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Sh'vat/Adar 5780

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

LJS
NEWS



Rabbi Michael Marmor and Avi Dabush at the AGM of the British Friends of Rabbis for Human Rights

At the AGM of the British Friends of Rabbis for Human Rights held in December, the LJS welcomed Rabbi Michael Marmor, Chairman of Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) Israel, and its Executive Director, Avi Dabush.

Addressing an intent audience, Rabbi Marmor spoke frankly about RHR's commitment to Jewish values and human rights – 'They do not stand apart from each other', he said. 'Israel', he added, 'is in the grip of a fascinating, exhausting conversation with itself. Is it to be a place of vulture capitalism or a place of social democracy?'

Avi Dabush, whose parents came from Syria and Libya, spoke of his desire for peace with those countries and the work of RHR with Jews, Arabs, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Bedouin communities. He appealed to those present to support the work of RHR in creating a Promised Land, built on human rights and dignity for all Israel's citizens and for her closest neighbour.

Rabbi Alexandra Wright

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Report from the Board of Deputies: Prince Charles pays tribute to the Jewish Community



© Board of Deputies



Around 400 people gathered at Buckingham Palace on 5 December for a pre-*Chanukkah* reception organised by the Prince of Wales to celebrate the UK Jewish community's contribution to British life. The LJS was well represented; Rabbi Alexandra Wright was invited in her own capacity, and was presented to the Prince, and LJS Deputies were also present. His Royal Highness paid his own tribute in his speech, saying, 'I have grown up being deeply touched by the fact that British synagogues have, for centuries, remembered my Family in your weekly prayers. And as you remember my Family, so we too remember and celebrate you. I am thinking not just of the most prominent members of our Jewish community who, through the ages, have literally transformed this country for the better. I am thinking also, crucially, of those who are not household names, but who are the cornerstones of their own local communities.'

Karen Newman

Bereavements We extend our sympathy to those who mourn:

Michael Asher husband of Conna and father of Andrew and Gavin

Leonard Frank Colvin husband of Eva and father of Brian, Michael, Antony, Peter and the late Jeanette

Jennifer Frankel mother of Tanya and Karen, and sister of Victor

Hella Gordon sister of Irith, and aunt of Ami and Vita

Ben Hooberman father of Lucy and Matthew

Robert Levy husband of Sheila and father of Katherine and Michael

Council and all Members and Friends of the LJS extend our sympathy to Rabbi Neil Janes, Rabbi at the LJS 2011-2015, on the death of his father, Paul (Justin) Janes.

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



Raficq Abdulla

We report the sad news of the death of Raficq Abdulla who received an MBE for his interfaith work. Raficq had a longstanding relationship with the Jewish community, which included working alongside both the late Rabbi David Goldberg and Rabbi Alexandra Wright. His most recent visit to the LJS was last September for a discussion of the book he had recently co-authored, 'Understanding *Sharia*'. We say farewell to an inspiring man and a dear friend.

Shabbat services: February to early March

Friday evening services are at 6.45pm. *Shabbat* morning services are at 11.00am unless otherwise stated.

DATE	RABBI/SPEAKER AND NOTES	
Friday 31 January	Alexandra Wright	<i>Koleinu</i> -style service followed by a <i>chavurah</i> supper – please bring vegetarian or sweet food to share
Shabbat 1 February Bo	Susan Morris	Mental Health Awareness <i>Shabbat</i> The service will be followed by an informal lunch, question and answer and discussion with Susan Morris and others (see page 6)
Friday 7 February	Elana Dellal	
Shabbat 8 February B'Shallach	Alexandra Wright	
Friday 14 February	Susannah Alexander	
Shabbat 15 February Yitro	Rachel Benjamin	<i>Rimon</i> half term Special 'green' <i>Kiddush</i> to mark the festival of <i>Tu Bi'Sh'vat</i> (New Year for Trees), which begins evening 9 February; our <i>Tu Bi'Sh'vat Seder</i> is 8.00pm 11 February
Friday 21 February	Alexandra Wright	
Shabbat 22 February Mishpatim/Shekalim	Alexandra Wright	9.45-10.30am meeting with Rabbi Frank Dabba-Smith and discussion about the LJS's forthcoming trip to Jordan and Israel with EcoPeace (see page 7 for details) 1.15 pm Nosh 'n' Drosh with Maggie and William Carver on Licoricia of Winchester (see page 14) <i>Rimon</i> half term
Friday 28 February	Elana Dellal	Service co-led by <i>Bat Mitzvah</i> Astrid Cohen
Shabbat 29 February Terumah	Elana Dellal	<i>Bat Mitzvah</i> Astrid Cohen Celebration of Albert Herskovits's leap-year birthday
Friday 6 March	Alexandra Wright	Service followed by a <i>chavurah</i> supper – please bring vegetarian or sweet food to share
Shabbat 7 March T'tzavveh/Zachor	<i>L'Dor va-Dor</i> service led by <i>Rimon</i> students and their families with Rabbi Elana Dellal	A <i>Koleinu</i> service will also take place in the John Rayner Prayer Room with Rabbi Alexandra Wright

Shabbat morning services are streamed live via the internet. If you would like to follow a service on your computer or tablet, please phone the LJS office to get your user name and password.

Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families

The next LJS Drop-Ins for asylum-seeker families will be on Sunday 9 February and Sunday 8 March from 2.00pm-4.00pm. Volunteers are asked to arrive at 1.00pm to help set up.

The next four dates (the second Sunday in the month apart from April) are: 19 April, 10 May, 14 June and 12 July. Volunteers are also needed from 5.00pm on Thursday 6 February and Thursday 5 March, and on the other Thursdays immediately prior to the Drop-In dates to sort clothes.

Social Action

Harriett Goldenberg brings us the latest news

In the autumn we announced our focus on food poverty and food sustainability, and that continues. We are supporting Sufra, a local food bank, and encourage members to make contributions of dry goods to the yellow wheelie bin in the corner of the foyer whenever they visit the synagogue.

Plans are developing for a Festival Day to be held at UCL Academy, a local secondary school, on 20 February. This is an LJS initiative in partnership with the Academy, the English Literacy Society, and a restaurateur supportive of this cause. The day is geared towards young people who may struggle during the school holidays, and is a pilot for more frequent intervention during the summer holidays.

Anyone who would like to be involved practically or through sponsorship should contact me at hgoldenberg@btinternet.com.

We will shortly begin our monthly teas at The Avenues, one of the few remaining youth clubs in London. The LJS began its relationship with The Avenues back in 2018 when it was one of the recipients of our High Holy Day Appeal.

Before all that comes the festival of *Tu Bi'Sh'vat*, the New Year for Trees, which is a wonderful focus for our ecological concerns. This year on 15 February, the *Shabbat* following *Tu Bi'Sh'vat*, we will be holding a green *Kiddush*. We hope to see you there, and for us to think together about the implications.

World AIDS Day at the LJS

On 29 November our community hosted a World AIDS Day service organised by LGBT+ group and Beit Klal Yisrael (BKY). I had the honour of co-leading the service with Rabbi Mark Solomon and Student Rabbi Anna Posner. Our special guest speaker, Sir Nicholas Hytner, theatre director, film director, and film producer, gave a frank and outspoken address during the service – apparently (and I quote him) his first ‘solo gig’ on a *bimah* since his *Bar Mitzvah*!

Nick Hytner spoke about what it means to be gay and Jewish, and that only theatre has given him a sense of community where he could be himself. ‘Theatre’ he explained, ‘has been a magnet for Jews, and also, of course, a magnet for anyone whose sexual or gender identity doesn’t conform to the expectations of the majority.’ He told us how actors, Jews and the LGBT+ community have a shared advantage in the arts: all are outsiders who are able simultaneously to look from the outside in, and to understand what’s going on from the inside out.

A famous religious principle is to treat others as we’d like to be treated ourselves. Nick Hytner



l-r: Jennifer Lennard, Anna Posner, Mark Solomon, Igor Zinkov, Nicholas Hytner, David Rubin

pointed out that this requirement was particularly pertinent on World AIDS Day whose 2019 theme was ‘Communities Make the Difference’. This service made me realise how important it is for a synagogue to be a welcoming and non-judgemental space, to treat others as we’d like to be treated ourselves, and how valuable it is for people to be allowed to be themselves in the safe space of a synagogue.

Igor Zinkov, December 2019

'Make, Think, Imagine'

Bernie Bulkin previews a Jewish Book Week event at King's Place

Bernie Bulkin, author of the recently published *Solving Chemistry*, is chairing a session at Jewish Book Week at 11am on Sunday 1 March on John Browne's book *Make, Think, Imagine: Engineering the Future of Civilization*. Here Bernie gives us a preview of this fascinating book.

When Lord Browne set out to write a book about engineering, its current state and to some extent its history, he interviewed more than a hundred leading engineers, architects, historians and philosophers, and then wove their comments into a narrative which also includes his own reactions to what they said, contradictions that emerged, and some predictions for the future.

Everyone will learn something from the resulting book. It does not require any technical knowledge, but it does have a lot to say about the issues that we face, and how we might solve them. At the same time, the book is intentionally provocative.

In effect it asserts that engineering has saved more lives than medicine, and continues to offer potential for harnessing science for the public good. John Browne promotes the view that automation, artificial intelligence, and other current advances will not lead to mass unemployment, but rather open up the possibility for new and different jobs; nor does he feel that humans will lose control to robots. There are also chapters on engineering for energy and military needs, and how these have benefitted society.

John Browne loves to interact with audiences, and doubtless the session will end with a robust Q&A session.



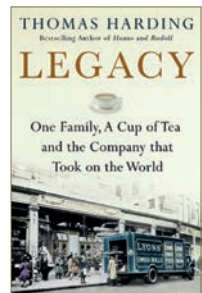
Please see page 12 for other Jewish Book Week events.

Library News

Bryan Diamond finds LJS connections in a highly regarded new book

Thomas Harding's recently published book, *Legacy: One Family, A Cup of Tea and The Company that Took On the World* describes how the Gluckstein and Salmon families ran J. Lyons Co. which dominated British mass catering in the first half of the 20th century. There is much about Montague (Monte) who was its Chairman from 1917. Harding recounts how he joined the LJS from its founding in 1911 and that he enjoyed Rabbi Mattuck's sermons. He joined the Council in 1913, then chaired the Building Committee to find the present site. He arranged for the gate (recently re-opened) between the LJS and adjacent Orthodox cemeteries. His move to a Liberal congregation caused discord with the other Glucksteins and the Salmon family who attended the Bayswater Synagogue.

The account of Monte's funeral in 1921 describes how the hearse was followed by a cortège of sixty cars. Monte had decided to be buried next to the brick wall, close to burials of his brothers and sisters in the United Synagogue cemetery. Women of the family did not attend the burial in case their sobs interrupted the solemnity of the ceremony! Sir Louis Gluckstein (LJS President 1944-1979) is mentioned for his speech in April 1933 at the Board of Deputies in favour of a boycott of Germany.



Forthcoming Events

Mental Health Awareness Shabbat 'In Pursuit of Good Mental Health'

with guest speaker Susan Morris
Saturday 1 February at 11.00am

The service will be followed by an informal lunch, Q and A session, and discussion with our guest speaker, Susan Morris, together with the LJS's Community Care Co-ordinator, Aviva Shafritz, and representatives from Jami, the mental health service for the Jewish community.

Susan Morris has personal experience of severe mental health issues. Her passion is to work with others to shed more light on mental health issues, to facilitate understanding, remove stigma, and help individuals receive effective treatment.

Please contact the office if you are planning to stay for lunch: rabbispa@ljs.org or 020 7432 1283.

Film Club at the LJS

Israeli films in Hebrew with English subtitles.
Wednesday 12 February at 7.00pm for 7.30pm

Sipur Ahava Eretz Yisraeli –
An Israeli Love Story (2017)
Directed by Dan Wolman

To mark Valentine's Day, we are screening an Israeli love story. The year is 1947. An 18-year-old Margalit meets and falls in love with 24-year-old Eli Ben Zvi. Their love story is played out during the dramatic events preceding the birth of the state of Israel.



**Drinks and popcorn served from 7.00pm;
screening 7.30pm - 9.00pm; post-film discussion.**
No charge for admission but a contribution
towards costs would be appreciated.

For further information please contact Cristina Galisi at cristina@galisi.com or to register please email rabbispa@ljs.org or call 020 7432 1283. Our next film screening is Wednesday 29 April.

**Films are presented with the kind support of
West London Synagogue.**

SAVE THE DATES

Tu Bi'Sh'vat Seder

Tuesday 11 February at 8.00pm

The LJS will be marking *Tu Bi'Sh'vat* (New Year for Trees) with a special *Seder*. Details will be announced in your *Shalom LJS* email.

Purim celebrations

Evening of Monday 9 March

Please save the date for our *Purim* celebrations, details of which will be announced shortly.



Communal Baby Blessing Shabbat 14 March at 12.00pm

It is now ten years since we held our first communal naming and blessing service for children at the LJS. Since then, many of the children who were named in February 2010 have entered *Rimon* and have even reached *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Our fourth communal naming and blessing will take place at the *Shabbat* morning service on 14 March. As usual, Tiny Tots will start at 11.00am, and the naming and blessing ceremony will take place in the Sanctuary at approximately 12.00pm.

If you missed the opportunity to arrange a naming and blessing specifically for your child, then please contact rabbispa@ljs.org or call 020 7432 1283 to participate in the communal service. You will need a form to register your child and choose a Hebrew name. For more information and/or help with choosing a Hebrew name, please contact one of the rabbis via the contact details above. There is no upper age limit, and all children are eligible to be called up to be blessed and given their Hebrew name.

Community News

Congratulations to Dr Peter Englander OBE

We are delighted to announce that LJS member Peter Englander has been awarded an OBE by the Queen in her New Year Honours list for his charitable and philanthropic work.

This special award reflects many decades of Peter's commitment to helping the underprivileged, whether personally or through the foundations he has been instrumental in launching. The Apax Foundation, which Peter established and continues to co-chair, is the channel for Apax Partners' corporate charitable giving round the world.

Peter was a founding non-executive director and later non-executive chairman of Bridges Fund Management, a social impact investment firm. Having personally contributed to the initial



funding, he has continued to offer invaluable support and advice as the business has developed.

Twenty years ago Peter also established a family charitable trust with the mission of providing opportunities for disadvantaged individuals to fulfil their potential. The recipients of funds are wide-ranging. Assistance is mostly focused on young people, including refugees, the disabled, those with learning

disabilities or with mental health problems. The trust also addresses issues such as poverty and homelessness, and supports education programmes.

Many of us already know Peter to be a force for good and a man of great integrity. He couldn't be more deserving of this special award. We offer him and his family a heartfelt *mazel tov!*

Sunday 25 October to Sunday 1 November 2020

A Liberal Jewish Synagogue Journey with EcoPeace

Crossing the Jordan River: Water Scarcity and Environmental Peacemaking

with Rabbi Alexandra Wright & Rabbi Frank Dabba Smith

Flying into Amman, journeying down the Jordan valley and returning from Tel Aviv, we will be looking at projects involving Israel and her neighbours in water management, desert ecology and peace initiatives. This community trip is over the UK Autumn school half term and accompanied children post-*Bar/Batmitzvah* (13+) and young adults are very welcome. Now booking, full details from SueBolsom@gmail.com. Numbers are limited by the available accommodation.



Saturday 22 February 2020

Trip presentation 9.45am-10.30am in the Montefiore Hall

with Rabbi Frank Dabba Smith of the EcoPeace Middle East International Advisory Committee and Rabbi Alexandra Wright – all welcome

Trees as ‘wondrous healers’

The origins and significance of *Tu Bi’Sh’vat*, the New Year for Trees



Where did the idea of *Tu Bi’Sh’vat* (the New Year for Trees) come from? One might imagine that a festival that marks the turning point of the year from winter into spring, when most of the year’s rains have already fallen in Israel and the first fruit appears on trees, goes back to the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible). After all, the land of Israel, its trees, flora and fauna, if not central protagonists, at least provide a rich and diverse landscape to the history of our people:

For the Eternal One your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey... (Deuteronomy 8:7-8)

There are myriad descriptions and references to trees in the pages of the Hebrew Bible: we read of the trees planted in the Garden of Eden; Abraham’s planting of a tamarisk tree as he and Abimelech, the king of Gerar, conclude their collaborative treaty negotiations; the gathering of palm branches and leafy boughs, bound together with willows of the brook and beautiful fruit from an unknown tree at *Sukkot*; the seven species associated with the Land of Israel that include vines, the fig, pomegranate, olive and date palm trees; the aloes and cedar, oak and sycamore and the broom and fir, almond and apple trees, myrtle and plane. All these are rooted in the topography

of the land of Israel. In orchards and gardens, beside streams of water, on mountain sides and in valleys, they take root, leaves unfurling, yielding their fruit in season; birds nest in their branches and the wind whispers through their crowns. Frankincense, balsam and myrrh are made from their resin; spikenard and cinnamon from their roots and bark.

No less a figure than King Solomon discourses about trees, ‘from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall’; while Jeremiah accuses the people of turning to trees to acknowledge them as creators of life, saying to wood, ‘You are my father’ and to stone, ‘You gave birth to me’ (*Jeremiah 2:27*). What must have been the power and beauty of these lofty specimens!

And Joel, the prophet of an unknown age, weeps for the days that are to come – days of havoc and catastrophe when the seeds have shrivelled, the granaries are desolate, the barns in ruins. This is a lament, too, for our own times as we witness the ‘wondrous healers’ of the earth scorched and consumed, while native animals and birds, insects and millions of living creatures that make trees their homes have been burnt in months of bushland fires in Australia and destroyed in the Amazon rainforest.

*‘To You, O Eternal One, I call.
For scorching heat has consumed
The pastures in the wilderness,
And flames have devoured
All the trees of the countryside.’*
(*Joel 1:19*).

In times of war, in sieges against cities, the *Torah* forbids a ‘scorched earth policy’ – only trees that do not provide food may be cut down if necessary and used for military purposes. No axe is to be wielded against a city’s fruit trees, for ‘Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?’ (*Deuteronomy 20.19*)

Where among these hundreds of references to trees in the Bible is there any mention of *Tu Bi’Sh’vat* – a



day for planting trees, acknowledging the rising of the sap, a glimpse of springtime at the most bleak moment of the year?

Not until the age of the *Mishnah* in the early part of the third century CE do we find this reference:

The first of Sh'vat is the New Year for trees, according to the words of Beit Shammai. Beit Hillel says: on the fifteenth of that month. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1)

Along with three other dates that mark three different New Years, including the first day of *Tishri* (*Rosh Hashanah*), the schools of Shammai and Hillel cannot agree which date should be commemorated as the New Year for Trees. Shammai argues for the first day of the month of *Sh'vat*; Hillel for the full moon on the fifteenth.

It was Hillel, of course, whose argument for the 15th day of *Sh'vat* won, but *Tu Bi'Sh'vat* didn't only have seasonal significance. It was also linked to the *mitzvah* of tithing – the setting aside of agricultural produce, fruit or livestock for the Levitical priests, the stranger, the orphan and widow, so that these families, living in the community but without hereditary land and without protection, could come and eat their fill.

In the centuries after the exile from Israel, *Tu Bi'Sh'vat* was a day to commemorate our connection with the land and was marked by eating fruit associated with *Eretz Yisrael*, particularly almonds, as the almond tree was believed to be the first to blossom of all the trees in Israel.

In the sixteenth century, the Kabbalists introduced the *Tu Bi'Sh'vat Seder*, modelled on the *Pesach Seder*, with four cups of wine and fifteen different kinds of fruit. The four cups of wine are linked to the seasons: white wine for winter, to which is added a drop of red wine for spring, darker rosé for summer and deep red for autumn. The fifteen different kinds of fruit correspond to the date of the festival, 15th *Sh'vat*, and also to the first two letters of God's name – *yod* and *heh* – the numerical value of which is fifteen. The whole ritual of the *Seder* is a spiritual journey through the mystical idea of 'four worlds', from the lowest of physical action to the highest of 'emanation', the realm of divine will, where the thought of creation first arises.

Trees embody the great value that Judaism places on all plant and animal life. As we plant trees during our lives to offset our carbon footprint, I wonder whether it is time to reconsider how we can return our bodies to the earth in more sustainable and natural ways, beneath a tree or marked by a bush or shrub, a place where plants and flowers can flourish, instead of laying a stone. The availability of woodland burials in areas throughout the country has made some of us ask whether it might be possible to turn part of our own cemetery in Willesden into a space for environmentally-friendly woodland burials and allow the earth to take care of our bodies, as it has done throughout human history.

Alexandra Wright



The Learning Circle

Adult education classes at the LJS

Purim term classes

Tuesday morning and evening classes run until 31 March with a break for half term on 18 February.

TUESDAY MORNINGS 11.15am-12.30pm

TUESDAY TEXTS

This friendly group is led by our rabbis. We study biblical and rabbinic texts, modern poetry and short stories, and enjoy sessions on Jewish art and music. The starting point is always a text or painting, whether ancient or modern, but the class is based around discussion on a variety of different topics. New students are always welcome.

TUESDAY EVENINGS 7.00-8.00pm

Classical and Prayer-Book Hebrew for Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

Have you tried to get your head around Hebrew letters for years and never quite achieved success? If so, join this fun and supportive class where we use a tried-and-tested method to get you reading faster than you thought possible. Beginning with Jonathan Romain's *Signs and Wonders*, we move on to a taste of grammar, liturgy and the Bible.

Next Steps in Prayer-Book Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Sally Gold

This class will help you to improve your understanding and confidence in prayer-book Hebrew. At the same time we will be learning the Hebrew of the *Tanakh* (Bible). You will be on the path towards greater enjoyment and participation in synagogue services. We practise reading simple Hebrew, building your reading skills and knowledge of vocabulary and grammar at an unhurried pace.

Reading the Psalms in Hebrew

Tutor: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

The Psalms are intensely personal songs of praise, lament and yearning. Many are familiar to us – ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...’; ‘I will lift up mine eyes to the hills...’ Some are read or sung in our Friday evening, *Shabbat* morning or festival liturgies. But how are they constructed, how do they sound in Hebrew, and what are they really saying? Join a class for Hebrew readers (at any pace that is comfortable for you) which will help you with your reading and understanding, and open up one of the most beautiful books in the Bible in its original language.

TUESDAY EVENINGS 8.00-9.00pm

Exploring Judaism

Tutored by our rabbis, Exploring Judaism is for people, including non-Jewish family members, who wish to know more about Judaism or who would like to brush up on their Hebrew knowledge. It is also an essential programme of instruction for people choosing Judaism by conversion. Class members are encouraged to read the materials made available online during the year. In addition to offering knowledge of Judaism, the course encourages practical experiences of Liberal Judaism and space for reflection within the group. Resources can be found on: www.ljsexploringjudaism.wordpress.com

Exploring Judaism Purim term 2020

4 February:

Life Cycle: End of Life, Funeral and Mourning

11 February:

Exploring *Tu Bi'Sh'vat* and *Seder*

18 February:

No session – half term

25 February:

Exploring *Purim*

Note: The evening of Monday 9 March students will attend the *Erev Purim* service. There is no class on Tuesday 10 March.

17 March:

Exploring *Shabbat*

24 March:

Exploring God and Belief

31 March:

Pesach and the Counting of the *Omer*

New Tuesday evening course for Purim Term!

The LJS in conjunction with the London Society for Jews and Christians:

The Gospels and Rabbinic Judaism

A six-week course inspired by Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton and Father Gordian Marshall's study guide of the same title

The course will be held on six Tuesday evenings during March and May from 8.00pm – 9.00pm.

This course aims to explore common themes or texts in Judaism and Christianity in order to learn about both faiths and to enhance our understanding of our own faith.

17 March: The Great Commandment

24 March: The Synagogue

31 March: The Parable and the *Mashal*

5 May: *Shabbat*

12 May: Divorce

19 May: Who can forgive?

This course is free to LJS Members and Friends, and to Members of The London Society of Jews and Christians; the cost to Non-Members is £10.00 per session.

To register, please email education@ljs.org or call 020 7432 1284.



SHABBAT MORNINGS 9.45-10.45am

Shabbat morning classes run until 28 March with a break for half term on 15 and 22 February

Beginners' Hebrew

Tutor: Naomi Brightwell

This class uses Jonathan Romain's *Signs and Wonders* to help absolute beginners decode Hebrew. Classes include a little bit of grammar and vocabulary, the structure of the liturgy, plenty of off-topic conversations on Jewish food, and anything else that helps us have fun while learning. No previous knowledge is required. Former students have even gone on to lead *Shabbat* morning services!

Moving Up in Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

The aim of this class is to allow students to begin to understand the Hebrew prayers and songs used in services. Those joining the class will need basic reading skills, and we will spend some time each week increasing reading fluency. We will look at the basics of Hebrew grammar using the textbook *Prayer Book Hebrew the Easy Way* (available for purchase £27.00). We will build up your vocabulary and there will be five words a week to learn. We will also start learning how to write Hebrew letters using simplified versions of the block letters we use in the *Siddur*.

Intermediate Hebrew

Tutor: Nitza Spiro

The aim of this class is to allow students to explore different Hebrew texts which they will come across in synagogue services on *Shabbatot* and festivals – from the morning blessings of the *Tefillah* to the Books of Ruth and Esther, and much more. The class will work on increasing fluency in reading, but at the same time we will also explore the historical, ethical, philosophical and ideological messages of the texts.

Continued over...

Exploring the Book of *Koheleth* (Ecclesiastes)

Facilitator: Michael Romain

'To everything there is a season and a time for purpose under heaven... A time to be born, and a time to die.' In these study sessions we unravel the secrets of the Book of *Koheleth* in the Hebrew Bible. Is this a book of profound faith and realism, or is its author a cynical individual who thinks that all there is to life is to eat, drink and to enjoy oneself, for tomorrow we die? Our rabbis and other teachers will guide us through different aspects of this twelve-chapter book.

If you would like to know more about the content of these classes or are wondering whether it's for you, please contact Michael Romain: romain@netgates.co.uk

Calling all Bar/Bat Mitzvah parents and grandparents!

How can you best help your son or daughter prepare for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah? The LJS runs classes on Tuesday evenings and *Shabbat* mornings designed to help you learn how to decode the letters and vowels so that you can listen to your child and ensure they are reading correctly. If you are already a reader, there are classes at a range of levels to help you brush up your Hebrew. Do make the most of the wonderful resources on offer.

Hebrew and Yiddish lessons with Spiro Ark



For details of lesson times and charges, please visit www.spiroark.org/classes or contact Spiro Ark on 020 7794 4655 or at: education@spiroark.org

Full details of all LJS adult education courses can be found in The Learning Circle brochure: download your copy from www.ljs.org and click on Learning.



JEWISH BOOK WEEK

Jewish Book Week runs 29 February to 8 March principally at King's Place, with some events at JW3. It is an outstanding festival with a wonderful line-up of speakers and performers who inform and entertain us, and who ignite our interest in new ideas.

On page 5 you can find Bernie Bulkin's article on the session he is chairing which discusses *Make, Think, Imagine: Engineering the Future of Civilisation*. There are a number of other Jewish Book Week events with LJS connections, including the following: on Tuesday 3 March at 7.00pm Michael Grade is interviewing the Israeli author and filmmaker, Ori Elon; on Thursday 5 March at 8.30pm, Simon Wallfisch, the wonderful baritone who sings in the LJS choir, is performing in a celebration of the life of Irving Berlin called 'There's no Business like Show Business'; on Sunday 8 March at 2.00pm tribute is paid to the life of Al Alvarez together with the lives of two former LJS members, the late Elaine Feinstein and Clive Sinclair.



The Parisian Novels (The Yellow Books) by Vincent van Gogh
(Image licensed by Bridgeman Education)

Trip to Ethiopia

Michael Romain shares his experience of travelling to meet with Jews of Ethiopia

Last November I joined the Jewish Renaissance trip to Ethiopia as a representative of the charity Meketa, of which I am a trustee. The purpose of the charity, co-founded by Hila Bram and LJS member Rabbi Sybil Sheridan, is to give assistance to the Jewish community in Gondar.

The two-week trip covered some of the most important tourist sites in Addis Ababa and to the north of the country. We visited the ancient city of Axum, the wonderful rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the source of the Nile at Lake Tana and the port on its south shore, Bahir Dar, as well as a trip to the Simien Mountains. We also spent time in Addis Ababa where we visited the Ethnological Museum.

All these places would be covered by most groups touring the northern part of the country. What was different for us, though, was that being a Jewish group we had a special focus which was to visit the Jews in the town of Gondar and in Addis Ababa. We attended the Friday night service in the synagogue in Gondar. To be in the middle of Africa in a converted shed with a mud floor reading prayers with which we are so familiar was a most moving experience. The Friday night meal which followed the service was a highlight of the tour. This was held in the local hotel with our group, other American and Israeli visitors, Israeli volunteers and staff employed by our charity.



Meketa is not concerned with the process of helping Ethiopian Jews make *aliyah*. What we are trying to do is give the Jewish community the support they need in Ethiopia. The way we do this includes creating opportunities in business, providing education through the after-school clubs which we run, and generally trying to enable members of the community to improve their prospects in life.

There are two aspects relating to Ethiopian Jews which are of particular interest to me. One is how and when Jews actually got to Ethiopia. Did they travel directly from the Holy Land or from Babylon after the destruction of the Temple? If they did make this direct journey, which I believe is very likely, does that mean there are ways to maintain Judaism other than through the rabbinic tradition? The way in which Orthodox Judaism developed in the Diaspora would have passed them by, which in turn demonstrates that there are different ways of becoming and staying Jewish.

The second issue is the oft-raised question as to how do we know that they are Jewish? As a progressive Jew, not burdened by strict rules of matrilineal descent, and with our welcoming rabbis, the answer to the question would seem to be that they self-identify. And perhaps that is what they are doing.

If you would like to know more about the charity please do contact me or go to the website: meketa.org.uk. And when you next consider making a foreign trip with a Jewish angle, please put Ethiopia on your list. You will find it both fascinating and rewarding.

Community Events

BRIDGE CLUB

The Bridge Club meets at 2.00pm every Monday (except Jewish and Bank Holidays) and finishes at 5.00pm, with a break for refreshments. The standard of Bridge playing is average, but players should know the basics of the game.

This is as much a social afternoon as a competitive one. Cost is £2.00 per person. We welcome new members. For more details please contact the LJS (020 7286 5181).



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.

RESTAURANT TUESDAY

This informal lunch club, successfully relaunched, is for the more elderly members of the congregation. Everyone is welcome! Join us at 12.45pm on the third Tuesday of the month for a chance to meet and chat and have a delicious meal, hosted by our delightful team of volunteers. We suggest a donation of £6.00. Our next lunch is on **Tuesday 18 February**. Please call the office on 020 7286 5181 to let us know if you are coming.

VIDEO AND TEA

The LJS warmly invites you to this monthly event on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 1.30-4.30pm. Just come along – there's no need to book. Cost is £2.00 for the film and refreshments. Enjoy soup on arrival then a DVD (film classics, musicals, etc) followed by a delicious tea including home-made coffee ice-cream.

We always welcome new volunteer helpers, and would appreciate hearing from you. Please contact the office on 020 7286 5181.

The next three screenings:

26 February: *The 39 Steps*

25 March: *There's No Business Like Show Business*

22 April: *Sully: Miracle on the Hudson*

SINGING FOR THE MIND

Singing for the Mind is open to anyone with memory problems or in the early stages of dementia. We meet once a week, serving tea and biscuits 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.

NOSH 'N' DROSH

Shabbat lunchtimes 1.15-2.15pm

Talks and discussions over a bagel lunch – all welcome; no charge

22 February 2020: William and Maggie Carver will talk about Licoricia of Winchester – the discovery of the life and business interests of one of the most prominent Jewish women of the 13th century.

14 March 2020: Geoffrey Pollard will give a talk on the Jewish revolutionary, Leon Trotsky.

30 May 2020: the life of LJS member Walter Wolfgang, who died last year, will be celebrated by his close friend, Carol Turner.

LOCAL WALKING GROUP

Our next walks will be on **Thursday 13 February** and **Thursday 12 March**, meeting at the LJS at 11.15am. All Members and Friends are welcome. We walk in Regent's Park for an hour or so and aim to end up at a café for coffee or lunch. To find out more, please contact Jody Graham on awithj@gmail.com / 07765 214867 or contact Michael Romain on romain@netgates.co.uk / 07818 000849.

Rimon Corner

Susannah Alexander reports on creative *Midrash* in the classroom

This term *Kittah Vav* (Year 6) has been learning about the five books of the *Chumash* and the stories they contain. One way of gaining more insight into the stories of the *Torah* is to look at the questions they leave unanswered and write a *Midrash* (commentary) to address these questions. The *Midrash* can be in the form of a tale (*Aggadic Midrash*) or a moral lesson (*Homiletic Midrash*). Class *Vav* used both forms, sometimes together, to respond to their favourite stories in the *Torah*. Here are two examples:

The story I have chosen is: The Creation Story (*Parashat B'reishit*)

I chose this story because: It is my favourite story.

My question about the story is: Why did animals start to eat each other?

Midrash:

On the 8th day of life God created the food chain because since animals would reproduce then it would be a natural part of animal culture for balance. But nowadays humans abuse our planet and are upsetting nature.

The story I have chosen is: The Wizard and the Talking Donkey (*Parashat Balak*)

I chose this story because: It has a flaming sword in it.

My question about the story is: What makes Bilam bless the Jews?

Midrash:

When the Angel stopped him, the angel looked into his eyes and made it so that when Bilam went to curse the Jews he blessed them instead. Bilam was probably feeling scared and terrified because Angels were scary and he knew that if God had to cross him then he knew he hadn't done good.

These interpretations have led to some fascinating discussions in class and have encouraged the young people to look deeper into the text and explore its relevance and meaning in relation to issues they encounter in everyday life.



Art can be a form of *Midrash* too. Here's how one young student interpreted the fiery serpents in *Numbers* 21.

We wish these young members of the LJS a very happy birthday in February

Rebekah Allen	Alan Lach Stein
Thea Bendel	Lily Lazarus
Alexander Boizard	Rafa Lewis
Adam Cang	Ariana Malbon-Arvanitakis
Joshua Cang	Jeremy Mencer
Vera Cohen	Clinton Newman
Becky Collett	Jake Phillips
Jason Covey	Jacques Sellier
Tomas Cowley	Gabrielle Sinclair
Layla Grant	Hannah Spearman-Walters
Daniel Isaacson	Daniel Tahar
Erik Klein Wassink	

Tiny Tots

These sessions for little ones between the ages of 0 and 4 with their parents, grandparents or carers are held at 11.00am on Shabbat mornings during term times.

The Nursery is always available for children to play or read on every *Shabbat* with a parent or other carer present.

Email education@ljs.org if you would like to be added to the Tiny Tots email circulation list.

Out and About Club Entertainment and Annual Dinner



Members of the Out and About Club were recently entertained by a performer who wasn't just out and about but also upside down! We had a most original and enjoyable entertainment from Jared Shanks (pictured), grandson of Ken and Jeanne Solomons. Jared is a circus acrobat and performed an amazing sequence of movements to rhythmic music, played a selection of classical music on the piano, and ended the evening with a virtuoso display of juggling.

Club members stepped out in style for our Annual Dinner which, as ever, was a great success. Charles Kessler was warmly welcomed as our new President. The delicious dinner, prepared by Shelley Salter, prompted special requests for her winter coleslaw recipe!

We are always delighted to be joined by clergy from local churches to which our members belong, and this year we were pleased to have as our guest Father Ben Woodley, the newly appointed Priest from the Church of Our Lady, Lisson Grove.

Three birthdays, including that of our chef, Shelley, were celebrated with a cake. All the helpers were thanked for their contribution throughout the year, and we recalled the year's entertainment as well as the annual trip to Worthing. Carole Goldberg drew the raffle, as she has done for many years. With animated conversation between members, guests and synagogue staff, as well as musical entertainment, everyone had a most enjoyable evening. The happy faces said it all!

Sonia Leanse (Co-Chairman)



Alma Magri and Betty O'Reilly at the Annual Dinner

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

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Jo and the late Willie Kessler
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At other times, call 020 8958 2112
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