

# The MBD

By Geoff Kuhillow

The Manchester Beth Din has been servicing the community in many ways for over 120 years, with MK kosher symbol appearing on many favourite products, the Manchester Community Eruv, the annual Calendar and much more.

The Holiday Times brings you a small glimpse from behind-the-scenes of the Beth Din.



DAYAN KRAUSZ



DAYAN STEINER



RABBI BRODIE

**T**he Beth Din is literally a House of Judgement.

It's where three Dayanim adjudicate often complex cases involving highly technical points of law.

But it's also a whole world more with lots and lots of good work being done quietly and efficiently behind the scenes.

So to get a taste of what goes on in that mystical, mysterious world, we took a peek into those hallowed offices on the first floor of Manchester's Jewish Community Centre on Bury Old Road.

The "engine room" which controls this slick, well-oiled machine is the stark, almost austere office of the Registrar, Rabbi Yehuda Brodie.

He describes himself as being "one step down the pyramid" from the dayanim, although in point of fact it is his professionalism, knowledge

and expertise that keeps the ship afloat – however much he modestly might try to deny it!

He is the perfect support for Dayan Gavriel Krausz (Rosh Beth Din), Dayan Yitzchok Berger (Av Beth Din) and Dayan Yehuda Osher Steiner.

And should there ever be a time when the dayanim need additional information or advice, it is to Rabbi Brodie that they turn.

It must seem at times that he has been there for ever. But, in fact, he joined the Beth Din in 1976 after being educated at Broughton Jewish Primary School and Bury Grammar School, followed by Manchester Yeshiva and Manchester Metropolitan University where he gained a BA Honours in Law.

While the prime function of a Beth Din is to arbitrate in civil disputes and to administer Jewish family law, duties have been vastly extended over the centuries.

**So what exactly do the dayanim do? Well, they all have specific areas of expertise.**

**DAYAN KRAUSZ** deals with divorce. Few may realise that it is actually a mitzvah to end an irreparable marriage with a Get – and the learned dayan applies compassion and humanity to the process of helping to free the couple from their commitments. The human side comes to the fore with the Beth Din also setting up post-divorce agreements concerning finance plus the care and custody of children. Efforts are made to maintain some form of relationship between the parties after divorce, especially when they have children."

**DAYAN BERGER** deals with litigation and arbitration. There is an overriding duty to bring a civil dispute before a Beth Din to ensure that the case is decided within the parameters of Jewish law.

**DAYAN STEINER** looks after the world of kashrut. It's a mammoth task. After all, one of the first commandments given to man concerned food – that was when Adam and Eve were told not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. And there have been do's and don'ts ever since.

Between them, the dayanim and registrar deal with myriad situations across a vast spectrum.

**So what was the most serious one?**

“Certainly, the most tragic surrounded the air disaster at Lockerbie,” Rabbi Brodie recalled.

Manchester Beth Din – representing the nearest major Jewish community – was called in to assist with victim identification after a Pan Am flight from London Heathrow to New York was downed by a terrorist bomb on December 21, 1988, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew.

“There were more than 20 Jewish victims and we had to make sure they were buried as soon as possible,” said the rabbi. “It was a very complicated task, but we managed to handle it successfully.”

**And the most lighthearted situation to face the Beth Din?**

For once, Rabbi Brodie was momentarily lost for words. Pensively, he shook his head. Could it be that there wasn't one? “No, it's certainly not that,” he opined, deep in thought. Oh well, perhaps too many to recall then.

**What are the most common issues to confront the dayanim?**

“When it comes to arbitration on civil matters, they might involve disputes between businesses or between partners,” said the rabbi. “There may also be disputes between neighbours or over people acting anti-socially.”

**And which is growing more than any other?**

“Perhaps that is a failure to repay debts,” Rabbi Brodie explained.

**We've touched on divorce and civil disputes, but what other matters occupy the time of the dayanim?**

“For one thing, there is conversion and all matters relating to Jewish status,” he went on.

“Then there is the Beth Din's responsibility for maintaining the standards in Kosher meat

production, for shechita and for the licensing of premises.

“Another important area is kosher certification – manufacturers' wanting to supply the Jewish market is a fast-growing scene, and doing it right is an arduous and complicated task.

“Mikva is the foundation for Jewish family life, and we are also responsible for numerous mikvas', ensuring their Kosher upkeep.

**The caring side of the Beth Din**

A Jewish Beth Din is sometimes referred to as 'the father of orphans' and as Rabbi Brodie comments “We are responsible for the burial of the poor and for people on the fringes of society. It is the Beth Din that ensures a Jewish burial in a dignified manner, for these individuals whom don't have any where to turn.

The Beth Din shows its caring side on social welfare problems – involving all parts of the community. “We can act as a go-between or advocate to make sure that the family's needs are understood,” said the registrar. “It is an expanding area as charedi families are growing.”

This phenomenon also manifests itself when it comes to divorce.

**What about Criminal issues?**

One thing the Beth Din will not touch are matters of a criminal nature. “We refer them to the relevant outside authorities,” Rabbi Brodie declared.

“In general we are a resource that is there for any person seeking guidance on any religious matter. Rabbi Brodie adds “not just for the Jewish world either – the police, fire and other agencies consult us when need be.”

He pointed out that the Beth Din “endeavours to be of service to all organisations and institutions that make up the mosaic of our community”. “And high up among them is Chabad Lubavitch,” he said.

“Some of the stalwarts of Chabad Lubavitch have been instrumental in the lay administration of the Beth Din – and very prominent members of the Lubavitch community have served as shoctim and supervisors.”

Rabbi Brodie also pointed out that the method used by the Beth Din to sell chometz before Pesach takes into account the particular requirements of Lubavitch. “And the stringencies which satisfy Lubavitch are also incorporated into mikvas,” he said.



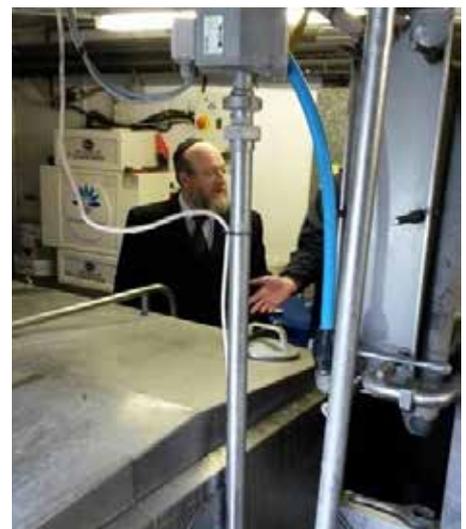
Dayan Berger acquiring the right to make an Eruv from the Mayor



The Dayanim at the 120 year celebration



Dayan Krausz selling the Chametz before Pesach



Dayan Steiner overseeing the milk production at The Kenyon Farm