

Sukkat Shalom

AUGUST 2011

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community

Scottish Charity No SC035678

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Secretary: Nancy Warren, secretary@eljc.org
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Treasurer: Jonathan Broadie, treasurer@eljc.org
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Community Phone: 0131 777 8024 Email info@eljc.org Web www.eljc.org

Events and Services

Date Friday 5 August 2011

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

Date Friday 12 August 2011

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

Date Friday 19 August 2011

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

Date Friday 26 August 2011

Event Chavurah Supper with Rabbi Mark Solomon.
Please bring a non-meat dish to share. No alcohol permitted in premises.
Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace.
Time 7pm

Date Saturday 27 August 2011

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

Event Tea & Talmud

Venue Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace
Time 3pm

Date Sunday 28 August 2011

Event Choosing Judaism
Venue Usual Venue
Time 10:30am

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.

HIGH HOLIDAYS 2011/5772

led by Rabbi Mark Solomon

Rosh Hashanah (29/30 September 2011)

Erev Rosh Hashanah Service, 7pm.

Rosh Hashanah Service, 11am

Yom Kippur (8/9 October 2011)

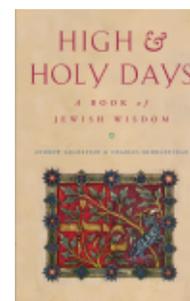
Kol Nidre Service, 7pm,

Yom Kippur Services, 11am

See page 2 for tickets for non-members.

THE HIGH HOLYDAYS WILL SOON BE WITH US

Traditionally the period of repentance starts 30 days before Rosh Hashanah - on the first of Elul, thus yielding in effect 40 Days of Repentance. Last year Rabbis Andrew Goldstein and Charles Middleburgh had an anthology published by SCM and Canterbury Press to help prepare you for the High Holy Days. There are 40 sections, one for each day, on a variety of predictable themes such as Renewal, Reconciliation, Good and Bad Inclination and Sin: But there are also less expected themes such as Creation, Autumn, Hope, The Years Pass By. Each section has 7 readings from Jewish literature through the ages - Psalms and rabbinic texts, Hassidic tales and modern poetry and prose. This is an anthology that can inspire you any day of the year, but which makes perfect reading in preparation for and during the High Holydays.



"High and Holy Days : A Book of Jewish Wisdom", available at £14.99 from orders@norwichbooksandmusic.co.uk Or from Rabbi Andrew Goldstein (agoldstein@f2s.com) at £12.00 plus £2.00 P & P.

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Future Dates

Our regular schedule is as follows:

Our **Erev Shabbat service** on the **SECOND** Friday of each calendar month at 7pm and our **Shabbat morning service** on the Saturday after the **FOURTH** Friday at 11am.

These at **Columcille Centre, 2 Newbattle Terrace.**

Other weekends a Kabbalat Shabbat service at 6.15pm at **Marchmont St Giles Church Centre**

2 Sept	Kabbalat Shabbat Service
9 Sept	Erev Shabbat Service
16 Sept	Kabbalat Shabbat Service
25 Sept	Shabbat Service
29 Sept	Erev Rosh Hashanah Service
30 Sept	Rosh Hashanah Service

High Holy Day tickets

Members will be receiving their tickets by post in the next few weeks. If you are interested in joining we offer a reduced price membership for the rest of the year. Email membership@eljc.org for details.

Nonmembers are welcome to attend but, for security reasons we ask that they contact us to obtain tickets by leaving a message on the community phone or emailing info@eljc.org.

Jewish Calendar

Yom Kippur	8 October 2011
Sukkot	13/14 October 2011
Simchat Torah	20/21 October 2011
Chanukkah	20-28 December 2011



Riding 4 Reform, 25th-29th March 2012



The 2012 ride provides a unique opportunity to experience Israel's nature and people in a way tourist tours usually cannot. Participants will ride through areas of diverse nature that are usually not explored, viewing a different and a unique chapter in the Israeli story. Further details of the 2012 route will be available towards the end of this summer, but you can get an idea of what to expect by going to

<http://www.riding4reform.org/Eng/2012/Pages/About.asp> or emailing riding4reform@reform.org.il

Day of Celebration 2011

video now available online!

Liberal Judaism's Mike Beral has put together a fantastic video that captures the spirit and essence of the hugely successful Day of Celebration. Workshops, discussions, dance sessions, film showings, LJY-Netzer and so much more can be seen, so if you missed out on the day, or just want to relive some of the great highlights, go to <http://liberaljudaism.org/news/296-lj-day-of-celebration-video-now-online.html>

WJR's East Africa Food

Crisis Appeal 2011



WJR has launched an appeal to assist millions of people across the Horn of Africa facing severe food shortages.

After a second successive poor rainy season the region is experiencing its driest years since 1950/51 in many of the pastoral zones. The impact of such drought has been compounded by high local cereal prices, excess livestock deaths and conflict. To find out more and how you can donate, go to <http://www.wjr.org.uk/appeals/860-wjr-s-east-africa-food-crisis-appeal>

Help us keep helping

Jewish Students

I will be climbing Snowdon on Sep 4th with the other Jewish chaplains from across the country to raise money for University Jewish Chaplaincy. Your support will help us so we can keep supporting students wherever they are, whether it's Shabbat hospitality, education, or social and welfare care.

Any donation, however small, helps!
<http://www.justgiving.com/gwayland>

Thank you very much,

Rabbi Garry Wayland
Jewish Student Chaplain, Scotland
07791 292 790
0141 638 9403
www.ujc.org.uk

Chairman's Word

Last month in my chairman's word (reproduced on p 9) I explained that I had resigned from the University and College Union in connection with their rejection of a definition of antisemitism. I now regret that I did so in a manner that might have been construed to align Sukkat Shalom with this position. I apologise to those members who were upset by this. It was never my intention to imply that this was an ELJC view and I hope most people will have realised this. But I now wish that my resignation had not been along with other members of ScoJeC, but just in my private capacity. The situation was made worse by the fact that my position as chair of ELJC was mentioned on the ScoJeC web site in connection with the letter of resignation. I asked for this to be corrected as soon as I saw it and this was done very promptly. But this was not before it was picked by and reproduced in *The Herald*.

You will see that this newsletter contains responses from members that provide arguments as to why this definition of antisemitism should be rejected. I don't wish to engage in further debate on these issues here. Perhaps this could be something we might debate in the community in future, remembering the commitment in our values statement about attitudes to Israel 'to building our community through mutual respect, regardless of our differences'.

On a completely different matter, the time will be coming soon for us to decide on our charities for the Kol Nidre appeal. One charity that has been suggested is *Physicians for Human Rights, Israel*. We have supported this cause before and Miri Weingarten's talk to us earlier this year, with an edited version in the June newsletter, has given us even more reason to admire their work. I would also like to propose a local charity, *Capability Scotland*. I have been a volunteer for them for a number of years. They provide services for disabled people and their staff do what is often a difficult job with good humour, always respecting the dignity of the disabled people they care for. I hope a donation from us might help to update some of their equipment. In addition to a local non-Jewish charity and an Israeli charity we have traditionally supported a local Jewish charity and a charity for International relief. We don't have to stick to this formula. We didn't last year. More suggestions for worthy charities would be most welcome. Just mention your suggestions to any member of the council. Leave a message on the community phone or email me at chair@eljc.org.

Community Matters

Rohan's Bar Mitzvah - Thank-you and Rohan's *Dvar Torah*

Rohan, Gina and I had a wonderful time and we would like to thank everyone for your warmth, kindness, good wishes and generosity. The community support - which came in a number of forms, not least the important help and guidance of Rabbi Mark - really helped to make the day the very special event for us that it was. THANK YOU ALL!



Left: Stew, Rohan and Gina

Nearest: Rohan on the Bima, posed after the service, with Rabbi Mark and two aunts who were called up to the Torah.

Rohan's D'var Torah

Hello everyone. This morning the portion of the Torah I will be reading is called Balak. In this parsha (the Hebrew word for portion) Balak the ruler of Moab is worried about the Israelites so he calls Balaam, a well known soothsayer, to curse the Jews. Balaam comes but he says he will only curse them if God lets him.

About half way through the parsha you will hear a poem – the first line of which – ‘How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel’ - you heard at the start of this service. This is Balaam blessing the Jews instead of cursing them.

Balak gets really infuriated at Balaam's blessing and tells him that he has held himself back from honour. But Balaam says if he was to be given his house full of silver and gold he would not say anything that God has not told him to.

In Liberal Judaism at least, we start every Shabbat service with Balaam's words and it is very interesting that we start our Jewish service with the words of a non-Jewish soothsayer.

Through the ages, the question has been asked why Jacob's tents appeared so lovely or 'goodly'. Two interesting explanations have been offered. The first very practical explanation is that the tents were arranged in such a way as that from the door of their tent no one could see into another tent. The rabbis suggest that this indicates a healthy respect for, and valuing of, privacy within the intimacy of family life.

The second explanation is much more symbolic: Some rabbis interpret 'tents' as houses of study and 'dwelling places' as synagogues where God's presence dwells. The implication being that a blessed society needs places of study and worship.

At first when I discovered this was to be my parsha, I thought it extremely appropriate as it seemed to be named after a Chelsea player – Michael Balack. Unfortunately Balack left Chelsea at the end of last season. So this seemed like a sign that perhaps I wasn't really meant to have a Bar Mitzvah. However, while reading it again I discovered I was meant to have a Bar Mitzvah after all. Because, the words 'falling down with eyes uncovered' clearly refers to those well known divers - Manchester United!

During the reading I will read the parsha in three different stages, reading the English translation following each.

Through the course of the preparation for today I have improved my Hebrew reading a lot. This has given me a sense of real achievement matched only by completing Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2, probably one of the greatest Playstation games ever made.

It has also really helped my confidence because if you can read out loud to a big audience in another language, presenting in English becomes a lot easier.

Okay so what is a Bar Mitzvah to me? I have realised how lucky I am to be part of a community although I think we could get more members by having cake at the Kiddush every Erev Shabbat service (instead of just occasionally).

I am relieved to be here after preparing for this for what feels like every day for over a year - well okay maybe not every day but definitely a lot over a year. A Bar Mitzvah was something I was pushed into and I'd like now to be able to say that it wasn't that bad - but I can't, it was worse! (haha)

I have enjoyed working at something and now to be here it is a very rewarding experience. It hasn't all been easy but it has given me more of a sense of achievement now that I have completed it. And while I'm still not sure what I feel about religion and God, I really do appreciate the important values and principles for living that all religions teach. And I see how living by them can help me achieve happiness and spiritual peace. These will always be with me.

I would like to thank Rabbi Mark for teaching me, my mum for her goodwill and input with the English aspects of the service and finally my dad for all his help with my Hebrew learning and practice - even if it was a lot like Bin Laden's training camp!

Finally I would like to thank you all for coming and supporting me today.

Rohan Green, July 9th 2011

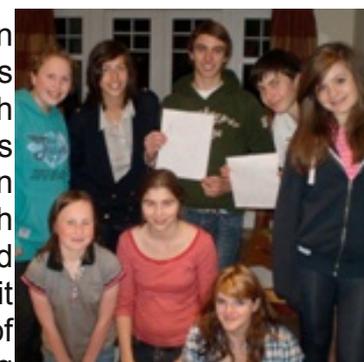
Pictures from the Community Barbecue on 24 July



Many thanks to our hosts Nick and Kate Silk for a wonderful afternoon, to Nick for manning the barbecue with such style, despite having nearly set the garden on fire and Kate for her usual wonderful spread of delicious treats. And thanks to the sun for shining all afternoon.

Maccabi calling young people

Senior Maccabi (a Jewish youth group that has run for literally decades in Edinburgh) is looking for new members. Currently, we consist of 9 members and are open to any Jewish teenagers between the ages of 11 and 18. Each Sunday evening during term time, we meet at different members' houses between 6:30 and 9:00 to take part in peer-run programmes that often include games, drama, art and topical debates. The emphasis is very much on socialising in an informal setting, being proud of our Jewish identity and having fun! Considering how few Jewish teenagers there are in Edinburgh, it would be great to get as many new members as possible, regardless of religious affiliation. If you are interested in finding out more, or coming along to see what we do, feel free to contact me at sarah_levy@hotmail.com.



Mitzvah Days



A number of Sukkat Shalom members had a very successful second visit to Holyrood Park in June – a bonus Mitzvah day. A member of the Historic Ranger service guided us in collecting rubbish and then in the afternoon of cutting down swathes of the invasive Rosebay Willow-herb (see picture) that stifles other weaker plants. Thanks to Phil Wadler for organising this. The next Mitzvah day will be on **Sunday 20th November** and we look forward to further activities.

Mazal Tov

To Rohan Green who took part this month in the 100 metres at the Scottish Seniors and Under 14s National Championships at Scotstoun. He ran 13.16secs in the final - a little slower than his personal best of 12.73, but still good enough to get second place and a silver medal.



Events and Announcements

Festival of Spirituality and Peace 6th – 29th August

Over 300 events, many on an interfaith theme, including the two detailed below. For the full programme see <http://www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk/>. Sukkat Shalom members are also invited to attend the opening event at St Johns Church, Sunday 7th August 6-9pm.

MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP: DISTINCT BUT EQUAL?

Friday 26 August, 12.30pm – 1.30pm at St John's Church

The current options for coupledness are civil partnership for same-sex couples and civil or religious marriage for male/female couples. Are there legitimate distinctions to be drawn between these options or should all options be open to all couples? Bishop Gregor Duncan who supports equal status for same-sex relationships – says 'no'. In discussion with Tim Hopkins of the Equality Network and Rabbi Mark Solomon, Interfaith Consultant for Liberal Judaism.

CAN THE WOLF LIE DOWN WITH THE LAMB? TALKING VISIONS OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Friday 26 August, 10.30am – 11.30am at St John's Church

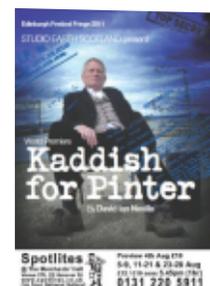
After his experiences in the second Lebanon war, Alick Isaacs began to challenge some of his deeply held convictions about Judaism, Zionism, war and peace and to search for a way of reconciling the fact that religion is sometime used to justify violence with its messages of peace. In his book *A Prophetic Peace* he draws on sacred and secular sources to propose an ambitious vision of religiously inspired peace and describes a project called Talking Peace whose aim is to bring individuals of different views together to share varying understandings of peace. In conversation with George Wilkes from the Edinburgh University Project on Religion and Ethics in the Making of War and Peace and Oliver McTernan whose work in conflict resolution has involved him with both Israeli and Palestinian religious parties.

Some Fringe and International Festival events

Here are a few suggestions for events in the Festivals. There may well be others. If you have any recommendations from these or other events of Jewish interest please email chair@eljc.org and we can pass them on later in the month in the reminder email.

Plays

Kaddish for Pinter Barker is waiting. They keep him fed and just warm enough. Waiting. He knows they'll come. Only a matter of time. They need what he knows. By any means? Human rights, human wrongs - are one man's human rights expendable for the public good? This homage to Pinter is a tense, humorous, psychological drama about the state we're in! By award-winning writer/director David Ian Neville, *Kaddish For Pinter* features a cast of three leading Scottish actors: Crawford Logan, Corinne Harris, and Gavin Wright. Spotlites @ The Merchants' Hall, Venue 278, 22 Hanover Street. Edinburgh EH2 2EP, www.spotlites.co.uk



Nuclear Family is a comedic drama set in New Zealand on the eve of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. 'Nuclear Family' is a multi-cultural solo show, a 5-star comedic drama, following a colorful bunch of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union and Venezuela as they are forced to question whether freedom and control over one's destiny are only illusions.

The play was born out of personal experience and the desire to explore immigrant journeys and the primary right to freedom of choice, issues which, while particular to individual circumstances, are also universal. It is most meaningful to us that Amnesty International has approached us to say our show is eligible for their Freedom of Expression Award. The venue is Theatre 1, theSpace @ Surgeons' Hall (Venue 53) Nicolson Street, www.nuclearfamily.co.nz. Fringe brochure p 284

FRINGE PLAYS (contd)**Children of Terezin**

The award-winning play set in a diabolical, false-fronted prison camp in 1943. Six children face the psychological barbarism of the Nazi war machine in the days before their deportation to Auschwitz. The play is a tribute to the past and a reminder of the best and worst that human beings are capable of. The 2011 Fringe performance is dedicated to the children of Darfur.

August 5-20th , 13:40, The Spaces on the Mile

Kafka and Son The smash-hit Canadian production Fringe brochure p 273

Kafka's Metamorphosis as Performed by the Actors of the Nowy Teatr Kameralny Play-within-a-play set in the Warsaw ghetto Fringe brochure p 273

Nine Suitcases Author Bela Zsolt awaits deportation to Auschwitz Fringe brochure p 283

The Lift An Englishman, an Irishman, and a Jew get trapped in a lift... Fringe brochure p 275

Shylock ... globally acclaimed work on Shakespeare's infamous villain or victim... or is Shylock someone even more intriguing? Fringe brochure p 296

When Abel Met Cain Stories inspired by the situation in Israel/Palestine Fringe brochure p 310 (free)

Cabaret

More Jewish Chronicles Master songwriter returns. Fringe brochure p 12

Comedy

Free Jewish Comedy Admission free, gentiles half-price. Fringe brochure p 79

JEWELSH Bennett Arron is both Jewish and Welsh, no joke. (free) Fringe brochure p 98

Music

David Vernon and Dick Lee This brilliant accordion and clarinet duo perform an eclectic mix of music with infectious enjoyment - French, jazz, Jewish, traditional...

Kopelman Quartet 8 Programme includes Shostakovich's String Quartet No 4 which includes Jewish melodies International Festival, 27/8

The Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation - Jewish Edinburgh Group

Festival Open Day Sunday 21st August 2011, 12.00 – 3.30pm, at the Synagogue, 4 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh (near the Commonwealth Swimming Pool)

Join us for bagels, coffee, cake and a taste of Jewish cultural events at the Edinburgh Festivals!

See our exhibition - the history of the Edinburgh Jewish Community.

Tour the Synagogue - a rare modernist 1930s building by leading Glasgow architect James Miller.

Enjoy Festival participants performing extracts and talking about their shows In Conversation with

writer/producer David Ian Neville

(Festival guests still to be confirmed.)

Suggested donation £ 5.00

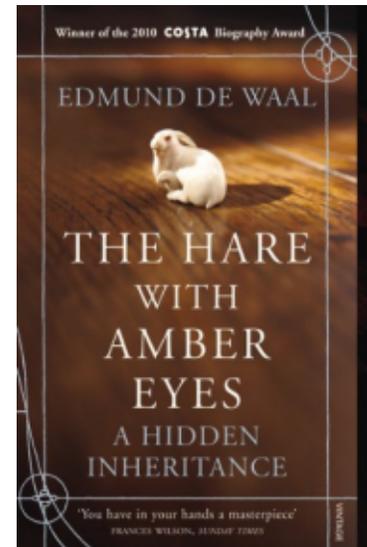
Students & children £ 3.00 *Children under five free*

email: secretary@ehcong.com for further details

REVIEW: Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance*, London: Vintage (paperback), 2010, £8.99. ISBN 9780099539551.

By Charles Raab

Edmund de Waal's journey into his past is compulsive reading. The author, the distinguished London-based ceramic artist, inherited 264 netsuke – small sculptured toggles for attaching containers for personal possessions to traditional Japanese male garments – from his great-uncle Iggie in 1994, and was charged with the responsibility of caring for them in this generation. De Waal's forebears were the Ephrussi: a major, Rothschild-class family whose vast fortune was made in grain export; their Ringstrasse palace in Vienna came to epitomise the Ephrussi riches and cultured life at their zenith. Netsuke, which flourished as practical and decorative objects in Japan from the 17th century through the 19th, are an art-form, highly prized by collectors for their aesthetic and tactile qualities, not least by those Parisians near the end of the 19th century with taste and money for all things Japanese. Charles Ephrussi had bought what became the family's collection in Paris in the 1870s, displaying them in a lacquered vitrine to his circle of friends and prominent artists – Renoir and Degas – amidst other treasures when they called on Charles and Louise in their grand apartment in the rue de Monceau. He later gave them as a wedding present to his cousin (de Waal's great-grandfather) Viktor von Ephrussi in Vienna at the turn of the century.



Taken for a time from their vitrines, netsuke are for admiring, handling, playing with, and enjoying, down the Ephrussi generations. A hare with amber eyes is one of the 264. But this book is not about it, or them, so much as it is about the past as it speaks to the present through the long saga of the netsukes' survival through times of family prosperity and grandeur and then tragedy at the hands of the Nazi regime, as property was sequestered and the family dispersed. It is also about the author's voyage of research and discovery through Paris, Vienna and Tokyo. He discovers that Anna, the faithful Gentile servant, had secreted the netsuke, a few each time, in her mattress (hence the book's subtitle) as she was forced to catalogue the family possessions for the Gestapo. For her, each one was 'a resistance to the sapping of memory...a resistance against the news, a story recalled, a future held on to'. When she returned to Vienna in December 1945, de Waal's grandmother Elisabeth received the 264 from Anna, and took them to Tunbridge Wells, and thus to Iggie, who had last played with them, 30 years before, as a boy. They later went with him to his residence in Tokyo: 'here the netsuke became Japanese again'. The collection became Edmund's inheritance in due course. And now? He puts a few out on display; his own children move them around; and so 'the netsuke begin again.'

In unforgettably vivid strokes, de Waal tells this wonderful, sad and yet defiant story both factually and imaginarily reconstructed from letters and fragments of evidence. We are there through the generations, know the aunts and the cousins, the palatial rooms, experience the private events as well as the public and political ones that eventually tightened the screw on rich and poor Jews alike. We see the netsuke in their black lacquer cabinet, taken out and played with by the Viennese children: 'Gisela loved the Japanese dancer, holding her fan against the brocade gown, caught in mid-step. Iggie loved the wolf, a tight dark tangle of limbs, faint markings all along its flanks, gleaming eyes and a snarl.' We see them much later on in Iggie's house in Japan. The history, and family history, of more than a century is refracted in them.

This book deservedly won the 2010 Costa biography award. It is simply one of the most beautiful and memorable books you will read this year, or any year.

DEBATE: The University and College Union (UCU) and Antisemitism

reprint of last month's *Chairman's Word*

Antisemitism, anti-Zionism and the UCU

Most of our members will be aware that, as a community, we do not take any position on the situation in the Middle East and on Israel in particular. In agreeing a position on the values page of our web site, we acknowledged the differences in views between our members and “committed ourselves to building our community through mutual respect, regardless of our differences”.

Along with three other members of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) I have, this week, signed a joint letter of resignation to the University and College Union (UCU), my union for most of my working life. The reason for our resignation is explained below and relates to a resolution recently passed by the UCU that, in our opinion, legitimises antisemitism when it is expressed in connection with criticism of Israel. Like us, SCoJec takes no position on Israel. Its democratic role is solely to represent the interests of Jewish people in Scotland. It is because racist propaganda against Israel has exposed Jewish people in Scotland and the UK to hostility that it is relevant for SCoJeC members to take issue with the UCU. Students at Scottish universities have borne the brunt of this, as we hear from those who have come to our services.

The UCU Congress at the end of May adopted motion 70 which rejects the definition of antisemitism initially proposed by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia and now by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights. The definition includes a list of examples of antisemitism that masquerade as criticism of Israel: for example “Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel”. SCoJeC explained the problems to the Scottish Trades Union Congress in these terms:

The STUC has complained that Jewish representative organisations are conflating anti-Semitism with legitimate criticism; but criticism of Israel is often expressed in racist terms. When you read, for example, that Israel's behaviour is determined by the character of the Jewish people, that a powerful Zionist lobby exerts a sinister influence on Western governments, or that Israel is setting out to kill non-Jewish children, you are reading the politics of hate.

By rejecting the definition the UCU are allowing their criticisms of Israel to be directed against all Jews. The EU definition specifically allows legitimate criticism of Israel, in the same way as any other country can be criticised. And we should be careful not to deny this freedom to everyone, Jew or non-Jew, without demonising them as is sometimes done in the Jewish press.

I signed the letter of resignation from the UCU as an individual, albeit on SCoJeC headed paper. I hope that members of the community will not think that I overstepped the mark in taking a position on Israel. Please feel free to air your views in the newsletter. The text of our letter is on the SCoJeC website at <http://www.scojec.org/>.

Reprint of a letter to *The Herald*. The signatories include members of Sukkat Shalom

Rejection of a particular definition is not a licence for anti-semitism

Published on 15 July 2011,

<http://www.heraldsotland.com/mobile/comment/herald-letters/rejection-of-a-particular-definition-is-not-a-licence-for-anti-semitism-1.1112177>

We write as Scottish Jews and members of the University and College Union (UCU).

We would like to express our support for the UCU's position regarding the so-called working definition of anti-semitism drafted by the European Union Monitoring Committee (EUMC). The draft has been abandoned by the successor to the EUMC, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights.

The UCU motion rejecting the EUMC draft definition also confirms the UCU will “combat all forms of racial or religious discrimination”. Strange that rejection of the draft is misinterpreted as “a licence to vilify Jews in service of its political aims” as suggested by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (“Top Jewish academics quit union in anti-semitism row”, *The Herald*, July 11). Rejection of a particular definition is not a licence for anti-semitism.

We applaud the UCU for asserting the EUMC working draft confuses criticism of Israeli government policy and actions with genuine anti-semitism, since it clearly does. The draft definition reserves the right to interpret criticism of Israel as anti-semitic. This is dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, any definition which confuses anti-semitism with criticism of Israel could lead to anti-semitism not being taken seriously. Secondly, criticism of Israeli or any other government's policy is

legitimate, and attempts to suppress dissent by conflating it with prejudice must be opposed. We protest at the misuse of the term “anti-semitic” in this way.

Dr Marion Hersh, Dr Alex Benchimol, Dr Katherine Lebow, Prof Philip Wadler, Prof Henry Maitles, Barrie Levine, Scottish Jews for a Just Peace, c/o 13 University Gardens, Glasgow.

From Maurice Naftalin

Dear Hannah

I'm writing in reply to Gillian's invitation to respond to her piece in last month's newsletter about her resignation from the University and College Union (UCU). She wrote to the UCU, jointly with three other members of SCoJeC (the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities) in response to the union's dissociation of itself from the EUMC (the European Union Monitoring Committee) “working definition of antisemitism”. (The definition has no official status, by the way. It was never adopted by the EUMC, which no longer exists. The EUMC's successor body, the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights, does not use the definition and has no plans to develop it from its draft status.)

I see two major problems with the SCoJeC letter:

1) It takes the union's rejection of a particular definition of antisemitism as automatically being evidence of antisemitism. This would be reasonable if the definition being rejected was uncontroversial. For an (extreme) hypothetical example, the union would clearly be wrong to refuse to accept “expressing hatred of all Jews” as a definition of antisemitism, since if it did so a UCU member who expressed hatred of all Jews could claim not to be an anti-semite. But for a second extreme hypothetical example, none of us would accept a definition of antisemitism as “expressing hatred of all Jews OR criticising Israel in any way” because that allows the possibility of legitimate behaviour being outlawed as a variety of hate speech. So it makes no sense to criticise the UCU for legitimising antisemitism by rejecting one particular definition unless you've first made sure that this particular definition is sound.

2) When we do look at what the EUMC definition says, we find that it in fact it isn't sound. For illustration—and apparently as part of the definition—it includes controversial examples of how antisemitism could be manifested in connection with Israel. For brevity, I will take just one example: “Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation”. Of course, someone doing this could be

motivated by antisemitism. But supporters of the Israeli government often argue that to criticize Israel's actions during the Gaza war of 2008-9 is to hold Israel to a higher standard than that of other countries at war. Speaking for myself, I was (and am) strongly critical of what the IDF did in Gaza, so this definition lays me personally open to the absurd accusation of antisemitism! If the definition is accepted, the only way I can escape this damning charge is to fall silent. Similar arguments apply to the other examples of the EUMC definition, and make it, in my opinion and that of many serious observers, an instrument designed more to curtail criticism of Israel than to combat hatred of Jews.

The EUMC definition provides only part of the background to this issue. Although the SCoJeC letter refers only to the rejection of the EUMC document, many of those now resigning from UCU perceive that as only the latest event in a worsening climate of antisemitism within UCU and on university campuses generally. I know that this was one factor motivating Gillian to sign the SCoJeC letter. And I fully agree that when university students and staff tell us that they feel that criticism of Israel seems to target them as Jews, we should take that very seriously. But we also have to evaluate it carefully.

The problem is that many of us are in a very difficult place. We identify with Israeli Jews even as we become increasingly opposed to Israeli policies and opinions. Our identification can make hard-edged criticism of Israel very uncomfortable to hear, and it is natural to react against that discomfort. But it is a big step further to automatically label such criticism “anti-semitic” purely because it makes us feel uncomfortable as Jews to hear it. If we were to insist on our right to do that, the definition of what constitutes antisemitism would rest entirely on the subjective feeling of Jews—and which Jews? (If the authors of the SCoJeC letter really do want to adopt an entirely subjective definition of racism, as they claim, we should ask them if they will accept the subjective experience of all those who see themselves as victims of racism in the form of Zionism!)

It's obvious that, while Israel continues to arouse such strong feelings, we can expect to continue to feel conflicted, and to be involved in difficult discussions. Of course, we are fully entitled to demand the exclusion of anti-semitic and other racist discourse from these discussions, however uncomfortable they may continue to be otherwise. It's vital that we should be able to identify such discourse accurately. I conclude that since the EUMC “working definition” is deeply unhelpful for this purpose, the UCU was right to reject it, and the very emotional accusations that the SCoJeC letter makes of institutional antisemitism in the union are (certainly on this count) unjustified and counter-productive.