol ha'adam lekaf zechut". This can be understood as instruction to judge everybody favourably, but more literally means that we must judge the whole person favourably.

With both eyes open, we can find reason to love each other and, in this way, work towards rebuilding the Temple speedily in our days.

The Fast of 17 Tammuz

The Mishna in Ta'anit (4:3) lists five calamities that happened on 17 Tammuz:

- Moses broke the first tablets of stone when he descended Mount Sinai and found the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf.
- The daily sacrifice was suspended in the First Temple, just prior to its destruction.
- The walls of Jerusalem were breached three weeks before the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, and on 9 Tammuz prior to the destruction of the First Temple (Jeremiah 52:67).

- Apostamus burnt the Torah during the time of the Second Temple.
- An idol was placed inside the Sanctuary. This probably occurred around the same time.

The Fast of 17 Tammuz ushers in the period known as the 'Three Weeks'. We refrain from haircuts, weddings and listening to music. One may get engaged during this time. We refrain from reciting the shehecheyanu blessing on new garments or fruit, except on Shabbat. From Rosh Chodesh Av, we do not eat meat nor drink wine, except on Shabbat.

blesses Israel. Balak dismisses him. Before leaving, Bilam tells Balak that the Israelites could be vulnerable to licentious behaviour (Rashi). He then prophesies about future stages of their history. Bilam and Balak go their separate ways. The Israelites settle in Shittim where the men are attracted to Moabite women, as well as towards worshipping the idol Pe'or. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, sees a public display of licentious behaviour and kills the culprit, Zimri from the tribe of

Shimon, along with Kozbi, the Midianite princess.

Haftarah (of Balak, Micha 5:6-8)

The prophet Micha describes the Messianic times that the 'remnant of Yaakov' will experience. He also recalls how God looked after the nation in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt, including His thwarting of the evil plans of Balak and Bilam.

SCHOOL YEARS
4, 5 AND 6

SOCIALLY
DISTANCED
BUBBLES*

£140
FOR 4 DAYS

TRIBE SUMMER DAY CAMP

THE STAYCATION 2020



OUTDOOR
ACTIVITIES

SPORTS

ARTS
& CRAFTS

GAMES

Monday - Thursday
9:30am - 3:30pm

Weeks commencing
27 July, 3 August,
10 August

For more information or to
sign up please visit
www.tribeuk.com



tribe
www.tribeuk.com

*Tribe's Summer Camp 2020 will be run in strict accordance with the latest government guidelines. Details are subject to change.

 [tribe.uk](https://www.instagram.com/tribe.uk)
 [@TheTribeUK](https://twitter.com/TheTribeUK)
 [Tribe](https://www.facebook.com/Tribe)



THE TRIBE SCRIBE

US AT 150: EPISODE 3



DID YOU KNOW THE **UNITED SYNAGOGUE** WAS FOUNDED IN 1870 WHICH MEANS THAT THIS YEAR IS ITS **150TH BIRTHDAY**?

WOAH, THAT'S A LOT OF CANDLES! JOIN US IN **EPISODE 3** OF 4 SPECIAL EPISODES AS WE FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE **UNITED SYNAGOGUE** ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.



WE NOW KNOW THAT THE **1870 ACT OF PARLIAMENT** BROUGHT THE **UNITED SYNAGOGUE** INTO EXISTENCE. BUT WHICH WERE THOSE FOUNDING SYNAGOGUES?

The Great Synagogue – Dukes Place, Aldgate was the leading **Ashkenazi** Synagogue in the City of London (1690-1977). Home to the seat of **Chief Rabbis**, this synagogue was destroyed in the Blitz.



JOIN US AS WE CHECK OUT THE FIVE ORIGINAL SHULS/SYNAGOGUES OF THE **US** - THREE SYNAGOGUES OF THE CITY OF LONDON AND TWO SYNAGOGUES OF THE WEST END.

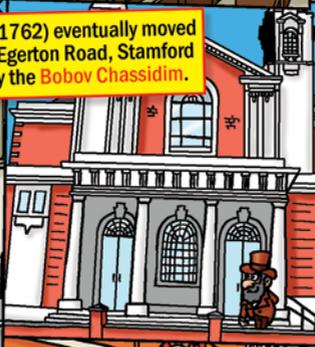
The Hambro' Synagogue (1707-1936) Fenchurch Street. It was called **The Hambro' Synagogue** as it followed the customs of the Hamburg community.



The New Synagogue (1762) eventually moved from the East End to Egerton Road, Stamford Hill. It is now used by the **Bobov Chassidim**.



The Central Synagogue (1848) has been in Great Portland Street for more than 155 years!



BUT PA, AREN'T WE THERE YET? WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR MILES!

TODAY, 150 YEARS LATER, THE **CHIEF RABBI** IS STILL THE HEAD OF THE **UNITED SYNAGOGUE** AS ITS SPIRITUAL LEADER, BUT WE'VE GROWN A BIT... THE **US** IS THE LARGEST SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENT IN EUROPE!



DON'T WORRY, THIS IS THE LAST OF OUR LONG WALKS TO SYNAGOGUE ON **SHABBAT**. FROM NEXT WEEK WE'LL HAVE OUR OWN SYNAGOGUE ROUND THE CORNER IN BAYSWATER!

The Bayswater Synagogue (1863-1984) was one of the two West End Synagogues established so that Jews who had moved away from the City of London wouldn't have to walk so far to get to Shul on **Shabbat**!



THIS INCLUDES OVER **60** COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, LOOKING AFTER APPROX. **60,000** PEOPLE!



tribe
www.tribeuk.com

Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.