

My goodness, my Guinness

Never mind breaking the fast, it's time to break some records!

It was great fun to read this paper's report on how the largest ever Shabbat dinner – for 2226 guests – made it into the Guinness Book of Records (*AJN* 27/06). How about those hundreds of waiters balancing trays of salmon above their heads? That this Shabbat dinner happened in “secular” Tel Aviv, and not in “religious” Jerusalem, provokes some interesting questions.

For now, however, I only want to ask: What is it with Jews and breaking records? I mean Guinness is not affiliated with the JNF. It's a Gaelic-Irish brewery that produces strange-tasting beer. Back in the 1950s Guinness sponsored a book about records. Like *Topsy*, it grew. Yet from its earliest days, Jewish over-achievers have been especially eager to claim Guinness World Records.

Inevitably, this includes producing large quantities of food. Like the chef in Tucson, Arizona who followed his bubba's recipe and made the world's largest matzah ball. It weighed in at 221.3 kg. Then he threw in 320 chickens, 36 kilograms of carrots, 18kg of celery, and 18kg of onions to make the soup, as you do.

Impressive, no? But not good enough to win the Guinness *hechsher*. For them, size isn't everything. You have to have the right ingredients. You have to have documentation. And there must be two trustworthy witnesses. Like a Jewish wedding.

So the bubba's grandson from Tucson didn't make it. The current GWR for the largest matzah ball is still held by Noah's Ark Original Deli in New York.

On August 6, 2009, theirs weighed a mere 121kg and measured only 74cm across. But they had done the paperwork.

Mind you, the Jewish pursuit of records hasn't only been about food. Rabbi Yossi Cunin performed the longest non-stop Chassidic dance –over six hours at a Beverly Hills Chabad telethon. Go Yossi. In 2010, two Yeshivah University students recruited 616 other thrill-seekers and adventurers to create the record for “the most Chanukah dreidels spun simultaneously”. What's next? Doing it on Mount Everest?

More recently a New Jersey synagogue lit 834 menorahs on 90 tables in an airport hangar. And Alik Gershon, an Israeli chess champion, played 523 opponents simultaneously and beat 86 per cent of them.

We even have an Australian record holder. Sydney's Jarryd Rubinstein has done the most muscle-ups. He completed 25 on Bondi Beach to beat the previous record of 15. What's a muscle-up, you ask? Apparently it's a combination chin-up and dip, and it's really hard. Jarryd toughened up

Partisan



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while serving in an elite Israeli commando unit.

But you can't really go past Ashrita Furman. Now 59, Furman was born Keith Furman in Brooklyn. (Ashrita is Sanskrit for “protected by God” and was given to Furman by his meditation teacher Sri Chimnoy.) Keith/Ashrita has set 519 official Guinness records and still holds 179 of them, “including the record for holding the most Guinness world records”.

Among his records is jumping up and down Mount Fuji for 18-and-a-half kilometres on a pogo stick. He is also still the fastest runner of a mile at Uluru while hula hooping. And I quite like his Number 93 record: “Running the fastest half marathon with a litre bottle of milk balancing on head – two hours, 33 minutes, 28 seconds”.

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Inspired by these Guinness champions, I have decided to call for nominations for Australian Jewish entries. In some limited categories.

- The longest vote of thanks by a speaker. To qualify, it must be longer than the speech made by the speaker being thanked. At least two witnesses who will swear they stayed awake for both speeches must certify the timing.

- The shul with the largest ratio of talkers to worshippers. This category will have four sub-sections: those who talk only through the Torah and Haftarah readings, those who go outside to talk for the Torah and Haftarah readings, those who talk only during Shacharit and Musaf, and those who never go outside and never stop talking.

- The organisation that holds the most committee meetings to decide when to hold the next committee meeting. Any organisation that signs off on an agenda item, and then actually implements the decision, is not eligible.

I have a few more categories in mind, such as the shortest vote of thanks, the quietest shul where everybody prays and nobody talks, and the organisation that meets the least but gets the most done. These records may be somewhat harder to establish. Still, with Guinness, you have to start somewhere. Maybe even over Shabbat dinner.

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