

Shabbos Hagodol enlarged

► Elyokim Feder

GATESHEAD'S kehillah experienced a change of venue for this year's Shabbos Hagodol drosho, with the gathering taking place in their own simcha hall, the Bewick Centre.

It had been noted in previous years that as a result of the expansion of the kehillah, the current Shul premises on Bewick Road could no longer accommodate the crowds of members wishing to participate in this pre-Pesach tradition, with the expansion of the kehillah and the coming of age of the younger members wishing to attend.

The Beis Hamedrash of the shul, built in the late 1930s, was refurbished in the summer of 2008, the old wooden seats replaced with freestanding tables and chairs, adding capacity to the shul. Attempts to enable the increased numbers to attend the

bi-annual kehillah-wide addresses of Shabbos Hagodol and Shabbos Shuvah involved removing the tables to add the maximum number of chairs, and the opening of the Ezras Noshim and the large upstairs hall for members to listen.

This still left a capacity of only 200 seats, and even these were in highly overcrowded conditions, turning large numbers away from the gathering.

This year's innovation saw over 550 seats placed in the spacious surroundings of the Bewick Centre simcha hall, in addition to tens of people who were standing. A sefer Torah and appurtenances were placed in the centre of the hall for the massive mincha minyan which preceded the drosho. Printed siddurim containing the sections relevant for both Shabbos Hagodol and Shabbos Shuvah had thoughtfully been provided at each place, along with copies of the Gemoros

and sources which the Rov had announced for preparation the week before.

Following Mincha the Gateshead Rov, Rav Shraga Feivel Zimmerman delivered an impressive halachic discourse on the two aspects of the mitzvah of Maror, the Torah's obligation upon us and its purpose of reminding us of the bitterness, and the halachic ramifications of these concepts.

The Rov then gave a brief reminder of the halochos specific to the first day of Pesach falling on Shabbos, most of which can be avoided by preparing before the onset of Shabbos and Yomtov, for example the preparation of salt-water, the checking of the lettuce leaves, the roasting of the *zeroa* and the removal of questionable parts of the matzos.

He continued with the message that each person must take to heart the real idea behind the removal of chometz, namely the

removal of irrelevant externalities from our own lives to allow the purity and *penimius* of the neshomo to shine through.

We create for ourselves an unreal world, where we chase after possessions, pleasures and approval, imagining that these are somehow necessary to our well-being, but not realising that they have no intrinsic value. This is why the *yetzer hora* appears to the tzaddikim as nothing more than a hair's breadth, as it holds, in reality, no attraction.

The more we are steeped in the darkness of our imaginary world of pleasures, said the Rov, the more attractive they seem. It is only by attaching oneself to the light of Torah and mitzvos that we can chase away the darkness.

The Rov also gave a drosho to the noshim of the kehillah later in the day, attended by over 400 ladies.

Ladies flock to Orah shalosh seudos

► Batya Bentley

NEARLY one hundred ladies, ranging from high school girls to grandmothers, participated in a communal Seudah Shelishis organised by Orah, the recently launched learning programme for women in North West London. The mix of food, singing of zemiros and divrei Torah at Ner Yisroel shul

in Hendon made for an inspiring occasion, the idea of which was suggested by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, a Holocaust survivor and director of the outreach programme Hineni. In a recent talk in London, she had highlighted the importance of the third Shabbos meal and its role in helping us survive the difficulties of golus and meriting us to see the coming geulah.

The guest speaker at the event was Rabbi Ilan Halberstadt. He spoke about the power of women and their special relationship to Rosh Chodesh. It taps into the idea of *chiddush*, "newness" where the Jewish people have the amazing ability to reinvent themselves every month, like the cycle of the moon. They are not bound to the *shana*, "year" and its constant "repetition"

that characterises the outlook of the gentile nations. Rather, the woman has the special strength to see Hashem behind the natural cycle of events and is empowered to bring a state of "newness" to the mundane routine of taking care of the house and family.

It is the women who will be responsible for using this to bring forth the redemption – especially

during Nisan the month of "redemption" in spiritual and physical freedom.

The Seudah Shlishis organisers were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response and the amazing atmosphere. There are plans to follow this up on a monthly basis on every Shabbos Mevorchim to continue to inspire women of all ages and throughout the community.



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