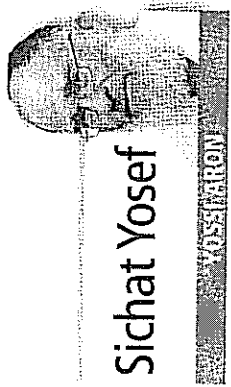


# Across the Nullarbor, looking west

**H**AVE lived in Australia for more than six decades, but recently discovered a reality many of us ignore. Yes, Australia does extend beyond the eastern states. (Incidentally, when I mentioned this while speaking at a *seudah shlishit* in Perth, someone called out that I should tell that to Kevin Rudd – even after only a few days in that city one notices that anti-Rudd Government feeling in the media, and even among individuals, is indeed palpable).

Why emphasise this reality? Because, regrettably, so many of us think of Australian Jewry as synonymous with the communities of Melbourne and Sydney (except, perhaps, when we pay passing acknowledgement to holiday destination Surfers Paradise). Such a myopic approach ignores an Australian community that is thriving in a way that belies its size.

Albeit among the remotest Jewish communities in the world, separated from other Jewish centres by oceans, the Nullarbor and some four hours flying time, the 7000-strong Perth community has all that a practising Jewish family would want. Set in a park-like environment are four Orthodox shuls with regular daily services and *shiurim*: Perth Hebrew Congregation (PHC), Noranda shul that particularly serves the South African community, the Dianella shul and a Chabad House. Perth also sports a kosher food centre (colloquially known as KFC) housing a butcher and baker, other bakery outlets and even a bagel bar – though a more substantial cafe/restaurant is sorely lacking. The PHC includes a



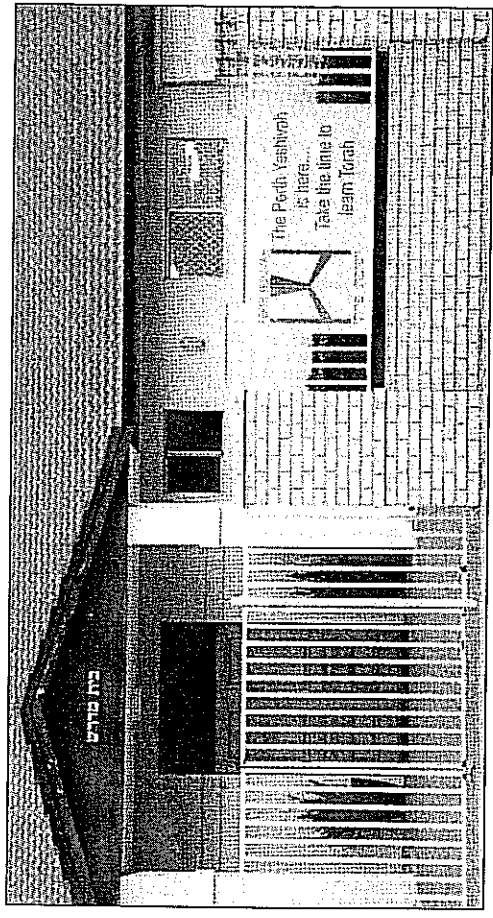
Sichat Yosef

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milkvah and creche; the main Jewish residential areas are covered by an *ervuv*. Carmel School provides a solid secular and Jewish education, while the Maurice Zeffert facility serves the aged. Active youth groups include Bnei Akiva and Habonim. Temple David caters for the Progressive community.

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There is much to say about so many aspects of Perth Jewish life, but for the moment, my focus is upon what is truly a hidden gem. It is the Dianella shul, also known as the Beit Midrash of Western Australia incorporating the Perth *Yeshivah*. Led by Rabbi Marcus Solomon and his wife Linda, it operates in conjunction with a branch of Kollel Torah Mit'zion. Kollel chaverim headed by Rabbi Binyamin Krausze and his wife Orah – a qualified *Nistumat yoetzet halachah* (halachic adviser) –



The Dianella Beit Midrash in Perth ... Jewish life in the Western Australian capital is thriving, but there is always the threat of out-movement.

conduct *shiurim* for a shul membership, including academics and other professionals. Perhaps I am naive, but I was amazed to find that early morning Shacharit had 40 attendees (of whom only three recited *kaddish*).

Friday evening, Kabbalat Shabbat a la Carlebach-style was a service to be remembered. It has been a while since I attended a shul where the bar mitzvah boy not only read the parshah, but also led Shacharit and presented a *dvar Torah* prior to the rabbi's sermon.

And the young men and women of the kollel serve the broader Jewish community in so many ways. Together with Rabbi Solomon, they enhance the Jewish studies program at Carmel School. I observed a *chavruta* program with high school pupils before school Shacharit – participants can hold their own in an Israeli *yeshivah* if they choose to study there after finishing school. They assist with adult education; their influence on all generations is

immeasurable. Where else in a small community do 120 attend Bnei Akiva on Shabbat afternoon followed by a Carlebach-style *havdalah* with 20 minutes of singing and dancing to farewell the Shabbat.

Adult education too is a feature of Perth Jewish life. Sunday, May 30, saw the West Australian Society of Jewish Jurists and Lawyers together with the WA Jewish Medical Ethics Group host a Medico Legal Conference. Attended by more than 100 people, topics included designer babies (genetic engineering), voluntary euthanasia legislation and organ donation. Keynote speaker was former Perth kollel head Rabbi Eli Lewis, who came especially from Israel, and was joined by legal and medical practitioners of the highest rank. I was particularly impressed by the number of kippah-wearers and obviously Orthodox women in the audience.

Yet all that does not mean the community's future is absolutely secure.

Inevitably, while its growth is a product of immigration (especially from South Africa), the greatest problem is out-movement. The well-endowed school has concerns regarding retention of numbers. Despite the financial opportunities across the state, so many young marrieds (even where both parties may be ex-Perth) tend to look elsewhere. Of course, the silver lining in this problem is that, like the rest of Australia, Perth too apparently has a rate of aliyah that would be the envy of many an American city.

The expression "Go west young man" had its origins in 19th century American history. However, all of us in the eastern states of Australia could do a lot worse than pay an occasional visit to our western counterparts.

Shabbat shalom,  
Yossi

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