

November/December 2021
Cheshvan/Kislev/
Tevet 5782

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

LJS NEWS



Photo of Shoah Memorial by Peter Singer

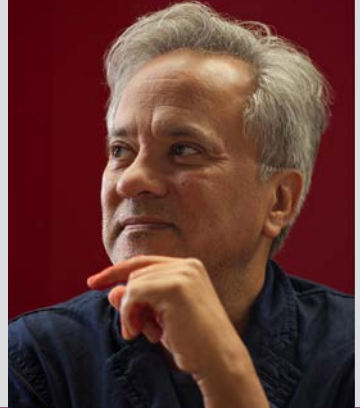


Photo of Anish Kapoor © Jillian Edelman 2012

Remembering Kristallnacht

How does an artist conceptualise and create the unimaginable? At 7.00pm on Tuesday 9 November, the LJS will welcome the artist and sculptor of our Shoah Memorial, Sir Anish Kapoor, to mark the 25th anniversary since the powerful and moving sculpture was commissioned and installed in our front foyer.

Sir Anish will address the congregation and guests as we commemorate Kristallnacht – the Night of Broken Glass – which took place throughout Germany, Austria and Sudetenland on the night of 9 – 10 November 1938.

Rabbi John Rayner (z"l) recalled that on that night, the Berlin sky had a curiously reddish tinge. It was only when he was sent to school as usual the following morning that he learnt that synagogues had been burnt and the windows of Jewish shops and businesses broken, giving rise to the name Kristallnacht, which is now more appropriately called the November Pogrom.

Sir Anish will be introduced by Jeremy Lewison, LJS member and former Director of Collections at Tate. The talk will take place in the Sanctuary and will be preceded by words and music, and will end with the Memorial Prayer and Kaddish. Congregants will have the opportunity to spend time by the Shoah Memorial.

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KRISTALLNACHT COMMEMORATION

with Sir Anish Kapoor
introduced by Jeremy Lewison

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER
7.00 – 8.00pm at the LJS and on Zoom

We mark the anniversary of the dedication service for our Shoah Memorial and commemorate the November Program of 9 November 1938.

THE LJS ANNUAL MULTI-FAITH CHANUKKAH CELEBRATION

with principal guest speaker
Zara Mohammed,
Secretary General of the
Muslim Council of Britain

THURSDAY 2 DECEMBER
4.30 – 5.30pm at the LJS and online

Further details for registering to attend both events or to join on Zoom will be provided in the Shalom LJS weekly email.

Mazal tov!

We are delighted to announce the safe arrival of four new little people in our LJS community:

Aida, born on 18 October 2020, is the daughter and firstborn child of Ella Volkmann and Khaled Hassan. Aida is pictured here aged 10 months.



Twins **Tamara Jacqueline** and **Jasper David** were born 29 May 2021. They are the children of Ally and Alexander Goldsmith and are sister and brother to Otto Jacob, who is already proving to be a very helpful and loving big brother. Tamara (*right*) and Jasper (*left*) are pictured here at 16 weeks with Otto, two months before his third birthday.



Quinn Sarah, born 26 August 2021, is the daughter and firstborn child of Gabrielle Wright and Dylan Shipsey. She is the first grandchild of Rabbi Alexandra Wright, and the first great-grandchild of Rabbi Alex's parents, Susan and Neil Levitt. Quinn is pictured here aged seven weeks.



A hearty mazal tov to all these families.

We also send our warmest congratulations to **Alexandra Trebulova** and **David Weinberg** (*pictured*) and to **Tory Lawson** and **Jack Martin** whose weddings both took place on 29 August 2021.



Bereavements

We offer our sympathy to those who mourn:

Barbara Brandenburger, mother of Simon and Caroline

Sybil Gottlieb, mother of David and Paula

Colette Hawes, mother of Ruth, Jeremy and Michael, and aunt of Susannah Alexander (LJS Rimon Deputy Head Teacher)

Gilly Middleburgh, wife of Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh and mother of Miles and Jonathan

We also extend our sympathy to Aviva Shafritz (LJS Community Care Co-ordinator) and her family on the death of Aviva's mother **Vera Morris**.

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

Shabbat and Festival Services: November and December

Friday evening services are at 6.45pm. Shabbat morning services are at 11.00am. You are welcome to join us in person. Please note that mask-wearing is currently required within the LJS building and that non-members are required to register

at membership@ljs.org for security purposes. Alternatively you can attend online via YouTube/Zoom. This information is correct and in line with government guidelines at the time of going to press, but please refer to Shalom LJS for any updates.

Friday 5 November	Co-led by Bat Mitzvah Eve Spearman-Walters A special blessing to celebrate the first anniversary of the marriage of Abi Berger and John Slade
Shabbat 6 November <i>Tol'dot</i>	EcoShabbat Bat Mitzvah Eve Spearman-Walters
Tuesday 9 November 7.00pm	Kristallnacht commemoration with guest speaker Sir Anish Kapoor, marking the 25th anniversary since the LJS's acquiring of the Shoah Memorial (see announcement on page 2 and articles on pages 1 and 7)
Friday 12 November	Co-led by Bar Mitzvah Michael Josefs
Shabbat 13 November <i>Vayetze</i>	Remembrance Shabbat Bar Mitzvah Michael Josefs
Friday 19 November	Co-led by Bar Mitzvah Eli Wolchover
Shabbat 20 November <i>Vayishlach</i>	Bar Mitzvah Eli Wolchover
Friday 26 November	
Shabbat 27 November <i>Vayeshev</i>	Volunteers' Shabbat – we offer heartfelt thanks to our many volunteers <i>Aufruf</i> to celebrate the forthcoming marriage of Matt Turchin (Rimon Lead) and Avi Green
29 November – 6 December	Chanukkah. The first candle is lit on Sunday 28 November and the eighth candle on Sunday 5 December. Please see Shalom LJS for details of in-person lighting during the week at the LJS.
Thursday 2 December 4.30pm	Multi-Faith Chanukkah Celebration at the LJS with guest speaker Zara Mohammed, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (see announcements on pages 2 and 11)
Friday 3 December	6th Night of Chanukkah. The candles will be lit in the Sanctuary at 6.45pm just before the beginning of the Erev Shabbat service.
Shabbat 4 December <i>Mikkeitz/Chanukkah</i>	L'Dor va-Dor service Elio Parisi Mills, Naming and Blessing
Friday 10 December	
Shabbat 11 December <i>Vayiggash</i>	
Friday 17 December	
Shabbat 18 December <i>Va-y'chi</i>	
Friday 24 December	
Shabbat 25 December <i>Shemot</i>	
Friday 31 December	The online Zoom Kiddush after the service will provide an opportunity for sharing reflections on the past year.
Shabbat 1 January 2022 <i>Va'era</i>	

Council Report

'Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off' (Proverbs, 23:18)



The Council meeting following the High Holy Days was our first hybrid meeting, with most of us joining in person at the LJS building and others online. For those in the building, it was good to be able to meet around the table, appropriately

socially distanced, and to take part in discussions. We hope to develop hybrid meetings, giving people opportunities to join in even if they are not able to come to the LJS itself. As with the services in the sanctuary, our new technology opens up these possibilities.

At this meeting, Council said farewell to Lysa Schwartz, our outgoing Executive Director. We thanked Lysa for all she has done for us; with chocolate cake and a glass of Prosecco, we wished her well for her retirement. (On page 16 of this newsletter, Karen Newman writes of Lysa's achievements over the past four years.)

Jonathan Bruck, the new Executive Director, also attended the meeting and was welcomed. He brings much experience to this post having spent over twenty years in the not-for-profit sector holding positions at Jewish Care, Sport England and the Anne Frank Trust. Council is looking forward to working with him.

This was the beginning of the new Jewish year of 5782 and an appropriate time to review the achievements of the last twelve months, particularly in relation to the goals we set ourselves in our Strategic Plan.

The Rabbis, staff and volunteers were commended for the wonderfully creative hybrid services over the High Holy Days, resulting in over five thousand people worldwide joining online for the Yom Kippur morning service, and many others returning to the sanctuary for the

first time since the Covid pandemic began. The question for Council was how to build on our online presence, while at the same time ensuring that our in-person community continues to return safely and with enjoyment. Resuming coffee before the service and kiddush afterwards are first steps to encouraging people to attend on shabbat morning.

As part of our review of the Strategic Plan, Council discussed education. Rimon, our Religion School, has resumed its classes in the building after more than a year online. Council agreed to consider this further when Rimon has had more time to settle in, and to assess then the numbers attending and any issues there might be.

Underpinning the work we do is the issue of sustainability, and this continues to be a challenge for us. Council discussed the likely end-of-year deficit of £100,000 and ways to reduce it in an age when Members are reluctant, or unable, to pay their full subscriptions. We have several projects in hand, such as the President's Patrons initiative, the building of flats on an unused and unneeded part of our cemetery, and the Covid Appeal which to date has brought in an amazing £85,000. A fund-raising committee has also been established to support efforts to raise income.

Council agreed to revise some of our targets in the light of this review and revisit the Strategic Plan in December.

Step by step the LJS is opening, and Council expressed the hope that the return to the building will continue for services, education and social activities. We have come through difficult times, and although there are problems to be resolved, there is hope for the future.

Sue Head,
Chairman of Council

Community News

Library Donations

The library at the LJS has acquired many new books over the past year. Thanks to a very generous donation from Peter Lantos, we have bought over 50 new books, covering the history and development of Judaism, Bible studies and works of Jewish-themed literature. Additionally, books have been donated by Judith King, Ann and Bob Kirk, Allen Levy and Jenny Stephany.

We are delighted to house books from the library of the late Walter Wolfgang. These are additional copies of books on Liberal Judaism which are much in demand. Each title contains a bookplate in Walter's memory.

All donations are much appreciated.

We will keep you informed about plans for the re-opening of the library.

Sally Van Noorden, Honorary Librarian

Community Care

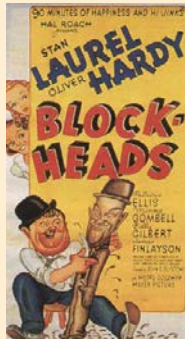
Aviva Shafritz, our Community Care Co-ordinator, is ready to help with difficulties experienced not only by our older members, such as with illness and provision of care, but also across the spectrum of life. You can contact Aviva by email: a.shafritz@ljs.org or by telephone on 020 7286 5181.

Video and Tea

The monthly Video and Tea Group has returned to the LJS to the great pleasure of participants and our dedicated band of volunteers.

Although the sessions usually take place on the fourth Wednesday afternoon of the month, there is a change of plan for the rest of 2021, and there is just one session on **Wednesday 1 December**, when we screen **Block-Heads**. The classic Laurel and Hardy feature film sees Stan left to guard a trench in World War I, only to be discovered – still at his post – twenty years after the war.

No need to book. Doors open 1.30pm for a 2.00pm start. After the film we serve a delicious tea followed by our famous homemade coffee ice-cream. The subscription is still only £2.00. Safety guidelines will be provided nearer the time, including any requirement to wear a mask.



'All That Jazz'

7.00pm on Saturday 6 November at the LJS

'All That Jazz' – an evening of live jazz with LJS member Peter Werth and the Jazz Crew.

Tickets include supper and are £35.00.

Please note there will be a limited number of spaces to ensure we keep safety to the fore.

To apply: <https://allthatjazz2021.eventbrite.co.uk>

THE LIBERAL JEWISH SYNAGOGUE
PRESENTS
**ALL THAT...
JAZZ**

An evening of live jazz with
Peter Werth and the Jazz Crew

- FEATURING -
IRENE SERRA VOCALS | PAUL ELDRIDGE PIANO |
MICHAEL COATES SAXOPHONE | ANDY DAVIES TRUMPET |
GAVIN SCOTT BASS | COLIN OXLEY GUITAR | PETER WERTH DRUMS

Saturday 6th November @ 7pm

28 St John's Wood Road
London NW8 7HA
T: 020 7286 5181

TICKETS £35
including supper

<https://allthatjazz2021.eventbrite.co.uk>

Company No. 0910302. Charity No. 1156292

Reflections on *Leopoldstadt*

LJS member Felicity Davidson tells us about her recent experience of acting in Tom Stoppard's latest play, in which he explores Jewish identity.



Aged just thirteen, I played Thomasina in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, and there started my love of acting. Fast forward to December 2019, when a group of forty or so actors,

producers, director, casting director, the writer and a biographer gathered at the London Welsh Centre for the first run-through of *Leopoldstadt*, following weeks of rehearsals. Waiting in the wings for the denouement, we found ourselves crying whilst listening to the roll call of a family who had perished in the Holocaust. Just as in *Arcadia*, Tom brings the ghosts of the past flooding back into the present on stage. Echoes of his thoughts run through his plays, and this book-ending of plays feels particularly pertinent for me; from Valentine's line in *Arcadia*, 'The future is disorder' to Ludwig in *Leopoldstadt*, describing cat's cradle and that 'Each state came out of the previous one. So there is order underneath. Mathematical order.' Tom manages to capture a timelessness that resonates with your every fibre but which acts as a desperate warning. Due to a Covid case, I found myself going on stage as Rosa, one of the lead characters (see picture above). Waiting in the wings, I heard Leo's line, 'It can't happen again, Nathan!' and thought of the situation in Afghanistan and of all its horrors to come.

Being in a play like this was a dream. We were a cast of twenty-six actors, including a huge number of children, and many characters were only on stage briefly, so we worked as a close ensemble. Having got over a case of imposter syndrome when initially finding myself in this company, I soon found that we relaxed into our family, only to be cut short in our eighth week due to the

pandemic. In the strange void that followed, we re-grouped on Zoom to catch up; and the momentum kept going, and we felt we were really the most fortunate of people to re-open in the West End. Most of the cast returned, and one character even had to be slightly adjusted: whereas in 2020 Eva was on stage with her new-born baby, Nellie, in the second run she was pregnant on stage to allow for the actress's visible bump.

I think the cast and crew have all been changed by this play. A rabbi came in during rehearsals to oversee our Seder scene and help with Hebrew pronunciation appropriate to the era. I didn't know I had a Sephardi accent, nor did I know that Ashkenazi Jews only dipped their parsley once in the salt water. As Rabbi Alexandra Wright put it, the experience of the play awakened 'disquieting questions and curiosity' surrounding our own identity, faith and what it means to be Jewish, and also what that means if one isn't a practising Jew. One of my friends and fellow actors is the granddaughter of a woman who escaped the Nazis and she isn't a practising Jew, which has led to many conversations about her identity and what it all means. Surely this is the sign of a good play: always to question oneself and the world around us.



Scene from *Leopoldstadt* with Leo Roberts playing Young Jacob Photo © Marc Brenner

The LJS Shoah Memorial

LJS News spoke with Bob Kirk about our Shoah Memorial. On 9 November we mark the 25th anniversary of the dedication service for the installation of the sculpture by Sir Anish Kapoor.

There had been no memorial to the victims of the Shoah in the 'old' synagogue. When the new building was being planned, Bob Kirk, as Council member, proposed that this needed to be rectified. Bob served on the Design and Use Committee headed by Neil Levitt, and also chaired the Shoah Memorial Committee. He tells us how the realisation of a Shoah memorial was probably the most difficult assignment he had ever had to deal with.

At the first meeting in April 1989, the criteria were established: beauty, simplicity, dignity and permanence, together with the need for low maintenance. The notion of beauty was itself problematic, because, as Bob points out, how do you represent the Shoah beautifully? He explains, 'We started by inviting six artists to submit proposals, none of which really met the criteria. During the next four years we saw many submissions, some very interesting, but none that commanded spontaneous and unanimous support. Part of the problem lay in the tension between those wanting a very simple memorial (mainly the older element) and those happy to go for something more elaborate.'

A worrying amount of time was passing, and the committee felt they were getting nowhere.

Fortunately, a number of members, the late Vikki Slowe, Jeremy Lewison (then Deputy Keeper of the Modern Collection at the Tate Gallery) and Edward Mendelsohn, together with the late Rabbi David Goldberg, were willing and able to devote much time to the search which eventually led us to Anish (now Sir Anish) Kapoor. Everyone felt that Anish's submission indicated that he clearly understood the meaning of the word *Zachor* – 'Remember'. In his account of this period, Rabbi David Goldberg wrote, 'We went for Anish Kapoor because his concept best combined those elements of spirituality, awe and eternal mystery we wished to convey in a non-representational manner.' It was

only afterwards that the committee discovered that, on his mother's side, Sir Anish is a sixteenth-generation Iraqi Jew – a fitting connection.

The original plan was to paint the inside of the stone black, but while working on the stone, Anish hit on the idea of polishing the interior which entirely transformed the effect. 'Anyone who has stood in front of the memorial will know the almost mystical suggestion of movement and shadow within the black void', Bob tells us. 'The idea of simplicity was also the reason for the inscription, *'We have vowed to remember'*. We started with a quite lengthy text, but decided that this short adaptation of the first line of Avraham Schlonsky's poem *The Oath* might encourage reflection on the question: Whom – and what – are we to remember? This is where the role of education comes in ...'

The dedication of the memorial on 10 November 1996 was a deeply affecting event, with a sermon by Rabbi David Goldberg, a reading by Janet Suzman from Primo Levi's *The Truce*, a short but very moving address by Anish Kapoor, *El Maleh Rachamim* sung by Rabbi Mark Solomon, and a dedication prayer by Rabbi John Rayner, the text of which hangs next to the memorial. Since its installation 25 years ago, a service has been held in the front foyer around the memorial every year to commemorate Kristallnacht, when more than a thousand German, Austrian and Czech synagogues were destroyed and communal buildings, homes and shops vandalised, and the level of persecution of Jews took a savage new turn.



Bob and Ann Kirk by the Shoah Memorial
Photo by Peter Singer

EcoShabbat and COP26

Rabbi Alexandra Wright expresses her thoughts about our stewardship of, and kinship with, the natural world as the LJS holds a special EcoShabbat on 6 November to coincide with COP26.



In November, the United Kingdom will host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. The gathering is known as COP26 – COP standing for Conference of Parties. Many believe that COP26 will be our last and best chance to bring the climate emergency under some control. Floods,

storms and wildfires are intensifying, and their impact, particularly on the homes of impoverished citizens in the global south, is destroying homes and livelihoods.

The LJS will acknowledge the conference with a special EcoShabbat on 6 November, helping to promote awareness of COP26, but also committing ourselves to promoting environmental sustainability and engagement across the Jewish community. We are already part of EcoSynagogue, a cross-communal project that requires synagogues to undertake an audit of their ecological footprint, and we are constantly re-evaluating our organisation on an environmental level, from use of electricity and heating to paper and plastics, as well as in other ways.

In a recent sermon, I argued that the challenge for us today is not only practical. We know how we can mitigate the effects of the climate emergency. The real challenge, I believe, is a theological or philosophical one – it is one of faith.

There are two paradigms of our relationship with nature. One is enshrined in the biblical verse that describes how God placed the first human being in the Garden of Eden, with the purpose of ‘working and keeping it’ (*Genesis 2:15*). Our role is not dominion over the living earth but maintaining our stewardship of it. This often-quoted midrash underlines our sacred obligation to become its trustee:

When the Blessed Holy One created the first human being, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: ‘Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! All that I have created, I created for you. Be careful that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you.’ (Kohélet Rabbah 7:13)

The second paradigm is that of kinship with the earth. Human beings are part of the great procession of natural life, subject to natural instincts, susceptible to pain and suffering, just like other living creatures, and created from the same materials – ‘for dust you are, and to dust you shall return’ (*Genesis 3:19*). As one of my students put it recently, we are all ultimately made from stardust, just like the rest of creation. We share that origin with every substance in the universe; we are intricately connected.

Underpinning these ideas of stewardship and kinship is faith – an acknowledgement that there is something mysterious that lies at the heart of the universe; that science cannot claim its exclusive hold on truth, but must be viewed as a ‘hypothetical and contingent way of describing the physical world’.¹

There is a lack of dialogue and encounter between the scientific and religious worlds, as though they exist in separate silos – both stereotyped as fiercely dogmatic – the secular and the sacred, the physical and abstract. If we could only liberate these two disciplines from their oppressive boundaries, imagine how we might create a new coexistence between them, where each would draw on the wisdom and knowledge of the other, science undergirded by this sense of stewardship and kinship with creation.

The LJS EcoShabbat is at 11.00am on 6 November in person and online.

¹ Jacob Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 11.

A brief guide to lighting your chanukkiyah at home

The first candle should be lit on Sunday evening 28 November.

1 On each night of Chanukkah, place the chanukkiyah where it can be seen clearly, and on the first night place one candle in the holder for the shamash ('servant candle') and the candle for the first night in the holder on the far right.

2 Turn to one of the readings in the Siddur between pages 393 and 401 OR follow the simple service outlined here.

3 Light the shamash and recite this prayer followed by these blessings:

i)

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו
במצותיו, וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה.

*Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu l'hadlik ner
shel Chanukkah.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the Universe, You sanctify us by Your
commandments, and enjoin us to kindle the
Chanukkah lights.

ii)

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשה נסים
לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.

*Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam,
she-asah nissim la'avoteynu ba-yamim ha-hem
u'vaz'man ha-zeh.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the
Universe, You performed wonders for our
ancestors in days of old, at this season.

iii) **First night only**

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקימנו
והגיינו לזמן הזה.

*Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam,
shehecheyanu, v'kiyy'manu, v'higgiyanu laz'man
ha-zeh.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the
Universe: You have kept us alive, sustained us and
enabled us to reach this season.

4 Light the first candle. On subsequent nights insert a new shamash and an additional candle for each night starting at the right-hand side, but always light from left to right.



5 While lighting the candles the following is sung or read:

*Ha-nerot halalu anachnu madlikin al ha-nissim v'al
ha-t'shuot, v'al ha-nifla-ot she-asita la'avoteynu
v'chol shemonat y'mei Chanukkah ha-nerot halalu
kodesh; v'eyn lanu r'shut l'hishtamesh ba-hem, ella
lirotam bilvad, k'dei l'hodot l'shim'cha al nissecha
v'al nifl'otecha v'al y'shuotecha.*

We kindle these lights in remembrance of the
wonderful deliverance You performed for our
ancestors. During all the eight days of Chanukkah
these lights are sacred; we are enjoined not to
use them but only to gaze upon them, so that
their glow may move us to give thanks for Your
wonderful acts of deliverance.

*Ma'oz tzur yeshuati, l'cha na'eh l'shabbeach,
Tikkon beyt t'fillati, v'sham todah n'zabbeach,
L'et tashbit mat'be'ach v'tzar ha-m'nabbeach,
Az egmor b'shir mizmor, chanukkat ha-miz'be'ach.*

Rock of Ages, let our song
Praise Your wondrous saving power,
You amid the raging foes,
Were our safe and sheltering tower.
Furious, they assailed us,
But your arm availed us,
And Your word
Broke their sword
When our own strength failed us.

6 Eat latkes and doughnuts to recall the vial of oil that miraculously burned for eight days in the Temple; play the dreidel game and bet all your chocolate money away; watch the candles burn down.

7 Give tz'dakah (charitable donations) at this time of year when so many are lonely.

Chanukkah Sameach!

Religious Traditions and Meditation

LJS member Geraldine Van Bueren describes how in a range of religious traditions, meditation brings peace.



Many people began meditating during lockdown, seeking inner peace and harmony, and as lockdown restrictions lifted, their intention was to continue with this practice. At both the religious and secular heart of meditation

is a focus on breath, which has had a particular poignancy during the Covid pandemic.

Focusing attention on breathing is common to Hindu and Buddhist practices and to Jewish, Christian, and Sufi traditions. They all offer different meditative techniques, including chanting, meditating on visual artforms, and sitting in silence, alone or in groups.

Religions sometimes focus on their differences in approaches to prayers and worship, but meditation illustrates that there are also significant commonalities.

It is sometime assumed that meditation only exists in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, but meditation is also rooted in the Abrahamic faiths. In Judaism, Abraham Maimonides commented that the biblical prophets ‘did not prophesy at will; rather they focused their minds and sat joyfully and contentedly in a state of meditation’. The ‘river of light’, as Jewish mysticism describes meditation, is when the deepest currents rise to the surface before significant truths emerge – truths about self, the dignity of others, and God. Meditation is a precursor and guide, and not a replacement for action.

In some Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions meditations are focused on prayers or on passages in the Bible or Quran. The Book of Psalms has numerous references to meditation, including in Psalm 19 ‘Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight.’

In Hinduism, as with other religions, meditation or *dhyana*, the journey or movement of the mind, helps control responses and reactions.

Through regular practice, insight is gained into the essential nature of life and the impermanence of bodily existence.

The repeating of a mantra assists in disconnecting from thoughts crowding the brain, allowing the mind to experience a deeper level of awareness. The mind can only concentrate on one object at a time and, if it is concentrating on a mantra, then the mind does not wander.

Meditation is focused contemplation in which the mind and the body are brought together to function as one harmonious whole. According to many religious traditions, as well as secular psychology, you become what you think, and thoughts influence how you live your life. In Hinduism this influences the course of your life here and hereafter. This emphasis on the importance of thought is the reason that the right to freedom of thought is protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The name Buddha is Sanskrit for the enlightened or awakened one, and meditation in Buddhism is the art of fully awakening, leading to enlightenment and spiritual freedom. The principal types of Buddhist meditation include *vipassana*, or insight, and *samatha*, tranquillity.

Both Buddhism and Yogic practice build meditation upon a period of moral and ethical preparation. Meditation is not simply an add-on to life to relieve stress, as with some forms of contemporary mindfulness, although this is valuable. It is the development of a deeper state of mind, which can only grow from living a moral life. According to the Dalai Lama this is circular. First comes morality, then concentrated meditation, and these lead to wisdom, which in turns leads to morality.

A common form of meditation focuses attention and redirects the attention on the area between

the eyebrows, sometimes described in Hinduism as the third eye or *ajna chakra*. This is also a means to silence the mind, with the gaps between thoughts growing wider and deeper.

During meditation both incoming and outgoing thoughts are simply observed in stable silence and with detachment.

Many people associate the traditional lotus cross-legged position with meditation, but the position is intended to be comfortable, allowing the diaphragm to expand to its maximum to benefit from the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. There are also walking meditations. Their essence is the same because, as Mildred Norman, the first woman to walk the Appalachian Trail in one season, and who called herself the Peace Pilgrim, observed 'You are within God. God is within you.'

Although the relationship between science and religion is sometimes erroneously regarded as contradictory, an increasing number of scientific research papers point to the health benefits of meditation. These range from a 2012 study in which meditation may increase the brain's ability to process information, to studies which point to a reduction in blood pressure.

Meditation, whether religious or secular, demonstrates that there can be commonality between the religious and the secular.

© 2021 Professor Emerita Geraldine Van Bueren QC
Queen Mary University of London and Visiting Fellow Kellogg College Oxford

This article was first published in *The Times* on 19 June 2021, and we are grateful to have permission to reproduce it here for *LJS News*.

The LJS Annual Multi-Faith Chanukkah Celebration

'Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit ...' (Proverbs, 23:18)

Open dialogue, shared celebration and curiosity about the faith, culture and philosophies of other communities are crucial and pressing concerns. Over the last ten years, the LJS has opened its doors to ambassadors and politicians, school children, refugee families and representatives of six world religions, as well as our own Members and Friends to celebrate the festival of Chanukkah.

Last year, at our online celebration, we welcomed the Archbishop of Canterbury as our guest speaker, with greetings from representatives of other faiths. This year, on 2 December, we are delighted to announce that our Annual Multi-Faith Chanukkah celebration will be both in person and online, and we are honoured that **Zara Mohammed**

(pictured), **Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)** has agreed to be our guest speaker. She is the first woman and the youngest person to lead the organisation in its history.



Zara was born in Glasgow and studied at the University of Strathclyde where she graduated with an LLB in Human Rights Law. She has previously served as Assistant Secretary General for the MCB and was elected Secretary General in 2021.

We hope that some of the Afghani evacuees who have been living in a hotel in North Westminster since the end of August will join us for our celebration, together with refugee families from Salisbury World (a charity whose mission is to empower refugee and migrant children and families) and pupils from the Swiss Cottage School (a special needs school for 2–19-year-olds) as well as other institutions of learning and faith.

All are welcome, and we are delighted that we can join together in person to celebrate this uplifting and illuminating festival of light, commemorating the re-dedication of the Second Temple in the 2nd century BCE by the Maccabees.

Alexandra Wright



The Learning Circle

Adult education classes at the LJS

Please note that unless classes are specifically stated as being held online, they will be hybrid (both on Zoom and in person). You can check in advance by looking at the LJS website, the weekly Shalom LJS email or by contacting Debi Penhey: education@ljs.org.

TUESDAY MORNINGS 11.15 – 12.30pm

Tuesday Texts

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

TUESDAY EVENINGS 5.45 – 6.45pm

Reading Joshua

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi (on Zoom)

This course aims to increase students' understanding of Biblical Hebrew. The class reads key chapters in the Book of Joshua, and discusses the interactions of the text and how it fits into the Biblical Hebrew canon. We study the grammatical structure of sentences as well as extend our Hebrew vocabulary. The course is suitable for those who can read Hebrew and wish to practise reading as well as discuss the meaning of the text.

TUESDAY EVENINGS 7.00 – 8.00pm

Classical Hebrew for Absolute Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander (on Zoom)

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, £15.00), this class will enable you to unlock the mystery of the Hebrew letters and start reading. Absolutely no previous knowledge is required, just regular attendance of this friendly and supportive class.

Understanding Hebrew Grammar

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi (on Zoom)

The aim of this class is to enable students to understand the Hebrew prayers and songs used in services. Those joining the class will need basic reading skills, and we spend some time each week increasing reading fluency. We look at the basics of Hebrew grammar using the textbook *Prayerbook Hebrew the Easy Way* (available for purchase from the LJS, £34.00) and build up your vocabulary as we go. The class also read key Torah portions to reinforce the basic grammar and to understand the geography of the Torah.

Gaining Confidence in Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Sally Gold

If you can read a little Hebrew, no matter how long ago or how recently, this highly supportive, informal class will help you to gain confidence. Our reading of *Bereishit* (Genesis) is guided and at your own pace, with questions about the language and texts encouraged. As you gain skills and understanding, you will be on the path towards greater enjoyment and participation in synagogue services, using the Siddur, Bible reading and Jewish life cycle, for all of which Hebrew is the key.

Narrative and Counter-Narrative:

The Story of Joseph

Tutor: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

From the very beginning of the story of Joseph, we are aware of an undertow to the plot. Jacob is 'settled' in the land of Canaan, but his 'settled' status is about to be overturned by the loss of his favourite child. His brothers plan to kill him, but then sell him to traffickers, telling their father he has been 'torn to pieces' by a wild animal. Joseph is taken to Egypt, escaping the toxic jealousy of his brothers. But is this where he can flourish, or is there a poignant awareness of his own losses as he experiences years of imprisonment and then a sudden rise to power? The text is studied in Hebrew, and we welcome readers with different levels of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

TUESDAY EVENINGS 8.10 – 9.10pm

Exploring Judaism

Tutor: Rabbi Igor Zinkov

Exploring Judaism is for people, including non-Jewish family members, who wish to know more about Judaism, Jewish history and the Jewish people. It is also an essential programme of instruction for people choosing Judaism by conversion. Class members are encouraged to read materials which will be put online during the year. In addition to offering knowledge of Judaism, the course encourages practical experiences of Liberal Judaism and space for reflection within the group. Resources can be found on: <https://tinyurl.com/ljsexploring>

2 November: Jewish Symbols

9 November: Kristallnacht Remembrance Service

16 November: Exploring Kashrut (Jewish dietary laws)

23 November: Exploring Chanukah

30 November: Jewish History Overview

7 December: Presentations from students

14 December: Synagogue and Home: Home Rituals and Prayers

THURSDAY EVENINGS 6.30 – 7.30pm

Classical Hebrew for Post-Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander (on Zoom)

This is a fun and supportive class which began with Jonathan Romain's *Signs and Wonders*, and has now moved on to grammar, liturgy and the Bible. New students who would like practice in reading and understanding key prayers are also welcome.

The class is a continuation of the Absolute Beginners class that began in March 2021 and will continue until December 2021.

SHABBAT MORNINGS 9.45 – 10.45am

Classical Hebrew for Post-Beginners

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

This course is for those who have some basic familiarity with the Hebrew *alef bet*, and can read simple phrases. In a supportive and friendly environment, you will be taught using

a tried-and-tested method to improve your reading. We use Jonathan Romain's *Signs and Wonders*, study new vocabulary and some basic grammar, and become acquainted with the structure of the liturgy. There are off-topic conversations on Jewish food, and anything else that helps us have fun whilst learning.

The True Image of Female Biblical Characters

Tutor: Nitzza Spiro

In response to student request, our learning this year will revolve around the true characters of women in the Bible, understanding them through sensitive analysis of the texts using linguistics, psychology and history, and making comparisons with ancient Middle Eastern cultures, leading to surprising revelations!

The texts are prepared by participants during the preceding week, reading them in class in Hebrew, but discussing them in English.

Learning with Texts

Facilitator: Michael Romain

This class addresses the question: 'How does Judaism affect my attitude towards ...?' Subjects will include our approach to existential risk, COVID-19, civil disobedience, inequality in society, and social media. Classes will be led by our Rabbis and by members of the class. All are welcome.

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Romain: romain@netgates.co.uk

GCSE Syllabus in Classical Hebrew

Tutor: Dr Dov Softi

The course aims to develop knowledge and understanding of ancient literature, values and society through the study of original texts. Students will follow the syllabus of the GCSE in Classical Hebrew, will read and understand unseen passages of Biblical Hebrew, translate text from unseen passages into English, and understand the grammatical structures of Biblical Hebrew.

This course is suitable for those who can read Hebrew and have some basic Hebrew vocabulary.

Exploring interfaith relations

Tuesday evenings 8.10pm – 9.30pm

Judaism and Islam: A Shared History

with LJS Scholar in Residence, Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton and our guest Muslim lecturer, Dr Harith Ramli from Edge Hill University

7 December: *Pathways to God: Judaism and Islam as Religions of Law* This is an introduction to Halachah and Shari'a.

25 January: *Is every Quran/Torah scroll the same?* This will focus on the drive to establish canonical texts in each faith. We'll explain a little about the parallel vowel systems in Arabic and Hebrew, and which texts are considered definitive.

1 March: *Layers of meaning* This will focus on the different levels of interpretation of scripture available to scholars studying our scriptures.

10 May: *Why we love Jerusalem* We consider Jewish and Muslim traditions and teachings about the holy city.

14 June: *The Jewish Orientalists* In this lecture, the Rabbi Dr David J. Goldberg Memorial Lecture, we investigate the little-known story of the leading Western scholars of, and enthusiasts for, Islam who came from Jewish backgrounds.



New study initiative: LJS Chavruta – Learning with Study Companions

Join in this exciting study opportunity launching in November!

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

Everyone of all ages is welcome to take part. You will be assigned study partners and texts, and your Chavruta group will meet for an hour-long session virtually or in person every month, with the opportunity of staying together or joining other study companions for future sessions.

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

Coming up ... New courses starting in 2022

**Tuesday evenings
7.00 – 8.00pm
from 11 January
Absolute Beginners
Hebrew**

Tutor: Susannah Alexander

**Tuesday evenings
8.10 – 9.15pm
from 11 January
Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah
class**

Tutor: Rabbi Alexandra Wright

This class is for adults who would like to celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah either individually or as part of a group. The sessions will build on existing Hebrew and Jewish knowledge by studying different passages from the Torah, and students will learn how to construct a D'var Torah (their own interpretation of a Torah portion) using the text itself, medieval commentators, midrash and contemporary commentaries.

Rimon Corner

Matt Turchin, Rimon Lead, tells us about Rimon Religion School activities – now back in person after 18 months!

Our new autumn term commenced on 11 September, on Shabbat Shuvah, the intermediate Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and there was much to do. This year Rimon has undergone a restructuring of its schedule, allotting more time for tefillah (prayer) and a rotating schedule of social activities, while cutting back a bit on structured class time. The goal of this has been to re-socialise our students, who have been apart for a long time, through engagement in a variety of activities chosen by them, such as arts and crafts, story time, drama, games, and Hebrew catch-up, all viewed through



a Jewish lens. A core element of these activities is to generate relationships across the years with students of all ages engaged in projects together. These sessions have proved to be very successful, and several of them will rotate each half-term to take into account varying interests and the not inconsiderable skills of our teachers.



On 18 September we worked together to make decorations for our beautiful sukkah in preparation for Sukkot, and the following week each class visited the sukkah to learn about the structure and the meaning of the four species, including the lulav and etrog, which we bless as part of this very important ancient harvest festival.

Most importantly, the halls are now alive with the sound of children's voices as they learn, pray, engage in social activities, and express their joy at being back together in our beautiful building.

We wish these young members of the LJS a very happy birthday in November and December.

November

Allegra Azern
Kaila Brooks
Sam Cooper
Marni Dagtoglou
Floriana Davis
Henry Davis
Harrison Gold
Sidney Gold
Otto Goldsmith
Sidney Gruber
Eden Licht

Alessa Lindblad Hill
Axel Munthe Sforza
Natalie Ohana-Cole
Freddie Price
Melanie Silbiger
Tigist Silbiger
Leora Sternberg
Nina Williams
Seth Williams
Abe Wolchover
Yahel Yaroshevski

December

Manny Baum Appignanesi
Eva Bielawski
Ari Cohen
Beatrice Cohen
Dean Cumerlato
Lyla Cumerlato
Ambrose Davies-Benjamin
Matilda Delijani
Jonah Dellal
Leo Gavshon
Sophie Gold

Arthur Grant
Jazzy Lang
Aubrey Licht
Tara Moran
Alice Osband
Elio Parisi-Mills
Max Phillips
Grace Rogers
Noah Simon
Winter Simon
Jacob Sinclair

Joseph Sinclair
Benjamin Tombs
Finlay Tyler
Lauren Warshaw

Thank you and farewell to Lysa Schwartz



Lysa opening her present at her farewell gathering

In September we said goodbye to Lysa Schwartz, our Executive Director since April 2017. The job is huge, involving so many complex aspects of LJS activities which, from our perspective as members, just happen, but actually require a massive amount of work, imagination, energy, determination, dedication, professionalism and expertise. The role involves managing staff, taking care of the building, and overall responsibility for health and safety, financial management, the LJS cemetery, lettings, membership, taking on the role of Company Secretary, and juggling various volunteer activities and priorities, which isn't easy, as we all think our project is or should be the most important priority ... Whatever the problem, Lysa was always on it, be it dealing with acoustic ceilings or managing High Holy Day ticketing during Covid. Twice.

Sharing some parting thoughts with us, Lysa said that the best part of the job was that she kept on learning; not just that there was something new every day, but that continuous learning characterises so much of what the LJS is about. She felt proud of her staff, and the professionalisation of the office, and its approach to its work, having masterminded the transition of the LJS website, membership data management etc. to ShulCloud, and evolved ways of working at home during Covid restrictions while helping to maintain core synagogue functions. Her advice to us was to embrace being the flagship synagogue of Liberal Judaism while maintaining awareness that the concept of synagogue membership is changing, and what that might mean for the future of progressive Judaism in the UK.

Now that we've adjusted to seeing the words 'retiring' and Lysa appearing in the same sentence, we wish her well, and hope she will now have time to invest in herself and her family, in the way that she has tirelessly given of herself to us. We look forward to welcoming her back to the LJS whether for a special anniversary occasion, or to check that the cemetery toilets are up to scratch.

Karen Newman

Final copy date for the January/February 2022 issue of *LJS News* is Monday 29 November. Copy and ideas should be emailed to: newsletter@ljs.org
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The LJS is a constituent synagogue of Liberal Judaism

liberal judaism 

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

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