



KT students visit Prague

The verdict on the first ever LJS Kabbalat Torah visit to Prague in February was that it was a resounding success! We spent three action-packed days learning about Prague's rich and often disturbing Jewish history and getting a flavour of Jewish and secular life in Prague today.

Here are some of the highlights in the words of five of our students:

- ◆ 'I really enjoyed being immersed in Czech Jewish culture in a way I never could in a classroom.' *Winter* ◆
- ◆ 'One of my favourite things was when we went to the Spanish synagogue. The inside was so beautiful and intricate – and the ark was amazing.' *Elkie* ◆
- ◆ 'I really took away a lot from the [Friday night] service because it was very different from the service at our synagogue in how it is organised and works.' *Spencer* ◆
- ◆ 'Terezin was a very emotional experience, but I thought it was an important trip to make as it made me realise the scale of the deaths.' *Roxy* ◆
- ◆ 'My favourite part of the Prague trip was the VR [Virtual Reality] experience of the story of the golem because it was fun and interactive.' *Sam* ◆

Heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this visit possible.

Susannah Alexander, Rimon Head Teacher

The KT group celebrating Erev Shabbat with the Etz Chaim Jewish community in Prague

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Shabbat and festival services: March and April 2024 (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. The link is shown on screen with clear instructions.

This information is correct at the time of going to press. The weekly e-newsletter, Shalom LJS, provides up-to-date information.

Friday 1 March	Co-led by Layla Grant, Bat Mitzvah
Shabbat 2 March <i>Ki Tissa</i>	Layla Grant, Bat Mitzvah
Friday 8 March	Co-led by Angel Desmond, Bat Mitzvah
Shabbat 9 March <i>Va-yakheil</i>	Angel Desmond, Bat Mitzvah
Friday 15 March	Service co-led by Daniel Tahar, Bar Mitzvah, and Rabbi Elana Dellal
Shabbat 16 March <i>Pekudey</i>	Daniel Tahar, Bar Mitzvah
Friday 22 March	
Shabbat 23 March <i>Vayikra/Zachor</i>	L'Dor va-Dor service in the Sanctuary led by Rabbi Elana Dellal, Rabbi Igor Zinkov and the students of Rimon Religion School Koleinu service in the Rabbi John Rayner Prayer Room led by Rabbi Alexandra Wright
Saturday 23 March at 6.45pm	Erev Purim – Reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther) – see page 4
Friday 29 March	
Shabbat 30 March <i>Tzav/Parah</i>	Service led by Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton
Friday 5 April	
Shabbat 6 April <i>Shemini/Ha-Chodesh</i>	Guest preacher Rabbi Anthony Lazarus Magrill Kiddush to celebrate the special birthdays of Judith King and Deborah Lazarus
Friday 12 April	
Shabbat 13 April <i>Tazri'a</i>	
Friday 19 April	
Shabbat 20 April <i>M'tzora/Ha-Gadol</i>	
Tuesday 23 April First Day Pesach	Festival Morning Service
Tuesday 23 April at 6.30pm	Communal Seder – see page 4
Friday 26 April <i>Erev Shabbat Chol Ha-Mo'ed Pesach</i>	
Shabbat 27 April <i>Chol Ha-Mo'ed Pesach</i>	
Sunday 28 April at 4.30pm Erev Seventh Day Pesach	Tea and talk by special guest speaker, Lord Alf Dubs – see page 4
Monday 29 April Seventh Day Pesach	Festival Morning Service

Congratulations

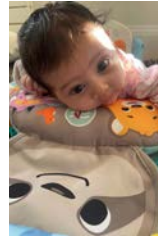


Photo: Ferris and Twine

Mazel tov to **Tamar Fyne and Joshua Kirk** whose wedding took place at the LJS on Sunday 7 January 2024.

We are also delighted to announce the following births:

Avaya Swabe, pictured right at 6 weeks, was born on 5 December 2023, the firstborn daughter of Vai and Zachary Swabe.



Frederick (Freddie) Michael Thomas Lewis, pictured far right at 5 days old, was born on 31 January 2024, the firstborn son of Kerry Fitzgerald and Max Lewis.



Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families

The next Drop-Ins for asylum-seeker families are on **Sunday 10 March and Sunday 14 April from 2.00–4.00pm.**

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

In addition to a call-out for new volunteers for the Sunday sessions, Hannah would be most grateful to find volunteers who could make themselves available to help set up the Drop-In on the Saturday before each Sunday session. For the March and April Drop-Ins this means Saturday 9 March and Saturday 13 April. It entails being at the LJS for an hour or so immediately after the Shabbat morning service and Kiddush.

Yom Kippur Appeal 2023/5784

The LJS Yom Kippur Appeal, supporting our selected charities – The Headroom Project, Hackney Doorways and the Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum – has raised the extraordinary sum of £77,858.00. Thank you so much to everyone who was able to make a donation.

Progressive Judaism Project

LJS member Karen Newman, Chair of Liberal Judaism (LJ), says that LJS members would be most welcome to contact her about LJ or progress on the Progressive Judaism project at k.newman@liberaljudaism.org. Members will be interested to know that Progressive Judaism now has its own website: <https://pathtoprogressivejudaism.org.uk/>

Claude Montefiore by Bryan Diamond

The well-attended launch of LJS Member Bryan Diamond's new book on Claude Montefiore took place, fittingly, in the Montefiore Hall at the LJS on 20 January. Bryan explained why he chose to write this book, which turned out to be a considerable undertaking requiring much research. In addition to two most interesting talks by Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein and Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton outlining the book's contents, the audience had the opportunity to hear a recording of Claude Montefiore, offering a further insight into the man who played such a key role in Liberal Judaism in this country. To purchase a copy of Bryan's book: www.bryandiamond.co.uk

Bereavements

We offer our sympathy to those who mourn:

Ann Bensusan, wife of Larry and sister of Marsha

David Bucks, father of Michael, Romola and Richard

Malcolm Godfrey, husband of Barbara and father of Jenny, Richard and the late Claire

Clifford Stossel, husband of Kathleen and father of Louisa and Hilary

We also extend our sympathy to LJS member Ralph Cohen and his family on the death of Ralph and Jill's father **Desmond Cohen**.

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

Forthcoming Events at the LJS

Purim

Saturday 23 March at 6.45pm

There will be a reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther) on Erev Purim, Saturday 23 March, to which everyone is invited. This will be followed, at 7.30pm, by a special evening of entertainment, 'Comedy and Connection', for people in their 30s and 40s. To book: <https://bitly.ws/3dXxN>

Communal Seder

Tuesday 23 April at 6.30pm

Members, Friends and guests, including children, are warmly invited to book for this stimulating and enjoyable evening on the second night of Pesach.

Tickets include a flavourful Israeli-style supper with desserts, wine and soft drinks, and all the foods of the Seder plate: <https://bitly.ws/3dXx2>

Erev 7th Night Pesach – Talk by Lord Alf Dubs

Sunday 28 April at 4.30pm

As we approach the last day of Passover, everyone is invited to a special tea with delicious Pesachdik (suitable for Pesach) refreshments at 4.30pm in the Montefiore Hall.

Tea will be followed by a talk by Lord Alf Dubs at 5.00pm. We are honoured to have such a distinguished speaker who will talk on the topic of 'Refugees, past and present, and looking to the future'. This aligns with the subject of freedom, key to the festival of Pesach. In his talk, Lord Dubs will encompass the Kindertransport – of which he has personal experience – as well as recent refugee policies, and he will consider how we can achieve a fairer, more compassionate approach in future.



Kabbalat Torah (KT) Service

Saturday 4 May at 11.00am

The Kabbalat Torah service for this year's KT students will take place during the Shabbat morning service on Saturday 4 May.

Memorial Service for the Loss of a Child

Sunday 19 May at 3.00pm

If you would like to mark the loss of a child or the loss of the prospect of a child, a recent loss or one that has stayed with you for many years, please do join us for this memorial service, led jointly by the Rabbis of the LJS, West London Synagogue and Oaks Lane Reform Synagogue. The service will be followed by a home-made tea.

For more details, or if you would like a confidential conversation, please contact Rabbi Alexandra Wright (a.wright@ljs.com or 07976 930112).

Czech Scrolls Service and Music Celebration

Saturday 18 May at 11.00am

At this Shabbat morning service we will mark the 60th anniversary of the arrival in the UK of the 1564 scrolls which came from the Czech village of Moravské Budějovice. These include the small scroll which is housed at the LJS. This will be a very significant occasion with guests including the Czech Ambassador. Special music will be played, including the complete version of Toby Young's setting of the Torah service, commissioned by the LJS, some of which was premiered at *The Human Spirit* concert at the LJS last March.

Shavuot Celebrations

Tuesday 11 June at 6.45pm

The service at 6.45pm will be followed by a buffet supper, our annual cheesecake competition and Tikkun Leyl Shavuot (study sessions). The Shacharit (morning service) will be at 11.00am on Wednesday 12 June.

Honouring Rabbi John Rayner

Monday 8 July 9.30am – 4.00pm

Please save the date for this conference being held in honour of our highly esteemed and much loved late Senior Rabbi, John Rayner CBE, to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth. In the morning there will be five short lectures from special guests, followed by lunch. The afternoon will be taken up with participative discussion groups.

LJS Tour to Lithuania

23–28 July 2024

The LJS has recently been building links with the small Progressive Jewish Community in Vilnius called Bnei Maskilim, and we invite you to join an LJS communal visit there in July, accompanied by Rabbi Igor Zinkov. We will meet with the Community and be led on a fascinating 5-day tour of the country by Viljamas Žitkauskas, who is both a top professional tour guide and a leader of the Bnei Maskilim Community.



The Bnei Maskilim Community

The trip is being planned by LJS member Sue Bolsom. LJS Members and LJS Friends have priority booking until the end of March. Please visit: www.ljs.org/event/lithuaniatour2024

Tour itinerary

Tuesday 23 July: Arrival in Vilnius, the ‘Lithuanian Jerusalem’

Wednesday 24 July: Vilnius

Vilnius was once a major centre of Jewish learning, but the Jewish community was largely destroyed in World War II. Walking around the medieval Jewish Quarter and the Big Ghetto, we will hear tales of resistance, suffering, partisans, and of impossible choices. We will also see the Nazi-installed Jewish Council office, the hiding places created in cellars, and hear how the Ghetto theatre became the seat of spiritual resistance. We will visit the Choral Synagogue, the only synagogue to survive the war and built in 1903 in Moorish-Romanesque style, and we will take in the Tolerance Centre, a Jewish State museum.



The Choral Synagogue of Vilnius

Thursday 25 July: Kaunas

On the way to Kaunas, Lithuania’s second largest city, we will stop at a typical shtetl, Žiežmariai, to learn about shtetl life and visit the recently renovated wooden synagogue. Then on to the cobbled old town of Kaunas with its Catholic churches, narrow streets, cosy cafés and art galleries. We will walk along the main pedestrian street, Laisvės alėja, its low-rise buildings looking as they did before the war. Then we will drive through Slobodka (now called Vilijampolė), a Jewish neighbourhood dating back to 1500, to view the famous Slobodka Yeshiva, and on to the History Museum followed by the Memorial of the Ninth Fort, where the Nazis and their collaborators killed over 50,000 people, mostly Jews.

Friday 26 July: To Ponar & Trakai – Erev Shabbat

A morning drive will take us to Ponar forest and the Holocaust Memorial built on the extermination site of 100,000 people, of which 70,000 were Jews. This will be followed by a tour of Trakai – the land of lakes and forests. Then on to the ancient capital and residence of Grand Dukes of Lithuania with its 14th-century island castle which is now the Museum of Lithuanian History. We will visit the Karaite Museum and the cemetery to look at the history of this small ethnic Jewish group, originally from Crimea some 600 years earlier.



Trakai Island Castle

We prepare for Shabbat, Kabbalat Shabbat and a meal with Bnei Maskilim community members at the Jewish Community Centre.

Saturday 27 July: Shabbat & Walking in Vilnius

Morning service and kiddush at the Tarbut Gimnazija, now the Jewish Community Centre building. We then go walking in the streets of Vilnius Old Town to the music school where violinist Jascha Heifetz studied, the ORT school building, the former Yiddish theatre, the Rabbis’ Council and the location of Theodor Herzl’s 1903 visit. We will also see the Benedictine convent where Jews were hidden and saved, Vilnius’s Ghetto streets and the site of the Great Synagogue.

Sunday 28 July: Ponevezh & Ukmergė

A morning drive to Ponevezh, Lithuania’s fifth city, famous for the Ponevezh Yeshiva which we will visit, along with the cemetery and a number of other Jewish landmarks. We will continue on to Ukmergė, now called Vilkomir, to see the city centre with the remains of the Great Synagogue, which was turned into a sports hall by the Soviet regime.

Council Report

Benita Hart, our Chair of Council, summarises key points from the January and February meetings.



As 2024 has come galloping in, your Council has picked up several batons with gusto. Our three-year Strategic Plan consolidates the myriad workings of this amazing synagogue, enabling us to

plan, build and work to achieve the targets we set ourselves. It is a substantial body of work, one which is regularly reviewed, and for which all the contributing committees, groups and individuals should be congratulated. Our Strategic Plan can be read here: [LJS Strategic Plan 2022–2024 – The Liberal Jewish Synagogue](#)

Now that we are in the final year of our current Strategic Plan, we are using it as a foundation for the next one. As we build on the brainstorming and plans made at last year's Awayday, our next Strategic Plan will concentrate on the growth of membership, and on the improvements, communications and events needed to support our very special community.

To underpin and sustain this growth, a few specific core projects are being researched and discussed, most notably the appointment of a further rabbi to support our current wonderful rabbinic team; the membership and fees of younger people up to the age of 30; and the possibility of introducing burial fees within the membership fee structure to certain age groups.

The Board of Deputies 'Adopt A Hostage' initiative was accepted and acted upon with gratitude for providing a symbol and an action on which we could focus. The anger, pain and despair we each feel at the seemingly never-ending crisis in Israel and Gaza continues to haunt so many of our lives.

Security levels were reviewed as we noted that elsewhere a return to pre-7 October levels has been considered. However, Council has decided that the number of security guards on Shabbat will not be reduced for some time to

come. All other new security measures such as pre-registration for all events will continue in perpetuity. Increased security needs for other events will continue to be assessed on an individual basis.

We were truly delighted to welcome Rabbi Igor back from his sabbatical/paternity leave, and are already so enjoying having him involved in discussions, in planning and in our services. His return in January precipitated a discussion and agreement that we return to the pre-Covid arrangement that only one rabbi need be in attendance on Friday nights, particularly as we now have good technical support.

Natasha Forde, our caretaker, has also returned to work, and we are thoroughly enjoying her return as well. David Ashley, who has worked at the LJS Pound Lane Cemetery for the past 33 years, announced his retirement. He will be missed for his diligence and the care he has taken in his work, and we wish him well for his retirement.

A recently formed group reporting on LJS properties informed Council that the newly built flats by the Cemetery are nearing completion, and will add to the income of the synagogue in years to come. Other property news, but not our own, is that Lord's Cricket Ground will begin a large rebuilding of the Tavern and Allen stands at the end of September this year. This huge project is expected to last for 3–4 years. The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) has launched an extensive consultation with neighbouring residences and with the LJS. Jonathan Bruck, LJS Executive Director, has been involved from the start and is successfully ensuring a minimum of disturbance on Shabbat and, hopefully, none on the High Holy Days. We will continue to maintain a close relationship with the MCC in an effort to maintain this, and are very grateful for their goodwill thus far and Jonathan's fine attention to detail!

Benita Hart,
Chair of Council

Community

The Bereavement Coffee Group

The Bereavement Coffee Group (BCG) meets regularly at the LJS. We are a mixed group of people who come together to sit and chat. Nobody is afraid to vent their feelings. We cry, laugh or just sit and listen to other people's stories. No pressure to respond or contribute. The topics range from practical problems to coping with grief and loneliness. Our wonderful LJS volunteers offer us gentle guidance with tea and sympathy. Our next meetings will take place on **Tuesday 5 March** and **Wednesday 1 May** at 11.00am. Please just come along or contact Aviva for more information: a.shafritz@ljs.org or telephone 020 7286 5181.

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 **19 March** and **16 April**. Please call the office on 020 7286 5181 to let us know if you are coming.

The Out & About Club

The Out & About Club is a non-denominational club for elderly disabled people which meets at the LJS every first and third Tuesday of the month in the evening. It is a social club, and we organise regular talks, musical evenings and outings. Contact Sonia Leanse or Jenny Nathan via the LJS office on 020 7286 5181.

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 14 March: *Yellow Face* by R. F. Kuang

Thursday 11 April: *The History of Love* by Nicole Kraus

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

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:

27 March: *The Glenn Miller Story*

24 April: *Miss Potter*

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.

What is True Freedom?

As we approach the festival of Pesach, Rabbi Igor considers the meaning of freedom.



Every festival has the potential to be an educational tool for posing important questions and inspiring people to improve themselves. In this sense, Passover is a time to reflect on the concept of freedom.

Like many ancient festivals, it has multiple layers of meaning. On an agricultural level, it marks the harvest season. On a spiritual level, it commemorates the Exodus from Egypt and the liberation from slavery. To fully grasp the idea of freedom, one must examine this story in a broader context. What occurred after the Exodus? The Revelation on Mount Sinai and the receiving of the Decalogue.

How is the idea of freedom connected to receiving the Ten Commandments? Jewish thought linked these ideas and concluded that the liberation from Egypt became purposeful only after the Israelites took on responsibility for their own law at Sinai.

Judaism teaches us that true freedom is realised only when we willingly adhere to certain standards of behaviour and action. These standards are not solely determined by the individual, but by a set of rules and principles that govern our society. In essence, the greater the amount of freedom we possess, the greater the level of responsibility we must assume.

In his 1959 book *The Insecurity of Freedom*, Abraham Joshua Heschel expresses a profound understanding of freedom. While freedom has immense potential to improve people's lives, it is inherently unstable and demands constant effort to sustain and safeguard. Heschel expresses the idea that true freedom is not individual. It must transcend self-centredness and align with good, requiring responsibility and sacrifice:

'The Bible is an answer to the question, What does God require of man? But to modern man, this question is suppressed by another one, namely, What does man demand of God? Modern man continues to ponder: What will I get out of life? What escapes his attention is the fundamental, yet forgotten question, What will life get out of me?*' Absorbed in the struggle for the emancipation of the individual we have concentrated our attention upon the idea of human rights and overlooked the importance of human obligations.'

** Note: Today we would expect these ideas to be expressed in gender neutral language.*

The right and privilege of being free is inseparable from a set of responsibilities. Later in the text, Heschel concludes that true freedom 'presupposes the capacity for sacrifice'. In other words, a slave has no freedom and is never put in a position of self-sacrifice. In contrast, a free person must constantly balance the needs of others and personal interests. The main question should not be 'What can I get from this world?' but 'What can this world get from me?'

We live in a world where we want everything to be done quickly and without much effort. Fast delivery of goods and the availability of everything at the click of a button have made our lives easier, but there are many things in human life that cannot be solved quickly or with such ease. The Jewish calendar teaches us an important lesson through the questions that Pesach asks us. To truly celebrate the festival of liberation, we must also accept law, order, and responsibility. We must work towards changing and improving the world, and always strive to live with decency, responsibility and integrity as our guiding principles. In the words of Heschel, again from *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 'Magnificent synagogues are not enough if they mean a petrified Judaism. Nor will the stirrings of creative life in the land of Israel find any echo if brilliance is held more important than warmth.'

Understanding the emotional impact of the conflict in Israel and Gaza

Aviva Shafritz, our Community Care Co-ordinator, shares some learning on this difficult but important topic.



Since 7 October I have been struggling with much distress, anxiety and depression as the war in Israel and Gaza continues, especially as I have close family in Israel. I know that my strong emotions are shared by many of you.

At the Limmud festival last December I attended sessions given by Talya Greene, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at University College London, who spoke about different aspects of mental health in times of war and trauma. Talya grew up in the Progressive Jewish community in London, lived in Israel for 17 years, returning to the UK in 2022, and is well placed to understand the often very different Israeli and Anglo-Jewish perspectives on the present conflict. No, Talya's wise words didn't take away my distress, but they did give me a much better understanding of what I, we and the population of Israel have been experiencing; what is sadly a 'normal' response to a traumatic event, what can help, and when a person may need specific psychiatric treatment.

I'd like to share something of what I learned.

Talya outlined the concept of **moral injury**, which has been described as the profound psychological distress that can arise after perpetrating, failing to prevent or witnessing events that transgress an individual's moral and ethical code.

To illustrate this, Talya explained how the terrible events of 7 October – which can be likened to a pogrom – in the communities on the Gaza border were a trauma for the whole of Israel. Soldiers and first responders who arrived in the area were often unable to protect and save the lives of the families living there, and saw unspeakable evidence of the slaughter. Not only was this deeply distressing and frightening, but it undermined their core values that they were trained to protect people and save lives.

For most of Israel's Jewish population there is a sense of betrayal of the belief that the government and the military will keep families safe in their homes, that Israel's very existence means that pogroms are a matter of history and no longer possible. This undermining of core beliefs is defined as moral injury.

Here is another example: many of those living in the communities on the Gaza border were actively committed to pursuing peace with the Palestinians. Those who survived experienced first-hand the ghastly brutality of Hamas members. Their deeply held values were violated on 7 October. Talya described a recent survey which showed that some of the survivors, amazingly, remained committed to pursuing peace, others said that they couldn't do this at present, while others said that they could no longer believe in this.

Among those who suffer moral injury, many will be able to move on with support and with time, but some will require treatment from mental health professionals to find a way through (about which another whole article could be written ...).

Talya also spoke of the current **dissonance** between many Jews living here and Jews in Israel, something I have experienced. While sadly, at the time of writing, I see no solution to the situation in Israel-Gaza, I am concerned about the plight of the civilian population in Gaza. This concern is not generally shared by friends in Israel, people who would usually share my perceptions. The trauma and grief resulting from 7 October, the unbearable plight of the hostages and the risk to life of soldiers who are fighting, affects everyone and leaves even the most peace-loving citizens without the emotional capacity to care about those suffering in Gaza. Others are understandably very angry with Hamas and are not able to feel compassion for the civilians there. This dissonance we experience is distressing, but helpful to acknowledge in these dark times.

Aviva Shafritz
4 February 2024

The Jews of Geneva

Following her articles about the Jews of Marrakesh and of Cairo, LJS Member Anna Palmer tells us about the Jewish community in Geneva, an area with which she has a strong connection.



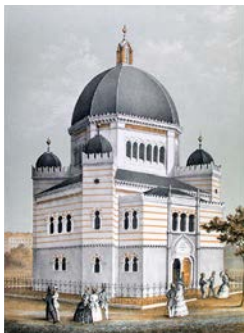
Having grown up in neighbouring Haute-Savoie, I have experienced the Jewish presence in Geneva as a constant in my life. I decided, however, to revisit this city with the eyes of an outsider, and to look afresh at various

resources to rediscover the history and traditions of this community.

The Jewish presence in Geneva dates from 1428 when it was concentrated around the Place du Grand-Mézel in the Old Town. This makes it the oldest closed Jewish quarter in Europe, having been established 88 years before the Venice ghetto. The Old Town is situated on a small hill, with the shopping streets on one side and the University and cultural buildings on the other. It is now the heart of tourist Geneva.

Whilst the community was expelled from the city in 1490 and forbidden to stay there until the 19th century, it was re-established with a strong foothold by Alsatian Jews. Their presence was consolidated in 1852 when the community was offered a plot of land by the city to build a synagogue as a sign of its tolerance toward non-Protestant minorities.

Coming down 200 metres from the Grand-Mézel in the Old Town, you will now find the Beth Yaakov synagogue standing largely as it was designed by Jean-Henri Bachofen in 1857. Combining eastern style with Polish characteristics, it features a grey and pink-striped facade, four crenelated turrets crowned by domes, and a central dome topped with the Tablets of the Law. The interior is predominantly light blue, while the



stained-glass windows and panelling add to the vividness of the colours.

The Jewish community grew around this synagogue to approximately 1,100, aided considerably in the 19th and early 20th centuries by the need to fill the lecture halls of the University of Geneva, originally established by Jean Calvin in 1559. The University opened itself to women (a radical move at the time) and to those escaping the 19th century political upheavals in Eastern Europe. Jews from the East, often from very modest backgrounds, were welcomed warmly and eventually came to make up more than half of the students in Geneva. Among them were Lina Stern, a world specialist in the brain and the first woman professor at the University. Chaim Weizmann, the future first president of Israel, taught chemistry there; indeed it was in Geneva that Weizmann was one of the key figures who developed the idea of what would become the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The final quarter of the 20th century saw a renaissance of the community, now numbering around 8,000, and created the shape and form which I have come to know during my life. With Mediterranean Jews growing to become the majority, the Hekhal Haness synagogue was built in 1970 to serve the Sephardic Jewish community. The impressive Community Centre was established to house the Jewish main library, rich in several high quality scientific and artistic collections, to organise cultural events, and to provide a kosher restaurant.

However, it was the community known as the GIL formed by Rabbi François Garai, that has had perhaps the greatest recent impact on the Jewish life in the city. It started in a private house with fifteen people for a celebration of Purim and led to the creation on 7 December 1970 of the Groupe Israélite Libérale which became the Communauté Israélite Libérale de Genève. Since then, the growth of GIL has been rapid, and today numbers over 800 families and 1250 members with regular attendance of 100+ (900+ for High Holy Days) and approximately

20 B'nai Mitzvah each year. Interestingly, it was the first synagogue in the French-speaking world to have girls read the Torah during their Bat Mitzvah. Its community life is strong with 120 children in its young person's preparation classes called Talmud Torah, and with regular classes for adults, GIL-NET – a group for young adults, as well as community dinners and regular cultural activities.

The GIL practises a traditional approach to Judaism rooted in the written (the Torah and Bible) and oral (rabbinic) traditions, and believes strongly in equality – the founding families of the GIL vowed to ensure its financial stability with no request for any special recognition in exchange. There are no reserved spaces, no special advantages and no special honours resulting from a financial contribution. The GIL collaborates with many Jewish institutions, locally as well as nationally – the Platform of Liberal Jews in Switzerland, and Jewish representation with the Federal authorities – and also internationally, including the French-speaking Federation of Liberal Judaism, the European Union for Progressive Judaism and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The GIL is also involved in inter-religious discussions.

With this growth a different home was needed for the GIL, and a new building, situated on Route de Chêne in the affluent inner suburb of Chêne Bougerie, was inaugurated in 2010 integrating all activities under the same roof. The building is rich in symbols. Its shape evokes the shofar, and its casing of concrete and glass recalls the Ten Commandments. On the street side, the concrete is pierced with five narrow openings (because the light of God dazzles) which represent the first five commandments defining the relationship of human beings to God. On the courtyard side, the entirely glazed surface evokes the transparency and openness of the last five commandments (symbolised by five metal uprights)



which define relationships with others. The facade bears a large menorah.

Inside, the synagogue has a ceiling of seven bays which represent the seven days of the week. The assembly is seated in a semi-circle in front of the ark in the shape of ה, the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, symbolically associated with the breath of life and the name of God. Its dimensions, 248 × 365 cm, when added together to make 613, convey the number of mitzvot present in the Torah. The room is pierced at its top with horizontal openings which crown the room with light.



As an occasional guest of the community, I can affirm to the power of the building and the vibrancy of the community that meets there. The mix of languages – French, English, Italian and Swiss-German – together with the cosmopolitan feel match contemporary Geneva with its rich culture, internationalism and strong foundation in the traditions of the past. Indeed, this could be considered an exemplary description for modern Judaism.

Study with us

As an occasionally wandering Jew visiting other communities and traditions, it is clear to me that using study to create a bridge between the past and matters of today is a tradition that is treasured everywhere I go. Here in London at the LJS we have a sparkling class, 'Learning with Texts' (see page 14), where we aim to uphold this tradition every Saturday at 9.45am. Do come and join us before the service or online.

Link to class: <https://www.ljs.org/education-adults.html>



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.

If you have any questions, such as which Hebrew class is the right level for you, or whether a class is online, in person or hybrid, please email: education@ljs.org and one of the staff will respond in writing or give you a call back.

If you would like to sign up for a course, please click: <http://tinyurl.com/5hbb22r8> for the registration form or contact education@ljs.org. Please note that registration is online only.

Courses are free for Members and Friends who have paid membership of the LJS. For non-members, termly fees are £120.00.

Purim (Spring) term classes (continued from January)

Tuesday mornings 11.15am – 12.30pm

Tuesday Conversations

This friendly group is led by Rabbis Alexandra Wright and Igor Zinkov, and Dr Dov Softi, with the occasional guest speaker. Biblical and rabbinic texts as well as modern poetry and short stories are studied, and there are also sessions on Jewish art and music. New students are always welcome.

Tuesday afternoons 4.00 – 5.00pm; repeated 5.45 – 6.45pm

Understanding the Geography of the Torah

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

This course focuses on understanding the structure of the five books of the Torah.

The class will have the opportunity to examine key Torah portions, adhering to the weekly Torah portions which are read at the LJS. Students will read the Torah portions, understand their meaning, and be able to see them in light of the bigger picture of the Torah.

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

Please note that the course is held at 4.00pm and repeated at 5.45pm to help ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to attend.

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 2023. 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 follow the book *Prayerbook Hebrew the Easy Way* (available for purchase from the LJS) which focuses on understanding biblical and siddur (prayerbook) Hebrew. Participants also read key Torah portions to increase their understanding of the Bible as well as their Hebrew vocabulary. 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 looking at the Book of Ruth. Your reading is guided and at your own pace, and 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 and Bible, and life-cycle events.

Tricks, Tests and Tears in the Story of Joseph

Tutor: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

When Joseph's brothers appear before him, they still do not recognise the younger brother they sold into slavery seventeen years earlier. He tests them to find out whether or not they have changed since they threw him into an empty pit. The build-up to the reconciliation is beautifully conceived. If you read Hebrew (even slowly) and want to build up vocabulary and a little bit of grammar, please join us for our rich discussion around the nuances of this story.

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. In addition to offering knowledge of Judaism, the course encourages practical experiences of Liberal Judaism and space for reflection within the group.

Tuesday evenings 8.10 – 9.25pm

NEW short course on 5, 12, 19 and 26 March

Taste of Mussar

Tutor: Rabbi Monique Mayer

This new online course will introduce you to the Jewish wisdom of Mussar, a treasured body of teachings and practices that provides distinctively Jewish answers to the questions we all ask about life. Mussar guides you in identifying your unique, personal path of spiritual growth, and offers practices to assist you on your journey. Two character traits (*middot*) will be studied: humility (*anavah*) and enthusiasm (*z'rizut*).

The course will be facilitated by Rabbi Monique Mayer of the Bristol & West Progressive Jewish Congregation.



Wednesday evenings 7.00 – 8.00pm

Classical Hebrew for Elementary Level Students

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

This is a fun and supportive class for students who have completed a year of Beginners' Hebrew or can already read a little Hebrew but would like to learn more. We explore the texts that are the cornerstones of the Jewish year.

NEW course starting 14 March

Thursday evenings 6.00 – 7.00pm

Classical Hebrew for Absolute Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

Susannah is starting a new online course from Thursday 14 March for Absolute Beginners.

If you know absolutely nothing about reading Hebrew but want to learn, this class is for you. Using Jonathan Romain's *Signs and Wonders* (available for purchase from the LJS), this class will enable you to unlock the mystery of the Hebrew letters and start reading. Absolutely no previous experience is required, just regular attendance of this friendly and supportive class.

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: Harriett Goldenberg

The theme for the term is 'Who is a Jew?', and asks what it is to be Jewish.

The classes are led by the Rabbis and lay members of the class, and will cover a range of ideas including *The Invention of Jews* by Shlomo Sands and the Legal Status of being Jewish, as seen through the British Courts.

For a full timetable with a list of subjects and class leaders, please contact Harriett Goldenberg: hgoldenberg@btinternet.com.

We welcome new members.

Understanding Biblical Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

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

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

The LJS Chavruta

What is Chavruta?

Chavruta, which means 'companionship', is the study among small groups to uncover the meaning of specific texts. In doing so, we hope that our students gain a greater understanding of the passages and can apply it to their own lives. In studying together this way, long-standing friendships are often formed between study companions. The original concept has been adapted by Rabbi Igor Zinkov into a modern format for LJS Members and Friends. The LJS Chavruta encourages intriguing debates on applying traditional texts to our own lives using many of the different influences in our society, such as modern and classical literature, poetry, and music.

How it works

All participants are split into groups of 3–5 people. Each month, you receive a few texts and questions for study companions to discuss. Meetings can be virtual or in person and last for around an hour. For safeguarding reasons, in-person meetings can only be held at the LJS. There is no need to read texts or prepare anything in advance. The texts will be read and discussed during the session at a convenient time for each group. Conversations are not limited to the study sheet and questions provided, and discussion into other areas, texts and topics is encouraged. After the first two sessions, each group will have a feedback session with Rabbi Igor, and participants can continue studying within the same group, or join up with other study companions.

The LJS Chavruta Registration Form

The LJS Chavruta is only available to Members and Friends of the LJS. The registration form helps us to match you to your best study companion. Please

only provide as much information as you would like. The aim is to make Chavruta rewarding and enjoyable for everyone taking part.

Click here to register: <https://tinyurl.com/ljschavruta>



The Israel Abrahams Library

The Israel Abrahams Library at the LJS has over 6,000 books of Jewish interest covering prayer books, Bible commentaries, history, biography, philosophy, studies on Judaism and comparative religion, and books on Israel, art, sociology and literature. The library regularly buys new books. There is also a collection of DVDs including Israeli films, and some periodicals.

Please note we now have an online catalogue: <https://www.librarything.com/catalog/LJSynagogue>

The link is on the LJS website www.ljs.org (under About Us/The LJS/Our library). To search the catalogue, go to 'Books' and make sure you are in 'All collections'; then at the right, in the box 'Search this library', enter the author or title required, and press Enter on the computer.

Rimon Corner

Rimon Head Teacher Susannah Alexander recounts Aviv (Spring) term activities up to half-term, and looks ahead to the rest of the term.

The first half of our Aviv term has been as busy as ever. We have celebrated four B'nei Mitzvah, welcomed several new students, and started a brand new online Hebrew class led by Dr Dov Softi to give additional support to students in classes Vav and Zayin (Years 6 and 7). We are also delighted that Tiny Tots has relaunched under the expert leadership of Gina Kane. Tiny Tots will now take place on the first Shabbat of every month in the downstairs crèche. All children aged 4 and under are warmly welcome for stories, songs, games and activities.

27 January was a particularly important day for us as it marked both our celebrations of Tu BiSh'vat and our commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day. Our primary school classes celebrated the former, the New Year for Trees, with magnificent fruit platters prepared by Rimon parents (*pictured*), to whom we offer our thanks. The young students also enjoyed tree-themed activities including painting, singing songs about trees, dancing and crafts.



In preparation for their forthcoming visit to Prague (see page 1), our senior students enjoyed a visit from Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein, who shared memories of the city and showed our students pictures of some of the sights they would likely see. Afterwards, students were able to discuss the recent film *One Life*, which tells of the life-saving work of Nicholas Winton when he rescued Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in the weeks leading up to the Second World War. Students were due to have an opportunity to visit the Winton statue in Prague, and on their return, to meet actress Henrietta Garden, who played the adult Vera Gissing in the film.

In the next half of term, we are looking forward to celebrating three more B'nei Mitzvah, enjoying a Friday night supper for B'nei Mitzvah families, coming together for our L'Dor va-Dor service, and of course our fabulous, fun Purim celebrations.

If your child is not already part of Rimon and would like to join us, please email Lindsay at education@ljs.org to arrange a free trial visit.

We wish these young members of the LJS a very happy birthday in March and April.

March

Lola Altschuler
Isaiah Baum Appignanesi
Lawrence Bresnark
Angel Desmond
Rebecca Forster
Kitt Frankel
Gabriel Grade
Samuel Grainger
Matilde Hockley Lester
Noah Jones
Eric Lach Stein
Sofia Lach Stein
Eve Livingston-Sarner
Clementine Maller
Ellie Matthews
Daisy Nahum
Quincy Newman
Emily Roth
Jacob Rushbrook
Cy Solomons
Sebastian Wasserberg

February

Joshua Dreyer
Juno East
Wilfred Ginsberg
Emily Gruber
Clementine Klich Martin
Ava Rosenthal
Baxter Spurr
Edie Spurr
Emilia Stonehill
Thomas Stonehill
Zetta Tombs
Joshua Turner
Lilybella Ullmann
Tom Wald
Lara Wicks

JVN Awards to Ann, Bob and Maria!

The whole LJS community is delighted to learn of the awards given to three LJS Members at the Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) annual Volunteering Awards ceremony held at The Grove in Hertfordshire on Sunday 14 January.

To a standing ovation of around 400 people, **Ann and Bob Kirk** (pictured with Gaby Lazarus on the left and Benita Hart on the right) received a very particular accolade – that of Outstanding Lifetime Achievement. To appreciate just what an honour this is, it means that of the 19 Lifetime Achievement awards presented that day, each one significant in its own right, Ann and Bob's award was selected from all of them as the year's Outstanding Lifetime Achievement. They were recognised for their 'service, dedication, love and loyalty'. For over 70 years they have worked tirelessly as volunteers, and their special award could not be better deserved.



In receiving a Volunteer of the Year award, **Maria Snider** (pictured) is honoured for her magnificent volunteering contribution to the community. We are so pleased her work has been recognised publicly in this way.



Heartfelt congratulations to Ann, Bob and Maria – you are an inspiration to us all!

The full story of Ann, Bob and Maria's volunteer journeys can be read in the January/February 2024 edition of LJS News.

Tell us the story of your name!

LJS News invites Members and Friends to tell us about your name – your first name(s), family name and/or Hebrew name – or even a nickname. Please say in a few sentences something about your name, or perhaps the name of one of your forbears, and tell us how it is connected with your Jewish identity.

Please send your contributions to newsletter@ljs.org by Sunday 28 April 2024. We look forward to hearing from you!

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

In line with LJS policy, the paper which LJS News is printed on is recycled.

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The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

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Registered office:
28 St John's Wood Road
London NW8 7HA
Tel 020 7286 5181

Linked to Typetalk
Email ljs@ljs.org
Website www.ljs.org

Senior Rabbi

Alexandra Wright

Rabbi

Igor Zinkov

Scholar in Residence

Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton

President

Rita Adler

Chair of Council

Benita Hart

Vice-Chair of Council

Gaby Lazarus

Executive Director

Jonathan Bruck

Director of Music

Cathy Heller Jones

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Martin Sanders-Hewett

Nursery Head Teacher

Caroline Villiers

Rimon Rabbi

Elana Dellal

Rimon Head Teacher

Susannah Alexander

Community Care Co-ordinator

Aviva Shafritz

LJS News Team

Editor: Judith King
Designers: George and Nick Newton

In case of bereavement:

In office hours, call 020 7432 1298
At other times, call 020 8958 2112
(Calo's)