

Sim Shalom Annual Report – 2006

Sim Shalom congregation continues to do well, but premises has become a crucial problem for us in the past year. After six years in a 3-room flat on Csalogany (Nightingale) Street, we finally had to leave for two reasons. The first was that we had outgrown the space. Attendance at anything but the simplest educational programs and religious services had increased so much that we were often bulging at the seams. For Rosh Hashanah and Passover, we have always had to hire a hall to accommodate all those who wanted to attend. The second reason was much less pleasant! We were forced to leave sooner than we wished to because of the strong resistance to our presence by the neighbors, especially one who lived directly below us. He resorted to physical threats and intimidation, and to leaving gross objects on our doormat, as well as campaigning vigorously against us with the governing council of the apartment house. He also made complaints to the local government. No adequate and timely answer was made to these various complaints, and finally we exhausted our appeals and had to move out.

Since July we have been holding all of our programs in space allocated to us in Balint Haz, the Budapest Jewish Community Center, in the center of Pest. The space is not ideal, but there is one large room we can use which was able to hold us for our Rosh Hashanah services, so for the first time we did not have to rent a hall.

Knowing that we would likely have to leave the Csalogany location, we had been searching since late 2005 without success for new premises that we could afford. No space owned by city-government, which might have been free, was usable, and privately owned space that we found was too expensive. Several properties owned by the national Hungarian government also proved to be quite unsatisfactory. But finally, the Hungarian government offered us the use of a large Art Nouveau style villa in a good residential area of Pest. Late in the year we signed a contract to use it. The drawback is that it is in poor condition and needs \$150,000/250,000 to renovate it and make it usable. In anticipation of the contract, we have had architects drawing up plans for the renovation. Fund-raising for the renovation will start immediately after the start of 2007.

Another unpleasant event was the splitting off of a small number of members to form a new Reform Jewish association. In the elections at the Annual General Meeting in the spring, the president and vice-president were not reelected. The vice-president had resigned previously and the president did not reply when asked if he was standing again for election. New officers were elected, along with some new Board members. The old president and vice-president formed a new organization, in which they were joined by a few former Sim Shalom members. Some of these people have since returned to Sim Shalom.

On a happier note, Sim Shalom and its leaders have continued to make a strong showing in the greater Budapest Jewish Community. The most notable of these was at the Hungarian version of the well-known Limmud conferences of the British Jewish community. These are held around Christmas time, with an attendance of thousands at manifold workshops, lectures, services, etc. It's a real festival of Judaism. The Hungarian version was called Keshet, and lasted for three days in November. Our new President was one of the organizers. Sim Shalom's contributions included running two religious services, a lecture on Liturgy by Rabbi Kelemen, and participation in two round table discussions.

In the fall there was a Beit Deborah Conference in Budapest, attended by women active in Jewish affairs from all over the world, including Israel and the U.S.. Rabbi Kelemen conducted Friday night services for the conference attendees, and ran one of the programs. During the fall Rabbi Kelemen also gave a series of lectures in Balint Haz on Basic Judaism and Liturgy. Though intended for people who were contemplating conversion, the lectures were open to the public, and attracted a good number of other attendees.

As usual, we had a number of visiting groups during the year who added to the flavor and pleasure of our services and holiday celebrations. We are starting to find Hungarian Jewish and secular organizations who will fund grants for our operating expenses. With this support plus tax donations from our supporters, we are slowly becoming more self-supporting.

Jesse Weil, Treasurer
Feb. 26, 2008