

May/June 2023
Iyyar/Sivan/Tammuz 5783

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

LJS News



The Human Spirit Concert

There was a buzz at the LJS the afternoon of Sunday 26 March as everyone arrived for *The Human Spirit* charity concert. When the lights dimmed and a hush descended in the Sanctuary, the sound of an unseen string quartet emerged from the choir loft, setting the mood for what was to be a magical concert.

The inspired programming, featuring both chamber music and choral pieces, made for an uplifting experience as everyone took in the virtuosic piano and string playing, Stephanie Marshall's compelling voice, and the choral singing of the LJS Professional and Members' Choirs, together with the organ, percussion and harp. The repertoire ranged from a deeply moving Yiddish Lullaby, and the profundity of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, to the rhythmic masterpiece of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* with its soulful treble solo.

The concert, directed by Cathy Heller Jones, featured three beautiful and arresting pieces specially commissioned by the LJS, generously sponsored by Merula Frankel, who was present along with the composers – Julian Marshall, Roxanna Panufnik and Toby Young. Merula's heartfelt words together with Dame Maureen Lipman's introduction conveyed the message behind the concert – honouring those we have lost and celebrating the strength and resilience of the human spirit.

The LJS Professional and Members' Choirs as the concert ends, with treble soloist Ingrid Birchall (front row, far left) and percussionist Dominic Daggett (back row, far left) Photo: Tony Barr

Inside this issue

Services and Announcements	2-3
Council Report	4
Community	5
Forthcoming Events	6-7
Diverse Jewish Cultures	8-9
Chinese Jews	9
Reflections on the Book of Ruth	10-11
The Learning Circle	12-13
KT visit to Amsterdam	14-15
Rimon Update	15
The LJS Communal Seder	16

Shabbat and Festival services: May and June (in person and online)

Unless otherwise stated, Friday evening services are at 6.45pm and Shabbat morning services are at 11.00am, and led either by either Rabbi Alexandra Wright or Rabbi Igor Zinkov. At the end of each Friday evening and Saturday morning service congregants are invited to kiddush either in person or via Zoom.

Friday 5 May	
Shabbat 6 May Emor	Coronation Shabbat: 'O God, endow the king with Your judgements' (Psalm 72.1). Please join us for this special service at the LJS which will include readings and music to acknowledge the King's coronation. A coronation kiddush will allow us all to watch the events on the large screen in the Montefiore Hall after the service.
Friday 12 May	Service led by Rabbi Alex's 'Continuing our Jewish Journey' class Sermon given by Karen Newman
Shabbat 13 May B'Har/B'Chukkotay	Service led by Rabbi Alex's 'Continuing our Jewish Journey' class Sermon given by Jan McPherson Nosh 'n' Drosh with Lord Grade and Sarah Hamilton-Fairley from The Sepsis Trust – see page 6
Friday 19 May	The LJ Biennial weekend in Daventry – see page 6
Shabbat 20 May B'Midbar	Sophia Baneth Naming and Blessing
Thursday 25 May Erev Shavuot (time to be announced in Shalom LJS)	Please note that the LJS will be participating in the online celebrations hosted by The Ark Synagogue this evening
Friday 26 May Shavuot Festival Morning at 11.00am	Festival morning service in the Rabbi John Rayner Prayer Room – a short celebration of the first day of Shavuot
Friday 26 May Erev Shavuot – 2nd Day at 6.45pm	Festival evening service; chavurah bring-and-share supper and cheesecake competition; performance of Maya Goldstein's <i>Za'atar Rain</i> ; all-night study session and early morning Shacharit – see page 7 for full details
Shabbat 27 May at 11.00am Shavuot/Naso	Festival morning service for the 2nd Day of Shavuot
Friday 2 June	Led by Rabbi Rachel Benjamin
Shabbat 3 June B'ha'a'lot'cha	
Friday 9 June	Erev Shabbat service co-led by Ida Wiesenfeld Bat Mitzvah
Shabbat 10 June Sh'lach L'cha	Ida Wiesenfeld Bat Mitzvah
Friday 16 June	
Shabbat 17 June Korach	L'Dor va-Dor service in the Sanctuary led by Rimon students with Rabbi Igor and Rabbi Elana Koleinu alternative service in the Rabbi John Rayner Prayer Room led by Rabbi Alex This Shabbat is designated 'School Uniform Shabbat'. We ask members to donate new school uniforms for the children of the LJS Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families. Nosh 'n' Drosh with Avraham Neguise and Ambanesh Biru on Jews living in Ethiopia today – see page 6

Friday 23 June	Service co-led by Jane Scott Bat Mitzvah, together with Student Rabbi Matt Turchin
Shabbat 24 June Chukkat	Jane Scott Bat Mitzvah
Friday 30 June Please note that there are two services this evening at two different times	6.30pm Erev Shabbat service co-led by Elkie Braddick Bat Mitzvah 7.45pm Pre-Pride service followed by bring-and-share chavurah supper
Shabbat 1 July Balak	Elkie Braddick Bat Mitzvah

Congratulations

We are delighted to announce the births of two new little ones in our community:

Max Peter Wyatt Englander (*pictured right at 2 months old*) was born on 23 January 2023, and is the firstborn son of Sophie and Simon Englander, and first grandchild of Leanda and Peter Englander.

Florence Sophie Fidler (*pictured right at 1 month old*) was born on 22 February 2023, and is the daughter of Laura and Richard Fidler, sister to Sienna, and granddaughter of Barbara Fidler.



Also, Mazel tov to **Zippy Woolfson** and **Hector Penny** whose blessing following their marriage took place at the LJS on 19 March 2023.

The LJS 2023 AGM and Council Elections

7.30pm Thursday 22 June
(doors open 7.00pm; refreshments)

Our guest speaker for this year's in-person and online AGM is Rabbi Niles Goldstein (Congregation Beth Shalom of Napa Valley, California) who will be in the UK during part of his sabbatical. His talk will be 'A Bold Path for Renewing an Ancient Faith'.

At the AGM the LJS will confirm a new Chair, elect a new President, confirm the Council members standing for a second term and appoint new members to Council.

If you are interested in becoming a Council member, please contact Jonathan Bruck, Executive Director (execdirector@ljs.org), for more information. **Council nominations must be submitted by 9.00am on Wednesday 31 May.**

Details will also be available in our weekly e-newsletter Shalom LJS and on the LJS website.

Progressive Judaism

For the press release of 17 April about a new Progressive Jewish entity in the UK, please refer to the Liberal Judaism website.

Bereavements

We offer our sympathy to those who mourn:

Lynne Dubin, wife of Daniel, mother of Joshua, sister of Michael and Julian, and aunt of Joel Wolchover

Rozia Gregory, step-mother of Susan and aunt of Mila

Meira Penchina, mother of Leora and Gil

Michael Rudman, partner of Felicity Kendal and father of Amanda, Katy and Jacob

Martin Slowe, past President of the LJS, father of Emily and Hannah, brother of Richard and Peter, and cousin of Robert

Sybil Summers, mother of Geoffrey

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר האבלים
May God comfort you and all who mourn

A tribute to **Martin Slowe**, our immediate past President of the LJS, will appear in the next edition of *LJS News*.

Council Report



Photo: Trevor Haynes

Those who attended the General Meeting on 9 March will appreciate that a number of changes were agreed to the synagogue's Articles of Association to improve the way in which it is governed. Most of these affect

Council, which will be smaller (in future 8 to 12 members) with no-one normally serving more than six years continuously and a period of three years between six-year terms. The purpose is to create a more cohesive group with more opportunities for those who have not previously served to join Council. The changes mean that, rather than serving as Chair for three or six years, I shall leave Council at the AGM as I shall have served six years. My successor will be advised in the next newsletter.

Council was pleased with the success of many recent events, and congratulated everyone involved – staff, rabbis and volunteers. Events included the Purimspiel, an excellent Nosh 'n' Drosch with Marie van der Zyl (President of the Board of Deputies) and the very well-supported Second Night Seder. The Seder was attended by over 120 members and friends, and Council is to review the format to ensure it remains as popular and well-supported in the future. Finally, Council was delighted with the success of *The Human Spirit* concert, which took place in a packed Sanctuary.

Community care is at the heart of the synagogue's work, and the former '4Cs' committee has been renamed Community Care, to be accompanied by changes to the LJS website to emphasise the LJS commitment. Another committee to have changed is the finance committee, which has been superseded by one also covering operations, risk and governance: it will be known as FORG.

The audit of the 2022 accounts continues and these will be presented to the AGM on 22 June. I hope as many members and friends as possible will attend this meeting, which will also consider

the quorum for Council meetings – a commitment we gave to the General Meeting.

The administrative staff structure is being reviewed following the loss of two staff – Debi Penhey and Paul Reuben. Both had given good service to the LJS and will be missed. Council is also considering how to improve support for the Rabbis. There are no easy answers, as their responsibilities are wide-ranging and we do not have unlimited finance to pay for additional support, but Council is determined to find a way of achieving this.

Development of new flats at the cemetery continues. When completed, these will bring additional income to the synagogue and help us bridge the gap between membership income and expenditure. Improvements to the fabric of both the synagogue and the cemetery continue as finances permit, always with priority for safety issues. Recent improvements include stair edgings and some unobtrusive work on the bimah. Still on the subject of safety, food safety training is available to all who need to work in the LJS kitchen and anyone who needs this but has not received an invitation should contact our Executive Director. Council has approved extra expenditure on maintenance of our archives, work which most members do not see but which is professionally managed by our volunteer archivist, Cinde Lee and a small team.

Some members will know of the Chavurah held by members of the former West Central Liberal Synagogue. This takes place at the LJS on one Shabbat a month, during the afternoon as originally established by Lily Montagu. Council agreed that these should continue, at the expense of the LJS if necessary, and members are invited to support these.

Finally, I should like to encourage as many members as possible to attend the LJ Biennial, which will be held near Daventry, Northants, from 19 to 21 May. A lot is happening in the Progressive Jewish movement and this will be an excellent opportunity to find out what it all means and to help shape the future of Progressive Judaism.

Chris Godbold, Chair of Council

Community

Community Care

Aviva Shafritz, our Community Care Co-ordinator, is ready to help with difficulties experienced not only by our older members, such as with illness and provision of care, but also across the spectrum of life. You can contact Aviva by email: a.shafritz@ljs.org or by telephone on 020 7286 5181.

Video and Tea

You are warmly invited to this event which takes place on the fourth Wednesday of the month 1.30–4.30pm. There is no need to book – just come along for some soup on arrival, after which we hold the film screening. This is followed by a delicious tea including ice-cream. The cost is just £2.00 per session.

Our next screenings:

24 May: *Annie Get Your Gun*

28 June: *Kes*

Restaurant Tuesday

Everyone in our community is welcome to attend our informal lunch club at 12.45pm on the third Tuesday of the month for a chance to meet and chat and have a delicious meal, hosted by our delightful team of volunteers. We suggest a donation of £6.00. Our next lunches are on **16 May** and **20 June**. Please call the office on 020 7286 5181 to let us know if you are coming.

Singing for the Mind

Singing for the Mind is open to anyone with memory problems or in the early stages of dementia. Tea and biscuits are served as people arrive to allow participants and their companions the chance to chat before we start singing. The hour-long singing session is led by a trained music leader, supported by volunteers. A dementia specialist is available for help and advice. For further details and advice on joining the group, please email sfm@ljs.org or phone the LJS on 020 7286 5181.

The LJS Book Group

All LJS Members and Friends are invited to join our friendly and informal book group. The sessions are on Zoom, start at 7.00pm and last between an hour and an hour and a half.

The next sessions are:

Thursday 11 May: *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan

Wednesday 7 June: *Passing* by Nella Larsen

If you have any questions or would like to be sent a zoom link for the next Book Group meeting, please email ljsreaders@hotmail.com

Chavurah Club

Former members and friends of West Central Liberal Synagogue, as well as those from the wider LJ community who wish to continue the legacy of Lily Montagu, are warmly invited to the monthly hybrid West Central Liberal Chavurah Club. These meetings are held in the Assembly Hall at the LJS on the first Shabbat of the month. A talk or discussion at 2.00pm is followed by an afternoon Shacharit at 3.00pm, after which there is tea and coffee and some social time.

For further information and Zoom links please contact Martina at: chavurah.emunah1@gmail.com

Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families

The next LJS Drop-Ins for asylum-seeker families are on Sunday 14 May and Sunday 11 June from 2.00pm – 4.00pm.

If you are interested in becoming a Drop-In volunteer, please email Hannah Tickle at: asylumproject@ljs.org

Bridge Club

The Bridge Club meets at 2.00pm every Monday (except Jewish and Bank Holidays) and continues until 5.00pm, with a break for refreshments. This is as much a social afternoon as a competitive one. Cost is £2.00 per members and £3.00 for non-members. We welcome new players. For more details, please contact the LJS on 020 7286 5181.

Forthcoming Events

This information is correct at the time of going to press. Updated information is given in the Shalom LJS weekly e-newsletter.

Nosh 'n' Drosh

Join us for our occasional series of talks and discussion over a bagel lunch following the Shabbat morning service. All welcome.

Saturday 13 May at 1.00pm

'This Could Save Your Life'

Join LJS Member Lord Grade and Sarah Hamilton-Fairley to hear about the work of the UK Sepsis Trust.

Every year about 245,000 people develop sepsis, and 48,000 die of it, more than everyone who dies of breast, bowel and prostate cancer.

These are shocking figures, but if the symptoms are recognised, urgent treatment can be given to cure patients.

Lord Grade first learned about sepsis when his PA developed it and thankfully recovered. He realised that diagnosis is essential and that many people, both medical and non-medical, do not recognise the symptoms. He became determined to change this through the UK Sepsis Trust. Michael Grade is now Patron of the Trust and together with his CEO, Sarah Hamilton-Fairley, will explain more about their work.



Saturday 17 June at 1.00pm

'The Jews left behind: The stories of Jews living in Ethiopia today'

Join Avraham Neguise, the first Ethiopian MK in the Knesset, and Ambanesh Biru, head of community work for Meketa in Gondar.

The organisation Meketa raises funds to support Jews who remain in Gondar, Ethiopia. Its goal is to provide educational support, training and livelihood improvement, and encourages children to stay in education to help them better their economic and social future. It also provides an afternoon club for the community's children.

Liberal Judaism Biennial in Daventry

Friday 19 – Sunday 21 May

'Liberal Judaism: LJ Matters'

Everyone is invited to the Liberal Judaism Biennial Weekend 2023 held at Staverton Park Hotel in Daventry.

This is the first in-person Biennial in five years! Join a gathering of Liberal Jews for learning and debating about what matters today to Liberal Jews and Liberal Judaism. Keynote speakers include Rabbi Larry Hoffman, Rebecca Soffer and Dr Joel Hoffman.

Ticket/registration information is available via Shalom LJS and on the Liberal Judaism website.

Chagall Windows in Tudeley, Kent

Sunday 25 June

Following the success of last summer's outing, Michael and Effie Romain are leading a repeat visit to Tudeley Church in Kent. It is the only church in the world to have all its twelve stained glass windows designed by Marc Chagall.

For those who wish to combine the outing with a country walk, we will meet at Tonbridge Station (direct fast train from London Bridge) in the late morning to walk

2½ miles through pleasant countryside to the church. We will have a picnic lunch in the grounds before visiting the church, where a talk has been organised about the history of these remarkable windows and their installation. We return to the station by an alternative walking route. For those not wishing to walk, there are taxis at the station, or you can drive all the way.

There is a small charge for the outing of £8.00 per person. For further information and to register, please contact Michael Romain: romain@netgates.co.uk.

We do hope you can join us.





Shavuot 2023

at The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

Listen ! שמע

- Listening in a world of many opinions
- Israel and its current crisis of democracy
- The climate emergency

FRIDAY, 26 MAY 2023

6.45pm Shavuot Erev Service

7.45pm Buffet Supper and Cheesecake Competition

9.00pm 'Za'atar Rain' A One Woman Show

A Fantastical Journey Into a Forbidden Land. Maya Goldstein's play will challenge the audience to reflect upon and question the notion of borders, and the frequent craving to cross them to reach the unreachable.



10.30pm Join study sessions, discussions and talks

The programme will include guests from 'Oasis of Peace' - the Israeli village where Palestinians and Israelis live together; the premiere and a discussion of the photo exhibition 'Queer Religion', Q&A on 'Za'atar Rain' and much more.



SATURDAY, 27 MAY 2023

0.00am Rabbis at Midnight - Discussing texts in small groups

1.00am All-night Festival of Jewish Learning

5.00am Early morning Shacharit

Find out more and register:
www.ljs.org/event/shavuot2023



The Liberal Jewish Synagogue
28 St. John's Wood Road, London, NW8 7HA

The Diversity of Religious Cultures within Judaism

Geraldine Van Bueren reflects on the multi-ethnicity of Judaism.



A few months ago, in celebration of Purim, we commemorated Esther, who became Queen to King Xerxes of Persia, and through her bravery, saved Persian Jews from annihilation. Esther and her adoptive father Mordechai, both Persian,

would be astonished to learn that the contemporary image of Jews in the UK is blinkered, limiting it to communities who only have European roots and who are Caucasian. The reality is very different.

Multi-ethnicity is at the core of Judaism and has been for centuries. We are too slow to recognise the wonderful religious and cultural tapestry that is both ancient and contemporary Judaism, not least the Judaism practised in Africa and Asia.

In Isaiah, the prophet records life as it was in Cush, an area which extended across regions within Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. The Beta Israel, which translates as the House of Israel, in Ethiopia is often known by the pejorative word Falasha, meaning alien or stranger. It is descended from Dan, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The church in Ethiopia has adopted rituals recognisable in Judaism, including circumcision, dietary laws and Sabbath observance. It is this embracing of customs and cross-fertilisation that, if required, ought to help unite different religions.

The Ethiopian Jewish community celebrates Sigd 50 days after Yom Kippur. Sigd, which means prostration in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian liturgical language, marks the renewal of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and the prayers include a return to Jerusalem.

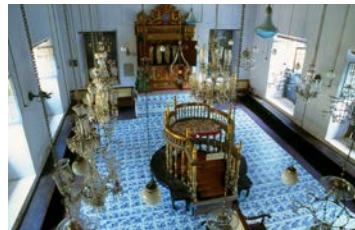


Daily prayer in a small synagogue, Gondar, Ethiopia
(Bridgeman Images)

Also descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel is the Sefwi Jewish community living in southwest Ghana, which has an oral tradition spanning over two centuries, and which includes learning the Torah by heart. This impressive tradition has helped to keep the community alive without having the religious scrolls. It is also a community which adheres to the laws of kashrut.

In Nigeria about 3,000 Igbo who are Jewish follow Orthodox Jewish traditions. They trace their families back to the tribe of Gad, one of Jacob's sons. They pray daily with tefillin and their prayers in the synagogues are led by a cantor.

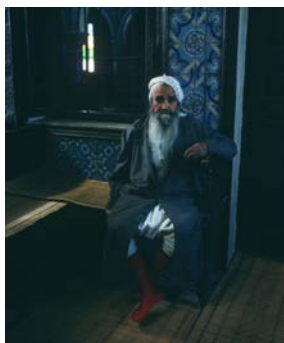
In India, the Malabar trace their arrival in Cochin to King Solomon. Jews from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan arrived in Surat from the middle of the 18th century. However, some Jews with ancient roots in India, including the Bnei Menashe, the sons of Manasseh, are Mizo and Kuki people who have more recently adopted contemporary Judaism. As well as communally praying in Hebrew, the Jewish communities scattered across India share a hybrid Jewish cuisine, including aloo mkalla murgi, roast chicken with potatoes, and arook, rice balls flavoured with garam masala.



Interior of the Paradesi Synagogue, Cochin, Kerala, India
(Bridgeman Images)

The Tunisian Jewish community dates back over 2,000 years, and developed its own variety of Arabic known as Judeo-Tunisian, still spoken by the older members of the community, a community which also has its own traditional clothing and embroidery. From the 16th century its numbers grew with the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal, the Sephardim.

The Tunisian island of Djerba is called the island of priests because the majority of the Jewish community there is descended from the Cohenim.



Keeper of El Ghriba Synagogue, Djerba, Tunisia (Bridgeman Images)

After the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, the high priest Tzadok and his fellow priests escaped to Djerba. The Jewish community believe that the Cohenim carried with them a stone from the altar of the destroyed Temple. This stone was incorporated into the El Ghriba synagogue built in about 585 BCE.

Many Jewish communities have declined, but there are also newer communities, including the

Abayudaya in Uganda, and ancient communities that have been growing, such as the Lemba in southern Africa.

The Abayudaya's name is derived from the Hebrew for 'father'. They do not claim ancient roots, and came into being a century ago. They now have nine synagogues, serving a community of about 2,000.

In contrast, the Lemba, who live mainly in Zimbabwe and in South Africa, are growing. Their oral history claims that the ngoma lungundu, or the drum that thunders, was the biblical Ark of the Covenant.

The richly diverse religious cultures within Judaism need to be more widely recognised by all.

Professor Emerita Geraldine Van Bueren is a Visiting Fellow at Kellogg College, Oxford.

This article was first published in *The Times* on 11 March 2023, and we are grateful to have permission to reproduce it here in an edited form for *LJS News*.

Chinese Jews

Cinde Lee tells us about the names given to the Jewish community in China.



Although official records started recording the affairs of the Yehudis in Kaifeng, China around the 12th century, where there was a thriving community as well as a synagogue, ancient manuscripts bought by

Western collectors from China in the 18th and 19th century date back to the 9th century.

In and amongst that literature, the Jewish faith was known by many names. The most common is 'the tribal teaching of the Yehudis' 「猶太教」 ('tribal' and 'teaching' put together makes the word 'religion'), which has endured to the present day, but there are two names out of the many that are not referred to any longer though both are revealing expressions of the people who once lived in that region. One is 'the teaching of sinew pickers' 「挑筋教」, which refers to the struggle of Jacob at the River Jabbok, the picking of the sinew being part of *shehitah* (Genesis

32:33), and the Jewish people were known for this practice. The other name is 'The teaching of 一賜樂業', which was given to the community by the Emperor of the Jin Dynasty (early 12th century). Some say it is the phonetic translation of 'Israel', but Chinese words put together can have a specific meaning rather than just being random syllables, and this may be translated as 'the One gives happy vocation'. There is no source explanation as to why that name was given, but one can really spend some time thinking about what it might mean.

Cinde Lee



Jews of Kaifeng, China (Bridgeman Images)

The Book of Ruth: A Model of Contemporary Hospitality to the Stranger

As we celebrate the festival of Shavuot, Rabbi Alexandra Wright reflects on the story of Ruth.



The Book of Ruth, which we read at Shavuot, is one of five biblical books known as the *megillot* (scrolls) – each one associated with a particular festival in the Jewish year. In the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), it is preceded by The Song

of Songs, which is read at Pesach, and is followed by *Eichah* (Lamentations) which is chanted on Tisha B'Av. In non-Jewish versions and translations of the Bible, Ruth is placed between the literary, propagandist Book of Judges and the Books of Samuel, the former offering a fictional, temporal reference point with the opening verse of Ruth: 'In the days when the judges ruled' (1:1), the latter anticipating the kingship of David, whose genealogy is listed in the final verses (Ruth 4:18–22).

The events of the story of Ruth span the agricultural season from Pesach to Shavuot – from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the wheat harvest. But this isn't the only reason for our reading of the story at this time of the year. From around the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, Shavuot was equated with the revelation at Mount Sinai three months after the Israelites had left Egypt, and Ruth's famous declaration to her mother-in-law is interpreted in the rabbinic imagination as the words of an ideal convert turning to Judaism:

'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you.
For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.
Thus and more may the Eternal One do to me if anything but death parts me from you.'
(Ruth 1:16–17).

Despite this popular and well-known formula, still used in our Admission Service for converts and sometimes in blessings following a marriage, conversion to Judaism, as we know it, did not take place in biblical times. Until the end of the Book of Ruth, its eponymous heroine is referred to as a 'Moabite', and although she marries Boaz, the Israelite, and gives birth to their son, Obed, it is Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, who takes the child and becomes his *omenet* (foster mother), the women neighbours naming him with the words: 'A son is born to Naomi!'

There are other significant themes that flow through the book and bring it to life in our own age: foreignness, poverty, hospitality, food, gender and loss are woven into a rich textual narrative in its four short chapters.

Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons, Machlon ('sickness') and Chilion ('failing' or 'consumptive'), their names anticipating their early deaths, reside in Bethlehem ('House of Bread') where, ironically, there is a famine. The family moves from Judah across the border to Moab. We should not be surprised by this migration of refugees fleeing from famine, but the name Moab is freighted throughout Tanakh with prejudice and sordidness as to its people's origins. For the Moabites and the Ammonites are the descendants of the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters, and remain Israel's implacable enemies for this implicit reason and their lack of hospitality in not allowing the Israelites to cross through their territory (Numbers 22:1ff). Although both peoples were afforded residence in the land, they were forbidden to marry into the Israelite community: 'No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Eternal One; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the Eternal One ...' (Deuteronomy 23:4).

Ruth, therefore, is probably one of the most subversive books in the Hebrew Bible, and Ruth herself, transgressive, not only because of her marriage to an Israelite, but because she becomes the great-grandmother of no less a figure than King David and the Davidic messianic line.

After the death of Elimelech and Machlon and Chilion, Naomi and Ruth make the return journey to Judah. We are left to wonder how two women, alone, and without the protection of their menfolk, were able to cross dangerous territory, returning to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Contemporary scholarship has noted the confusion of Hebrew grammatical endings in several verses throughout the Book of Ruth, where there is gender disagreement between subjects and pronouns. Naomi's first words to her two daughters-in-law address them in the imperative, feminine plural: 'Turn back each of you to her mother's house' (1:8), but then she continues, 'May the Eternal One deal kindly with you [masculine], as you have dealt [masculine] with the dead and with me.' Gender discord occurs in nine out of ten instances in chapter 1 of Ruth, and once in the final chapter, when the people of the town bless Ruth saying, 'May the Eternal One make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom [masculine] built up the House of Israel!' (4:11).

While there may be philological reasons for this gender disagreement, these 'slips of the tongue' can also reveal something of Naomi's inner life, the turmoil and anguish she experiences at the loss of her husband and sons. 'Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up ...' (1:11–13). The masculine endings reveal her longing for the men she has lost in her life, but perhaps also something else. Gender is fluid; the women are not helpless dependents, to be owned and under the legal protection of a father or husband. They make the journey without attendants across the border to Bethlehem, perhaps disguised as men, setting the whole town buzzing with excitement over their arrival (1:19). Ruth and Naomi are wanderers, slipping across borders; their close relationship more than conventional mother and daughter-in-law, the latter clinging to the former, Naomi seeking

a home for Ruth, encouraging the younger woman to bathe, anoint herself, dress up and go down to the threshing floor to uncover the feet of the man who has allowed her to glean in his fields. Sexual boundaries are loosened as Ruth lies down at the feet of Boaz – the passage is full of erotic innuendo, both women taking agency for their actions.

A key theme of the Book of Ruth is hospitality to the stranger. Despite her ignoble origins as a Moabite, Ruth is encouraged to glean among the ears of grain, collecting the fallen sheafs left by Boaz's gleaners, in accordance with the law that unharvested crops can be collected by the stranger (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:19). The landowner, Boaz, demonstrates great compassion towards Ruth, instructing her to stay close to his own female workers, ordering the men not to molest her, to help herself to something to drink when she is thirsty and acknowledging the kindness she has shown to her mother-in-law. Not only does he offer her his protection, but also tells his workers to pull up some stalks from the heaps for Ruth to glean and not to rebuke her.

His acknowledgement of her vulnerability both as a woman and foreigner is made explicit in his conduct towards her and in his instruction to his workers: he offers her protection in his field; he shares food with her and tells her to help herself to water when she is thirsty; he tells his workers not to interfere with her; he is generous, compassionate and kind.

This story of loss and prejudice, famine and foreignness is mitigated by the way each of the characters weave a dance-like movement in relation to each other. Famine and death have left an emptiness and loss in the lives of the women, but as they make the journey back to Judah together, where there is food in plenty, their lives take on an emotional fullness that is based on their mutual love, compassion and care for each other.

And Ruth, as a stranger in a strange land, assumes an agency that secures her a husband and child, and places her as a descendant of the matriarchal line of Rachel and Leah. Whether Obed is Ruth's (biological) child or Naomi's (adopted) child does not matter – the matrix that is Boaz, Naomi and Ruth offers us a more open, less limiting and more generous and compassionate way of how we are with the other and of reinterpreting our Judaism.



The Learning Circle

Adult education classes at the LJS

Our rich adult education programme includes Classical Hebrew classes at all levels, and opportunities for learning and discussion about Judaism and Jewish life.

The Shavuot term is under way. Half-term for Tuesday classes is 30 May, and term ends on 11 July. Half-term for Shabbat morning classes is 27 May and 3 June, and term ends on 8 July.

Classes

Tuesday mornings 11.15am – 12.30pm

Tuesday Texts

This friendly group is led by our Rabbis and Dr Dov Softi. We study biblical and rabbinic texts, modern poetry and short stories, as well as Jewish history, and we enjoy sessions on Jewish art and music. The class is based around discussion on a variety of topics, the starting point being a text, painting or piece of music. New students are always welcome.

Tuesday evenings 5.45 – 6.45pm

Reading and Understanding the Book of Judges

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

The Book of Judges is the seventh book in the Tanakh (canonical collection of Hebrew scriptures). It describes a period of social and political unrest among the Israelite tribes, a period before the Israelites' monarchy. The stories are interesting and intriguing to read and learn from.

This course is suitable for those who can read Hebrew and have a basic understanding of Biblical Hebrew, grammatical structure and a basic knowledge of Biblical Hebrew words.

Tuesday evenings 7.00 – 8.00pm

Classical Hebrew for Not Quite Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

This is a fun and supportive class which is a continuation of the Absolute Beginners class which began in September 2022.

New students who would like practice in reading and understanding key prayers are also welcome.

Understanding Biblical Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

Participants in this course will follow the book *Prayerbook Hebrew the Easy Way* (available for purchase from the LJS) which focuses on understanding Biblical and Siddur (prayerbook) Hebrew. Participants will also read key Torah portions to increase their understanding of the Bible as well as their Hebrew vocabulary. This course is suitable for those who can read basic Hebrew.

Gaining Confidence in Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Sally Gold

If you can read a little Hebrew, this supportive, informal class will help you to improve. We are reading the Abraham narrative in *Bereishit* (Genesis). Your reading is guided and at your own pace, with questions about the language and texts encouraged. Your confidence will grow with your skills and understanding, and you will be on the path towards greater enjoyment and participation in synagogue services, using the Siddur, Bible reading and lifecycle events.

Joseph: From Hebrew Slave to Egyptian Chancellor

Tutor: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

New students are welcome to this class as we follow the story of Joseph, now chancellor of Egypt, taking control of the people's grain, so that it can be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine. We read of his marriage to the Egyptian Asenath, and the effect of the famine on Jacob and his family. The class reads in Hebrew, learns some grammar and vocabulary, and enjoys far-reaching discussion about this consummate literary novella.

Tuesday evenings 8.10 – 9.15pm

Exploring Judaism

Tutor: Rabbi Igor Zinkov

Exploring Judaism is for people, including non-Jewish family members, who wish to know more about Judaism, Jewish history and the Jewish people. It is also an essential programme of instruction for people choosing Judaism by conversion. Class members are encouraged to read materials which will be put online during the year. In addition to offering knowledge of Judaism, the course encourages practical experiences of Liberal Judaism and space for reflection within the group. The full syllabus is in The Learning Circle brochure, available on the LJS website: www.ljs.org

Shabbat mornings 9.45 – 10.45am

Women in the Bible

Tutor: Nitza Spiro

In this course we examine key female figures in the Bible, analysing their characters and roles in the context of psychology, sociology, politics and literature, often making comparisons with ancient texts of other cultures in that area and era.

Our discussions are in English, with texts read in Hebrew, enriching participants' vocabulary and understanding of grammatical structure.

Members of the group receive weekly guidance of words and topics to think about prior to each lesson, making the learning more effective. Should be of interest to men, too!

Learning with Texts

Facilitator: Michael Romain

This term, the subjects include: Art as Midrash, Radical Feminism, George Washington and his letter to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island 1790, and the artist Ben Shahn.

We welcome new members to the class. If you are interested, please contact Michael Romain by email: romain@netgates.co.uk. No knowledge of Hebrew is required, and classes can be attended either in person at the LJS or online.

Understanding Biblical Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

Participants in this course will follow the book *Prayerbook Hebrew the Easy Way* (available for purchase from the LJS) which focuses on understanding Biblical and Siddur (prayerbook) Hebrew. Participants will also read key Torah portions to increase their understanding of the Bible as well as their Hebrew vocabulary. This course is suitable for those who can read basic Hebrew.

Please note this course commences at 10.00am to allow parents of Rimmon children to attend Tefillah.

The LJS Chavruta – Learning with Study Companions

Rabbi Igor Zinkov has adapted a traditional form of study called Chavruta (literally 'Companionship') specially for the LJS: groups of two or three people study specific texts together in search of their meaning, then discuss how to apply their findings to their own lives. Chavruta fosters meaningful friendships between study companions.

The project has proved to be very popular, with many groups now engaged in companionable study.

The programme allows for continuous enrolment, so you can register at any time, and as soon as there are enough people to form a new group, that group will open. Everyone of all ages is welcome to take part.

You are assigned study partners and texts which are from both traditional and general cultural sources. The traditional sources are in both Hebrew and English, so knowledge of Hebrew is not a prerequisite, and the experience is meaningful even if you have no knowledge of Hebrew at all. The general culture sources include poetry, art and book extracts.

Your Chavruta group meets for an hour-long session virtually or in person every month at a time agreed between participants, with the opportunity of staying together or joining other study companions for future sessions.

To find out more, and/or to register, please contact Rabbi Igor Zinkov: i.zinkov@ljs.org or visit www.tinyurl.com/ljsch

Rimon Corner

The KT Visit to Amsterdam

Traditionally at the LJS, students preparing for KT (Kabbalat Torah) spend a weekend in Amsterdam to visit places with a connection to Jews and Judaism. This February that trip resumed for the first time since the pandemic, and Rabbi Igor Zinkov, together with teachers Danny Lang and Talia Vardi, accompanied the group. Here we learn of the students' experiences in their own words.

Freya: We really enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and see a new city.

Eve: It was too clean. Even the metro train tracks were weirdly clean.

Jake: It's not as big as London making it much easier to navigate.

Freya: We really loved the hostel. There were great places to chill and play different games like ping pong and air hockey. It was clean and it had really nice staff.

Eve: We discovered a Dutch breakfast classic called Hagelslag. It's chocolate sprinkles which go on top of white bread. We went on a boat tour and there were long wonky-looking houses everywhere.



Students enjoy a Friday evening hummus supper

Michael: We visited the Amsterdam Liberal community and participated in their Friday night service. The Liberal Jewish Synagogue building was cool. It's an enormous modern building built over a canal. The wood-lined Sanctuary has a massive patterned window.

Winter: The Rabbi was assisted by a cantor who sang very loudly with a deep baritone voice. Some of the melodies we recognised but a lot we didn't. The community joined in for parts of the singing. The music had a piano accompanist and the room had really good acoustics, a bit like a concert hall.

Rachel: Some of us joined with the singing. Most of us didn't want to interrupt the cantor's beautiful voice.

Eli: It's important to visit somewhere so close to where parts of the Shoah took place, and to see the effect it had.

Will: The National Holocaust Names Monument was very moving. It is a massive brick structure forming the words *Lizkor* ('in remembrance') in Hebrew.

Roxy: Each brick bears the name of one of the Dutch victims of the Shoah.

Rachel: I found another Rachel Kops there, and we all found people who shared our names and the names of other of our family members. Walking through over 100,000 names in the memorial shows you the enormity of what took place here and in the rest of Europe.

Harry: We found Heinz Geiringer's paintings on display at the Resistance Museum, where LJS member Eva Schloss, who came to talk to us recently, has contributed her and her brother's story.

Michael: We thought about who should go to places like Anne Frank's House and the Resistance Museum, and we thought you should only miss them if you cannot afford to visit them or if you are housebound with a medical problem.

Eli: On the last day we visited the Portuguese synagogue, the second oldest working synagogue in Europe, and the Jewish Museum.

Winter: We are few in number. Secularisation is coming.

Jake: It was really good hummus we got given on Friday after the LJ service.

Eve: I disagree. But I did really enjoy the traditional Amsterdam Rijsttafel we ate on Saturday night at an Indonesian restaurant. I love rice!

Eli: We're very grateful to all the LJS community for supporting this trip as it's made a big difference to all of us.

Charlie: We got to know each other much better on the trip, and we're all really pleased we signed up.

Winter: We would recommend it to anyone.

Rimon Update

Susannah Alexander, Rimon Head Teacher, gives us a summary of what's been happening at Rimon.

This Purim, the whole of Rimon worked together to produce *mishloach manot* gift baskets for the Out and About Club. Each class prepared a different Purim gift. The Kabbalat Torah (KT) classes then packaged the gifts in baskets containing a Purim card, home-made biscuits, a box of chocolates, a handmade bookmark and a decorated notebook.

At the Club, Rabbi Igor gave members a short description of the Festival of Purim which everyone enjoyed, and Susannah distributed the baskets to them all. All the members were very happy to be going home with such a lovely surprise gift.

Our L'Dor va-Dor service featured songs and poems from the children, reflections from the KT class on their trip to Amsterdam (see above), and a lively retelling of the Purim story. We were delighted to have so many families with us, and thrilled by the range and imagination of the costumes on display.

We ended the term by celebrating Passover. Many of the classes held mock *Sedarim*. Class Zayin took part in a matzah cover workshop led by professional props artist Ariel Galimard. The KT classes studied Passover customs around the world, and enjoyed eating moufleta, a Moroccan Passover delicacy generously prepared by their teacher Danny as a farewell for KT2, who will be leaving us as pupils after their Kabbalat Torah service in April. We look forward to welcoming them back to Rimon as teaching assistants later in the new term.

Susannah Alexander, Rimon Head Teacher



Caroline Hagard and Susannah Alexander with the Purim gift baskets

We wish these young members of the LJS a very happy birthday in May and June.

May	June
Benjamin Allen	Rain Cohen
Zachary Benson	Alfred Davidson
Nora Bielawski	Betty Freeman
Vaughn Conway	Raphaella Heath
Elliott De Winter	Celia Hou
Amelia Gale	Kernkraut
Jasper Goldsmith	Masha Lander
Tamara Goldsmith	Shoshana
Sophia Grade	Malbon
Shanna Hutchinson	Arvanitakis
Sydney Johnson	Antonia Moore
Dan Lach Stein	Romilly Morrison
Roxy Lang	Samuel Salas
Seth Lefebvre Sell	Georgia Scott
Cecily Newman	Margot Scott
Ren Rieger	Jane Scott
Abraham Scott	Nuala Tyler
Isaac Sternberg	Ida Wiesenfeld
Adrien Tahar	

The LJS Communal Seder

There is a long tradition at the LJS of holding a Communal Seder on the second night of Pesach. And so it was that this year 120 people gathered in the Montefiore Hall for a joyous celebration. Although last year's event was in person (and not solely online), we were up to full numbers this year, and it worked well that people unable to attend in person also had the opportunity to join by Zoom.

Rabbi Igor Zinkov led proceedings as we worked through the Hagaddah, and he made interesting interpolations on the significance and meaning of the service, including the symbolic foods such as the bitter herbs. These were exceptionally bitter but mitigated by the sweetness of the charoseth! Anyone who wanted to was given the opportunity to join in the reading. All the youngest members of families asked the Four Questions, and there were joint winners when it came to the prize for finding the Afikomen.



We had a special treat when music bands from two Ukrainian cultural schools, Krynychenka and Rodyna, sang and played instruments for us, and a highlight was the extremely talented young boy who played the theme tune from *Schindler's List* exquisitely on the violin.



Everyone enjoyed the Passover meal and the post-prandial community singing, complete with special sound effects for *Chad Gadya*. When Rabbi Igor asked us to think of a word we wanted to represent this coming year, everyone made their contribution, but there was a predominant call for 'Shalom'.

The LJS KT class 2023

Mazal tov to our Kabbalat Torah students whose special service was held on 29 April.



L-R: Eli Wolchover, Charlie Grainger, Nora Bielawski, William Copsey, Michael Josefs

Copy and ideas for the newsletter should be emailed to: newsletter@ljs.org

The paper which *LJS News* is printed on comes from a sustainable source.

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The LJS is a constituent synagogue of Liberal Judaism



The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

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