

# Sukkat Shalom

## JUNE 2011

### Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community

Scottish Charity No SC035678

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## Events and Services

### Date **Friday 3 June 2011**

Event Kabbalat Shabbat Service  
Venue Marchmont St Giles, 1a Kilgraston Road  
Time 6:15pm

### **EREV SHAVUOT SERVICE**

**Tuesday 7 June 2011**

**Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace 7pm**

See page 2.

Contributions of dairy dishes (e.g. cheese cake) greenery or flowers most welcome.

### Date **Friday 10 June 2011**

Event Erev Shabbat Service  
Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace  
Time 7pm

### Date **Friday 17 June 2011**

Event Kabbalat Shabbat Service  
Venue Marchmont St Giles, 1a Kilgraston Road  
Time 6:15pm

### Date **Saturday 25 June**

Event Shabbat Service led by Rabbi Mark Solomon  
Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace  
Time 11am

## ELJC support line

### 07904 813162



Use this number if you have an emergency and really need to speak to someone. It goes to one of our members. Otherwise please leave a message on the community phone and we will respond as soon as possible.

### **Event Tea & Talmud**

Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace  
Time 3pm

**Evening** Night out - see page 5

**Sunday 26 June 2011, 10-3:30pm**  
**Bonus Mitzvah/Sewa Day, Holyrood Park**  
for details see p.5

### Date **Sunday 26 June 2011**

Event Choosing Judaism

Venue usual location

Time 10:30am

### **Event Cantillation**

Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace

Time 3pm

### **Event Spinoza**

Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace

Time 4pm

## **Shabbat Service & Bar Mitzvah of Rohan Green**

**Saturday 9 July 2011, 11am**

**with Rabbi Mark Solomon officiating**  
**Turmeau Hall, Napier Craighouse**  
for further details see p.5

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## Future Dates

Our regular schedule is as follows:

Our **Erev Shabbat service** will be on the **SECOND** Friday of each calendar month and our **Shabbat morning service** on the Saturday after the **FOURTH** Friday. These services generally take place in the **Columille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace**.

On weekends when no other service is held we have a short Kabbalat Shabbat service at Marchmont St Giles. See the diary page of the web site for a complete list.

Sun 3 July	Hill walk, see page 5
Fri 8 July	Discussion Group on texts for new Erev Shabbat Booklet, NO SERVICE
Sat 9 July	Shabbat service & Bar Mitzvah of Rohan Green, Rabbi Mark Solomon officiating
Sun 10 July	Choosing Judaism Cantillation Spinoza
Sat 23 July	Shabbat Service

## Jewish Calendar

Rosh Hashanah	5772 29/30 September 2011
Yom Kippur	8 October 2011
Succot	13/14 October 2011
Simchat Torah	21 October 2011
Chanukah	20-28 December 2011



## Jewish and Single? Raw TV is making a BBC3 documentary about the Jewish dating scene



Award winning television company Raw TV is making a documentary for BBC about young people and

their search for a future partner. It will be one programme within a series of films each focusing on a different religion. They are looking to speak to single Jewish people aged 22-28 from different backgrounds and observances who can offer an insight into Judaism through their search for a partner. For more information contact Cat on 020 7017 1658 or email [Jewish@rawtelevision.co.uk](mailto:Jewish@rawtelevision.co.uk).

## Chairman's word

I hope you will enjoy this month's newsletter, especially the second of two pieces about Shavuot by Rabbi Mark Solomon and the article about Physicians for Human Rights Israel.

In this month's piece about Shavuot Rabbi Mark emphasises in particular the relevance of Shavuot for those of us who have become Jews by choice. In particular the reading of the story of Ruth is, at least for me, a very special aspect of this festival. This year we are going to read the book of Ruth as a dramatised piece, following the successful performances of members when reading parts of the the Megillah at Purim. There is lots of dialogue and quite an array of characters. Here is an approximate cast list:-

*Narrator, Naomi, Other daughters, People of Bethlehem, Ruth, Boaz, Supervising worker, Ploni Almoni, People at the gate, Women, Neighbour*

Many like Ploni Almoni (Hebrew for Joe Shmoe) have only one line, while others have longer parts. Do come to the service on Tuesday the 7th to take part or just to enjoy listening.

While there is little formal religious ceremony associated with Shavuot, it does have two very pleasant associations. Cheese, especially cheese cake and flowers or greenery. I believe that the tradition of decorating synagogues with flowers or greenery on shavuot is associated with a midrash that says that when the Torah was given on Mount Sinai the hillsides burst out in leaf and bloom. So we invite you all to come bringing contributions of your favourite cheese cake and any flowers or green leaves that you can gather so we may have a fragrant service with great refreshments after (there will be tea and coffee and socialising after too).



# A Season for Giving our Torah

Mark L. Solomon

Shavuot has always been a festival with a focus on proselytes. Ancient custom links it with the reading of the book of Ruth, the lovely short story of the Moabite woman who leaves her pagan land and settles in Judea out of devotion to her mother-in-law Naomi. When she utters the words, 'Your people shall be my people, and your God my God,' it was natural for the Rabbinic mind to conceive of her as the perfect proselyte, and these words are now enshrined at the heart of the Liberal service of Admission to Judaism. With their penchant for transforming Biblical monologues into dialogues, the Rabbis of the Midrash even reinterpreted Ruth's declaration as the correct answers to a 'conversion test.' Naomi says to her: 'My daughter, Jewish girls don't go to heathen theatres and circuses,' to which Ruth dutifully replies, 'Where you go I will go.' 'My daughter, Jews don't live in a house without a mezuzah,' and Ruth responds, 'Where you live I will live,' etc. (Ruth Rabbah 2:22)

We read Ruth on Shavuot, firstly, because it is a tale set at harvest time, and Shavuot is chag ha-katzir, the harvest festival. Secondly, because Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David, whose birth and death were said to have happened on Shavuot. Thirdly, and most importantly, on Shavuot all Israel were like proselytes, accepting the Torah upon themselves at Mount Sinai.

According to the Talmud, all future proselytes were present in spirit at Mt. Sinai: 'I make this covenant ... both with those who are standing here with us this day before the Eternal One our God and with those who are not with us here this day.' (Deut. 29:13-14, as interpreted in Talmud Bavli, Sh'vuot 39a)

One third-century Rabbi took the idea in a different direction, to raise even further the status of the sincere convert: 'The proselyte is more beloved to God than all those multitudes who stood at Mt. Sinai. For if those multitudes had not seen the flash of lightning and not heard the sound of the thunder and the blast of the horn, they would not have bowed to the sovereignty of God. But this one beheld no miracles and yet made his peace with God and accepted God's sovereignty. Can anyone be more dearly beloved than he?' (Tanchuma ed. Buber, Lech L'cha 6)

The Rabbinic interpretation of Ruth – like their view of Abraham as the original missionary – was of course anachronistic, since there was no such concept as religious conversion in Biblical times. A man was either a born member of one of the Israelite tribes, or a resident alien. A woman who married an Israelite would normally leave her own people and follow her husband's ways, but the fear of contamination by idolatry (as in the case of King Solomon's wives) led the Torah to discourage intermarriage with non-Israelite tribes. The book of Ruth may have been written as a polemic against Ezra's policy, in the fifth century BCE, of forcing Israelite men to send away their non-Israelite wives.

The evidence suggests that only about the first century BCE did the idea of Judaism as a religion, as distinct from a tribal or national identity, come into being, and with it the idea of conversion. The ritual of immersion in a mikveh, used in the Bible solely in the context of cultic purity, was adapted as a spiritual rite of passage into Judaism.

There were differing attitudes among the Rabbis regarding the necessity or desirability of accepting proselytes. Some regarded it as important to make converts, and there was a period of more-or-less intense missionary activity throughout the Roman Empire, with a willingness to ease the ritual requirements of conversion. Others were more negative about the impact converts would have on the community, and insisted on the most stringent entrance criteria.

This more insular strand was reinforced by external pressure, as Christian anti-Judaism intensified after the time of Constantine, and conversion of Christians to Judaism became a capital offence. Even during these centuries of suppression, however, there were rabbinic authorities who viewed conversion as a mitzvah, and proselytes were still accepted, especially in northern Europe during the 12th-13th centuries.

Nevertheless, as ghetto walls went up and Jews' lives narrowed, the attitude of suspicion, and often downright rejection of would-be-proselytes became ingrained in the Jewish psyche, as one still finds in parts of the Jewish world today. Even after the emancipation, in some places the price of civil acceptance was to forego any proselytising activity, however modest.

In principle, however, Liberal Judaism has shown greater openness to converts, including a willingness to dispense with some of the halachic rites of passage to ease the way. An important aspect of this new openness has been the acceptance of marriage as a valid motive for conversion. The Talmud and Codes generally regarded marriage as an unacceptable ulterior motive, even though the Tosafists (mediaeval Franco-

German talmudists) had already pointed to the extraordinary Talmudic tale of the prostitute who falls in love with a young scholar and is permitted to convert in order to marry him. Nowadays most of those who approach Liberal synagogues for conversion have a Jewish partner and are attracted to the positive value attached to family life in Judaism. We regard it as a great mitzvah to help such couples build a Jewish home and family together.

Liberal Judaism has always stressed the centrality of the prophetic vision of Israel as a light unto the nations. The last century saw several of our greatest leaders calling for a renewal of the Jewish mission, not to bully or cajole, but to offer the riches and beauty of Judaism to a world desperately in need of spiritual values. In 1949 Leo Baeck challenged the World Union of Progressive Judaism, meeting in London, to send out Jewish missionaries to the whole world, and in 1978 the late Rabbi Alexander Shindler, beloved leader of American Reform Judaism, urged his movement to engage in energetic outreach to the unchurched masses. Even some Orthodox voices have been saying for years now that Judaism should rediscover its missionary impulse, and the last Archbishop of Canterbury made the astounding pronouncement that Christians who found the dogmas of their own religion impossible to believe should turn to Judaism as a rational Biblical monotheism.

In our prayers we call Shavuot z'man mattan toratenu – 'Season of the Giving of our Torah.' Perhaps we should practise the virtue of imitatio Dei – emulating the ways of God. Instead of just receiving the Torah, let us make Shavuot our 'season of giving the Torah' – to other people, so that their lives might be enriched by Judaism and they, in turn, might enrich the Jewish people with their faith and commitment. Instead of waiting passively for people to find us, perhaps we should go out and proclaim our message of open, rational, ethical faith with confidence and enthusiasm, for the greater good of Judaism and all humanity, and the greater glory of God.

## Report on Shabbaton in Glasgow

Members from Shabbat Shalom traveled to the Glasgow Reform Synagogue on 14 May to participate in a joint day of worship and discussion. We were welcomed very warmly by the members of GRS. Rabbi Mark and Rabbi Nancy put together a wonderful service and Rabbi Mark was able to use his beautiful voice in front of two Jewish communities. After the service we were given a lovely lunch where we had the opportunity to talk to many people. It was a chance for the two communities to get to know each other and this went very well if the volume of voices in the room was any indication.

The theme for the day was the environment and the planned discussion took place after lunch. Although only a small number remained for the talk, there were people present with quite a bit of knowledge about the environment which led to a lively discussion. The small number of people present may be a sign of how the general public doesn't find the environment top on their agenda and is indicative of the work that still needs to be done.

One of the subjects we spoke about was what we could do as Jewish communities. Suggestions were made that we could start by making sure our places of worship and our practices are green. There is a lot of information on the internet about this. One of the best sites to go to is the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) which can be found at [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org). Another suggestion is that we should start with ourselves and make sure we are living as green as possible and then to spread the word.

Concern was also expressed that we are already beyond the point of no return and that nothing we do can stop the destruction of the planet. There is a lot of discussion about this in the world of environmental experts on whether or not this is true. But in our discussions there was agreement that 'if' we can't stop the destruction, we can try to slow it down. There was interest in pursuing more about what we can do as communities since tikkun olam (repairing the world), tzedek (justice), g'milut hasadim (performing deeds of loving kindness), and shalom (peace) are all part of our Jewish heritage. We hope that the communities will integrate some environmental thinking in their practices reflecting on some of the ideas from the Torah that we identified in our discussions.

**Report by Claudette Hudes**

*NOTE: We are planning a return visit by members of GRS to a Shabbaton in Edinburgh.*

## Community Matters

### Night out Saturday 25th June

We are planning a community night out this weekend during Rabbi Mark's visit. Join us from 7pm at the Golf Tavern overlooking Bruntsfield Links and/or thereafter at 8pm at the Apartment Restaurant at 7-13 Barclay Place, Bruntsfield. We hope to arrange a group booking with a reasonably priced meal. To be sure of a place send an email to Maureen Makinnon (email [catering@eljic.org](mailto:catering@eljic.org)) or leave a message on the community phone as soon as possible to say you plan to come to the restaurant.

### Bonus Mitzvah/Sewa Day - Holyrood Park

#### 10am-3.30pm Sunday 26 June 2011

This is a follow up of our successful day jointly with the Edinburgh Hindu Community in November. We will meet at the Holyrood Park Education Centre for 10 am. The address is Holyrood Park Education Centre, 1 Queen's Drive Edinburgh. EH8 8HG tel: 0131 652 8150. It is at the back of the flat grassy area behind Holyrood Palace.

If you can't make the 10am start but would like to join us later in the day, please ring or text Phil Wadler on 07976 507 543 and he'll let you know where to find us.

Wear warm and waterproof clothing, and sturdy footwear with a good grip. Please bring a packed lunch, snacks, drinks, and a water bottle.

If you are driving, please note that Sunday road closures will be in effect from 8.30am--3.30pm. You will still be able to access the Park from Horse Wynd or Holyrood Road, parking on the Broad Pavement on the Queen's Drive.

The Sheep Heid Inn is nearby, and folk may wish to retire there after 4pm. <http://www.sheepheid.co.uk/> If you want to eat please let Phil know, as booking in advance is recommended. No booking needed to just pop in for a drink.

### Rohan's Bar Mitzvah and our July Services

Many of you will be aware that Rohan Green will celebrate his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday July 9th. The service will take place at 11am in the Turmeau Hall of Napier University which is in the Craighouse Campus. Rabbi Mark will officiate and the service will be followed by a kiddush hosted by Stew & Gina. Directions of how to find the venue will be in the July Newsletter.

With this in mind, we have changed our service schedule for July slightly: The Bar Mitzvah service replaces the normal Erev Shabbat service so there will be NO SERVICE ON JULY 8th. However, on the evening of July 8th we will be holding a discussion about the contents of our new Erev Shabbat booklet (details will follow in next month's newsletter) and our regular monthly Shabbat service will take place on July 23rd in Columcille as normal.

### Hill walk Sunday 3rd July

Our summer hill walk tradition is being revived. Sue Lieberman is organising and will coordinate lifts. Current plans are to go to either Auchnafree Hill (north of Crieff) or Beinn a Choin, just east of Loch Lomond. Both are Corbets (ie. between 2,500 and 2,999 feet in height for the uninitiated). Either is about a 2 to 2.5 hour ascent and sound interesting. Neither starts from sea level, although Auchnafree gives considerably less climbing. Actual choice will probably depend on weather. If we have enough cars and if people are up for it, we (or some) can do a 'through' route to make it more interesting.

Please contact Sue (email: [shushana@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:shushana@blueyonder.co.uk)) to let her know you would like to come and she will send details of meeting places etc. nearer the time. We are hoping that members of Glasgow Reform Synagogue will join us on this walk as they have on previous ones.

## Library Update

Our library is beginning to take shape at last. Children's books are in the library stand at Marchmont St Giles which can come out at Cheder events and at other times by arrangement. Adult books are in the bookcases at the top of the stairs at the Columcille Centre. There is a borrowing book where you can sign a book out to borrow.

So far we have had donations of 21 adult books of Jewish interest. They cover a variety of topics and in particular they include books that might be helpful and interesting for members of the Choosing Judaism class. There are also some novels and books on Jewish history and other topics.

We have set up our library on an internet site that allows you to see all of the books and descriptions of many of them. Anyone can look at our list at <http://www.librarything.com/catalog/eljc>.

It will look something like this. Both adult and children's books will appear on the list when you first go to the site. To see just the adult books you can click on the arrow ringed in red on the picture and select the category you want.

We have further donations that we have not yet processed and our catalogue could be better organized. If you don't have access to the internet but would like a list of our books, please just leave a message on the community phone and we will post a list to you. We are hoping that members and friends will help this project to get off the ground by:

- Donating any books they think might be of interest to members
- By volunteering to help plan and run the library by joining our library group. We could use help to improve the electronic catalogue and to arrange books.
- By making a curtain to cover the bookshelves and keep the dust out.

If you could help with any of the above, please email [librarian@eljc.org](mailto:librarian@eljc.org) or leave a message on the community phone so we can get back to you.



## Events and Announcements

### Palestine on Film: Saturday 18th June at 15.30

As part of the Edinburgh International Film Festival there will be a discussion at Film House, Lothian Road, between two film makers. In 2004, (Israeli) Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi (Palestinian) collaborated on the award-winning Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel. As filmmakers their oeuvres (works) are very different. Eyal is a sharp-eyed, creative and cinematic documentarian, while Michel's concern with everyday life inside the occupation echoes out of the poetic fiction and documentaries he has made. Their films are intimately tied up with the occupation and conflict in Palestine/Israel. Meet these two visionary filmmakers, as they discuss the relationship between the occupation and their cinema. See the [film festival web site](#) to book.

### Salisbury Road Shul Parent, Baby and Toddler Group

It would be great if you could join us on Sunday 12th June at the Community Hall, 4 Salisbury Road 10.30-12.00, for fun, games, toys, singing, drinks and snacks, and maybe some Shavuot related things. All very welcome. If you have any queries, please do get in touch via email ([susan.shenkin@ed.ac.uk](mailto:susan.shenkin@ed.ac.uk)), or on 07891928535.

### Tribute Concert - Cantor Ernest Levy, Sunday 19th June

There is a Tribute Concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on Sunday 19th June at 7.30 pm. Guests include the Shabbaton Choir, Glasgow Jewish Singers, Rabbi Danny Bergson and the East Renfrewshire Senior String Octet. Tickets are £10 and available from the Box Office on 0141 353 8000 or [www.glasgowconcerthalls.com](http://www.glasgowconcerthalls.com).

# Physicians for Human Rights - Israel

Sukkat Shalom has twice made Physicians for Human Rights – Israel (PHR-I) a beneficiary of our Yom Kippur appeal. So we were very pleased, earlier this year, to welcome Miri Weingarten from PHR-I to speak to us at a very well-attended Chavurah Supper about the organisation and its work. Here is a summary of her talk:

## History

PHR-I's origins were at the start of the first intifada (uprising) in 1988, when a group of Israeli and Palestinian doctors joined to support medical care and human rights for Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT). Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin had responded to the intifada by cancelling all medical referrals of Palestinian patients in the OPT to Israeli hospitals, and PHR-I's early members opposed this misuse of healthcare for political pressure and control. The group began visiting Gaza hospitals to assist in the treatment of head injuries sustained during the suppression of the uprising.

But with the Oslo Accords and the hope for a Palestinian state, it was decided to build separate organisations in the Israeli and the Palestinian communities. PHR-I was born, and developed a broader mandate—to work for the right to health of all people under Israeli control, both in Israel and in the OPT.

Today PHR-I has more than 2300 members and volunteers, mostly medical professionals, as well as a small staff of human rights professionals. We address policies of exclusion and injustice, on the basis that the essential preconditions for health include not only healthcare, but also improved social conditions such as sanitation, housing, employment and social equality. We are guided by human rights, medical ethics and social justice.

## Israeli society – challenges

Israeli society and government policies can be described in two ways, in terms of inclusion and ethnic identity.

In terms of inclusion, Israeli society is a series of concentric circles. At the centre are Israeli males of Ashkenazi (European) origin, living in Tel Aviv. They enjoy excellent healthcare, public health insurance and good prospects of education, employment and income. Despite some discrimination, Ashkenazi women share most of these benefits.

Next are Israelis who are descendants of Jewish immigrants from Arab or Asian countries (Mizrahim), and those who live in the periphery of Israel, in the north or the south. They enjoy less access to good education, employment opportunities and specialist healthcare. But they have a right, at least by law, to equal access and services.

Further out are Arab citizens of Israel, about 20% of the population. They are on average much poorer, less likely to attain higher education, and less able to access healthcare than Jewish citizens. As a result, they are less healthy, with higher infant mortality rates and lower life expectancy. Government policies often directly cause this; for example, the 'unrecognised' Bedouin communities of the Negev (40% of the Bedouin population) are denied access to the electricity grid, to drinkable water, to sanitation services, to roads and to housing, all obstacles to the right to health.

Arab-Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are even further excluded because they are not citizens but 'permanent residents'—a status that can be revoked at any time, resulting in loss of basic healthcare (since healthcare rights are dependent on residency). Eviction and house demolitions add to the precarious nature of East Jerusalemites' lives.

Beyond this circle is that of non-Jewish immigrants—migrants with temporary work permits, asylum seekers and refugees—and their children. Non-Jews cannot be naturalised in Israel even if they are born there. The only way to naturalisation is marriage, but marriage between members of different religions is not recognised in Israel. Migrant workers can obtain healthcare through private insurance policies, but these are often terminated in case

of serious illness. Asylum seekers have no health rights and almost no healthcare except that provided by PHR-I's volunteers.

In terms of ethnic identity, the division of society between Israeli Jews and Arab Palestinians results in little sympathy for the idea that Israel 'owes' Palestinians in the OPT, even though they are under effective Israeli control, the same health and human rights as those of anyone else under Israeli jurisdiction. PHR-I believes that the occupation itself is a violation of human rights. But so long as it continues the Israeli government owes residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip full human and health rights, without discrimination between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents.

## Physicians for Human Rights-Israel - response

To address the problems of these different communities, PHR-I runs five departments: Israeli Residents (including the Project for Unrecognised Bedouin Villages); Prisoners and Detainees; Migrants, Refugees and Undocumented People; the OPT; and Public Outreach.

PHR-I's staff and volunteers represent individuals by corresponding with Israeli authorities, taking cases to court, lobbying policy-makers, and reaching out to the media, the public and the medical community. For those communities with no access to healthcare at all under Israeli law, PHR-I also operates free, volunteer-run clinics:

The Open Clinic in Jaffa provides free medical care to refugees, migrants and undocumented people in Israel, together with a counselling service for refugees suffering the after-effects of war, bereavement, torture and injury. The clinic aims not only to provide assistance but also to expose the situation of these people to Israeli society, and to pressure the authorities to include their communities in the public healthcare system.

The Mobile Clinic to the OPT travels each week to West Bank villages cut off from specialist medical care as a result of Israeli closure policies, and to hospitals in the Gaza Strip. Israeli and Palestinian medical professionals work together to provide medical assistance, to send a message of support to Palestinians under occupation, and to witness and protest against the conditions that deny them full health and human rights.

PHR-I also reaches out to the medical community in Israel, especially young professionals and students, seeking to challenge, inform and guide them, and eventually to convince them to become agents for change. We work closely with others advocating human rights, peace and social justice. PHR-I is working to build a united community of human rights defenders in Israel, in a difficult climate. And we reach out to medical and to Jewish communities overseas, seeking allies and supporters for our work and vision.

## Our questions and an answer

At the end of Miri's talk, there was a lively question-and-answer session. The last question was: "What can we do?" She replied that whenever she's asked that question, she always says: "Come and see for yourselves". She believes that the best way that Jewish communities overseas can understand and work with organisations like PHR-I is to come and see for themselves, and on behalf of PHR-I she presented a warm welcome and an offer to coordinate contacts with civil society in Israel.

So, a Sukkat Shalom community trip to Israel?—what do you think?

Maurice Naftalin