

## **President's Report to the 2024 Kolot Mayim AGM**

The events that had the greatest impact on Kolot Mayim and the lives of its congregants took place over 10,000 kilometres away from the doors of this synagogue. Hamas' vile and heinous attack on October 7<sup>th</sup> resulted in the largest murder of Jews in a single day since the Holocaust. It has resulted in the kidnapping of about 250 people, about half of whom have returned and rest of whom either remain in captivity or have died. Immediately after that day, Israel declared a state of war to eliminate Hamas and its evil, but deaths, injuries, suffering, and destruction continue.

The fallout around the world from these events have been significant. Issues regarding Israel and Palestine have moved to forefront of an already caustic and polarized political landscape. Attacks against Jews, which had risen dramatically in the past decade, have accelerated significantly since then. In Canada, the Jewish community has suffered many acts of violence, including a fire and Molotov cocktails at a synagogue and two Jewish community centres in Montreal in November; people shot at a Toronto Jewish school in May; one or more gunshots aimed at a Jewish school in Montreal; and, most recently, a fire set in the doorway of Schara Tzedek synagogue in Vancouver.

No different than everywhere else in the world or Canada, these events have cast a pall on life at Kolot Mayim and the lives of its congregants. We have dealt with the loss of life, the injuries suffered, and the uncertainty faced by people in Israel, including some who are our family and friends. We have faced institutions here that have failed to properly distinguish between acceptable speech and unacceptable hatred and that have not adequately protected Jews from that hatred. We have faced cultural organizations here that have cancelled programs because they portray Jews or because artists have some sort of connection with Israel. And we have faced increased risks to our physical safety and security. Our efforts to defend ourselves, to survive in an increasingly threatening environment, and to deal with the resulting stress has taken a toll. Some schisms within the Jewish community that have lain beneath the surface have been brought to the fore. Understandably, all this has diminished our capacity to build on the growth from past years.

Not surprisingly, Kolot Mayim has had to increase its focus on physical security and that has been a matter often discussed throughout the year. As president, I sat on a security committee led by the Jewish Federation, which has provided an overview on security issues in the Jewish community. The Federation has been advising the police of Jewish events in Victoria, including advising the Saanich police of Kolot Mayim's events. This has led to a heightened police presence here during our services and other activities.

Because we rent space from the Jewish Community Centre, the JCC is primarily responsible for the physical security measures of the property. As a result, Kolot Mayim has had many discussions with the JCC on that subject over the past year. There is now a permanent spot in the JCC parking lot reserved exclusively for the police. The Jewish Federation of Vancouver has also assisted in reviewing the security at the JCC. There is government funding that has recently become available for increased security and the JCC is applying for funds to help purchase a video-camera security system and improved outside lighting. Last fall, Kolot Mayim instituted its own security measure by requiring that people attending services and social events only use the front door of the building.

Perhaps one disappointment has been a small decline in membership, which had averaged 94 over the previous two years, but only reached 85 in this past year. Fortunately, despite reduced membership, Kolot Mayim had done very well financially. Under the stewardship of our new treasurer, Stephen Larre, Kolot Mayim increased its investment income to take advantage of interest rates that have been the highest in many years. Kolot Mayim also spread some investments to another financial institution that offers superior returns.

With the new bylaws adopted at the last AGM, the long list of committees set out in the old bylaws were replaced by committees established by the board. The board created a total of six committees. Three of them were committees that already existed – Adult Education, Religious Services, and Care and Concern. In addition, the board created three new committees to focus on communications, social action, and membership expansion. Unfortunately, for these three new committees, we were unable to find the volunteers necessary to create functional committees. We will see in the year ahead the future of these committees that would improve Kolot Mayim's communications (such as the website), support the ideals of social action and Tikkun Olam, and expand the membership.

We continue to be the beneficiaries of the Adult Education Committee, which has had another successful Speakers Series, with the theme of L'dor V'dor. It is already hard at work on next year's theme of Kvell at the Well.

In the past, we have relied on volunteers to set up and clean for Oneg and Kiddush. The difficulty has been in finding enough volunteers and reducing the opportunity of volunteers to participate in these social events. As a result, the board agreed to hire workers to clean and wash dishes. The board also established a fund to pay for this service, and we have been successful in receiving enough in donations to match the expenses. I would like to thank Carolyn Canny for her hard work in the planning and organizing that has made Oneg and Kiddush such a success at Kolot Mayim.

I also want to recognize and thank some other people who have contributed to Kolot Mayim. An enormous factor in Kolot Mayim's success has been the dedication and tireless work of Rabbi Lynn. Sam Margolis has been responsible for administrative work which may be behind the scenes but is vital to keep Kolot Mayim's operations running smoothly. Marika Rathfelder has succeeded in the challenge of creating and acting in the new position of bookkeeper for this year. I recognize my fellow board members upon whose shoulders rest the overall responsibility for Kolot Mayim's affairs. I would like to thank Susan Halpert and Deb Weiss, two long-time Kolot Mayim members, and Joshua Torontow. Susan and Joshua are retiring from the board and Deb has retired as chair of the Care and Concern committee. Neil Marcovitz will be leaving the board after having served for the past two years as vice-president, and I am grateful for the help and support he has provided during that time. Pat Dunphy is retiring as Membership Chair for the past three years and we are fortunate that two weeks ago, Carolyn Canny has taken over this responsibility. Finally, we recognize the work of committee members and all other volunteers, who give their time to provide the activities, services, and events that our congregation enjoys.