

July/August 2023  
Tammuz/Av/Elul 5783

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

# LJS News



### Celebrating Shavuot

The theme of this year's Shavuot programme was 'Listen! *Shema*' ... and we certainly listened! On Friday 26 May, over 80 members and guests created a warm and engaging atmosphere starting with the Friday night service, followed by a buffet supper which included an incredible eight cheesecakes in the annual competition! Congratulations to this year's joint winners, Harriett Goldenberg and 8-year-old Arthur.

We were then treated to a production of the thought-provoking, one-woman show *Za'atar Rain*, written and performed by Maya Goldstein, reflecting on borders, attempting to cross them and reaching the unreachable. The programme continued with a choice of speaker events including photographer Frances Marshall talking about her moving photo project 'Queer Religion' displayed in the Montefiore Hall, and two guest speakers from Oasis of Peace discussing 'How to make peace relevant again between Palestinians and Israelis'. Sessions were also hosted by our members Hazel Summerfield, Tyana Petrova, Raffaele Gelein and LJS Friend Dodo van Udon. These sessions were interspersed with study sessions led by our Rabbis, an ice-cream making workshop led by Jack Sheeran, and plenty of snacks!

The programme culminated with a sunrise Shacharit service at 5am, attended by 13 people!

*Gaby Lazarus*

Writer and performer Maya Goldstein; a beautifully decorated cheesecake competition entry; competition winners Arthur and Harriet; the judges – Caroline, Zoë and Benita

### Inside this issue

Services and Announcements	2-3
Membership Survey	4
Council Report	5
AGM	6
Appointments; Forthcoming Events	
Tribute to Martin Slove	7
Community	8
Continuing our Jewish Journey	9
The Last Jews of Cairo	10-11
Summer Reading	12-13
The Learning Circle	14
Rimon Corner	15
Board of Deputies	16

## Shabbat and Festival services: July and August (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 Rabbi Alexandra Wright or Rabbi Igor Zinkov.

At the end of each Friday evening or Saturday morning service congregants are invited to Kiddush either in person or via Zoom.

<b>Friday 30 June</b> Please note the times of two separate services this evening	6.30pm Erev Shabbat service co-led by Elkie Braddick Bat Mitzvah 7.45pm Pre-Pride service led by Rabbi Igor Zinkov and Rabbi Anna Wolfson
<b>Shabbat 1 July</b> <i>Balak</i>	Elkie Braddick Bat Mitzvah
<b>Friday 7 July</b>	Co-led by Rosa Wolchover Bat Mitzvah
<b>Shabbat 8 July</b> <i>Pinchas</i>	Rosa Wolchover Bat Mitzvah Last day of Rimmon term
<b>Friday 14 July</b>	Co-led by Ezra Cohen Kabbalat Mitzvah
<b>Shabbat 15 July</b> <i>Mattot-Masey</i>	Ezra Cohen Kabbalat Mitzvah
<b>Friday 21 July</b>	
<b>Shabbat 22 July</b> <i>D'varim</i>	Nosh 'n' Drosh with Jonathan Bergwerk on Sigmund Freud – see page 6
<b>Wednesday 26 July</b> <b>8.00pm</b>	Erev Tisha B'Av service – please note this service is online only
<b>Friday 28 July</b>	
<b>Shabbat 29 July</b> <i>Va-etchanan</i>	Naming and Blessing of Sophie Baneth
<b>Friday 4 August</b>	
<b>Shabbat 5 August</b> <i>Ekev</i>	Torah reading and sermon given by Professor Michael Alpert
<b>Friday 11 August</b>	
<b>Shabbat 12 August</b> <i>Re'eh</i>	Sermon given by Sue Head
<b>Friday 18 August</b>	
<b>Shabbat 19 August</b> <i>Shof'tim</i>	Service led by Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton
<b>Friday 25 August</b>	
<b>Shabbat 26 August</b> <i>Ki Tetze</i>	Service led by Bernie Bulkin and Vivien Rose
<b>Friday 1 September</b>	Co-led by Mia Dixter Bat Mitzvah
<b>Shabbat 2 September</b> <i>Ki Tavo</i>	Mia Dixter Bat Mitzvah

## High Holy Day and Festival Services

**Selichot:** 7.30pm Saturday 9 September (see page 6)

**Rosh Hashanah:** 6.45pm Friday 15 September;  
10.30am Saturday 16 September

**Kol Nidrei:** 7.15pm Sunday 24 September

**Yom Kippur:** 10.30am (continuing all day) Monday  
25 September

**Sukkot:** 6.45pm 29 September; 11.00am Saturday  
30 September

**Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah:** 6.45pm Friday  
6 October; 11.00am Saturday 7 October

## Congratulations

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

Identical twin brothers Alexander Hadley Moss and Joshua Ethan Moss were born on 28 January 2023, the firstborn children of Vicky and Ben Moss.



Sol Asher Amari Gilbert was born on 30 January 2023, son of Rosie and John Gilbert. His big brothers are Raphael, Junayd and Idrys, and his big sisters are Ariana and Shoshana.



Mazel tov to Hannah Stephenson and Ian Grant whose wedding took place on Sunday 28 May 2023 at Pendley Manor, Tring.



We also say mazel tov to two of our members, Gar Davies and David Ben Alon, who took part in the Bar Mitzvah ceremony in the egalitarian part of the Western Wall in Jerusalem on 4 May 2023. It was a part of the WUPJ conference 'Connections 2023'. Gar (on the left) and David (on the right) are pictured here with Rabbi Igor Zinkov.



## Bereavements

We offer our sympathy to those who mourn:

**Peter Englander**, husband of Leanda, father of Simon, Thomas and William, and brother of Susan

**Peter Graham**, husband of Susan, and father of Edward

**Ruth Montagu**, wife of Lee, and mother of Sophie and Dan

**David Riesel**, father of Alex, and brother of Geoffrey

**Marcus Sarner**, husband of Andrea, and father of Moya

**Jocelyn Tobin**, mother of Rupert, Sasha and Annabel

We also extend our sympathy to Gaby, Micah and Lily Lazarus on the death of Gaby's mother and Micah and Lily's grandmother **Nina Hofman**.

הַמָּקוֹם יִנַּחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר הָאֲבֵלִים  
*May God comfort you and all who mourn*

## Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families

**The next LJS Drop-Ins for asylum-seeker families are on Sunday 9 July and Sunday 13 August from 2.00pm – 4.00pm.**

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

## Calling all knitters!

The Drop-In is re-introducing new baby bags for the pregnant mothers amongst our guests. We need to find a supply of hand-knitted baby blankets to add to the bags. Perhaps you are a keen knitter or part of a knitting group that likes to support charities. Please get in touch if you or someone you know can help out by emailing [asylumproject@ljs.org](mailto:asylumproject@ljs.org) or calling the office on 020 7286 5181.

# The LJS Membership Survey

*LJS Executive Director Jonathan Bruck outlines key outcomes of the survey.*



In November 2022 the Liberal Jewish Synagogue launched its first annual membership survey. As a member-focused organisation, the LJS is always looking for ways to improve what we do and how we do it; and in this digital era

where each one of us is able to choose how we receive news, it is vitally important to know how best to inform everyone of the rich panoply of events taking place throughout the year.

Whilst members have the ability to have their say through the LJS Council and committees, it was felt important to hear directly from them about what is being done well and what could be altered, updated or changed altogether.

The survey was designed to achieve actionable events. Five key areas of the LJS were represented – Education, Religious Services, Volunteering, Community and Communications – with each area having both multiple-choice questions and free text ‘opinion’ options.

We received 162 responses, an impressive 11% response rate. Whilst this may appear low, statistically it is much higher than most surveys and was considered a great start.

The results are currently being correlated into a ‘you said, we will do’ document to ensure that those who have had their say can be reassured that we have listened.

## Headline Results

**Education** We found that there was a great awareness of the adult education courses whilst the biggest influences on members attending were the subject being taught and the timing of the lesson. Popular subjects requested were Judaism, Hebrew, history, contemporary music and literature. Regarding the quality of the classes, over 90% of the respondents scored the courses 7 or above out of 10.

**Services** Given the option, 55% of the respondents prefer to attend services in person whilst 37% would like to be offered a choice on how they attend a service. As regards obstacles to attending a service,

31% stated that there were none, whilst 26% felt they had other things going on in busy lives. Distance and transport were also highlighted as issues. With reference to music, 90% of respondents stated that the music impacted directly on their enjoyment of the service.

**Volunteering** An impressive 71% of the respondents had volunteered or are volunteering at the LJS. 68% of the respondents stated that volunteering opportunities are clearly signposted, whilst 51% were more likely to volunteer if directly approached. When asked about joining a volunteer register, 52% would consider being part of a register. Travelling distance and time constraints were the main barriers to respondents volunteering. When asked if all members, within reasonable expectations – i.e. just once a year – should be expected to volunteer to support the community, 54% said no.

**Community** When asked which special events they would be most likely to attend, respondents were keen to attend lectures and discussions, as well as social, festival and musical events. 61% felt that there is currently a wide enough range of activities on offer, but were more likely to attend one-off events than a series.

**Communications** Respondents were very happy with the communications received from the synagogue with 70% opening Shalom LJS and Thought for the Week routinely. The majority of respondents were happy to receive communication by email, and 75% rated the LJS newsletter 7 and above. 88% of respondents find what they are looking for on the website, with 67% rating it 7 and above. Finally, 92% of respondents feel that they are kept in touch with all the services, events and activities that the LJS offers.

**Conclusion** The initial analysis of the survey statistics are pleasingly positive overall and it would appear that the LJS is providing a good service to its members. However, there is a lot of interesting as well as challenging detail and feedback in the free text boxes, and these are currently being analysed. The plan is for a full report to be delivered in the near future.

# Council Report

*Chris Godbold, outgoing Chair of Council, summarises key points from the May and June meetings.*



Photo: Trevor Haynes

At the AGM on 22 June, Benita Hart was appointed Chairman with Gaby Lazarus as Vice-Chairman. As I stand down from my role, I hope Benita and Gaby will find their terms of office as rewarding

as I have. I know they will enjoy the support of members, and I take this opportunity to express my thanks to members for the support I have enjoyed.

Council meetings have continued to be very busy, considering a number of diverse issues such as staffing and pay, safety procedures and arrangements for the AGM. Of particular significance is the coming together of Liberal Judaism and the Movement for Reform Judaism to form a single Progressive entity. Council welcomes the moves towards unity of the two movements while noting that this will be a lengthy process during which synagogues and indeed the movements themselves will retain their existing names and structures as well as their distinctive *siddurim*. Council was pleased that, despite the obvious challenges, there is a clear willingness for the coming together to succeed, giving Progressive Judaism a clearer and more powerful voice as well as enabling resources to be better deployed, including increased support for Leo Baeck College. An open meeting is planned for 11 July (see page 6) to explain what is proposed so far and to answer questions.

Next year is the 60th anniversary of the arrival in the UK of the Czech scrolls, and the LJS will be holding a special service to commemorate the event in which members of this community were so deeply involved. We reviewed the highly successful concert, *The Human Spirit*, and were delighted to learn that a surplus of over £10,000 was achieved; this will be shared between the LJS's Asylum Seekers' Drop-In and the World Union for Progressive Judaism Ukraine Crisis Fund. We were also gratified with the success of

the Yom Ha-Shoah service at which Peter Lantos gave a most moving address, and of the joint LJS and Jewish LGBT+ service.

Council has been pleased to review the number of new members and friends joining the LJS. Sometimes they move from other synagogues and sometimes they are previously unaffiliated, but often they are people who have completed the 'Choosing Judaism' course and have decided to join the Jewish people. All new members and friends are welcome, and we are happy to receive membership enquiries which are sometimes initiated by our members.

LJS member Bryan Diamond is finalising a book about one of the founders of our movement, Claude Montefiore. Bryan will be publishing this privately, but copies will be available from the LJS and Amazon in due course, and we wish Bryan every success with this endeavour, which will increase awareness of the work of Claude Montefiore.

We were pleased to learn of the activities of the Family Support Group and of the Bereavement Support Team as well as of the first meeting of the new Film Club. Further details of all activities are available elsewhere in *LJS News*, or from the office.

Each Council meeting reviews the work of the various committees and the latest meeting considered reports on such matters as preserving the heritage of the LJS and proposals to mount exhibitions on another LJS founder, Lily Montagu, and our late Senior Rabbi, John Rayner. Social action remains a priority and the Social Action committee is investigating what help may be given to the campaign to allow the remaining Ethiopian Jews to make Aliyah.

Four other Council members stood down at the AGM – Sylvia Churba, David Davidson, Michael Romain and Alexandra Weiss. I thank all of them for their contribution over past years and wish them well.

*Chris Godbold, Chair of Council*

## The LJS Annual General Meeting

At the AGM on 22 June the following changes and new appointments were made:

**Rita Adler** was elected President of the LJS.

**Chris Godbold** stepped down from his position as Chair as his term came to an end, and **Benita Hart** was appointed Chairman of Council, with **Gaby Lazarus** as Vice-Chairman.

The following Council members stepped down from their positions as their terms had come to an end: **Sylvia Churba**, **David Davidson**, **Michael Romain**



Rita Adler



Benita Hart



Gaby Lazarus

and **Alexandra Weiss**. Two new Council members were elected: **Scott Dinwiddie** and **Tyana Petrova**.

The AGM offered an opportunity to extend heartfelt thanks to all those who serve our community.

## Forthcoming Events

### A New Vision for Progressive Judaism

With Rabbi Charley Baginsky, CEO of Liberal Judaism and Rabbi Josh Levy, CEO of The Movement for Reform Judaism

Thursday 11 July at the LJS

7.00pm Refreshments; 7.30pm Talk

Liberal Judaism and the Movement for Reform Judaism will create one single unified Progressive Jewish movement in the UK.

Come and listen to Rabbi Charley Baginsky and Rabbi Josh Levy on leading this exciting and history-making project. You will have the opportunity to hear them outline their vision and ask questions.



### 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 22 July at 1.00pm

### The Life and Thoughts of Sigmund Freud

Jonathan Bergwerk, occupational psychologist and author of *Audacious Jews*, will talk about Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. What does Freudian psychology tell us about

personality and motivation in the Bible, about our own attachment to Judaism and how we engage with belief and practice?

### Selichot service and musical offering

Shabbat 9 September

The Selichot service is an atmospheric service inaugurating the High Holy Day season of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – a season with themes of reflection, repentance, renewal and return.

**7.30pm:** We are delighted to welcome the music group *Vache Baroque* to the LJS for a concert of 16th–17th century music including works by the Jewish composer Salamone Rossi.

**8.30pm:** Havdalah will be followed by our beautiful Selichot service which introduces us to some of the prayers and music of the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe).

The evening will conclude by 9.30pm.

### Memorial Service at The Liberal Jewish Cemetery, Pound Lane, Willesden, London NW10 2HG

Sunday 10 September at 11.00am

The LJS's annual memorial Service will take place on the Sunday before Rosh Hashanah and be led by the Rabbis. All are welcome to join the congregation in remembering loved ones who are buried or whose ashes are buried in the cemetery.



# Martin Slowe 11 September 1940 – 17 April 2023

*Emily Scholl pays tribute to her father, Martin Slowe, President of the LJS 2016–2022.*



Photo: Trevor Haynes

My father had a quiet, modest, unassuming manner which belied a sharp business brain, innate intelligence, and sound judgement. A man of great integrity, he possessed extraordinary kindness

and genuinely cared for others, particularly those less fortunate than himself. He lived according to the mantra, 'It is nice to be important but more important to be nice.' He was, of course, both.

Born in September 1940 during the Blitz, Martin was one of three children born to Malcolm and Pat Slowe, elder brother to Richard and Peter. He spent his early childhood years evacuated to Moor Park with his mother and grandparents. He was given a set of mini-bricks, developing a passion for them because he could build houses, shops, and hotels.

His love for real estate continued for the next eighty years. He attended the College of Estate Management, qualified as a Chartered Surveyor, and then joined Edward Erdman, a well-respected West End estate agency, where he met Stanley Dias. Together they formed their own agency, Dias & Slowe. In 1971 he set up business on his own and later joined forces with the late Sir Sigmund Sternberg in a business partnership and friendship which thrived for over 40 years, building up a property business of considerable value, the core of which was high street shopping parades all over England. Martin had a very strong work ethic, often combining holidays and outings with detours to look at properties round the country – with our long-suffering mother hijacked in the passenger seat!

My father met my mother, Vikki, at her 17th birthday party – love at first sight! My mother, however, kept him waiting – or rather her father did! – until she was 19, when in 1966, they got married. Vikki was the absolute love of his life, supporting him in growing the business, as well as looking after the family and their many friends, and she played an active role in synagogue life with him. Equally, he encouraged her work as an artist. In 1970 I was born and in 1973 my sister, Hannah, followed. He was

always very supportive of our decisions and proud of our achievements, and equally proud of his grandchildren.

Martin was dedicated to the LJS, and for about 20 years organised the synagogue's steward rotas for the High Holy Days. He always generously supported and helped fundraise for many charities. He championed the Israel Society, and in 2013 initiated the highly successful Nosh 'n' Drosh in memory of our mother. When his lifelong friend Rita Adler and Rabbi Alexandra needed funds to launch the first LJS Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families, he swiftly raised the money from synagogue members.

During the following years he continued to attend Drop-Ins and chatted away to those attending in an effortless manner, and was there as recently as March this year.

Martin was incredibly generous both financially and with his time. He became unintentionally generous when his hat and coat became accidentally mixed in with those being donated to asylum seekers. When he discovered this, he shrugged and said, 'Never mind, I have spare; they need them more than I do.'

In 2016 he was elected President of the synagogue, and set up the President's Patrons to help secure the financial security of the LJS. His professional expertise in planning and building matters was regularly called upon. After he retired from his presidency in 2022, he continued to meet and greet in the synagogue foyer, with his ready smile and lovely sense of humour. A stickler for formalities and good manners, he took being smartly dressed and wearing a tie to a new level when spotted gardening in a tie!

My father not only had a really strong sense of Jewish community, but dearly loved his family and close friends. If any family member or friend was sick, he would immediately visit them; if they needed advice or practical help he would be there. He believed in fairness to all and had a natural way of mediating, finding solutions to the most insolvable problems, always making time to really listen to people, which is why he was trusted and loved by so many.

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This tribute is a shortened version of the eulogy given at Martin Slowe's funeral.

# 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](mailto: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. You will have soup on arrival, then watch a film. This is followed by a delicious tea including ice-cream. The cost is just £2.00 per session.

**Our next screenings:**

**26 July: *Mamma Mia***

**23 August: *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris***

## Tuesday Conversations

Everyone is welcome to join in In these sessions (previously called ‘Tuesday Texts’) which take place on Tuesday mornings between 11.15am and 12.30pm during term-time. This friendly group is led by Rabbi Alexandra Wright, Rabbi Igor Zinkov and Dr Dov Softi, with the occasional guest speaker. The sessions are based around discussion on biblical and rabbinic texts as well as modern poetry and short stories, and we also have conversations on Jewish art and music. The starting point is a text, painting or piece of music.

## 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 £7.50.

Our next lunches are on **18 July** and **15 August**. 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 the singing starts. 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](mailto: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 13 July: *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus**

**Thursday 10 August: *Money* by Martin Amis**

If you have any questions or would like to be sent a zoom link for the next Book Club, please email [ljsreaders@hotmail.com](mailto:ljsreaders@hotmail.com)

## Bridge Club

The Bridge Club meets at 2.00pm every Monday (except Jewish and Bank Holidays) and continues till 5.00pm, with a break for refreshments. 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.

## 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](mailto:chavurah.emunah1@gmail.com)



# Continuing our Jewish Journey

*Karen Newman tells us about a journey of study and discovery.*



Students in the 'Continuing our Jewish Journey' class

Ours was truly an eclectic class in the variety of pathways that had led us as a group of individuals to be studying together for 15 months with Rabbi Alexandra Wright and Dr Dov Softi on a course called 'Continuing Our Jewish Journey', which culminated in leading an Erev Shabbat and a Shabbat morning service at the LJS in May 2023.

For several students, some of whom had previously studied with Rabbi Igor Zinkov in the 'Exploring Judaism' class, this was an opportunity to continue to learn together with the potential to progress to an adult Bar or Bat Mitzvah. My reason for joining the class was different; it had begun to irk me as an Honorary Officer about to step down from that role, that the balance of my interactions with the synagogue has been more about (albeit not unimportant) management issues such as Covid-19, toilet refurbishment etc., and less about deepening my understanding of our heritage, texts and traditions; this course offered an opportunity to address that.

The prospectus was exciting. Billed as an opportunity to 'learn how to access Jewish texts from the Bible to the Talmud, from medieval codes of law to contemporary commentators', our weekly classes were never less than challenging, revelatory and convivial. In our first session we discussed 'What is the Torah? The centrality of Torah study? Who wrote the Torah?', and, with study materials that were shared with us before the class, and have left us with a wonderful resource, we started as we continued, wrestling with texts and concepts within our tradition individually, in small groups, guided

by Rabbi Alexandra and Dov, and with the whole class together. Sometimes individuals volunteered to give a brief presentation on a key Jewish scholar, writer or thinker; at other times we were invited to join other short courses that the LJS was offering to those eager to learn, including 'Judaism and Islam: A Shared History' and 'Navigating the Sea of Talmud'.

We agreed that the process of learning for and jointly leading a service together would be an appropriate 'coming of age' for the class as a whole, and some of us wanted the occasion to mark our own individual Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Some volunteered to read from the Torah, others to lead some prayers in Hebrew or English, and others to read the Special Theme, which, to accompany the Torah portion *B'Har/B'chukkotai*, was about freedom.

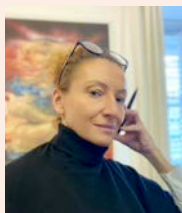
We had originally planned for the sermon on the Shabbat morning to take the form of a reflection on a class discussion about the themes of freedom, and what studying in the class had meant to us. We spoke about being more open, learning from each other, and the importance of creating different ideas from a text; holding the authority of the text and the panoply of interpretations it holds. We also valued the freedom to ask the question, 'What does a text mean?' One of us said 'The process is like weaving; you are taking the source, the text, and weaving yourself into it; it's yours and ours together.' For others, leading a service was 'a culmination of what it's been for us in the class; it's a staging post in the journey'. For others, it was about affirming that there is a strong Jewish community in their lives: 'It's a celebration of what we've gained together; learning from one another, growing spiritually and emotionally while emerging from the pandemic.' The sermon as delivered combined some of these points with a deeper dive into some of the issues posed by the word 'if' that opens *B'chukkotai*.

We all felt that leading the services that weekend marked an exhilarating 'coming of age' moment for our group, recognising, of course, that the journey continues ...

*Karen Newman*

## The Last Jews of Cairo

**Anna Dilphy visited Cairo earlier this year. Here she shares her experience as the once vibrant Jewish community comes to an end.**



They sit on wooden pews. Under the domed ceiling of the Sha'ar Hashamayim synagogue in downtown Cairo, the seven – mostly elderly – women gather.

It's a humid Cairo evening in early March and clothes

cling to bodies. The women fan their faces with paper programmes. The Muslim call to prayer drifts in through the windows, along with the sound of gridlocked traffic. From the ceiling hangs a huge chandelier in the shape of the Star of David.

Joining the women are a handful of expatriate Jews, foreign diplomats and non-Jewish friends. The women are all who are left – the last men of the Cairo Jewish community died out or left the country by the 1990s. The community has lacked a rabbi for decades, so a pair of young American volunteers lead the service in a mixture of Arabic, English, and Hebrew.

Magda Haroun, the leader of the Cairo Jewish community, says this could be the last time the Jews of Cairo will have an organised service for Rosh Hashanah. 'I don't know if next year we'll have members of the community, I mean. It doesn't make sense to be present if you don't have members,' she says. Aside from Haroun, who is 63, all the remaining Jews of Cairo are women over the age of 80. Four members of the community have died since 2013, she says. Another three remain in Alexandria.

The elderly women of the Cairo Jewish community are, in Haroun's view, the only living reminder of a history that dates to the time of the Bible. Over the centuries, Egypt – and Cairo in particular – has played a central part in Jewish history, and the ancient city is dotted with physical reminders of that history. The rabbi and philosopher Maimonides' 12th-century synagogue still stands in Cairo. The building was renovated in 2010, although it is not used with

any regularity. Elsewhere is a Jewish cemetery dating back to the 9th century where burials still take place, although the graveyard has fallen into disrepair in recent decades.

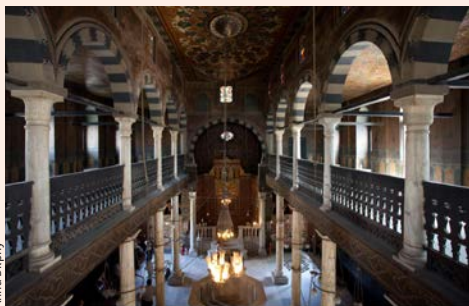
Around us are icons of a long-gone cosmopolitan era in Egyptian culture. Jewish-born singer and actress Laila Murad was a towering figure in mid-century Egyptian film and music. One of Murad's associates was Togo Mizrahi, an Alexandrian Jew of Italian lineage who was considered one of the founding fathers of Egyptian cinema and who directed films like *Cocaine*, a 1930s tale of murder and drug abuse.

That cultural flourishing ended soon after the 1948 war that gave birth to the neighbouring State of Israel. Coinciding with a surge in Egyptian nationalism in the 1950s, in the years following the overthrow of the British-backed monarchy, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser began a mass expulsion of Egyptian Jews, sending many to Europe, Israel, and the US. Some settled in places like Paris, Cyprus, and the San Francisco Bay area.

The expulsion continued for years, draining the community. In the 1950s, some Jews were issued one-way travel documents called *laissez passer* while others were stripped of their property. By the end of subsequent wars with Israel in 1967 and 1973, only a few hundred Egyptian Jews remained in the country, doing their best to continue daily life in a community now a fraction of its former size.



Anna Dilphy



Madga Haroun's family is one of those that chose to remain. Her father was a Communist who worked in an intellectual property firm, aiding patent and trademark applications. After attending university in Cairo, she eventually took over the family business. One of her sisters later moved to Europe, but she decided to stay.

And Egypt is Haroun's country. When I met her, she sat smoking a cigarette and sitting on the stone steps of the synagogue courtyard. The yard is dimly lit and guarded by a permanent police checkpoint. 'I had my first love here. I had my first boyfriend, my first deception.' She laughs with a smoker's rasp. 'It's my home, why should I leave? And my father felt the same.'

As she speaks, a young Cairene couple walk in from the street, strangers come to wish her well.

Haroun sees the Egyptian Jewish community as an accidental victim of regional politics. 'I myself am resentful of the State of Israel. Because if we are like this today, it is partly because of the establishment of the State of Israel, and partly the politics of the Arab countries which contributed to the idea of Israel.'

In Haroun's view, the creation of Israel upended regional politics and led to a backlash in Arab states, which then moved to expel outright or put pressure on their Jewish minorities. The simmering conflict between Israel and nationalist Arab regimes left some Middle Eastern Jews with an impossible choice: their religious affiliation or their homelands.

Jews are not the only religious minority to have faced persecution in Egypt. The country's Coptic Christians say they are regarded as second-class citizens, barred *de facto* from the top ranks of the military, harassed by the security forces

and menaced in some parts of the country by jihadists. Egypt's Bahai and Shia communities have also long struggled for rights under a state that refuses to recognise them.

Haroun says the Egyptian government no longer threatens the few remaining Egyptian Jews with expulsion or other punitive measures, but little can be done to reverse the community's impending extinction. That extends to her own family. Haroun's first husband was a Muslim, and so is her daughter. Her current husband is Italian and a Catholic. 'We are the only house in Egypt where the three religions are living under one roof,' she says.

Magda Haroun feels burdened with the task of presiding over the last days of her community. 'I'm sick of it,' she says. 'Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I'm crying. Because I don't know what will happen. When the phone rings, I don't know who died, who is sick. It's very hard to explain. It's very heavy. It's very sad. It's very frightening.'

Yet she is still intent on proclaiming the legacy of Egypt's Jews even to their dying days. When the previous leader of the Cairo Jewish community, Carmen Weinstein, died in 2013, Haroun laboured to make the funeral an event attended by local and foreign officials, along with a rabbi flown in from Paris. Haroun's sister and the deputy leader of the community died in 2014, and Haroun again helped organise a major funeral with a police escort. 'I made a point,' she said. 'We are going, but we have to go with glamour.'

'Unfortunately, it's a funeral. We won't have weddings, but we will be acknowledged, and I will fight until the end that our presence is acknowledged in history.'



# Summer Reading



**Clare Cohen, co-ordinator of the LJS Book Group, offers her summer reading recommendations. The first three books were read and discussed with the Book Group, and here Clare summarises the novels and presents the views of the group. Happy reading!**

## *Grey Bees by Andrey Kurkov*

You do not need to be an experienced beekeeper to learn from, and enjoy, this fascinating book, although I am assured that the technicalities and practicalities of beekeeping are accurate. It provides the reader with a fascinating insight into the world of beekeeping.



The book will provide the general reader, who has little or no knowledge of bees, with a great deal of fascinating information about 'bee society' without overwhelming them with facts and figures. For example, we learn that beekeepers need to keep their faces, hair and trouser legs protected when collecting honey, and it is telling that the only time Sergeyich (the beekeeper from the Grey Zone of Ukraine) is stung is when he is trying to return a bee from the hive which has been taken by the authorities in Crimea to one of his own, unadulterated hives.

It can be argued that in writing about the bees and their behaviour, Kurkov is using them as a metaphor for the way in which the natural world is corrupted by human intervention and sectarianism. Many parallels are drawn between the ugly and sometimes vicious actions of the people Sergeyich meets on his journey compared with the collaborative actions of the bees.

I thoroughly enjoyed the descriptions of Sergeyich's ability to cope with adversity and marvelled at his ability to live at one with nature on his travels through the Grey Zone to Crimea. His practical ingenuity, for example, when faced with a lack of the appropriate tools for the job and his ability to drive his Lada with no windows is a reminder, if needed, of the resilience of the Ukrainian spirit. It is fascinating to see how the honey is used as barter in a world where cash no longer has much value.

I think that the translation is excellent and the words flow in an easy and deceptively simple narrative, which brings many complicated and sadly relevant issues to the fore. An unusual and fascinating read

which sheds light on the strength of the Ukrainian people in these dark and dangerous times.

## *Mao's Last Dancer by Li Cunxin*

This is the story of Li Cunxin who was born and raised in a desperately poor village during the height of China's Cultural Revolution. His childhood revolved around the commune, his family and Chairman Mao's 'Little Red Book'.



When Madame Mao's cultural delegates came in search of young peasants to study ballet at the academy in Beijing, he finds himself one of the chosen boys, and his world changes overnight.

This book is not only the story of Li Cunxin and his personal journey to become one of the world's greatest ballet dancers, but it also sheds light on life as a privileged student in a school of strict rules and regulations over every aspect of their lives.

This book will highlight the relative values between the Chinese and western upbringing of children, and the reader is left to marvel at the resilience of the human spirit in the face of crushing regimentation. The reader is shown Li's gradual, but inevitable, realisation that life under Chairman Mao was not the Utopia they were instructed it was and that the desire for freedom would eventually be too strong for a person such as Li.

The book demonstrates the discipline and self-sacrifice required to dance classical ballet and the enormous toll which it takes on dancers' bodies.

Li is chosen to represent China on a cultural exchange to Houston and ultimately chooses to stay in the United States, facing the probability that he will never be allowed to return or to see his family again. However, that was not the case as eventually not only did his parents pay him a visit to Houston but he also returns to visit the family in their village after the fall of the Gang of Four. It is interesting to learn that Li worked as a stockbroker for some time after retiring from the stage, and is now artistic



director of the Queensland Ballet in Brisbane, Australia.

Interestingly, although Li's life in Houston was immensely privileged, he interjects several small notes of quiet criticism of the excess to which he was exposed during his year with his friends in the Houston ballet world.

I felt that this was an informative and interesting book which brought a new perspective on the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

### *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka

Many of us in the LJS Book Group read this book when it was first published in 2005 but, in light of recent events, it seemed that now would be a good time either to revisit this book or to read it for the first time.

Within the Book Group, we found that there was a distinct divide in opinion between those of us who were re-reading the book, having read it when it was first published, and those who were reading it for the first time.

Those who were reading it for the first time found it tender, moving and deeply funny in places, but those of us who were re-reading it found it darker and more problematic than we had the first time around.

We found the post-Communist, pre-independence, greedy and grasping character of Valentina to be a racial stereotype at distinct odds with our views of Ukraine at the present time.

However, we all felt that the interweaving of the two stories, the personal and the social/historical, to be extremely well done, especially knowing that this was a first novel. There has obviously been much in the media recently about the history between Ukraine and Russia and we found this book to be most enlightening. We also found the history of tractors to be surprisingly gripping and almost a short course on the history of capitalism.

We found the interaction and relationship between the two sisters to be both sad and believable. It was noted that the lives of the 'War Baby' and the 'Peacetime Baby' to be so different as to almost make them of a different generation. Several people commented that they had either personal

experience of or knew people who had been in the same situation.

Some of us also felt that the author had hinted at the possibility that the biological father of Nadia may have been the guard at the camp where Vera and her mother were placed after the war, but that she left it deliberately ambiguous.

In conclusion, it was agreed that this book opened up the possibility of a wide-ranging and interesting discussion with both personal and political relevance.

### *1979* by Val McDermid

Val McDermid takes us back to 1979, to a time when sexism, nationalism and an ever-present threat of violence were the norms in the newsroom of a Glasgow newspaper.



She tells a great story, and we are soon deep into this politically divisive period of British political history. The atmosphere is filled with cultural references which resonate today, and lays bare the bitterness and anger of those who fear that they will be left behind or shut out of the opportunities soon to be available in the next decade.

The newsroom is a microcosm of the sexism, misogyny and homophobia which was then accepted as the norm. Allie Burns, the only female news reporter, works with her colleagues Rona Dunsyre and Danny Sullivan to uncover two exclusive scoops which will catapult her career into another league. The stories are fraught with physical danger and political intrigue, and the tension is kept tight by this skilled master of suspense.

The journalists work the old-fashioned way with no access to Google, Wikipedia or mobile phones. We are introduced to a very believable world which can be either a haunting memory of a different era or a revelation that such attitudes were so acceptable, and accepted, only a few short decades ago.

This is a great thriller with plenty of pace, an intriguing story and a wonderful set of characters. The reader is swept along and it's a guaranteed pager-turner, which makes it an ideal summer read if you want the realism of a well-crafted plot and a well-rounded set of characters.

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To find out more about the LJS Book Group, see page 8.



# The Learning Circle

*Adult education classes at the LJS*

## Shavuot term dates

Tuesday classes are held until 11 July. Shabbat term classes run until 8 July.

## High Holy Day preparation

High Holy Day preparation classes (online) will be held on Tuesday evenings at 8.10pm on 5, 12 and 19 September. (Please note these are separate classes from those in the 'Exploring Judaism' course.)

## Sukkot term dates

Tuesday classes will run 5 September – 12 December, with half-term 31 October. Please note there are no classes on Tuesday 26 September (the day after Yom Kippur).

Shabbat morning classes will run 9 September – 9 December, with half-term 21 and 28 October. These are also the term dates for Rimmon Religion School.

## Preview of Sukkot term classes

Details of all classes will be announced in the forthcoming brochure for The Learning Circle and in the next newsletter.

Classes are held on Tuesday evenings and Shabbat mornings prior to the Shabbat morning services.

## Hebrew classes

Classes at all levels of Classical Hebrew, from beginners to more advanced students, are held throughout the academic year. A new class for Absolute Beginners will start in the Sukkot term. There are classes for those who would like to learn more about biblical and prayer-book Hebrew. Our tutors are Susannah Alexander, Dr Sally Gold, Dr Dov Softi, Nitza Spiro and Rabbi Alexandra Wright.

## Discussion classes

Please see page 8 for **Tuesday Conversations** (previously 'Tuesday Texts').

Discussion classes are held on Shabbat mornings. In the Shabbat morning **Learning with Texts**, the class will be looking at how our texts affect our

attitude to current issues. Classes will be led by Rabbi Alexandra Wright and Rabbi Igor Zinkov together with Rabbi Michael Hilton, our scholar in residence, and by our member, Rabbi Sybil Sheridan. If you are interested in joining the class or would like further information, please contact Michael Romain: [romain@netgates.co.uk](mailto:romain@netgates.co.uk)

## Exploring Judaism

This course is for people, including non-Jewish family members, who wish to know more about Judaism. It is also an essential programme of instruction for people choosing Judaism by conversion.

## LJS Chavruta

To learn more about the opportunity to learn with study companions, and/or to register, please contact Rabbi Igor Zinkov: [i.zinkov@ljs.org](mailto:i.zinkov@ljs.org) or visit [www.tinyurl.com/ljsch](http://www.tinyurl.com/ljsch)

## New autumn short course

We are delighted to announce that Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton, our scholar in residence, has put together a new course '**The Future of ...**' which will be on Tuesday evenings in October and November. This course of six sessions on Tuesday evenings from 8.10–9.30pm will be in person at the LJS and online. The schedule is:

**10 October: *The Future of Liberal Judaism*** – Rabbi Charley Baginsky

**17 October: *The Future of Jewish Theology*** – Rabbi Dr Judith Rosen-Berry

**24 October** (date tbc): ***The Future of Orthodoxy*** – Rabba Dr Lindsey Taylor-Gutharz

**7 November: *The Future of the Rabbinate*** – Rabbi Dr Deborah Kahn-Harris

**14 November: *The Future of the Yeshiva and Jewish Study*** – Rabbi Lev Taylor

**21 November** (date tbc): ***The Future of Anglo-Jewry*** – Dr Jonathan Boyd

The 30-minute presentations will be followed by discussion.



# Rimon Corner

Shavuot came early to Rimon this year. We celebrated on our last week before half-term with drama, songs, cake decorating, collages, edible art and flower crowns. Even the parents joined in, making a veritable bouquet of paper flowers for the crowns. You can see some of the beautiful things that were made in our display in the upstairs foyer.

At the end of the morning, the team attended a 'Lunch and Learn' led by Rabbi Alex on the principles of Liberal Judaism. Staff development is a vital element in building a strong and successful team. This year, staff have taken part in foundation training with Leo Baeck College, attended conferences, and participated in regular in-house training. Susannah is part of a group of B'nei Mitzvah educators from all over Europe who are learning about the history and practice

of B'nei Mitzvah and developing resources for our communities.

The culmination of a Liberal Jewish education is Kabbalat Torah. We are extremely proud of our recent KT graduates, and delighted that they are all training with us as assistants. We give special thanks to their teachers Jonathan, Danny and Rabbi Igor, and look forward to welcoming Charlie, Eli, Michael, Nora and William to our teaching team.

Remember, it's never too early to register interest in Rimon. If you're considering joining us next year, please email [education@ljs.org](mailto:education@ljs.org) to find out more.

*Susannah Alexander, Rimon Head Teacher and Rimon Rabbi Elana Dellal*



Photo credit: Rosie Cohen



Photo credit: Rosie Cohen



Photo credit: Leah Michie

***We wish these young members of the LJS a very happy birthday in July and August.***

## July

Nicolas Cozens  
Arthur Davidson-Kelly  
Oscar Davidson-Kelly  
Emma Dixter  
Joseph Frank  
Liam Gold  
Audrey Hutchinson  
Milo Langham McLellan

Semih Nasi  
Joel Pinto  
Gabriel Relkin  
Nathaniel Sellar  
Raphael Sellar  
Angelina Sokel  
Rosalie Wolchover

## August

Mia Dixter  
Daniel Fisher  
Theo Frankel  
Freddie Grant  
Noah Gulperin  
Ralph Hockley Lester  
Max Josefs  
Solomon Kane

Efron Levi-French  
Libby Lewis  
Quinn Shipsey  
Acacia Steen  
Joshua Tobias  
Skyler Tuvey  
Arthur Watts  
Eli Wolchover

# The LJS representatives on the Board of Deputies



Between the five of us – Karen Newman, Karen Maxwell, Jonty Bloomfield, Daniel Mautner, and myself – we are involved with a wide range of activities at the Board of Deputies.

Karen Newman co-chairs the Progressive Deputies Group. She serves on the Constitution Committee which scrutinises applications from candidate organisations wishing to join the Board, and which deals

with complaints arising from the Board's Code of Conduct. She is also a member of the Defence and Interfaith Division, which, among other things, leads the Board's response to antisemitism, and she participates in the Division's Higher Education working group.

Karen Maxwell is involved with interfaith work where she encourages more focus and action in this area. She co-ordinated with Sheila Gewolb of Cardiff United Synagogue and Religions for Peace an interfaith event on Women in Scripture.

Jonty chairs the newly created LGBTQ+ working group, organising events, aiming to improve LGBTQ+ representation/policy attention at the Board and within the wider Jewish society.

Daniel, our youngest deputy, is officially an observer, attending the monthly plenaries. He follows and contributes to the various BoD WhatsApp groups, the pulse of the Board.

And lastly, I convene the working group on Refugees and Human Trafficking. Our current project is facilitating the creation of new asylum-seeker Drop-Ins around the country, spearheaded by three leading London synagogues with Drop-Ins – West London, New North London, and our own Drop-In here at the LJS. This work is being undertaken in conjunction with the HIAS/JCore charity.

As Progressive Jews, we are a minority on the Board, but it's very useful to have a sense of how the Board operates, and to be in a position to make a contribution.

*Harriett Goldenberg*



Copy and ideas for the newsletter should be emailed to: [newsletter@ljs.org](mailto:newsletter@ljs.org)

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### Rabbi

Igor Zinkov

### Scholar in Residence

Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton

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Elana Dellal

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