

Nineteen years ago, we in Stanmore were in the fore-front of the campaign for the release of Soviet Jewry when a new and dynamic voice of leadership came to our community. It belonged of course to our new beloved Rabbi, Dr. Jeffrey Cohen.

During his and Gloria's time with us, the face of world Jewry has changed dramatically. Both the Soviet Union and the Berlin wall had collapsed some five years prior to their arrival and the Alliyah of Soviet Jewry was in full swing. The Jewish prisoners of conscience – Natan Sharansky, Vladimир Slepak, Ida Nudel and so many others, some of whom were known to several of us in the days of the Stanmore Soviet Jewry Committee, had been released and were making new lives in Israel and our Jewish brethren were arriving at the rate of 50/60000 per year.

At this exciting period, Rabbi Cohen's voice was a constant encouragement, urging us on in our efforts to encourage our community to identify with this great redemption of our people who had been lost to us for so long and fund raise. He and Gloria participated prominently with us on several Stanmore/London and national JIA missions to Israel where we welcomed many plane loads of new arrivals, visited new towns, where we saw the establishment of schools, homes and welfare and recreational facilities and witnessed the development of Israel as a modern technically advanced country in an oasis of backwardness in that part of our world.

Four years after his arrival in February 1990, Stanmore was privileged to host the first Soviet Jewry Solidarity Rally with over 1500 people packed into our shul and Freeman Susman Hall. Together with our local MP, mayor and several other dignitaries, we welcomed two of the heroes of our time – Maria and Vladimir Slepak. They were the couple who, in the early 80s, hung a banner outside the balcony of their apartment in the centre of Moscow which read WE WANT TO EMIGRATE TO ISRAEL and were subsequently imprisoned for five years. I had the honour to chair the evening and I am sure that the very many who were present, will never forget the manner in which our Rabbi welcomed those heroes to Stanmore and his very moving address, which is included in his book "Issues of the Day".

His commitment and support was no less forthcoming when the Ethiopian Jews started to arrive, indeed in all of Israel's triumphant moments as well as her periods of anxiety and unease, his voice and presence has been a constant source of encouragement to all who have been involved both inside our own community of Stanmore and beyond.

So too has his voice been heard when our community at home has been involved in matters of controversy and division. He has never been afraid to make his views known on the matter in hand, whether the issue was of a religious, political or social nature. He has not been afraid to be a lone voice amongst his peers and in so doing he has earned the continuous respect and admiration of our community.

In all of the period of his ministry here in Stanmore, our Rabbi has been to all who have called on him, a constant source of encouragement and a wise sounding board. His advice has always been given freely and with great affection and all of us will miss him greatly in our shul and be the poorer when he leaves us.

I am very grateful for this opportunity to publicly wish them both very many years of good health and happiness to enjoy a long and well deserved retirement with their children and grandchildren in the knowledge that his council will continue to be available and our friendship will remain as firm as it has always been.

David Cohen