

SPEECH OF TRIBUTE TO RABBI DR JEFFREY COHEN ON OCCASION OF HIS BEING HONOURED AS CHATAN TORAH BY STANMORE & CANONS PARK SYNAGOGUE IN 2005. DELIVERED BY DR NIGEL DE KARE-SILVER, WARDEN OF THE CONGREGATION.

It is a privilege and an honour to be here tonight, to present to you, Rabbi Dr Jeffrey Cohen, the certificate from Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue, on the occasion of your being accorded the well-deserved title of 'Chatan Torah.'

Minister and leader of this community for nearly twenty years, Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue has been transformed under your guidance and leadership from an unexceptional community in a prosperous North London suburb to the flagship of the United Synagogue movement and the largest orthodox community in the world.

You have an unmatched tolerance and are embracing in your approach to Judaism. This has brought many to make synagogue the centre of their lives in a way which before you came here would have been unimaginable. You have made the shul in Stanmore a warm and inviting place for many to call their second home, whatever their attitude to religion and practice outside. Many come here simply to hear your fine words, to hear you speak. Many come for the sense of community and social belonging which your attitude has established in this synagogue over the years. Increasingly more come to pray and to learn prayer.

You have a vast range of skills all of which you use at the highest level. You have integrity, you have a sharp wit, you have deep charm, you have respect, you have honour and you give honour to those around you, you are a renowned author, you can make us roar long and loud with laughter, you can touch our hearts and hold our eyes. You have a deep analytical approach to problems, be they religious or otherwise, and use your high intellectual level to rationalise into words what we all feel but are inadequate to enunciate.

You are inexorably independently minded, unafraid whenever it is justified, to criticise even those elevated by society, even where such criticism puts you into a hostile firing line. You are a fierce defender of Israel but never ignore the truth.

You are unafraid to question dogma even where this may challenge established didactic teachings and put you at odds with your colleagues.

Forever at your side, Gloria is with you. Together you have forged a team of great strength. With her unique gentle soft and welcoming approach, Gloria inimitably reaches into the hearts of people, and with you, is immediately at hand when they are in need. Yet this warm exterior veils her own formidable intellect, powers and talents. Gloria, formerly head of science department at a secondary school, gave up her own career, soon after it was taking off, to serve the community alongside you. Together you have a perfect harmony:

Gloria's encyclopaedic knowledge of names and family details of the community in tune with your near overwhelming scholasticism. Together you are a team of leaders, but also parents to your four wonderful children and twelve beautiful grandchildren, in addition to being parent, friend, mentor and guardian to your community.

With all this strength, something began to itch inside me. Was there a weakness anywhere? Having asked, searched and rummaged around at length amongst those who spend their weeks with you, looking for some fault, I believe I may have discovered the single flaw in your otherwise perfectly polished and distinguished personality. Ask anyone who has dared join you on a Wednesday morning. Somewhere down in the heart of Stanmore emerges a Jeffrey Cohen who shrugs off the mantle of his titles Rabbi and Doctor. An aggressive and accomplished versatile tennis player whom others fear to challenge, as masterful in his sport as he is in his life's vocation.

In Pirkei avot we read that Rabbi Shimon says the world stands on three things: the Torah, service [of g-d] and acts of loving-kindness. In you we see all three, and for our community you have worked ceaselessly over the past nineteen years. You have built permanent pillars here: pillars of granite, pillars with room for us all to stand with ease and comfort, pillars which are permanent testimonies to your leadership.

In Kohelet, on Chol Hamoed last Shabbat, we read: *Umi kehe-chakham umi yode'a peshet davar? Chokhmat adam ta'iyar panav*, "Who is like the wise man? Who know what things mean? A man's wisdom lights up his face ..."

You are that wise man. Your face is alight with your wisdom which shines on all of us when we are with you.

Every day in our services, twice a day, we say *Shema Yisrael*: "Listen Israel". Throughout the Torah the word *Shema* appears dozens of times. You are one to whom we all "listen."

You are a scholar, a ba'al tefilah, ba'al megilla and a ba'al korei. You are our rabbi and have been our rabbi here for longer than many have been members, and longer than a whole generation of our youth have lived.

You are our chazak, our strength, on which we have all depended for so long.

Rabbi Dr Jeffrey Cohen, we are honoured, grateful, privileged and humbled by you being our Chatan Torah this year and our Rav for the past nineteen years.

In Bereshit tomorrow we read the story of the Creation. We can look back and say the years you have been here have been good years, years of building, developing and enrichment. We hope, believe and trust you can look back on these years and feel the same.