



A Ukrainian 19th-century print representing the Seder table

Beasts of the Bible

Charles the Great and his Jewish subjects

Jewish Dynasties - Polack

Isaiah Berlin



As we approach *Pesach*, I encourage us to combine committed resolution with patient work. I suggest that each of us supplement our passionate desire to do better, with a more patient, persistent and gentle approach to bringing change in ourselves and in the world. There is an ancient practice, set down in the *mishnah* almost two thousand years ago, of searching for *chametz*, for all your bread and other prohibited food, and then burning it the day before *Pesach*. Indeed, the *Mishnah* on *Pesach* begins with the instruction to search for *chametz* by candlelight the night before *Pesach*. The word for searching is *bedikah*, the word for the subsequent burning is *biur*.

I want to be more conscientious about observing the practice this year; partly because it sounds fun, especially the searching, and indeed over the years it has become something of a game, with somebody hiding ten little pieces of bread or pizza, or whatever, in various parts of the house, so that they or others can then seek them out, guided by a candle or a torch late at night. The *biur*, the burning, does however bring with it a serious sentiment; some recite a line, along with the burning, which declares *May it Be Your Will, Eternal my God, that just as I have burnt the chametz from my house and my possession, so too may I merit to burn my bad inclination from my heart, and so too may You burn all that is bad from the world.*

Pesach is a time for change. There is a disagreement in the *Mishnah* about how to respond to the *chametz* that is still there. Rabbi Yehuda says that you should do all your checking, all your *bedikah*,

the day before *Pesach*, and you do no searching after burning, because *Pesach* is starting. You search in order to burn. The rest of the sages, however, give a potentially counter-intuitive teaching. They say that ideally you search the night before, or the day before, but if you haven't, then you should check for *chametz* during the festival itself. They even say that if you haven't yet sufficiently checked for *chametz* you should still check for it *after* the festival. One can imagine Rabbi Yehuda's consternation with this view that one should be actively looking on *Pesach* for that which you cannot eat on *Pesach*! Were I to look for pizza on *Pesach* my next step might be to eat that pizza, at least a nibble, or to suffer some serious discomfort. Yet our Rabbis teach us to recognise *chametz*, to check for our bad inclinations, and to check for bad in the world, and if necessary, to do so repeatedly and persistently.

May we find the opportunities in our community at Westminster to develop with joy.

The *chametz* is still there. We may be rightly disappointed, frustrated - furious even - with ourselves and with developments in our world. There are situations that require our persistent checking, such as climate change, anti-Semitism and violent xenophobia, and we check in too with the hurt that feeds such violence.

So, combine the burning desire to eradicate bad, with persistent, gentle checking by candlelight. Bring this checking to your life. Explore yourself and your tendencies. Interrogate your world and what concerns you. This checking brings to light that which you have buried, that from which you have sometimes preferred to avert your eyes,

pretending that it was extinguished long ago. Find ways to enjoy bringing to light what is, for lack of a better word, 'bad', or destructive. For this *checking*, as well as bringing things to light, is a process that happens with light, with that candle. Take on this checking, which is persistent but less judgemental than burning. You see *chametz* and see the slightest difference of just seventeen minutes of fermentation. You recognise your anger, and in your persistent checking, find in it passion. You check your frustrations and disappointments and find in them high standards, great belief in others and in yourself. You find in tiredness, love. In bringing something to light, it may be transformed.

Structure writing, or praying, or talking with someone, or reading and discussing the papers, and look for questions, before you assume statements. *Bedikah*, checking, means asking questions; exploring, warmly probing, interrogating. It is used elsewhere in Jewish law this term, *bedikah*, to cross-examine witnesses. The judgement comes later; it is the burning which offers the hope of a world and a self exactly as it could be, but we need to search first - and, as we have found so often, - we need to search after the burning too. May we find the opportunities in our community at Westminster to develop with joy.

Rabbi Benji Stanley

Beasts of the Bible



Noah's Ark (1966) - Marc Chagall

In the order in which God created the inhabitants of the earth, the fish came first, followed by the birds, the animals and 'creeping things' and finally man. We are told precisely which creatures are suitable to eat and which are not. But there is much more in the Old Testament than simply the Hebrew diet. We learn about the qualities of animals, how they can be useful to man, and which were a part of the lives of the Israelites in Canaan, so many centuries ago.



Instructions in Leviticus about eating fish are very explicit. 'Everything in the

waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you.' No fish are mentioned by name in the Bible, but fish are so plentiful in the Mediterranean and in the rivers of the Middle East that they formed a large part of the diet, and still do. In fact, recipes for fish are abundant in every Jewish cookery book. Cold fried fish is a dish common to English speaking countries, originally, it is believed, brought here by Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe. Following the injunction in Leviticus, many Jews will not partake of other seafood of any kind, even when they stretch the rules a little as far as certain fish are concerned.



Considering that chickens and their eggs play such an important part in the Jewish diet, it is rather odd that the domesticated fowl never appears in the Old Testament. The hen, as we know it today, is probably descended from the red jungle fowl, a common bird in India dating back at least to 3,000 BCE. But nowhere in the Old Testament is there a reference to a chicken, kept by the Israelites to eat - or for its eggs. However, many birds are mentioned, once God had created 'every winged fowl after his kind'. Noah is expressly told to take birds into the Ark, 'every bird of every sort'. The first bird mentioned by name was the raven, soon followed by the dove which came first to Noah to explain that the waters were still in place, and had to be sent out again, returning this time to say that floods had gone down and it was safe to leave the Ark. Peace was on the way.

When in Leviticus we read about what is fit to eat and what is not, birds are specifically listed, some with extraordinary names. Particularly forbidden is the ossifrage (vulture), glede (kite), and gier (eagle) and other birds of prey (buzzard, osprey, hawk and owl), even the cuckoo. The list is endless. It includes pelicans, storks, cormorants and herons. These birds are common to the Middle East even today and would have been a regular sight in ancient times. The instructions concerning which birds are permitted sound a little strange. 'Every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all fours with legs above their feet.' Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that it is permitted to eat dove, pheasant, pigeon, quail, and turkey.



Apart from man, beasts of the earth were the last creatures created by God. Animals of the Bible are many and various, though one common animal is never mentioned. This is the cat. There may well have been wild cats common to the countryside, but the early Jews seldom kept animals as pets, so



it is unlikely that the cat played a part in the lives of the inhabitants. Problems of translation lead to confusion as to what form the animals actually took. Were there, for instance, crocodiles in the Holy Land in ancient times? There were certainly crocodiles in the Nile, so the Israelites would have been familiar with them while they were in Egypt, but some scholars sometimes translate 'behemoth' – the great mystical beast – as crocodile. Others use the same word for rhinoceros or hippopotamus, though it seems unlikely that hippos ever reared up out of the Jordan to confront the local inhabitants.



Many of the animals mentioned are no longer to be found in Palestine: lions or bears, for example, are not to be seen today though they are mentioned in the

Bible for their fierceness, and occasionally as symbols – the Lion of Judah, for example. We do not read about elephants until the Maccabean times. The Book of Kings speaks of ivory, or *elephants' teeth* imported from Ophir. In the post-exile times, especially in the books of the Maccabees, elephants are frequently mentioned; they were an important element in the armies of the Seleucids, imported either from India or from Africa.

The majority of animals mentioned are those domesticated by the Israelites for food or for use. The horse is never mentioned in Scripture in connection with the Patriarchs; the first time the Bible speaks of it is in reference to the Egyptian army pursuing the Jews in their escape. The hilly country inhabited by the Israelites was not favourable to the use of the horse; this is why the Bible speaks of horses only in connection with war.

Dogs are usually spoken of in terms of contempt. The dog was known for its voracious appetites, its fierceness, or its loathsomeness; it was regarded as the emblem of lust, and of uncleanness. Often running in packs, it was feared by the people and regarded with horror. Like Muslims, Jews used the word as an insult. It was sometimes domesticated enough to guard flocks but seldom looked on with affection. The greyhound, according to the

Book of Proverbs, is 'comely in going', welcomed for its speed.



Deer are often mentioned, for their speed or their beauty, sometimes likened to the love of a man for a woman; 'Let her be as the loving hind or the roe,' also

appears in Proverbs. The gazelle, in particular, though not often mentioned specifically, was known for its grace and its athletic form.

It is the animals which played an everyday part in the lives of the Israelites, of which we hear most often. The commonest were probably the sheep, which are the subject of so many stories in the Bible. The lamb has become the representative of much of the tradition of the Jews. It is often offered for sacrifice, is part of the Jewish diet, must be cared for and nurtured.



The Paschal Lamb is an important part of religious services, in both Jewish and Christian belief. It marks the commemoration of the

deliverance from slavery in Egypt, when Jews were commanded to sacrifice a lamb, still a most important part of the Seder service. Among the many allusions to sheep in the Bible, is perhaps the best loved story of the *akeda*, about Abraham and Isaac, when the ram caught in a thicket is substituted for the child who was to be sacrificed. The Israelites are clearly fond of their animals, in spite of using the lamb as a sacrifice, and are instructed by Moses, 'You shall not see your neighbour's donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore it; you shall help to lift it up.' At the very beginning when God ordains a day of rest, he includes the ox and the ass in the instruction.



When it comes to using animals for man's purpose, the ass comes into her own. For

there are many stories of man and the beast of burden, more than 130 instances, from the commandment not to covet your neighbour's ass, Moses putting his wife and children on to the ass while he walks beside them, and Balaam and his ass. The

animal plays a vital part in the everyday life of early Jews, and the reciprocal arrangement between man and beast of burden seems to work well for both.

Goats and camels were equally important as domestic animals. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were a means of assessing a man's wealth and formed valuable gifts. Jacob's present to his brother Esau consisted of 200 female goats and twenty male goats, 200 female sheep and twenty male sheep, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys - quite a menagerie.



Ever since the serpent's temptation of Eve, reptiles have had a bad press. The serpent,

according to Genesis, was craftier than any other beast of the field. As a result of Eve's fall, God's instruction was, 'Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all fours, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things, them shall ye not eat, for they are an abomination.' This included lizards and snails. Snakes in the Bible represent evil and fiery serpents are used as impending punishments for those who stray from the narrow path.



There are specific instructions in the Bible about insects. 'All winged

insects that go on all fours are detestable to you. Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those that have

jointed legs above their feet, with which to hop on the ground. Of them you may eat: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, and the grasshopper of any kind. But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you.' The permissible insects may not sound very attractive to the modern Jew ('I'm a Celebrity - Get me out of Here!' owes much to the Bible), but in view of frequent famine in the ancient Middle East, they may well have saved lives.



The plagues recited at the Seder table include locusts and lice, a reminder that these early Israelites were liable at any time to infestations of locusts or hornets, which might devastate their crops and beset their families. Some insects are hailed as heroic. 'Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise', says Proverbs.

From the time of God's creation, Jews have looked on their four-footed neighbours with a degree of affection. They have learned to live with the animals in some harmony - more so than some of their contemporaries. Today, when we keep so many beasts as part of our home lives, we no longer use them as sacrifices, though we are tending more and more to abandon them as food. Perhaps Isaiah was a vegan, for he tells us, 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.'



Noah's Ark by Edward Hicks (1780-1849)

Philippa Bernard

Charles the Great & His Jewish Subjects A Frank View



Charles the Great by Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier

Charles the Great, the Carolingian King and Emperor, dominated European affairs in the early Middle Ages; and contrary to popular belief he was not known by the French epithet *Charlemagne* during his lifetime. He was born on 2nd April 748 in the palace at Quierzy, south of St. Quentin in France.

According to Einhard, one of Charles' early biographers, and from the examination of his mortal remains at Aachen (Aix la Chapelle), the King was six foot three inches tall, well above average for that period. He must have cut an impressive figure in his military attire; and we know Charles spent a significant part of his long reign of forty-six years in warfare, battling against, among others, Saxons, Avars, Slavs and Lombards.

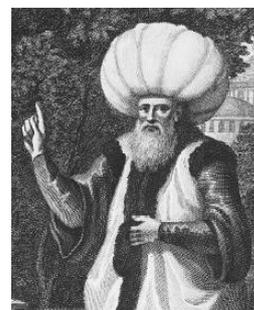
In her recent biography of Charles the Great, Janet Nelson gives a new perspective on Charles, evaluating the primary and secondary sources for his life, and she teases out new insights into his personality, revealing a softer side to a ruler who was intent upon crushing rebellion, using the full force of military might to smash Saxon opposition. However, she doesn't make reference to the Jews living in the Carolingian Empire; and this is a little surprising since there is evidence of the Emperor's attitude toward his Jewish subjects and his employment of them in furthering his influence abroad.

Although we don't have reliable data for the number of Jews living in Frankish lands in 800 CE, the fact that Charles passed legislation to control their conduct suggests that they were regarded as a significant minority. It should be remembered France was an important centre of Jewish learning in the Middle Ages, and one of her greatest sons, Rashi, the renowned Talmudist, flourished in Troyes in the eleventh century. As early as the sixth century there were well-established Jewish communities. Charles, like other medieval potentates, realised that the Jews were useful to the economy of his Empire. His attitude toward his Jewish subjects was not determined by liberal sentiments but rather by expediency, as one would expect from a skilful politician. Under Charles, Jews had considerable freedom to conduct business. They traded in pearls, horses, cattle, spices and paper, and, ironically, they often provided fabrics and incense for Christian religious rites. However, Jews were not allowed to trade in wine, grain or currency. The capitularies (ordinances) of Charles set down the relationship between the State and the Jewish population. These laws make it clear that the Jews were effectively owned by the Emperor and could only be tried by him; this afforded

When a Jew took an oath, he did so on the Torah

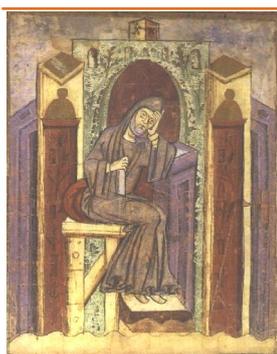
some protection from the hostility of the nobility and the Church. But it also meant security was dependent on the caprices of the Ruler; there are many examples in European history that illustrate the double standards by which monarchs ran their affairs. What has been described as Charles' 'fixed formula' defined Jewish obligations to their Christian brethren. They were allowed to enter into lawsuits with Christians, but they were disadvantaged by having to provide four, seven or nine witnesses as opposed to the Christians being required to produce three. Jews were not allowed to engage a Christian workman on Sundays, and no Jew was to force a Christian to go to prison as pledge for a Jew. When a Jew took an

oath, he did so on the *Torah*. Jews living in the Carolingian Empire, particularly in France, facilitated trade with the Orient, and Charles employed Jewish merchants to extend trade with the East. One such merchant, Isaac, was sent in 797 CE together with two ambassadors, to the fabulously rich Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid. It is the opulence of the court of Harun in Baghdad that is described in *The Thousand and One Nights*. It is believed this same Isaac brought back a very special gift for the Emperor: an elephant called Abul-Abbas! It was exhibited on various occasions at the Frankish court in Aachen, and was later removed to Augsburg in 810 CE, where at the age of forty it died from pneumonia.



Harun al-Rashid

So although Jews were permitted - within a Carolingian legal code - to trade successfully, their political status remained almost the same under Charles as under his predecessors. Even when Jews were given prominent positions at court, as for example, Farragut of Girgenti, who was physician to Charles, they were marginalised in Christian society. We know that popes had Jewish doctors who were no doubt respected for their learning, but were not counted among God's people; that role had been assumed by followers of the new religion (Christianity), bolstered by Church dogma. What the Jews provided to monarchs like Charles was an independent source of finance and connections with overseas developments, mainly because Jews were international traders. In return, since Jews were, for all intents and purposes, the property of the Emperor, they expected a degree of protection from anti-Semitic clerics and the easily-manipulated mob. This 'special relationship' between ruler and Jewish subjects caused friction; neither the ecclesiastics nor the nobility were happy with what they perceived as an unholy



Notker the Stammerer

alliance; but at the end of the day, the sovereign could and very often did ditch his erstwhile bankers, leaving the Jews to fend for themselves.

I want to round off this brief exploration of the status of Jews living in the Frankish Empire in the ninth century by quoting two references to Jews; one in the *Vita Karoli Magni* by the Frankish courtier and scholar Einhard, who was a contemporary of Charles; and the other quoted by Notker the Stammerer, a monk of Saint Gall who lived some thirty years after Charles had died. Notker's style is hagiographic where he relates eulogistic anecdotes regarding the Emperor Charlemagne. It is Einhard, in his short *Life of the Emperor*, who mentions the saga of the elephant sent to Charles by the Caliph of Baghdad. This 'jumbo' gesture made a statement about relative power; Charles is not the Caliph's equal, and although relations between the two men were cordial, it is Harun who makes generous territorial grants to Charles, demonstrating the Western Emperor's subordination to the Eastern magnate. Notker relates the story of ships being spotted off the coast of Southern Gaul. Observers speculated upon whose ships were approaching; some said that they were Jewish merchants, others that they were Africans or traders from Britain, but wise Charles knew from the design of the vessels that they were manned by Vikings!

Peter Beyfus



Jewish Organisations - AJEX



The Annual Remembrance Parade in Whitehall

During the First World War some 50,000 Jewish men and women served in the armed services from countries across the world. When the fighting was over, ex-service organisations offered to those who had participated, somewhere they could meet friends and find some help in their post-war lives.

In January 1920, the Jewish branch of the Federation of Discharged Soldiers met in Leeds to discuss forming their own association, and when the Armistice was celebrated in 1921, a group of men of the Judeans (the group of Jews who fought under their own banner during the war), laid a wreath at the Cenotaph. This small gesture became very important to the Jewish community, a physical statement that they had made their contribution to the defence of their country. They organised an annual dinner, and in 1926 the *Jewish Chronicle* reported a parade of 250 men of the Judean Battalions and the Menorah Club founded by Jewish ex-soldiers.

Trouble in Palestine led to a rise in anti-Semitism as fascism grew in Europe, and when a meeting was held in the East End to form the Jewish Ex-servicemen's Legion, some 200 members joined. The movement grew in popularity, and the first of the Annual Remembrance Parades was formed on Horse Guards Parade in November 1930. The Legion appointed the first Jewish chaplain to HM Forces, Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, and by 1936 the organisation had become the

Association of Jewish Ex-servicemen and Women - AJEX. This was to avoid confusion with the British Legion, which now became the Royal British Legion.

The aims of the Association are to continue remembrance of the part played by Jews in the fighting forces; to fight against anti-Semitism through education; to provide welfare for Jewish veterans and their families. The events of the Second World War - when 60,000 Jews served and three were awarded the Victoria Cross - and of the tragedy of the Holocaust, made growing demands on the Association, and the work was strengthened to deal with the increasing needs of the Jewish community.

Today, AJEX funds an annuity scheme disbursing financial assistance on the main Jewish festivals during the year to enable recipients to enjoy traditional holiday observance. The Education Forum involves a team of veterans acting as speakers who visit schools to deliver a short but powerful message to the students. A number of mobile exhibitions also tour the country. In recent years the Jewish Military Museum, now a part of the Jewish Museum in Camden Town, was set up to honour and perpetuate the memory of Jews who have died serving their country. The Annual Remembrance Parade and Ceremony at the Cenotaph is attended by UK Jewish veterans and those from around the world. It is conducted by the Chief Rabbi and has been graced over the years by many distinguished reviewing officers, among them HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, HRH The Duke of Kent, The Countess Mountbatten of Burma, HRH Princess Alexandra, HRH Prince Michael of Kent and many high-ranking Officers of the Armed Forces.

AJEX has set up a Record of Honour, which lists over 60,000 names of Jewish members of the Armed Forces, who have served since 1939. It can be accessed via the website www.ajex.org.uk.



Shadows in the Bible

2. Gideon

This is the second in our series on shadowy Biblical figures.

From the first description of Gideon as 'a mighty man of valour' the reader is introduced to the hero of the story, and knows that this is going to be a tale of courage and honour - perhaps what the script writer had in mind when he introduced another hero as, 'The name is Bond, James Bond.' Yet again the people of Israel had misbehaved 'in the sight of the Lord', and yet again they needed a saviour to get them out of another tricky situation.

It was a time of war. The Midianites, across the Jordan, far outnumbering the Israelites, were raiding their cattle, destroying their corn supplies and capturing their goods, 'leaving no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox nor ass.' They needed help. Gideon, the son of Joash the Abiezerite, had been appointed as a judge and it was to him, as usually happened when help was needed, that an angel appeared. Gideon was threshing wheat, keeping a low profile by the wine press so that the enemy couldn't see him. He asked the angel why God had not saved his people as he had promised and asked for a sign of the Lord's presence in a time of trouble.

A sacrifice was prepared - a young goat and some unleavened bread - and Gideon was instructed to place the meat on the altar and pour the broth over it. And then came the long-awaited sign: the Angel struck it with his rod and it burst into flame. The Angel vanished.

The next instruction was to bring down the altar of Baal, the God worshipped by the Midianites, which the Israelites had in their folly constructed. Nervous of his father's renegade followers, Gideon stole out under cover of darkness with ten of his own men and destroyed the altar. When morning came the townsfolk set up an inquiry to find the culprit. Gideon's father came to his defence, suggesting that if Baal really was a God, he would be perfectly capable of



The Battle of Gideon against the Midianites by Poussin

dealing with the destroyer of his altar himself.

Meanwhile the Midianite army, strengthened by other tribes, crossed the Jordan ready for a full attack on the much smaller Israelite forces. Gideon too was summoning fellow tribesmen prepared for battle. But again, he wanted the reassurance of God's help to achieve victory. He suggested that he would lay a fleece on the ground, and if by morning it was wet with dew while all around it was dry, then he would accept, with God's help, the task before him. By morning the fleece was soaking wet while the ground was dry. In fact, Gideon had to wring it out, getting a whole bowlful of water out of it! But this sceptical judge was still not satisfied. This time he wanted the fleece to be dry while all around was wet. God obliged, and all was set for the battle.

he wanted the reassurance of God's help to achieve victory

With thousands of men ready to fight, Gideon was told to take only three hundred, so he dismissed all those afraid to join battle. Some 22,000 left, but it still seemed too many, so Gideon was told to take the rest down to the water, where he separated 'those who

lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps, from those who kneel down to drink.' Those who lapped were chosen to go with Gideon to fight the Midianites, because they were less vulnerable to attack. He and his men surrounded the enemy camp, blowing trumpets and carrying torches - appearing a far bigger force than they were. The Midianites fled and victory was Gideon's.

Gideons International is an evangelical Christian association founded in 1899 in Wisconsin. The organization began in 1898, when two travelling salesmen met in a hotel room that they shared in Boscobel, Wisconsin, where they discussed the formation of an association. The Gideons' primary activity is the distribution of copies of the Bible, free of charge. A Gideon Bible may be found in most hotel bedrooms, though guests who read them may not know the history of the original Gideon.

Philippa Bernard

Mary the Jewess



*Mary the Jewess,
from Michael Maier's
Symbola aurea mensae, 1617*

Alchemy was an ancient branch of natural philosophy, a philosophical and scientific tradition believed to have originated in Egypt and taken up by the Greeks, although there were similar practices in the Far East. Alchemists attempted to purify, mature, and perfect certain materials, often with the aim of turning base metals into gold. One of the earliest alchemists known was a woman, known usually as Mary the Jewess.

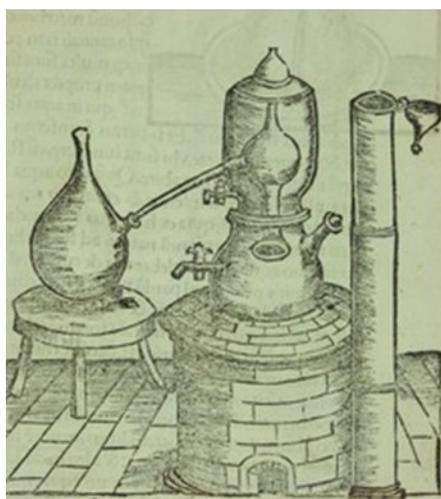
Little is known of Mary, sometimes referred to as Mary the Prophetess, who lived around the first or second century CE in Egypt. What we do know of her comes from the works of the author of the first book on alchemy, Zosimos of Panopolis, who referred to her as the 'sister of Moses', to emphasize her scholarship and her importance. She wrote in Greek, but none of her writings exist, though she has been referred to as the first Jewish woman writer. A few of her aphorisms have been quoted by other authors.

Mary was certainly a gifted alchemist, perhaps the first, and some of her experiments and discoveries are still used today. She was the first to make use of hydrochloric acid, and her construction of certain glass and metal equipment led to similar utensils still being used in laboratories today. Her *tribikos* was a kind of alembic (an alchemical still consisting of two vessels connected by a tube, for distilling) with three arms, often used in chemical experiments. She recommended that the copper or bronze

used to make the tubes should be the thickness of a frying pan and that the joints between the tubes and the still-head should be sealed with flour paste.

Another invention was the *kerotakis*, a device used to heat substances used in alchemy and to collect vapours. It is an airtight container with a sheet of copper on its upper side. When working properly, all its joints form a tight vacuum. The use of such sealed containers in the hermetic arts led to the term 'hermetically sealed'. The *kerotakis* was said to be a replication of the process of the formation of gold that was occurring in the bowels of the earth.

Perhaps the invention most familiar to us was the *bain-marie*, named after her, the double boiler, used in cookery today, which limits the maximum temperature of a container and its contents.



*An alchemical balneum Mariæ,
or Maria's Bath*

Some of Mary's sayings have been passed down. 'Mary's axiom' stated that 'One becomes two, two becomes three and out of the third comes the one as the fourth' – a phrase used by Carl Jung to express his notion of individuation - how a thing is identified as an individual that is not something else. She expressed other ideas connected with alchemy, such as: 'Just as a man is composed of four elements, likewise is copper; and as a man results from the association of liquids, of solids, and of the spirit, so does copper.' It was an early belief that man was composed of earth, fire, air and water.

Like other alchemists Mary, too, sought to find gold from base metals; the creation of pure gold was considered a transmutation towards heaven. It was rumoured that she had found the answer.

References to Mary as 'the Hebrew' or 'the Jewess' confirm that she was indeed of Jewish stock. It is mentioned that she believed that only she, as one of the chosen people, could receive knowledge from God. She is reported to have told her fellow alchemists not to touch the 'philosopher's stone', as 'you are not of the race of Abraham'.

This mysterious woman from ancient times appears in several pseudo-scientific treatises. We know little about her, but whenever we make use of a *bain-marie* in the kitchen we should perhaps give a thought to Mary the Jewess.

Philippa Bernard



A modern Bain Marie set

Jewish Dynasties

2. The Polacks



Rev. Joseph Polack

It is interesting to calculate the immense influence that this quiet, modest family has had since the arrival on the academic scene of the Rev. Joseph Polack in 1890. Joseph was thirty-four years of age and had been Junior Minister at Liverpool's Princes Road Synagogue when he was approached to take on the duties of Housemaster of the Jewish House at Clifton College in Bristol. He took up the post in 1890. The House, founded in 1878, was the first Jewish boarding house at an English Public School.

The first families whose sons were sent to the House were all members of what Chaim Bermant chose to call 'The Cousinhood' in his book of that name. Among these first boys who went on to great success were Arthur Stiebel -later Sir Arthur - an eminent bankruptcy barrister; Charlie Enoch who made his career in the army; Rex & Harold Cohen who became prominently successful businessmen in Liverpool and Mark Gubbay who became Financial Secretary in the Indian Civil Service and a director of the Chartered Bank. Even more well-known names were those of Jacob and Robert Waley Cohen. Robert went on to be adviser on petroleum to the UK Government in World War I and was knighted in 1931. They were followed in the House by Samuel Montagu's two younger sons Edwin and Gerald, who were later joined by their brother Lionel. Leslie Hore-Belisha - of Belisha Beacon

fame - was also a Polackian. In 1903 Robert Waley Cohen invited Polack's House to become involved with the Victoria Working Boys' Club which had been created to provide unemployed Jewish refugees with a place to meet and to take part in sport and social activities. The suggestion was taken up with alacrity and the House and its pupils remained supporters and contributors until the Club moved to Stamford Hill in 1945.

Joseph Polack and his wife lost their first child - a daughter - in 1881 but they went on to have three sons, Benjamin, Albert and Ernest. Tragically, Benjamin & Ernest were both killed in the war in 1916. For obvious reasons, these first names have been repeated through the generations, making for some confusion when studying the history of the family!



Albert (A I) Polack

Albert had decided to become a solicitor but with the loss of his brothers, he agreed to follow his father into Polack's House in 1923 on Joseph's retirement. He was married to Betty Cohen. Betty's two brothers Harold and Richard had been pupils at Clifton College. Betty was a warm and motherly Housemaster's wife and contributed greatly to the well-being of 'their' boys.

In December 1940, bombs fell on Bristol, and Polack's House was among the buildings which were damaged. It was decided to evacuate the whole School to Bude in Cornwall, where it stayed from 1941 to 1945.

One of the pupils during Albert's tenure was Bernard Waley Cohen who became

Lord Mayor of London in 1960. On the occasion of Albert and Betty's retirement in 1949, a splendid dinner in their honour was presided over by Sir Robert Waley Cohen.

Albert (known as A I) was a quietly spoken, rather self-effacing man who had been a teacher at Taunton College. He and Betty were Founder Members of Westminster Synagogue, and Albert's occasional sermons at Kent House were always profound, interesting and delivered in his gentle but very clear schoolmaster's voice. I was always amused, as were many of us, that he would often preface a section of his talk with 'As you know...' and then go on to recite a sentence or two in Latin or Greek, as if his audience were totally familiar with those languages! He would arrive on a *Shabbat* morning by Public Transport from their home in Northwood, wearing a brown trilby and carrying a small battered leather attaché case. Whilst at the School he had been a prominent member of the Council of Christians and Jews and when he retired he became their Education Officer - a post he held from 1949 to 1968.

He and Betty eventually went back to live in Clifton and their front door was always open in the expectation that old boys or their parents would 'pop in'. We visited them whenever we went to Bristol and were always welcomed with open arms and a cup of tea. Albert and Betty had two sons and two daughters. When in 1949, Albert retired it was thought perhaps that his elder son Bennie would take his place in the House, but he was only in his early twenties and would not



Philip Polack



Ernest Polack

have had sufficient experience. So, Albert's cousin, Philip, took on the job.

Philip's tenure saw a list of boys whose names are now well-known. To mention but a few, there were Brian Marber, who was President of The Cambridge Footlights and then went on to be one of the City of London's best-known forecasters of share prices and currency movements; Nick Tarsh, who became the first Jewish Head of School. A Rugby Blue at Cambridge, he qualified as a barrister, ran major travel companies and was awarded an OBE for services to charity; John & Francis Mocatta; Trevor Chinn who was Knighted in 1990 for political services; David Wolfson, made a Life Peer in 1991, and Clive Swift, the Royal Shakespeare actor who also regularly appeared on television.

When Philip took over as Housemaster, there were about fifty boys in the House, but this had risen to seventy by the time that his term of office ended in 1964. His retirement was due to the School having adopted the policy of a maximum tenure of fifteen years for its Housemasters.

Immediately following Philip (or Phil, as he was always known) came Albert's second son, Ernest who never married. His sister Pat, also single, took on the role of House 'Mother'. They carried on the Polack tradition of ensuring that there was great integration between the Jewish House and the other boarding Houses. They were, like their parents, warm and hospitable. Ernest was a friendly and engaging character with a broad smile. Highly principled, he was a staunch Socialist - which must have caused him a great deal of soul-searching when he was

considering taking up the post in a Public School. He was also an ardent worker in the struggle against the *apartheid* policies of South Africa, and he was a member of Amnesty International. One of the boys, Douglas Blausten, encouraged by Ernest and Pat, created a House Branch of Amnesty. The House Drama competition was also high on Ernest's list of importance and he encouraged all the boys of the House to take part. Polack's had many successes in this field.

Several of the present membership of Westminster Synagogue were boys at the House when Ernest was in charge. Among them were Howard (now Lord) Leigh - our President; David Connick - our Senior Warden; Jonathan Golden; Robert Laurance and David Bezem. Also the late Roger Stone, who composed the beautiful tune for *Yigdal*, which we sing every *Kol Nidre*.

The Polack family had had an enormous effect on the Jewish scene

In his book *Dynasty*, Derek Winterbottom writes of Ernest, 'He was a Housemaster who could read boys and situations with uncanny accuracy, who took just the right kind of action, who said just the right sort of thing, who acted drastically when he felt the need, who did nothing at all on other occasions. ... he could light up your day with praise and flashes of the wide grin.'

With Ernest due to retire, the problem of his successor arose. It had been hoped that Michael - Philip and Joanna's son - would take up the reins but he decided that it was not what he wanted to do. Sadly, therefore when Ernest's term of office came to an end in 1979, so did the close involvement of the Polack dynasty. The House was then 101 years old and the Polacks had been in charge of it for eighty-nine years.

In 1994, Ernest delivered the Annual Reinhart Lecture at Westminster Synagogue. His subject was 'One of Us? The relationship between the Anglo-Jewish Community and the British

Establishment over the last Century.' Of course it was an excellent talk. It was also a source of pleasure for many of us that here too, he had followed in his father's footsteps.

In our *Quarterly* of January 2015, David Bezem wrote: *...hundreds and hundreds of non-Jewish boys, mainly from the West Country, would come into Clifton as thirteen-year olds having encountered few, if any, Jews before and would leave five years later having interacted with the Polack's boys, along with all their other peers of course, in all school activities with the exception only of religious worship: everything from academic classes, to sport, to music and drama, and all in the particularly intense, intimate environment of a boarding school. It is very hard to imagine that any of those boys, even those who might have arrived at the school with some ingrained prejudices, left with any vestiges of anti-Semitism. At some point along their journey they all realised that the 'other' was actually the 'same'. That to my mind is perhaps the greatest legacy of Clifton College's Polack's House.*

Of one thing there is no doubt - the Polack family had had an enormous effect on the Jewish scene right from the time that Polack's House was established, to the end of that influential era.

Nick Tarsh who was Chairman of the Polack's House Education Trust and Vice-Chairman of the Clifton College Council, wrote, in the Preface to Winterbottom's book: - *Each of the four Polacks...saw the House through changing times, including the two world wars and evacuation from Bristol to Bude. Each was an outstanding success. The contribution of Polackians, both to the Jewish Community and to the nation at large, has been very significant.*

Claire Connick

In September 2019, two pupils - children of a third generation Old Polackian - celebrated their *Bar & Bat Mitzvah* in the College's Polack Centre Synagogue, with a capacity congregation of the College's twenty-six Jewish pupils and invited guests.

Amersham in World War II



The small town of Amersham in the Chiltern Hills, some thirty miles from London, was the ideal place for Jewish people to move themselves and their families to safety at the outbreak of war in 1939. For those who continued working in the city, Amersham had good transport facilities – trains on the Metropolitan Line running above ground until they joined the tube lines at Finchley Road – and easy roads (if petrol was available) at a time when traffic was minimal. The area was reasonably safe from aerial bombing as there were few factories or airfields to command the attention of the enemy. There was plenty of housing available, from large houses to tiny cottages, good schools and shopping facilities, though of course no supermarkets. Shopping in Amersham in those days was a friendly family affair, each shopkeeper knowing his customers, and they knowing him (or her if the owner was away at the war). The farms in the outlying countryside offered plenty of eggs, butter and milk, with many householders growing their own produce for the table. Many Jewish families who had previously not known what a spade looked like, turned over their gardens to grow potatoes, beans and other green vegetables, or even kept a few hens for fresh eggs – there were no kosher facilities for killing the birds, but this did not seem to worry most householders who were prepared to wring the hens' necks themselves.

In spite of its proximity to London, Amersham and its surrounding villages saw little of the war. One German plane, having dropped its stick of bombs, was damaged by anti-aircraft gunfire and had to crash land in a field on Amersham hill.

The Home Guard rushed out to capture the crew, who seemed only too pleased that their war was over. Several of the German airmen remained in the district when the war was over, settling down happily to an English agricultural life. One report of enemy activity said, '27 September 1940 - six bombs landed in Amersham Common. The assumed target was the railway station. Most landed on open ground, some in fields and one damaged a footpath and sewer cover. Apart from craters, no other property was damaged'. Most households constructed an air raid shelter in the back garden, but apart from one direct hit by a V2 bomb on an empty house, there was little damage.

There were very few Jews living in the area before the war: no synagogues or rabbis and no chance of the children learning Hebrew or Jewish studies, except by correspondence lessons. However it was not only the English Jews who came to the countryside seeking sanctuary. Many of the refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe who were able to leave came too. Work permits were difficult to obtain, but domestic work was available, and some highly educated women became household workers in order to be able to stay. Amersham welcomed them all, and very few instances of anti-Semitism or detrimental behaviour were observed. The worst racialism was probably from the Jews themselves towards the black US servicemen who arrived there later in the war, some of whom were befriended by Jewish families. Considering that the majority of the early foreign visitors were



The arch which led to the Synagogue still stands

German, with whom the nation was at war, it is perhaps surprising that most were welcomed into English households with friendship and affection.

In the early years the Jewish families worshipped either in private houses, or in a hall in Chesham Bois (pronounced Boys), the small hamlet between Amersham and Chesham. As more Jewish families began arriving, a synagogue was constructed in a pre-fabricated hut in Woodside Road, one of the main streets of the town. The little building represented the first sign of an element of safety for the Jewish community, a symbol of hope, especially



for those who had come from occupied territories. The congregation, the Amersham Hebrew Congregation, was Ashkenazi, affiliated – though not officially – to the United Synagogue. The people of Amersham, and surrounding areas, regardless of their religion and beliefs were welcomed in to share in prayers, social events and public talks.

During the war years, three ministers were appointed: Rev. Sonnie (Sebastian) Bloch, Rev. Izaak Rapaport, and Rev. Jonah Indech. Rabbi Bloch was known as 'the Rabbi in the green jacket' who rode a motorcycle except on Shabbat. Sunday School classes for the children and services on Shabbat and the Festivals, were soon established, together with the usual Jewish traditions: a Seder on Passover, a Women's Guild and live entertainment for all (before the advent of television). Amersham was able to provide plenty of interesting spare time fun. It had a small cinema and the Home Guard and Scout troop came into their own with many Jewish members. They offered home-made shows (Ralph Reader, the celebrated writer and

performer of musical comedy, was much loved for his Gang Shows) and many of the Jews in the town were encouraged to exercise their theatrical skills. The professional entertainment was the Playhouse Theatre near the station. This repertory company put on live plays and musicals throughout the war, the programme changing every week, and many an international star began their careers there. Dirk Bogarde (who lived in the town), Jill Bennett, Denholm Elliott, Glyn Houston, Peter Sallis, Robert Stevens, Patrick Troughton and many other household names cut their professional acting teeth at Amersham. Jewish people have always enjoyed the theatre and gave their support unstintingly. Sadly the Playhouse had to close after the war and the building became an auction house.



Amersham also had an ancient and highly successful school, Dr. Challoner's Grammar School. It was founded in 1624 in accordance with the last will and testament of Robert Chaloner (spelt with one 'l'). Chaloner, a Doctor of Divinity, was Rector of Amersham from 1576 to 1584. In 1905, the school became co-educational for the first time which, according to the school's first prospectus in 1906, was 'practically universal in America'. It later reverted to boys only, with girls in the sixth form in recent years. The Jews in war-time Amersham

naturally welcomed such a first-class education, and competition for entry was fierce. Roger Moore, the actor, was a pupil there, as was the MP Dominic Raab. Among the Jewish pupils were Chanoch Ehrentreu, who later became head of the United Synagogue's Beth Din. One head boy at Dr Challoner's was Maurice Bloch, who qualified as a doctor and worked in London. Dr Bloch belonged to the more orthodox Chesham Jewish Community, part of the Federation Synagogue. He was the younger brother of Rev. Sonnie Bloch. David Stamler was another classmate; he went on to become the Head of Carmel College. There were other good schools for girls and boys, some preparatory, before the pupils went on to public schools, such as Berkhamsted (two excellent schools for boys and girls, though the two never met!).

The Jewish community of Amersham were a close-knit group, who met together frequently outside the synagogue congregational activities. They numbered among them many who achieved distinction in several different spheres. Maurice Edelman became MP for Coventry and was a prolific journalist and author of several works of fiction and non-fiction. His wife, Tilli, was a historian, and his daughter, Professor Sonia Jackson, is Head of the Department of Social Studies at the University of Wales, Swansea. She was married at the Woodside Road synagogue, the only wedding ever to take place there.

The community was happy to play a considerable part in local activities

Other distinguished Jewish authors, artists and musicians made their home in Amersham during the war. The writer, Elias Canetti, who lived in Chesham Bois, won the Nobel Prize for literature for his novel *Auto-da-Fé*, the Goehr family, Walter the conductor, his wife Leila, the photographer and their son Alexander, the composer, all lived there. Sir Michael Sobell, the industrialist and philanthropist, moved his business (which provided electrical equipment to the



armed forces) to Amersham when his factory in London was bombed.

The community was happy to play a considerable part in local activities; they volunteered at Amersham General Hospital (which housed part of St. Mary's Paddington), where one German refugee was a senior nurse. Several joined the Women's Voluntary Service, others acted as Air Raid Wardens and Fire Service volunteers, or made barrage balloons at The Maltings (a large old house in Amersham, now a restaurant). There were also many Jewish servicemen from the Allied forces (including German, Polish, Palestinian and American) stationed in the area at army camps, Bovingdon Air Force Base nearby or working for British Intelligence at Latimer House. The Amersham community provided them with a social club and kosher canteen and invited them into their homes for *Pesach*, *Shabbat* and the High Holydays.

When the war was over most of the community returned to London, but some stayed on, enjoying the country life they had learned to love. The congregation amalgamated with the Chesham congregation for a while but closed in 1968. There is now a Liberal congregation, the South Bucks Liberal Jewish Community, which meets in Amersham, but there is no Jewish cemetery in or near Amersham.

Philippa Bernard

Penzance Jewish Cemetery



Nationally, there are only about twenty-five existing Georgian Jewish burial grounds pre-dating the early nineteenth century. Seven of these are to be found in the South West, and, collectively, they form the best-preserved regional group outside London. This is the story of one of them.

The Penzance cemetery has been recognised as by far the best preserved of these old burial grounds. It is now owned by the Board of Deputies. Classified as ‘closed’, the English Heritage Grade II listed cemetery is regarded as one of the finest. In a lane once known as Jerusalem Road, it is enclosed by a substantial high wall dating from 1845 and it has, at its entrance, a complete *Bet Tohorah*, or ‘Cleansing House’ – an extremely rare feature to survive from this period. The entrance porch, which may originally have been roofed over, contains a wedge-shaped alcove which could accommodate a coffin. At one stage small streams ran through the valley and they would have provided the fresh running water essential for the ritual cleansing of bodies.

Jews first came to Penzance from the Rhineland area of Germany and from Holland in the early part of the eighteenth century. The size of the Jewish population of the town at this time is unknown, and - as the first Synagogue was not built until 1768 - to begin with, they probably conducted their Services in private homes.

Rabbi Barnett Asher Simmons (1784-1860) was the longest-serving minister; he arrived in December 1811. He also

served as a *mohel* and as the *shochet* to the Community. He is buried in the cemetery.

The burial ground was established in about 1740 in what was then an open wooded valley; its location overlooks St Michael’s Mount Bay, and this must make it one of the most beautiful cemeteries in the UK. The land on which this original burial plot stood was owned by a Canon John Rogers, a distinguished scholar of Hebrew and Syriac who, it appears, wanted to encourage Jews to settle in Penzance. The Jewish community later purchased leases to adjacent plots, to prevent the encroachment of houses being built close by. In 1844, they bought the freehold to the whole of the present area, and completely enclosed the cemetery.



Rabbi Barnett Asher Simmons by Richard Thomas Pentreath - portrait in Penlee House Gallery & Museum

Sad to say, the headstones installed before 1791 have disappeared, but thanks to the protection of its enclosing walls, there are over fifty remaining in almost perfect condition, with their Hebrew and English inscriptions being of an exceptional quality. The Penzance Jewish community declined in the nineteenth century as more families left for the industrial cities in the North and the market for tin and copper fell, affecting the town’s prosperity.

The walls, mainly constructed in 1845, were so well built that they remained intact until the 1940s. However, during World War II, German bombs fell in the area and one bomb destroyed part of the lower wall near the cemetery entrance.

At the same time, several headstones in the section of the cemetery which had been reserved by the Congregation for the poor were irreparably damaged. Repairs to the wall were carried out, probably by the Penzance Council and, in spite of the fact that there had not been a Jewish community in the town for over fifty years, the headstones which had been damaged beyond repair were replaced with miniature ones.

In March 2016 Cornwall’s Jews celebrated the completion of restoration work, after a £13,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund helped them to rebuild the high stone granite walls and revive an important site in the country’s most western town. The Lottery Fund matched the contributions made by visitors to the cemetery and the donations from the descendants of those interred in the cemetery - as well as from local and Jewish grant-making organisations and local traders.

Leslie Lipert, treasurer of Friends of Penzance Cemetery, said, ‘The restoration has revived Jewish and Cornish history and strengthened links between the new Jewish community and the wider Cornish population. It connects both with a shared past.’



The Penzance Jewish Cemetery remains as evidence of a once thriving community. It can be visited by appointment by contacting Penlee House Gallery & Museum, info@penleehouse.org.uk which is open daily, except Sunday, all year round.

Claire Connick

COMMUNITY

The Peace of Mind Project



Despite the popular image of the fearless and resilient Israeli soldier, the long-term effects of veterans' exposure to stress from combat are very much part of their lives and the lives of their families. The Peace of Mind Project has been created to counter this damage.

It involves parties of fifteen or so veterans undergoing nine months of intensive therapy, including group and one-on-one counselling sessions. Also, as part of the treatment, the men are entertained by Jewish families in the Diaspora, giving them a feeling of caring and support in gratitude for their defence of Israel.

Through Peace of Mind, host Jewish communities play an active role in helping the recovery of these soldiers, and in the process create long-lasting relationships.

In November last year, some Westminster Synagogue members had the privilege of caring for these men – Thomas and Renee Salamon hosted two of the eighteen who came to London. The WS effort was organised by Sarah Derriey. During their stay here the soldiers took part in the Scrolls Memorial evening and six of them each lit a memorial candle.



This is what one of the veterans had to report:-

When my teammates and I first heard of the POM programme, we were sceptical. A bunch of tough guys, ex-combat soldiers, most of us are married, some with children. Why do we need to reflect back on the past? We did what we needed to do to protect our country.

We almost never stopped thinking about those men that didn't return from the war, or the physically injured ones, not to mention the mentally injured. If we did, it was mostly by cynical private jokes among ourselves. When we started the programme, it almost immediately peeled those layers of repression that shielded us all those years. In intimate conversations, each of us opened up like never before. We cried, laughed, shared our deepest feelings and, above all, we were there for each other. We realized how deeply rooted those feelings were within us and how they affect our day-to-day lives. Whether at work, with our partners, friends and family, the military and our shared experiences shaped who we are and how we react to most of our life's endeavours.

We also had a chance to get to know a wonderful community in London, who hosted us with such courtesy we never thought we deserved. It was a wonderful experience to realize how Jews in the diaspora think of us and care for us, and how important it is to preserve that connection to Israel.

I truly hope this programme will continue to grow and reach new communities to strengthen their connections to IDF veterans and Israel as a whole, while helping those ex-soldiers get the support they deserve.

Amusement Arcade

A fleeing ISIS terrorist, desperate for water, was plodding through the Afghan desert when he saw something far off in the distance. Hoping to find water, he hurried towards it, only to find a very frail little old Jewish man, standing at a small makeshift display rack – selling ties.

The ISIS terrorist asked, 'Do you have water?' The old man replied, 'I have no water. Would you like to buy a tie? They are only \$5'.

The Taliban shouted hysterically, 'Idiot Infidel! I do not need such an over-priced western adornment. I spit on your ties. I need water!'.

'Sorry, I have none - just ties - pure silk - and only \$5!'.

'Pahh! A curse on your ties! I should wrap one around your scrawny little neck and choke the life out of you - but I must conserve my energy and find water!'.

'Okay' said the little old man, 'it doesn't matter that you don't want to buy a tie from me, or that you hate me, threaten my life and call me Infidel. I will show you that I am bigger than that. If you continue over that hill to the east for about two miles, you will find a restaurant. It has the finest food and all the ice-cold water you need. Go in Peace!'.

Cursing him again, the desperate fugitive staggered away over the hill.

Several hours later, he crawled back, almost dead and gasped 'They won't let me in without a tie!'.



Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997)



One of the greatest philosophers of modern times, Isaiah Berlin had the gift, not granted to many men of extraordinary brainpower, of simplicity. He once said, 'Philosophers are adults who persist in asking childish questions'. In his essay *The Fox and the Hedgehog* he maintained that the fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Of that essay he wrote, 'I never meant it very seriously. I meant it as a kind of enjoyable intellectual game, but it was taken seriously.' In the essay he divides the world's thinkers into those (the foxes) who, like Aristotle and Shakespeare, knew many things, and those (the hedgehogs) who, like Plato and Dante, knew one big thing.

Taking Isaiah Berlin seriously is not an easy exercise. Even as a child he was precociously intelligent, wondering and questioning what was happening around him. His father and grandfather ran a prosperous timber business in Latvia, and were prominent in the Jewish community.

Born in 1909 in Riga (now capital of Latvia, then a part of the Russian empire), he moved with his family to Petrograd (St. Petersburg), at the age of six, where he witnessed the revolution of 1917. On a walk with his governess he saw a policeman being dragged away by a mob to his certain death. The memory of this event, he said on the BBC Radio 4 show *Desert Island Discs* in 1992, 'gave me a permanent horror of physical violence which has remained with me for the rest of my life'.

The turbulence of Bolshevik rule eventually led the Berlins to emigrate to England in 1921, where he soon learned English. In addition to Russian and English, Berlin was fluent in French, German and Italian, and knew Hebrew, Latin, and Ancient Greek. He was educated at St Paul's School, London. He won a place at Corpus Christi College Oxford, and after lecturing at New College, became the first Jew to be awarded a prize fellowship to All Souls College.

Throughout the 1930s Berlin was deeply involved in the development of Philosophy at Oxford. It was a time when many of the greatest English minds were there, often gathering in Berlin's rooms to discuss the subject. Among them were A.J. Ayer, Stuart Hampshire and J.L. Austin - all major philosophers - as well those who excelled in other fields, such as Maurice Bowra, the classicist, Stephen Spender, the poet and Nicolas Nabokov, the composer. Berlin's interests turned to a more historical approach to philosophy, and to social and political theory, as reflected in his intellectual biography of Karl Marx (1939), still in print.

When war broke out Berlin was turned down for National Service because of his foreign background. He also had a damaged arm dating from his early childhood. He was offered a post in the British Embassy in the Information Service, first in New York, then Washington and - when the war ended - in Moscow. He was appointed a CBE in the 1946 New Year Honours. While in Russia he visited the poet Anna Akhmatova, some twenty years older than he was. They talked far into the night, and were both much influenced by the meeting, apparently falling in love. Of that night Akhmatova wrote:

*As on a borderland of clouds
I recall your conversation,
And my conversation with you
When night stood as light as day.*

After the war Berlin was appointed Cichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford. He was President of the Aristotelian Society from 1963 to 1964, and in 1966 he played a critical role in creating Wolfson College, Oxford,

becoming its founding President. He was knighted in 1957, and appointed to the Order of Merit in 1971.



Cartoon by Niall Ferguson

He was President of the British Academy from 1974 to 1978. He also received the 1979 Jerusalem Prize for his lifelong defence of civil liberties.

Berlin's political philosophy is generally concerned with the problem of liberty and free will in increasingly totalitarian and mechanistic societies. He laid out much of his idealism in *Two Concepts of Liberty*, the inaugural lecture he delivered before the University of Oxford on 31st October 1958. It was subsequently published as a fifty-seven page pamphlet by Oxford at the Clarendon Press. His defence and refinement of what he saw as the most essential conception of freedom has achieved classic status, and the presence and character of this conception in the modern mind is due in no small measure to him. He also identified and developed, with considerable originality, a pluralist view of ultimate human ideals that supports his liberal stance.

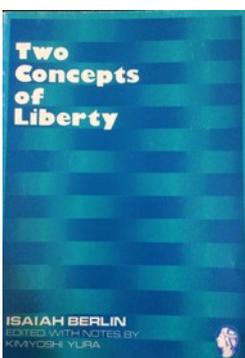
Minorities are often a valuable stimulus to a majority, a leaven, a source of information

Berlin expressed himself best, perhaps, in his essays and in his conversation. 'Why be clever?' he once asked. 'It is a much overrated attribute'. His

distinctive deep, rapid voice was often heard on the radio, and he led many to explore his chosen subject – the history of ideas.

Much of Berlin's thought was linked to his philosophy of 'value pluralism', which holds that moral values can be equally valid and yet mutually incompatible, creating conflicts that can only be reconciled pragmatically. Keeping a promise may conflict with the pursuit of truth, for example; liberty may clash with social justice; many things may clash with freedom. There can be no universal rules for reconciling such conflicts; the point is to find the best accommodation possible in each given case. He never produced a monolithic 'great work', and he scattered his writing and thoughts generously and widely - not only in his essays, lectures and journalism, but also in his letters, which are still in the process of being published.

His views on equality were important to his ethical thinking. He, as usual, put the subject simply, agreeing with the often quoted formula 'Every man to count for one and no one to count for more than one.' His chapter on equality in his book of essays, *Concepts and Categories* (1978) uses simple analogies to express complex opinions. 'If I own property, it is unfair that others (situated in relevant respects as I am) should not do so too, and if I am allowed to leave it to my children in my will it is unfair that others should not have a similar opportunity.'



Berlin was not an observant Jew, but he valued his Jewishness deeply. Whenever he was described as an English philosopher, Berlin always insisted that he was not an English philosopher, but would forever be a Russian Jew: 'I am a

Russian Jew from Riga, and all my years in England cannot change this. I love England, I have been well treated here, and I cherish many things about English life, but I am a Russian Jew; that is how I was born and that is who I will be to the end of my life.' When asked further about his Jewish background he replied, 'As for



Isaiah and Aline Berlin in 1955

my Jewish roots, they are so deep, so native to me, that it is idle for me to try to identify them, let alone analyse them.'

While in America Berlin became a good friend of Chaim Weitzmann. A lifelong Zionist, Berlin never settled in Israel. In 1951, he turned down Ben-Gurion's offer to become head of the Foreign Ministry; Abba Eban and Teddy Kollek, close acquaintances both, also urged him to move. Berlin, a Zionist who believed in the Diaspora, stayed in Oxford. 'I don't want Jews to stop living where they live. If they don't mind being a minority, that's in order' he commented. 'Minorities are often a valuable stimulus to a majority, a leaven, a source of information. But nobody should be forced to be a minority.'

In 1956 Berlin married Aline Halban, *née* de Gunzbourg (1915–2014) who was the former wife of an Oxford colleague and a previous winner of the Ladies' Golf Championship of France. She was from an exiled half Russian-aristocratic and half ennobled Jewish banking and petroleum family. She had three children from her first marriage but she and Isaiah did not have children together.

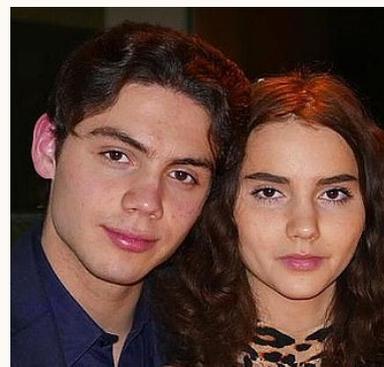
Isaiah Berlin died on 5th November 1997, aged 88. He is buried in Wolvercote Cemetery in Oxford. In its obituary *The Independent* said,

'Isaiah Berlin was one of the most remarkable men of his time, and one of

the leading liberal thinkers of the century. Philosopher, political theorist, historian of ideas; Russian, Englishman, Jew; essayist, critic, teacher; he was a man of formidable intellectual power with a rare gift for understanding a wide range of human motives, hopes and fears, and a prodigiously energetic capacity for enjoyment – of life, of people in all their variety, of their ideas and idiosyncrasies, of literature, of music, of art.'

Philippa Bernard

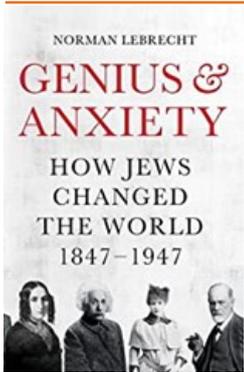
A Special Memorial



At the end of last year, *The Times* published a piece praising Westminster Synagogue member David Linsey for raising an amazing £350,000 to reform the trauma care system in Sri Lanka, in memory of his brother Daniel and his sister Amelie who were so tragically killed in the explosions at the Shangri-La Hotel there in October.

David has set up the Amelie and Daniel Linsey Foundation and was able to donate 100 trolley beds as his first delivery. The Foundation is planning to send ventilators and other equipment as part of the next instalment. What a remarkable way to help to overcome such a terrible loss.

BOOK REVIEW



Genius & Anxiety
by
Norman
Lebrecht

ONEWORLD
2019

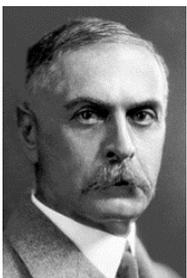
Norman Lebrecht catalogues a century of important Jewish lives in this slightly disjointed book - which helpfully contains a glossary of Jewish terms together with their origins - mainly Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish.

He begins with the Communist Manifesto in 1847 and ends with the foundation of the State of Israel in 1947.

Each chapter is devoted to a few years and includes various anecdotes and details of the lives of the characters he has chosen. There is no straight narrative; within the chapters he flips easily between anecdotes and their dates, but the stories are fascinating and the prose often amusing.

The book's subtitle, *How Jews Changed the World 1847-1947*, seems understated. The world wasn't changed, it was completely revolutionised. According to Lebrecht, Psychotherapy, the Pill, the Theory of Relativity, the Great American Songbook, historical materialism, the cure for syphilis, Broadway, blood transfusions, atonal music, critical theory, the pioneers of European modernism and investment banking all owe their existence to Jews.

We learn that Marcel Proust and Jacques Bizet (son of Georges) both had Jewish mothers - and were therefore technically Jewish - and that they were friends, although Proust was homosexual and it



Karl Landsteiner

would appear that Jacques Bizet was not.

Lebrecht recounts stories about such luminaries as Karl Marx, Franz Kafka, Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud whose names are well known - but he also gives us insight into some others whose names may be unfamiliar and whose input has had an enormous impact on our daily lives.

He gives us Nobel Prize winners Karl Landsteiner, the inventor of blood transfusion and Paul Erlich, the originator of chemotherapy. He points out that without Rosalind Franklin we would not have a model of DNA; without Emanuel Deutsch there would be no State of Israel.

Genius & Anxiety engenders pride in our Jewish heritage and provides a bulwark against the present tide of pernicious and pervasive anti-Semitism

There are some brilliant tales about people whose lives have been lost in the mists of time. The enigmatic musician, Charles-Valentin Alkan; self-taught engineer, Siegfried Leipmann Marcus; physician, Magnus Hirschfeld and Charles Dickens' friend, Eliza Davis are just a few of the people whose names and stories we discover between the pages of Lebrecht's book. Scientists, politicians, writers, painters, musicians appear and are described in interesting detail.

The huge bibliography bears witness to the enormous amount of research that was undertaken to produce this book. But whilst being scholarly, it is still very entertaining and full of interesting information. Lebrecht has a light touch - this little gem is from the Introduction:-

*Five Jews wrote the rules of society:-
Moses said the Law is everything
Jesus said Love is everything
Marx said Money is everything
Freud said Sex is everything
Einstein said Everything is Relative*

Genius & Anxiety engenders pride in our Jewish heritage and provides a bulwark against the present tide of pernicious and pervasive anti-Semitism.

I would not describe this as a page-turner as, although it is an easy read, it is a large book. It is in fact a great big soup of a book. Not chicken, as might be appropriate, but more of a minestrone - with many delicious titbits to discover and enjoy.

Claire Connick



Paul Erlich



Rosalind Franklin



Magnus Hirschfeld

The River Time: A Metaphor

I went up the river Time in my dream
A river not mentioned on maps
The only river which flows from past to future
Its waters transient yet the river permanent
Struggling against its pre-ordained course
Flowing across the vastness of unknown Eternity
Eternity where beginning and end merge
Eternity twinned with infinity: the mind's last frontier
Infinity beyond the space of life
Life the miracle which transcends Time

I wanted to rediscover its forgotten origin
The river I came into contact with at birth
Aware that this river is like no other
Not bridgeable, never discharging itself
Its waters colourless, noiseless, invisible
And yet the only waters which sustain life
A circular flow which takes me onward toward my past
As I circle in Space and go forward in Time
Time/Life: God's spirit transcends

Colette Littman



Heinz Heydrich



The infamous Reinhard Heydrich is often referred to as the author of the Final Solution. He was a high-ranking German SS and police official and Chief of the Reich Main Security Office (including the Gestapo, Kripo, and SD). He was also *Stellvertretender Reichsprotektor* (Deputy/Acting Reich-Protector) of Bohemia and Moravia. He served as president of the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC, later known as Interpol) and chaired the January 1942 Wannsee Conference which formalised plans for the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question' - the deportation and genocide of all Jews in German-occupied Europe. He was assassinated in 1942, an event which was followed by the extermination of the entire village of Lidice - an article about which was featured in our Quarterly of October, 2011. What is not so well known is that his younger brother Heinz later helped to save Jews from the concentration camps.

The Heydrich family were talented musicians. The father, Richard Bruno Heydrich, was a contrabassist in the Meiningen Court Orchestra where he began his career as a singer. His wife Elizabeth came from a wealthy family and was the daughter of the head of the Royal Conservatory of Dresden. Richard turned to composing choral works, songs, orchestral works and operas in the style of Richard Wagner, which were performed in Cologne and Leipzig. The family were

believed to have been of Jewish origin, Richard converting to Protestantism to further his career, though the Nazi investigations of the background of their leaders would surely have discovered this in the case of the Heydrichs. Heinz Heydrich, too, was an active member of the SS, reaching the rank of lieutenant (*Obersturmführer*); he was a journalist and publisher of the soldiers' newspaper, *Die Panzerfaust*. He was at first a fervent admirer of Hitler.

After the assassination of his brother, Heinz was handed a large box containing Reinhard's papers, previously stored in Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. He took the box home and sat up all night going through them and, according to his wife, burning much that he found. He appeared distraught and overwhelmed by what he read. Clearly the papers were Reinhard's personal files and Heinz had no idea of the depth and horror of the Nazi plans for the extermination of the Jews.

the story is extraordinary and adds some small part to the history of the Holocaust and of the Second World War

After his discovery he began to help Jews to escape from Germany and the occupied countries by using the printing presses of the *Panzerfaust* to forge passes and identity documents. Little is known of the names of those who managed to leave Germany, nor of the numbers of Jews he helped.

Two years later an economic commission investigated the editorial staff of *Panzerfaust*. Heinz Heydrich thought he had been discovered and in order to protect his family from the Gestapo he took his own life. In reality, the commission knew nothing about the forgeries, and was only trying to find out the reason for shortages in paper supplies.

Heinz left a wife and five children, of whom the eldest, Peter, was a well-known German cabaret singer, and wrote a book about his childhood, his father, and his uncle. In the book, Peter Heydrich describes how, as a youth, he enjoyed the fame of being the nephew of Reinhard Heydrich. During boyhood, he thought of his uncle as a successful sportsman and a sensitive musician. In Prague, Peter observed that his uncle had become a 'bigwig.' Peter derived many privileges from being Reinhard Heydrich's nephew, but finally, Peter Heydrich had to admit that Reinhard Heydrich was a schemer, who planned and executed the Holocaust and other crimes.

After the war, Heinz Heydrich's name was suggested as a recipient of Yad Vashem's 'Righteous Among the Nations'. It is possible that this may still happen, but one of the criteria for the honour, is not being involved in war crimes, which may be difficult to prove, in view of his brother's career. Nevertheless the story is extraordinary and adds some small part to the history of the Holocaust and of the Second World War.

Philippa Bernard



The Heydrich brothers

Pioneers of Kent House

2. Constance Stuart



Constance Stuart was a founder member and indeed an instigator of Westminster Synagogue, but we know surprisingly little about her. She gave out few details of her private life, though good friends gathered some information over the years.

Constance came from a long line of strong, intelligent Scots women. Her mother was a Suffragette, her sister the Headmistress of a girls' school, though neither girl married. She had a brother but seemed not to know much about him, though she liked to tell the story of meeting a man on a train. She looked at him and said, 'I think you are my brother.' 'I rather think I am,' he replied, and that apparently ended the conversation. Her Scottish ancestry was of much importance to her; she always claimed to be a direct descendant of Mary Stuart, Mary Queen of Scots. Her family was strict Presbyterian. She recalled never being allowed even to laugh on Sundays.

After leaving school she took a secretarial course and obtained a post as a secretary at the important accountancy firm of Touche, Ross & Co. in the City. While there she studied accountancy, qualified as a Chartered Accountant and remained at Touche's as their own in-house

accountant. She went on to play an important role as one of the few women in the City at that time to have achieved eminence in the world of finance. She became the first woman company secretary.

At some time in the thirties Constance met a French Jew (we don't even know his name) and they became engaged to be married. However, he was taken by the Nazis and executed. One of her few remembrances of him was his yellow armband inscribed 'Juif', which she later donated to the Memorial Scrolls Museum at Kent House. Following the tragedy, she decided to become Jewish herself. She approached Rabbi Reinhart at the West London Synagogue, and he guided her through her conversion to Judaism, becoming a friend in the process. Together with his wife Flora they remained close all their lives, and Constance's knowledge of Judaism and Jewish history equalled that of anyone born Jewish.

While at Touche's, she acquired, through her friendship with the partners, a love of wine, with which she became very knowledgeable, visiting vineyards in France and building a small but fine collection of wines, shared with special friends. She visited some of the French monasteries and would talk about Cluny and the Benedictines, or the Cistercians and Bernard of Clairvaux with an informed love for a religion that was not her own.

There was no part of the community at Kent House to which she did not devote her attention

She loved the City of London, and would walk through the streets, particularly on a Sunday afternoon, with friends, pointing out every church they passed and every landmark that meant something to her. When in 1957 Westminster Synagogue was founded, Constance took a vital part in establishing the congregation. Her accountant's mind was ideal for ensuring

that everything moved according to plan. She became the congregation's first Honorary Secretary, working diligently and efficiently while still putting in a full day's work in the City. She didn't hesitate to put Touche's stationery, communications and even staff at the disposal of the Synagogue, all of which were given with willingness and generosity. There was no part of the community at Kent House to which she did not devote her attention: the running of the office, the care of the house, the conduct of the Services, as well as the welfare of the members.

Constance had a great love for music, and was involved for many years with the Aldeburgh Music Festival. She knew Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears personally, as well most of the inhabitants of the little town, which she was to make her home when she retired from the City. Even after moving into a charming little house near the seafront at Aldeburgh, she continued to keep up her allegiance to the Synagogue, frequently attending services, and helping with all the arrangements at Kent House. Visitors were always welcome in her new home, with a fine wine on the table, tickets for the Festival, and often an introduction to the world-famous contributors to the music performances.

Like the famous flautist James Galway, she had the condition which causes the eyes to be in perpetual motion – Nystagmus. Like James Galway, it did not harm her career in any way.

Sadly, as time went on, her mind began to fade, and the woman who had achieved so much in her life, found it impossible to keep her home as she wished it to be, and she had to move into a nursing home nearby. Strangely, she had provided for her funeral to be a non-Jewish one, and she was buried near her sister, in a little village near Aldeburgh. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing this remarkable woman miss her still.

Philippa Bernard

Although it is some time since *Chanukah*, it is never too late to report with pride, that our own talented singer Yoav Oved performed with pianist Achinoam Keisar in a *Chanukah* concert for the Nightingale Hammerson home. The concert was arranged by The Jewish Music Institute (JMI). The performance included such *Chanukah* items as *Maoz Tsur*, *Sevivon Sov-Sov-Sov* and many other festival favourites, along with other traditional Jewish and Hebrew songs. The whole evening entertained and uplifted the residents, their families, friends and staff who gathered to hear this outstanding recital, with the residents singing, clapping along and enjoying the lighting of the first candle of *Chanukah*.

And on the subject of Music did you hear our Emeritus Rabbi Thomas Salamon on *Classic FM*?

As we all know, global warming is a threat that is coming closer all the time. We are urged to try to improve our life style by abandoning plastics, diminishing our carbon footprint and trying to become more organic. With this in mind, the Synagogue executive has decided to turn the Kent House garden into a small farm. A local gardener, **Olaf Lipor**, has been engaged to do the hard work. The flowerbeds will be emptied, to be refilled with vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers and herbs, all of which can be used in the Synagogue kitchen. A small shed will be erected to house chickens. All produce will be turned into material for our superb meals and *kiddushim*. The first member of staff to arrive in the morning will collect eggs, and we are seeking offers from members to clean up daily after the livestock, the resulting detritus being put back into the soil as fertiliser. With everyone's help we look forward to turning the congregation into a healthy, self-sufficient community.



Edward Glover writes:

David Connick mentioned that you were writing an article for the Quarterly about connections between Polack's House and WS. As you know, I am not a Polackian. However I have fond memories of Albert Polack. He addressed me at my *Bar Mitzvah*, taking as his text the words of Hillel 'If I am not...' which I had not heard before. I was sufficiently moved by what he said, to write down the three full Hillel sayings on a piece of paper which was in a drawer in my bedside table for many years and is still in a drawer in the small writing table/desk of my father's that I have. I also remember another address he gave on the subject of being an enthusiast, explaining the word's derivation from Greek and leaving me with an additional sense of the word which, as will be apparent, I have never forgotten. But I digress...

Some years ago, I became aware that Clifton College had been evacuated to Bude in Cornwall during the Second World War when a memorial was placed on the downs between the two beaches - more or less overlooking the cricket ground as well as the sea and on a prime dog-walking route. The photos are of this stone - the wording has already become somewhat indistinct but the College crest is clearer. However it was only in the last two or three years that I learnt that Albert had been in charge of Polack's at the time - and that the boarding houses of the School had taken over a row of houses on a road called Summerleaze Crescent. The third photo is of that row of houses - taken from the window of the sitting room of our family cottage! So whenever I am there, in a town with which I had always associated Juliet's family - her grandmother and aunt lived there and there are a number of relations in the churchyard in Stratton, about a mile and a half away - I have an unexpected reminder of my *Bar Mitzvah*.



Education Report



At the moment, I am identifying areas for growth and development across the community. All of this growth will take time. For the next six months I am focusing my efforts on Or Shabbat. We are continuing with our programme to train teachers, with Rabbi Benji and Dudi Appleton joining these training sessions. The sessions include reflection, Jewish learning, and resourcing teachers in planning their lessons for the term.

Three parents joined Rabbi Benji, Dudi and me for a meeting to consider the future vision and strategy for Or Shabbat. The plan is to begin to implement the strategy now with the aim to create change at Or Shabbat from September 2020. The Or Shabbat Vision team has met again to begin working with all the parents towards a new Or Shabbat vision. This vision will inform work on the curriculum and structure of Or Shabbat that will take place during the spring of 2020.

Westminster Synagogue

Residential – the Residential was a great success with thirteen attendees. Everyone had a fabulous weekend and one of the highlights was the *B'nei Mitzvah* students leading parts of the Service on Friday evening. They had been working on learning about the Friday evening Service for some time and took leadership, with teacher support, over different prayers and moments during the Service

Scrolls service – the BM students, after a few weeks of preparation with

Yoav, led *Oyfn Pripetchik* as part of the Scrolls Service, a poignant moment of children singing about children.

BM Process – We are working with a group of parents to revise the BM process, especially social engagement for children and parents. We hosted a BM parents' *kiddush* on 10th January.

Berlin Residential – The Residential will take place on 5th-7th June, 2020.

Vision and strategy – I am working on an ongoing basis with the rest of the innovation team - Rabbi Benji, Gary Sakol and Jon Zecharia - on our strategy and vision as a community, as well as our values and culture.

Adult learning – In addition to Or Chadash, we are working with a small group to build weekday adult learning one evening a month, centred around a creative activity (e.g. make your own *tallit*) with a focus on spirituality. This was launched on 3rd February.

Education Committee - We are in the process of rebuilding the education committee. Starting with Or Shabbat, the aim is to find a key leader from each age group as we work closely in developing our different programmes. The plan is that these leaders will come together to form a new education committee

As we approach the festival of Passover, I think of how, in every generation, each of us lives in a personal Egypt, a narrow place. *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, contains the word *tzar*, narrow place. For us as individuals, this may be connected to our mental or physical health, the daily stress of life, the situations of friends and family. Everyone's struggles are different. But collectively we experience the same challenges. Pesach can remind us of what it means to live in 'Egypt' as a people.

As Professor Michael Walzer writes: *We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form: first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;*

and third, that 'the way to the land is through the wilderness.' there is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

In January, we studied this passage of Walzer's, alongside other great Jewish texts on justice work. What we noticed in our study together was that one of the core texts on Jewish social justice work - *You shall not oppress the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt* - is predicated on our personal experiences impacting how we treat others. What we experience on a personal level is not so distant from that which is experienced by entire peoples, races, and ethnicities.

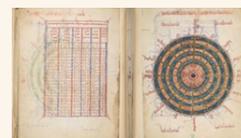
May this Passover allow us to experience our own personal liberation as well as freedom for all of those who suffer around us. May we be blessed with new experiences of song, learning, and community.

Yael Roberts

A SPECIAL EXHIBITION

Commencing on March 20th, the British Library will be presenting an exhibition of **Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word** to discover the history, culture and personal stories of Jewish people from all corners of the world through the ages.

Through rarely-seen treasures from as far back as the 10th century, this exhibition covers relationships between Jews and their neighbours in the communities in which they lived; from an Italian rabbi's reply to Henry VIII, who sought advice on divorcing his first wife, to a 13th-century Anglo-Jewish charter showing the passing of property between people of different faiths.





Westminster Quarterly

Planning Your Diary

Seder Night

Wednesday 8th April

Pesach First Day

Thursday 9th April

Pesach Last Day

Wednesday 15th April

Erev Shavuot

Thursday 28th May

Shavuot

Friday 29th May

Erev Rosh Hashana

Friday 18th September

Rosh Hashana

Saturday 19th September

Kol Nidre

Sunday 27th September

Yom Kippur

Monday 28th September

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Please send letters, articles, photographs or other items of interest for publication in the Westminster Synagogue Quarterly directly to the Synagogue office or e-mail to editor@westminstersynagogue.org

