

Fed chevra pay tribute to Mr Arnold Cohen z"l

► Brian Gordon

ATTENDANCE at the Federation of Synagogues Chevra Kadisha Seudah last Sunday, "Zayin Adar", at the Od Yosef Chai hall, Hendon, was the largest ever. This was undoubtedly due to the dedication of this year's annual event to the memory of the Federation's former President Mr Arnold (Avrohom Yeshaya) Cohen z"l, who was niftar last year.

The seudah proceedings were introduced by Dayan Yehoshua Posen, one of the recent distinguished appointees to the Federation. Dayan Posen referred to the curious order in which the materials collected from Klal Yisroel in Parshas Terumah - *techeiles*, *argomon*, *tola'as shoni* and *sheish moshzor* - were enumerated before mentioning the actual purpose for which they were to be applied - the building of the Mishkan. The reason was that "the giving was an end in itself". The opportunity to donate - irrespective of its target - was on its own a lesson to the Kehilla in the *inyonim* of unity and commitment. Dayan Posen described the Chevra Kadisha as the embodiment of voluntary self-commitment, and a collective fulfilment of the Torah's words in Parshas Vayakhel "*kol nediv libo*". He paid tribute to the evening's organisers, the Federation's C.E.O. Rabbi Avi Lazarus, its Operations Director Mrs Judy Silkoff, and a number of members of staff.

The seudah incorporated a Siyum Hashass, *l'ilui nishmas* the late Mr Cohen. The siyum and hadran were conducted by Reb Moishe Eckstein, a member of the Chevra Kadisha. Mr Eckstein opened with a drosha on the concept of *sholom*. "*Sholom* is giving away something" he stated. "The way of giving is *chessed*." He questioned why Hashem created human beings with the heart on the left - as opposed to the right - of the body, given that the heart is the vital spiritual organ of *chessed*. He explained "The heart is, in fact on the right hand-side, in terms of the recipient who faces the giver. Because it's the friend who receives the *chessed* who benefits." Greater still, he asserted, is the "*chessed shel emess*" of the Chevra Kadisha. They often sacrifice so much time and effort in their personal lives for the benefit of the *meisim*, who cannot personally thank them or return the good deed. "Chevra members have to overcome their emotions to face the performance of a very difficult and distressing task. They deserve nothing but praise from the kehilla."

The Av Beis Din Dayan Yisroel Yaakov Lichtenstein asked why such close attention was paid to the omission of Moshe Rabbeinu's name from just one Sedra, Tetzaveh. Given that the omission was a tribute to Moshe's extreme humility in calling for his name to be blotted out from the "Sefer" rather than see Klal Yisroel punished by destruction, surely his name should have been omitted



Rabbi Yossi Cohen

from the entire Torah! The answer, he suggested, was that since Moshe Rabbeinu's name was mentioned in every other Sedra from Shemos onwards, the exceptional omission in just one place made the *limmud* on his humility even more prominent.

Dayan Lichtenstein said that Arnold Cohen, in his lifetime of *askonus*, followed in the ways of Moshe Rabbeinu. Having known Mr. Cohen not just as a community leader but also as a close personal friend, the Dayan said he could

testify to "the very private way he helped numerous people financially, morally and socially, always with the utmost loyalty". As President of the Federation of Synagogues he had been the architect of the organisation's vast improvements and in more recent years had "supported, strengthened and revolutionised the Chevra Kadisha" ensuring that every community was properly served by a chevra, that there was unity and a pooling of resources among the various synagogue organisations to achieve the maximum availability of this sacred facility. The benefits gained by the Federation due to Mr Cohen's many innovations continued to live on, and were deeply appreciated by his successors, and the organisation's current dedicated leadership, headed by its President, Mr Andrew Cohen.

The guest speaker was Mr. Arnold Cohen's son, Rabbi Yossi Cohen, an accomplished *mechanech* living in Eretz Yisroel. Referring to the yohrzeit of Moshe Rabbeinu, 7 Adar, Rabbi Cohen noted that the gematria of "Torah" - Moshe Rabbeinu's gift to Klal Yisroel - equated with that of "*gemilus chasodim*", being the overriding attribute of the Chevra Kadisha. He explained how for Klal Yisroel, death in *olom hazeh* was not the end, but a stage in the ongoing process leading to *olom habo* and *techiyas hameisim*.

Contrasting the Jewish custom of laying stones on a kever with other people's custom of laying bouquets of flowers, Rabbi Cohen observed "Whereas the latter soon wither

and die, the former are solid and long-lasting as is the Matzeivoh we erect". This symbolised the eternity of the *neshoma* of the niftar. He then proceeded to deliver a fascinating exposition of the significance of a Melava Malka, in particular the "*luz*" bone of the human body, uniquely nourished on Motzoei Shabbos, hailing back to *ma'aseh bereishis* and the fruit sinfully consumed in Gan Eden. The *luz* represented the link between *kodesh* and *chol*, between this world and the next, between *golus* and the final *geulah*.

Rabbi Cohen declared that his mother and family were very moved by the heartfelt tribute being paid by so many to their beloved husband and father. His father had always endeavoured to act "*l'shem Shomayim*". "He always displayed emunah in both his professional and communal activities when the going got tough" and he knew "how to separate political differences from the need to get on with people". When speaking of achievements, his father always preferred to state "We" rather than "I" and in both his professional accountancy practice and as Federation President he was eventually "able to hand over the reins of leadership with absolute simcha and pride to the younger generation".

A number of prominent Dayanim, Rabbanim and askonim were present at the event as well as members of the Chevra Kadisha, their relatives and friends. The beautifully catered seudah concluded with bensching, led by Reb Yehuda Moshe Bleichfeld.



Some of the Chevra Kadisha members