

I first came to the South London community in the early summer of 1986. I had recently moved to Balham and was saying Kaddish for my father. I'd been going to Marble Arch synagogue where someone mentioned there was a congregation close to where I was living. So I contacted the shul and subsequently went to Leigham Court Road for a morning service. If I remember correctly, services were held in a neighbouring building as the new shul building was not yet complete. It opened in September later that year.

Rabbi Philip Ginsbury was very welcoming, as indeed was everyone, and all were somewhat intrigued by my Belfast heritage. After the service he asked if I'd be interested in coming to the Talmud Study Group. I'd attended a Talmud class at school for a short time studying Tractate Makkot, and hadn't understood a word of it, so thought maybe it wasn't a good idea. He responded that Makkot was very difficult, even for non-beginners, and his class was looking at a simpler text, very gently paced and with lots of explanation. So I went – and continued to attend the Monday evening *shiur* fairly continuously for the next 30+ years!

Tekiah! Souvenir Issue to Commemorate the Opening of the South London Synagogue on 28th September, 1986, p.21.

THE TALMUD:

Alive and well in South London!

The Talmud Study Circle continues its fascinating explorations of Jewish law and history, come rain come shine, throughout the year on Monday evenings at 7.00 pm (even on bank holidays!). We draw participants from Streatham, Brixton, Balham, Thornton Heath, Croydon and Sutton.

At present we are studying 'Rosh Hashana', which as well as giving us the origins and source of the laws and customs of this festival, also shows us the inner workings of the Jewish calendar—a most brilliantly conceived system of calculations, based on adjusting the lunar system to the solar, so that the spring festival of Pesach falls at the right time of the year.

The essence of the 'Shiur' (lesson) is participation; questions are encouraged and discussion is invariably lively and productive.

A video-tape has been made of one session held recently.

Newcomers are welcome to attend, and the sessions are structured so that everyone can follow, regardless of their standard of Hebrew knowledge.

We look forward to welcoming you! Mondays 7.00 pm in the Rabbi's study at the new Shool (45 Leigham Court Road).

This *Tekiah!* (South London Synagogue Magazine) extract from September, 1986 sets the scene perfectly. I joined in the middle of tractate Rosh Hashanah - Monday evenings 7- 8 pm.

This was long before the annotated texts of today's ArtScroll and Koren Talmud editions, and Sefaria on the internet. At that time, the only Talmud text with an English translation that was easily available, was the Soncino Press edition under the editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein z'l. The translation was quite literal and there were some brief footnotes. But it was impossible for a beginner to follow without a guiding hand – as supplied by Rabbi Ginsbury. I don't remember very much about those early classes. I was the youngest by many a year, the most inexperienced, and was certainly the 'new kid on the block' for quite some time.

I remember there was a good regular attendance, maybe 15 or more, and certainly enough people to recite Kaddish

d'Rabbanan at the end of each class.

Lessons were held around several joined-up tables in the shul hall with Rabbi Ginsbury at the head. He went through and then explained the text, sometimes delving into the commentaries, and taking questions as they arose. He constantly repeated key items so that basic terminology was ingrained, explained the Talmudic logic clearly, and supplied his own written notes and diagrams to make the text clearer as necessary. He had a fund of background stories of the various 'Rabbis' whose names were frequently quoted in the text. And there were also welcome 'breaks' with entertaining, relevant anecdotes about his time at Jews' College, lectures he had attended, and many other

current topics of interest including any current cricket matches! The atmosphere was very relaxed - so much so, that it was not unknown for some members to be lulled into a quiet (and sometimes not so quiet) snooze.

After Rabbi Ginsbury’s retirement in 2007 (becoming Emeritus Rabbi) the *shiurim* were held at his house at Downton Avenue at the usual Monday 7pm time. There were usually about 8-9 attendees which fitted nicely around the front-room table. It was a very informal and pleasant atmosphere – perhaps reminiscent of what old-time *shiurim* were like. If the Monday evening coincided with Succot Chol HaMoed then we relocated to the Succah at the back of the house. Chapter endings were celebrated with the traditional *Hadran* (‘we shall return to you....’) recital followed by cake, biscuits and soft drinks. Chapters typically took many months to complete.

If Rabbi Ginsbury was unable to attend, his place was ably filled by Dr. Isidore Crown, a member of Sutton Synagogue. Dr. Crown had a wonderfully mellifluous voice and was a good teacher. He also had a large repertoire of amusing jokes and stories (medical and otherwise) for everyone’s enjoyment, but sometimes to the detriment of getting the weekly material covered!

The most memorable occasions were the *siyyumim* (סייום : conclusion, ending) – the traditional celebration to mark the conclusion of a tractate. A *siyyum* typically consists of learning the final part of the tractate, the thrice recitation of the *Hadran* (‘we will return to you...’), a special *Kaddish*, followed by a celebratory meal with a discourse about the completed tractate ; and in our case, a customary book presentation to Rabbi Ginsbury from the study group members in appreciation of his teaching.

I was privileged to attend ten of these - as itemised in the table below showing the dates and guest speakers. Some of the invitations are shown in Annex I.

Tractate	No. of Pages	Siyyum Date	Guest Speaker(s)	No. Years to Complete
Rosh Hashanah	35	07-Mar-88	Dayan Ehrentreu	4?
Berachot	64	27-Jun-94	Dayan Gelley	6.2
Megillah	32	01-Nov-97	?	3.3
Chagigah	27	02-Mar-00	Rabbi Dubov	2.3
Rosh Hashanah	35	15-Sep-03	Rabbi Dubov	3.5
Ta'anit	31	11-Jun-06	Rabbi Dubov	2.7
Mo'ed Katan	29	22-Sep-08	Rabbi Dubov	2.2
Diamond Jubilee: Berachot	64	20-May-12	Mr Norman Turner, Rev. Reuben Turner, Rabbi Dubov	3.6
Succot	56	24-Aug-15	Mr Daniel Ginsbury	3.2
Beitza	40	09-Jul-18	Rabbi Dubov	2.8
Pesachim, Chap.10	23	Last shiur: Feb 2020		Not completed

Earlier *siyyumim* were held mostly at the shul - later ones (except for the Diamond Jubilee – see below) were held at Rabbi Ginsbury's house. As can be seen from the above table, with our one-hour study per week, and excluding Jewish holidays and other circumstances, it took several years to cover a tractate - and these were the shorter tractates. The Daf Yomi cycle covers 2711 (double-sided) pages of 37 volumes of Talmud in about 7½ years. At one hour per week, we would have taken more than 200 years!

Guest speakers included Dayanim Ehrentreu and Gelley, Rabbi Dubov and Mr. Danny Ginsbury – and Mr. Norman Turner, with Rev. Reuben Turner as guest of honour, for the Diamond Jubilee. In 1988 Rabbi Dubov with his wife Sarah established a Chabad House in Wimbledon and formed very close ties with Rabbi Ginsbury and the South London Synagogue. He was guest speaker at several of the *siyyumim* and his erudite and entertaining talks were always appreciated by all.

The high point was the Diamond Jubilee *siyyum* for Berachot which took place at the shul on May 20th, 2012 with about 50 attendees. This was also the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Tony Goldman produced a splendid photographic record of the event in bound booklet format. See annex II for some excerpts – which includes a letter from Queen Elizabeth II marking the occasion.

To quote from the booklet introduction:

“The study group began at the Brixton Synagogue in Effra Road in 1952, the year of Queen Elizabeth's accession, and was led by Rabbi Dayan Steinberg. He was succeeded by Rabbi Philip Ginsbury in 1966 when he took over as Rabbi of Brixton Synagogue, and the study group has continued under his tutelage ever since”.

The table above shows the tractates studied over the last 30 years. They were mostly the 'shorter' tractates from Seder Moed, relating to the various Jewish holidays but very wide-ranging around these topics. Berachot was the longest at 64 pages (in fact 63, as tractates always start on page 2). I can't remember why it took 6 years for completion the first time around – presumably it was studied in more depth – the second time reduced by about 3 years! But in general, it was 2-3 years to complete a tractate. For comparison, the longest is Baba Batra (dealing with various types of claims – interestingly, covering mostly secular subjects) with 176 pages, Shabbat is second longest with 157. These were beyond our practical timescales although I believe the group had previously studied Shabbat.

Megillah was the first to be studied using the new ArtScroll series (Rabbi Ginsbury obtained a bulk buy from a Stamford Hill bookshop). The huge number of detailed notes with references to the commentators was quite an eye-opener, and it brought home again that with our weekly study it was only possible to get a superficial understanding of the text.

The study group attendees who had passed on over the thirty years are many. The grand-children of Henry Silver, a regular attendee, donated a complete set of the ArtScroll Babylonian Talmud to the shul. This resided in Rabbi Ginsbury's office, covering a large amount of shelf space.

Perhaps, with some foresight of future events, it was decided after the completion of Tractate Beitza in July 2018, to study a tractate chapter rather than a complete tractate. Rabbi Ginsbury chose the last chapter of Pesachim, chapter 10 (pages 99b – 121b) which discusses the laws of the Seder table.

Rabbi Ginsbury relocated to Stamford Hill at the end of 2018 but still wanted to continue the study group at the synagogue, albeit at an earlier time. Initially he drove over, and later used a mini-cab service. The regular attendees for the final years were Tony Goldman, Jeffrey Galvan, Ian Schlazer, Joe Bartick, Stanley Davis and me.

Sadly Rabbi Ginsbury's health was failing, and the Covid crisis was looming. The last *shiur* was held in February 2020. We had just commenced page 117 of Pesachim, five pages before the chapter ending - alas not to be completed.

Rabbi Ginsbury had the ability to delve into the 'sea of Talmud' with a light touch, keeping our interest even during the more complex sections, but never losing sight of the reasons why we were studying – to learn about the foundations of Judaism with its applicability to one's everyday life.

The South London Talmud study group, led so inspirationally by Rabbi Philip Ginsbury for almost sixty years, last met in 2020. I was very privileged to be able to attend for almost thirty of them.

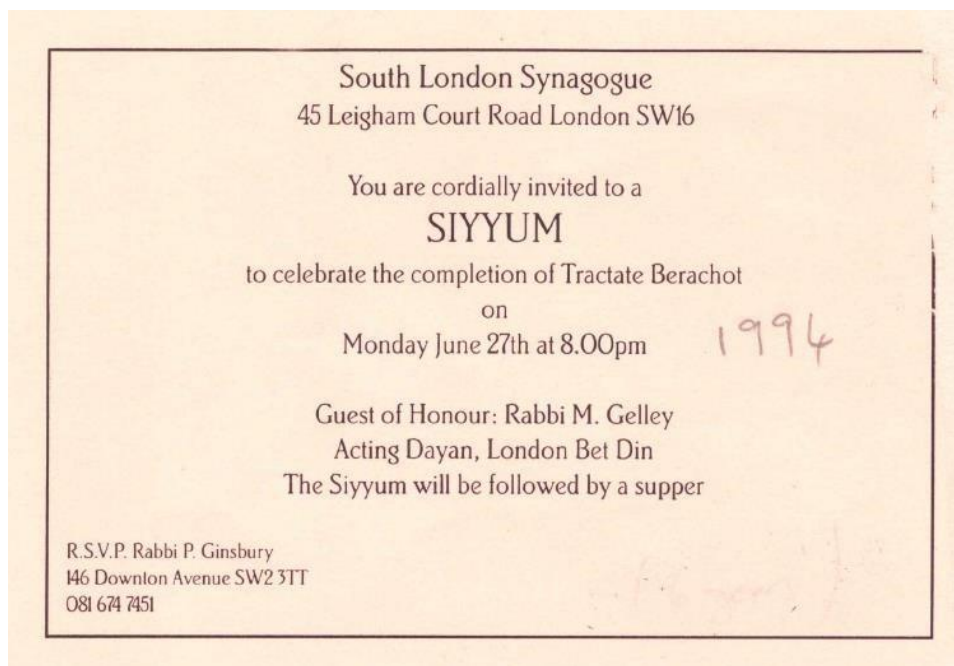
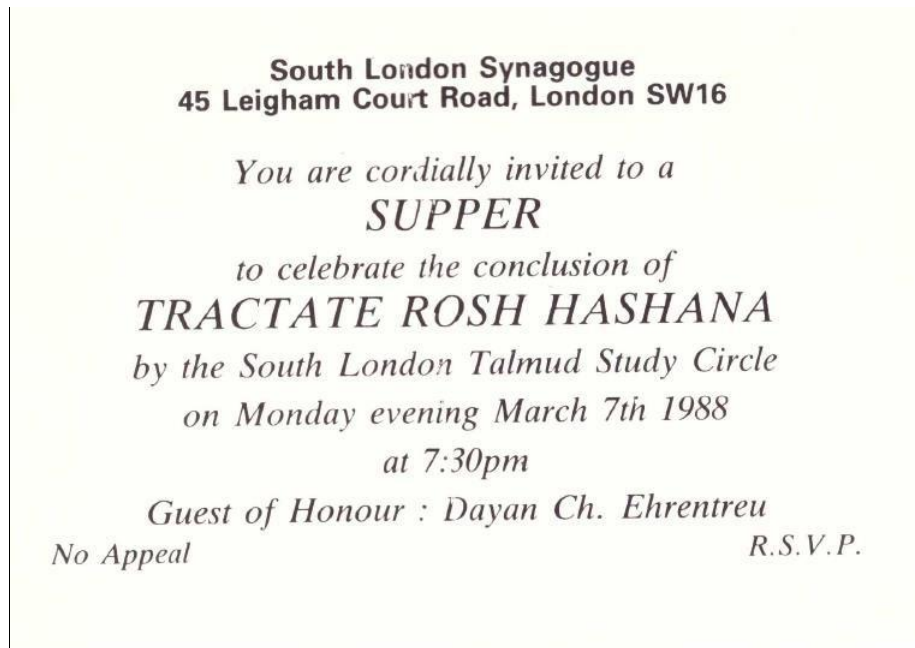
An Historical Footnote:

Belfast Jewish Record, Oct. 1965, Council meeting notes: *"Applications have been received for the advertised post of minister. It was the unanimous recommendation of the council that Rabbi P.N. Ginsbury, M.A., was not only the most suitable of these candidates, but seemed an excellent choice to fill the vacancy in Belfast."*

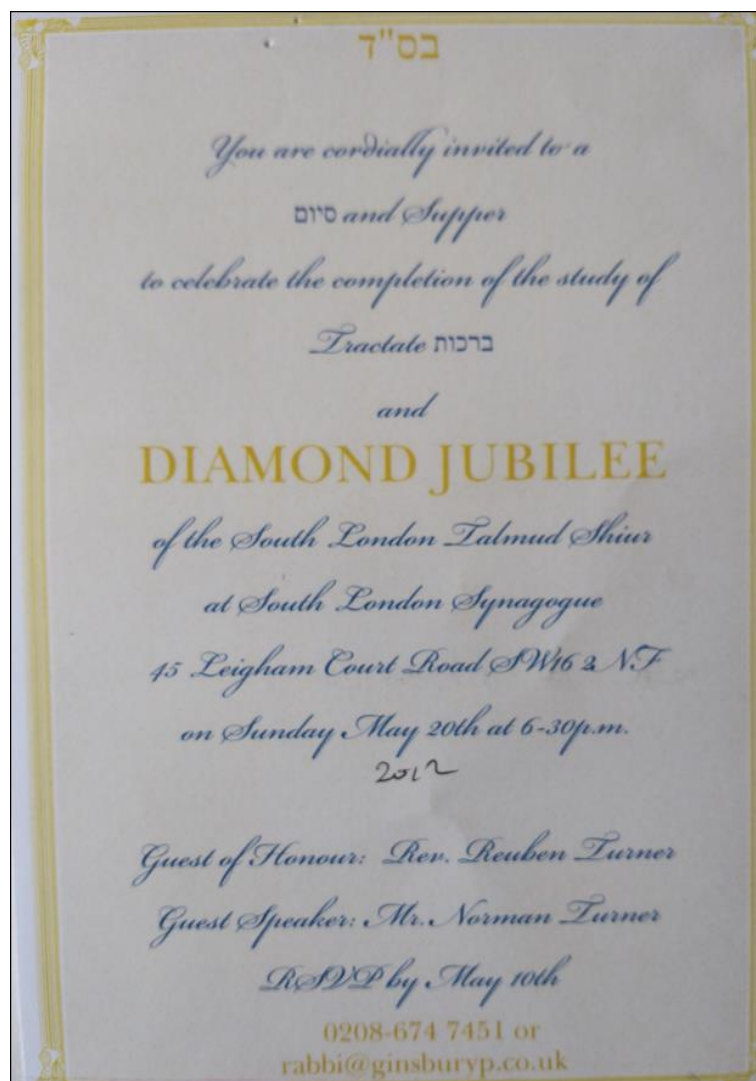
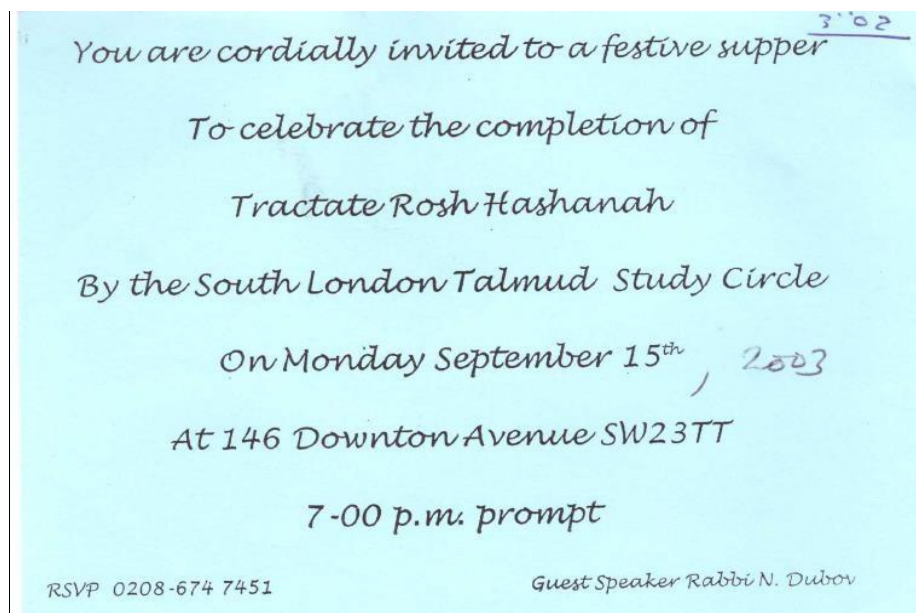
For some reason, the offer for the post was delayed. By the time it materialised, Rabbi Ginsbury had accepted the post with Brixton Synagogue. And the rest, as they say, is history!

Bernard Enlander

ANNEX I: Selection of Siyyum Invitations



ANNEX I (ctd.)



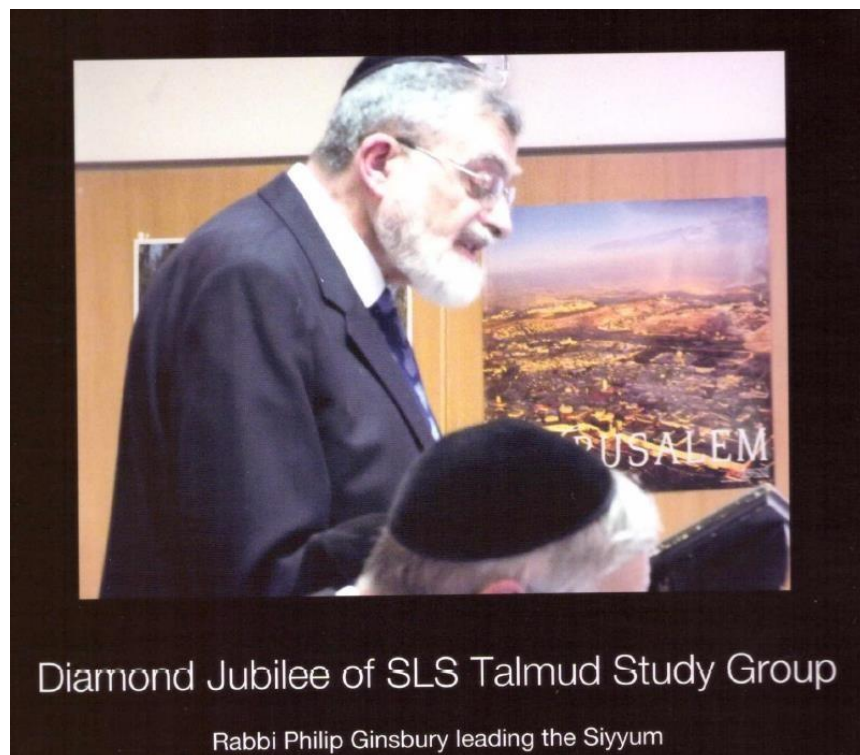
ANNEX II : Extracts from Tony Goldman’s photographic record book of the Diamond Jubilee Event, 20 May, 2021

South London Synagogue
Talmud Study Group
 Diamond Jubilee

**Siyyum on Massechet Berachot and
 Diamond Jubilee Celebration of
 South London Talmud Shiur 1952-2012/5712-5772**

Programme

6.30	Welcome guests
6.45	Mincha led by Rev. M. Lev
7.00	Yom Yerushalayim - Rev, Reuben Turner, Guest of Honour
7.30	Netilat Yadayim, Ha-Motzi-Siyyum-Rabbi Phillip Ginsbury
7.45	Seudat Mitzvah - Celebratory Meal
8.20	Rabbi Nissan D. Dubov - South London Chabad
8.30	Guest Speaker - Mr Norman Turner
9.00	Dessert - Birkat Ha-mazon
9.20	Presentations
9.30	Vote of Thanks - Mr Geoffrey Harris, Chairman, South London Synagogue
9.40	Maariv- Sefirat Ha-omer (Choral) led by Mr Daniel Ginsbury



Annex II (ctd). Diamond Jubilee: Letter from HM Queen Elizabeth II

