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Etrog

The Newsletter of Sukkat
Shalom Edinburgh

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Word From the Sofa

Nick Silk

Usually when it's my turn to write the 'Word from the Sofa' it takes me a while to decide what I want to write about but then I don't usually struggle too much with what it is I want to say. This time it's different. I know exactly what I need to talk about, but the struggle has been with finding the right words. As I'm sure you would expect, I need to talk about the recent exchanges that took place on the WhatsApp group and which led to the upset felt by many within our community and the open letter that we co-chairs sent to the community several weeks ago.



You'll maybe have noticed that a couple of times above I referred to what 'I need to talk about'. The truth is, I don't actually want to talk about the incident. It's not that I don't recognise the hurt that has been caused, to many of us, by the incident. It's not that I don't understand the concern expressed by those involved in the various exchanges, and indeed subsequently, which were eloquently summed up by Rabbi Mark in his sermon on 27th November. It's not that I think that we shouldn't do what we can to

address the hurt and concerns, and it's certainly not the case that I think that I am in any way immune from some of the things that Rabbi Mark in his sermon suggested that we all 'suffer' from. The one thing that really stuck in my mind from Rabbi Mark's sermon was his comment that he sometimes has thoughts after which he then immediately thinks 'How could I have thought that? That was totally inappropriate.' Rabbi Mark said that he didn't think he was the only one who had such thoughts, and I can assure him that he is not. I do too.

No, the reason why I don't want to talk about the incident is because I want to hope that if we don't talk about it, it will go away. I absolutely believe that everyone in our community has the best interests of all other members at heart. We are all different and do things in different ways, which means that sometimes we can inadvertently upset others. We maybe got things a bit wrong with this last incident, so let's all try a bit harder and, as I say, I would like to hope that 'it will go away'. But while that's my hope, I know it's not enough. If we do things which inadvertently hurt others, shouldn't we try and understand what it is we're doing that causes the hurt? And if we're the ones hurting, shouldn't we try to explain to those who are hurting us what it is they're doing that causes the hurt.

One of things that we as the co-chairs are doing is to look at 'unconscious bias' workshops. Not specifically for us as co-chairs, or indeed anyone in particular, but as something that we would hope that many of us would want to participate in. We all have our biases, and while I don't know how these workshops work, I'm guessing that they will encourage us to think about what we do and say and how we interact with other people, and so ultimately help us to all relate with each other in a much better way. And you know what, my first instinct when we started talking about these workshops was along the lines of 'not another of these 'right-on' things'. I reckon I know my own biases. But the more I think about it, the more I realise that my thinking this is actually more likely to inadvertently hurt others.

I'm going to conclude with another of my personal 'issues', which is social media. I'm not particularly into social media, I don't do Facebook or Twitter or suchlike, and WhatsApp Groups are pretty much about the limit of my involvement with social media. And to me, what happened on our WhatsApp group sums up the issues with social media. People can respond instantly, with no time to think, and things which could, when people are actually speaking with each other, be addressed, can rapidly escalate out of control. I'm reminded of something I recently heard on the radio – it was a quote reputedly from a Buddhist monk who said 'remember, the keys to the gates of heaven also open the doors of hell'. And that's what social media feels like to me. But you know what, that's the world we live in. And even if, like me, you would rather we talked to each other instead of using social media, that still doesn't mean that we don't have our own biases. So please, when they take place, do come along to the 'unconscious bias' workshops.

A Challenging Time for Sukkat Shalom

Maurice Naftalin

At the end of November, the Sukkat Shalom co-chairs wrote to members and associate members of our community about a problem that arose on the "Care and Support" WhatsApp group a week earlier. In this article, I'll describe what happened, and what actions the Council intends to take as a result.

The episode was explained with great clarity by Rabbi Mark in a sermon that he gave shortly afterwards. A short summary follows, but you can—and should!—read [the full text](#), which draws deeply on our traditions and texts to analyse the problems.

In it, Rabbi Mark describes how a single quoted remark, drawing on racist assumptions, ignited a fierce controversy between those who felt that they should publicly “reprove their fellow” (as Leviticus (19:17) commands), and those whose priority was to follow Rabbinic teachings in preventing the shaming or humiliating of another. A further issue, even deeper and more serious, was revealed in the pain felt by people of colour in our community who understood some of what was said as a defence of racism and as a result felt uncertain of their place in our community.

Rabbi Mark was very clear that he believes that “everyone in Sukkat Shalom is utterly convinced that racist views and language are always wrong”. But he acknowledged that we all contend with racial prejudice, imparted to us by our different cultural background, and that we all have work that we need to do on ourselves, sometimes including censoring ourselves. So he clearly understood the motivations of those who pointed out the racial bias implicit in the original remark.

When he discussed the issue of avoiding public shaming, he was bound to reference what happens these days on social media, both because it provides a modern context for our problem and because online discussion seems to encourage extreme expressions. The difference from social media in general, however, is that in the WhatsApp group everyone is a member of our community, having a common purpose and shared ethical values – certainly including complete rejection of all forms of racism (and other discrimination). He didn’t exclude the possibility that for any of us, our self-censorship can momentarily fail and we can say something that would, albeit unintentionally, be hurtful and offensive to others. But though such words should indeed be rebuked, it would be wrong to assume of the person who said them – a fellow community member – that they are a racist: as Rabbi Mark said, this is “one of the gravest, most painful”, and devastating” accusations that can be made today.

The most important aspect of the whole episode—the hurt it has caused to people of colour in our community—is not addressed in the sermon, but the co-chairs and Rabbi Mark have discussed it at length, between ourselves and with some of those who have suffered hurt. We hope that some of the actions planned for the community, listed below, will begin to repair that hurt and build the mutual understanding in our community that can prevent it happening again.

Finally, Rabbi Mark spoke about the role of the co-chairs, who were criticised for their initial inaction that gave some people the impression that we don’t care about the issues or, worse, that we were implicitly taking sides without actually saying so. Neither of those is the case, but we do accept that we were quite unprepared for this incident, possibly revealing our own unconscious biases, and we were slow to react. We’ve worked hard since then, however, to come up with actions that will begin to repair the damage and to build in the community a positive awareness of the issues that will prevent it ever recurring.

In brief, these actions are:

- As co-chairs, we’re listening—as a group, or individually—to any members affected by what happened, with the intention of getting a better understanding of peoples’ concerns and their ideas for how to go forward;
- We’re organising bespoke participative “unconscious bias workshops”, which will be open to all members, to be held early in 2022. Each workshop will have a maximum of 25 participants, will last 2-3 hours, and will provide handouts and references. We’re strongly encouraging everyone to attend one of these. Their purpose, in the words of the facilitator, is to “help people to reflect on their unconscious biases and the assumptions that they sometimes make about others”. The facilitator, **Brenda Lewis**, is Jewish and comes with high recommendations from previous clients including a Reform Synagogue.

- We're applying guidelines for using the "Care and Support" group and – with the agreement of Sue Lieberman, the current administrator – we're going to widen the pool of administrators, and set up a mechanism for moderating the group which will allow for "reproving your fellow" while avoiding the possibility of public shaming. The details are at the end of this piece.

In conclusion, I offer two personal observations: first, that reading the exchanges gave me a sense of how widespread mental health issues are among us now—and this isn't remote diagnosis, but what people said about themselves. I believe that much of the heat of this controversy came from people's underlying distress—about the pandemic, or about the climate crisis, or about how these things affect their own personal situation. Several times, when I've suggested to people that they had responded too heatedly to a comment, the reply has been "But I was so upset!". Of course, that doesn't excuse harsh words or provocations, but on seeing such words it might help to consider that just as they are causing you distress, they may be coming from a place of distress as well.

My second observation is that although as co-chairs we've taken on the responsibility of listening carefully to our members to try to understand everyone's perspective on what happened, four people can't solve the problems of a community of more than a hundred. I believe that in the end, to fully recover from this episode, people will have to listen to one another, even to those who gave us most distress. Such difficult conversations, conducted this time in a calm and respectful way, are the way to rebuild trust and strengthen ourselves as a community.

WhatsApp Care and Support Group: Code of Conduct

Since the start of lockdown, this group has been a great asset to the community, supporting members in many ways. People have requested and received help, shared good and bad news, and sometimes just chatted about whatever's been on their mind. This code of conduct is to help it continue this valuable role while explicitly upholding **the values** we aspire to live by as a community.

Code of Conduct for the group, to be reposted quarterly:

- Make sure you agree to this code of conduct which is a condition of using the group. Also, your WhatsApp profile should contain your name (and, better still, your photo).
- Be kind and treat people with respect. Remember that we're all members of the same religious community, with shared ethical values, and that everyone is entitled to the assumption that they are acting from good motives.
- Before you press "send" in reply to another member's post, please think of whether your message needs to go to the whole group or would be better sent just to the member individually.
- If you think someone's post is inappropriate, mail the moderators at waadmins@eljc.org and notify the group that you've done so. If someone else has posted such a notification, please avoid repeating it; just mail the moderators if you feel you should. The moderators can decide to take the matter no further unless it relates to a possible breach of community values; in that case, they will proceed according to the **guidelines for moderators**.

Welcome to Tova Eleanor Reid



Kyla and Matt Reid welcomed their first child, Tova Eleanor, in mid-November. She was 8lbs 12oz, and 21 inches long—taking after her tall daddy! Everyone is recovering well and they're looking forward to introducing her to Sukkat Shalom in the coming months.

Rebekah's Tribe Grows

Rebekah Gronowski

Recently, I was very delighted to welcome into my family an eighth great-grandchild. My eldest son's eldest son and his wife have a baby boy. He is the first boy to carry our family name by direct descent. This is my eldest son's first grandchild, and he is so pleased. It has been a worrying time for the family as mum (Sarah) was very poorly and she and baby (Oliver) had to stay in hospital. Daddy David (my grandson) has been absolutely amazing and cared for them both in hospital and, eventually, at home. He is an absolute natural and has taken to baby care like a duck to water.

Thankfully Sarah is recovering well, and baby Oliver is thriving and making great strides. He is really amazing and takes everything in; he is very alert and obviously a very happy baby. At the time of writing, he is eight weeks old. He laughs and smiles and engages with everything and everyone around him.

All my other seven great-grandchildren are from my two granddaughters whose Dad (my younger son) sadly died nearly eleven years ago. He would have been so proud of his girls and his grandchildren - he did see the first three, the eldest of whom has changed his name to the family name.

I always look forward to my Zoom calls and video calls and the photos of all the children which arrive on my phone.

Our members are painting, singing, performing and publishing – read all about them!

Miriam at Patriot Hall

Sue Bard and Miriam Vickers



Tynningame Sands

It was a pleasure to find Sukkat Shalom member Miriam Vickers' work exhibited at Patriothall during the Open Studios weekend at the end of November, and also to visit Miriam in her studio there, surrounded by finished work and work in progress.

Patriothall, in Stockbridge, is one of three Wasps (Workshop and Artists Studio Provision, Scotland) studios in Edinburgh, and the building alone is well worth a visit. Now a Category B listed building providing studio space for artists and craftspeople, it was originally developed by the Edinburgh Northern District Co-operative Society to provide high-quality tenement housing for 42 families and was completed in 1860.

Two of Miriam's striking watercolours were selected for the Open Studios exhibition – 'Tynningame Sands' and 'Fala Woods'.

Miriam says:

'Tynningame sands is a favourite place for me to go in John Muir Country Park. The watercolour in the exhibition at Patriothall was carried out a few years ago but recently reframed. The light on rocks and water means the scene is constantly changing as I work in my sketchbook. This provides the basis for subsequent painting and etching.'



Fala Woods

Fala Woods is part of the Fala Water area which is a wetland and of scientific interest because of its unique habitat for plants and pink-footed geese who stop to feed. Karine Polwart talks about it in her piece entitled 'Wind Resistance'. I have depicted Fala Woods as a watercolour and an etching. The etching is hung at Edinburgh Printmakers in a members' exhibition entitled 'Solace,' incorporating work produced during lockdown.

My future plans are to develop the work relating to my Back Green lockdown drawings that I am currently carrying out at Edinburgh Printmaker and at Fala.'

Singing with the Choir of the Earth

Rebekah Gronowski

No-one can ever say that I am bored or lazy! I have had a very busy few months, despite being restricted mainly to staying at home, apart from the odd foray down to the local shops.

Many of you will remember I have been singing with the 'Self Isolation Choir' which has now been re-named the 'Choir of The Earth' as all our members come from everywhere on the globe. We performed Mozart's 'Requiem' and, later, the hymn 'Eternal Father Strong to Save' for H.M. The Queen in memory of Prince Philip.

The latest music I have been studying (and re-learning) is Haydn's 'The Creation'. This has been very exciting, especially as our conductor for this was Sir Ben England, BEM again. I last sang this in 1961 as an alto, so it has been a challenge learning the tenor part. I must say, the tenor part is a much better fit for my voice because it is in a more comfortable range. As I have grown older my voice has gradually become lower and lower. Hopefully, it has now settled, although I have been known in the past to sing the occasional bass line!

I did manage all the rehearsals for this but, due to other happenings in the family, missed the deadline for submitting my recording and headshot for the performance. It was performed in the middle of December on YouTube - I will be able to join in from home when it happens but I won't be on the recording this time.

In January I will be starting to rehearse Karl Jenkins' 'The Armed Man' - again the tenor part. I have sung this before under the baton of Sir Karl Jenkins CBE, in the Royal Albert Hall with The Really Big Chorus. I do miss those days and somehow don't think I will be able to do that again. This is why it is such a joy for me to sing with the Choir of The Earth. I can do it from home!!

The choir of the earth will be performing Haydn's Creation on 12 February 2022 at 5.00pm and it will be on YouTube. Go to the website for more details [Choir of the Earth](#) CDs of former performances and other goodies are available from the website store.

Jewish Tales from Scotland

Sue Bard

After our long period of festival deprivation and depletion, it was good to have a new festival, 'Winter Tales – a festival of literature, religion and the imagination' that glowed in the dark December days. The festival included 'Jewish Tales from Scotland' performed in Edinburgh University's beautiful and atmospheric New College – itself celebrating its 175th anniversary.

Phil Alexander, Ellen Galford, Hannah Holtschneider and Elisa Koch (seen here) devised and performed a magical hour of stories and poetry, re-animating events and people from Scotland's Jewish past, for which the archives at the newly opened Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre in Glasgow were a rich source and Phil Alexander's and Elisa Koch's outstanding music an integral part.



We followed the gradual arrival in Edinburgh at the beginning of the 19th Century of early immigrants from Amsterdam and other Western European cities, as well as those that came later in the wave of

immigration from the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. These immigrants settled in the Southside, forming a vigorous Yiddish-speaking community, many of them earning their living as travelling salesmen and pedlars. Synagogues proliferated until Rabbi Salis Daiches arrived in 1919 with an injunction from the Chief Rabbi to unite them, which he eventually did – a process that culminated in 1932 in a new, purpose-built synagogue in Salisbury Road.

With a scene- shift to Glasgow, we met activist, writer and poet, Avrom Radutski, who'd arrived in the city from Kiev in the 1890s, going on to found Scotland's first Cigarette Workers' Union. A later arrival, Hilda Goldwag, was one of many refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe who found asylum in Scotland. A gifted artist, Hilda became head designer at the prominent textile company Friedlanders in Hillington. Later in life, as a full-time painter much of whose work depicted the gritty everyday life of her adopted city, Hilda was elected a member of the Scottish Society of Women Artists and exhibited frequently. Hilda lost her entire family in the Holocaust. 50 years after she'd left Vienna, she said: 'I think of them every day, and I dream of them. I cannot paint my mother, even though I have her image in my mind to this day.'

Another prominent figure was Isaac Hirshow, who'd trained as a cantor in Warsaw and became *chazan* first at the Chevra Kadisha synagogue in the Gorbals and then at the more upmarket Garnethill Synagogue. In his 40s, Hirshow enrolled for the new Music degree at the University of Glasgow, and in 1938 became the University's first-ever graduate in Music. As part of his degree, Hirshow produced a cantata for choir and orchestra, based on the words of Hebrew prayers, and combining the Eastern European *chazzanut* of his original training with Western classical musical harmony and structure. Look out for the first-ever performance of this work in its entirety by one of the BBC orchestras, planned for 2022. Computer simulation allowed us to hear a part of it here and now.

Lastly, in an intriguing and original narrative, Ellen Galford connected Jewish and Scottish landscapes of the imagination, drawing on and intermingling Scottish folklore and places and the mutable golem concepts and tales of Central Europe. Final food for thought at a rich banquet.

Still My Word Sings

Sue Bard

Avrom Sutzkever זינגט אלץ נאך מיין וואָרט / Still my Word Sings*

In her masterful bilingual anthology of Sutzkever's poetry ([reviewed in Etrog](#)) Heather Valencia described Sutzkever as 'generally considered to be the greatest modern Yiddish poet, increasingly being recognised as one of the foremost poets of the twentieth century.'

We're delighted to let you know that 'Still My Word Sings' is now available both as a [print-on-demand volume](#) and also as a [free download](#).

Heather has selected two poems, 'Every Hour, Every Day' written in Vilna Ghetto in 1943 and 'Bread and Salt' written in 1995. She says: 'In these two poems, written more than 50 years apart, we see the contrast between the horror of the war years - though even in such extremity, the poetic word survives - and the poet's serene affirmation, in his old age, of his life and being'.

יעדער שעה, יעדער טאָג

יעדער שעה, יעדער טאָג, -

איז מער ניט קיין שעה,

איז מער ניט קיין טאָג,

ס'איז אַ גרייטער מזבח בײַ דיר אין געביין,

וון פֿאַרשלונגען ווערט אַלץ, וואָס דו פֿילסט, וואָס דו זעסט,

און דו זינגסט נאָך דערביי, ווען דו פֿרעסט

זיך אַליין.

ווילנער געטאָ

27סטן אַפּריל

1943

Every Hour, Every Day

Every hour every day, -

is no longer an hour,

is no longer a day.

It's a sacrificial altar prepared in your bones,

where all that you feel, that you see, is consumed,

yet still you sing, as you devour

yourself.

ברויט און זאלץ

די זון איז אלעמענס, נאָר מער ווי אלעמענס
געהערט זי מיר אליין.

די וואַרצלען פֿון דער פֿינצטערניש
באָדאַרף איך ניט. איך בין
אַ זונקינד.

איך בין אליין דאָס לעבן,
און שפורן פֿון אַ זילבערפֿוקס אין שניי
איז מיין זכרון.

די האַק וואָס וועט מיך קומען אויסקאַרטשען
זי מוז און וועט מיר בלייבן אונטערטעניק.

איך בין די שטילקייט.
בין איר ברויט און זאלץ.

Bread and salt

The sun belongs to everyone, but even more

it is mine alone.

I do not need

the roots of darkness. I am

a sun child.

I am life itself,

my memory

the spoor of a silver fox in snow.

The axe that comes to tear me up by the roots,

it *must* and *shall* submit to my command.

I am silence.

I am its bread and salt

I couldn't resist adding a third poem to Heather's two choices, the epigraph of his book 'From Old and Young Manuscripts', published in 1982

And thus it shall be in the last days,
then it will come to pass: a mortal
will bring to his hungry mouth
neither bread nor meat,
neither fig nor honey;
he will simply try a word or two
and will be satisfied.

If this has whetted your appetite to know more about Avrom Sutzkever, sign up for the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research free Zoom talk **From the Vilna Ghetto to Nuremberg: Memoir and Testimony** Thursday 27 January 2022 1pm US time (**6pm UK time**).

*Avrom Sutzkever זינגט אַלץ נאָך מיין וואָרט / Still my Word Sings (Düsseldorf University Press 2017)

Edited and translated by Heather Valencia.

Chanukah Collage

Chanukah offered us what turned out to be a brief window of opportunity to celebrate this festival in person, on the first night of Chanukah at St Andrews Square, at the cheder Chanukah party and on the last night of Chanukah at our Sukkat Shalom get together.





Between Wrestling and Embrace

You may have recently seen an announcement from Liberal Jews for Justice in Israel /Palestine (LJJIP) about their formation as a grassroots network of Jews within Liberal Judaism committed to social justice and the application of universal human rights to Jews and Palestinians in Palestine/Israel. (Read their [Statement of Intent](#) and for more information contact info@ljjip.org) Etrog is publishing another viewpoint, from Rabbi Lea Mühlstein, the international chair of Arzenu (the international federation of progressive Zionists), whose commitment to “dialogue from difference” has led her to help LJJIP by facilitating discussions with LJ rabbis.

Thank you Lea for agreeing to write for Etrog on what it means to be a Progressive religious Zionist

Between Wrestling and Embrace: Being a Progressive Religious Zionist

Rabbi Lea Mühlstein

What does it mean to be a Progressive religious Zionist? Well, I guess that, as the old adage goes – two Jews, three opinions – it depends a little on who you ask. So, let me begin by sharing what it means to me to be a Progressive religious Zionist and then try to extrapolate some more general points based on my personal reflection.



My identity as a Progressive Jew is grounded in two core beliefs:

I believe in a Judaism that does not require me to leave my values and principles—whether steeped in Judaism or embraced from the wider society in which I live—at the threshold to the synagogue.

And I firmly believe that from its inception Judaism has been more than a religion: it has always been defined by the centrality of the covenant between God and the people, not as individuals but as a community bound by a shared history, language and a connection to a physical place promised as a homeland to the people.

So how do these core beliefs influence my Zionist identity?

Firstly, I cannot separate my Zionism from my religion. My commitment to the State of Israel is deeply anchored in my religious identity and the belief that having a place on earth where we are a sovereign nation presents essential opportunities for religious, spiritual and personal growth.

But it also comes with a special responsibility to use those opportunities and the power of sovereignty wisely – to not leave my values at the threshold to the Jewish State. I want the Jewish State to be more than just another nation state. I believe a state that would deserve to call itself Jewish must always strive to be better—as our prophets envisioned when they spoke up in the face of injustice. The founders of the

modern Zionist movement were indeed dreamers: Theodor Herzl put it this way: 'I once called Zionism an indefinite ideal, and I truly believe that even after attaining our country the Land of Israel... it will not stop being an ideal; because Zionism, as I see it includes not only in our aspiration for that Promised Land as a commandment for our unfortunate people, but also the aspiration for moral and spiritual perfection.'

So, what does it mean to be a Progressive religious Zionist? It means that we must be morally aspirational and brave like our ancient prophets. It means that we must do more than 'affirm our commitment to the State of Israel, our duty to seek its security, aid its development and support its absorption of immigrants', we must also make our contribution to fulfil the second half of the statement on Israel found in the Affirmations of Liberal Judaism: 'to further the fulfilment of the high ideals of Justice and Equality for all its citizens set out in its Declaration of Independence'.

But it would be too easy to stop there. Just like John Rayner argued for universalism in our prayerbook because it is not possible to imagine how praying for peace for the Jews would actually ever become a reality if we did not pray for peace for all of humanity, I believe that as a Progressive religious Zionist, I must care about Israel's relationship with its neighbours and in particular how it exercises its power over more than five million Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. As a firm believer in the right of Jews to sovereignty in a land that they call home, I equally believe in the right of Palestinians to a state of their own. And while I appreciate that at the moment it is too easy for either side to blame the other why this is not yet a reality, I think it is crucial that we keep reminding ourselves of the ideals we want to work towards.

In my role as the international chair of Arzenu, the political voice of Reform, Progressive and Liberal Religious Zionists within the international Zionist movement, I work alongside our Israeli sister movement – The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) – to ensure that Progressive Jewish values are reflected in the State of Israel. Together we advocate for Israel: as it should be and must become. We hold the Israeli government to account to be faithful to the aims of Israel's founders: to develop the land for the benefit of all its inhabitants, and to implement the Prophetic ideals of liberty and justice. We believe that the Zionist dream can become true, that Israel can be a state that is inclusive, moral, and a home for all of us if we ensure that it is not just the voice of right-wing ultra-orthodoxy that dictates what Jewish values are but remind Israeli society that Jewish values mandate us, above all, to stand up for the rights of the marginalised, to speak out against hatred – as Leviticus 19:17 reminds us: 'Reprove your kinsman and incur no guilt because of them.' Don't stand idly by.

Anat Hoffman, the Director of the Israel Religious Action Center of the IMPJ, calls on us to embrace our love for Israel by speaking up for our values: 'Zionism is not a spectator sport. It's participatory. Israel is too important to be left to Israelis.'

And so we find ourselves as Progressive religious Zionists like Jacob encountering the angel in Genesis 32 between wrestling and embrace. And maybe through this process, we might even catch the occasional glimpse of the Divine.

Rabbi Lea Mühlstein is one of the Senior Rabbis at The Ark Synagogue (NPLS). She is also the international chair of Arzenu - the political voice of Reform, Liberal and progressive Religious Zionists. She is a member of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel and a member of the Expanded Executive of the World Zionist Organization.

Uyghur Tribunal

Nick Silk

In September 2020 the Uyghur Tribunal started work to investigate ongoing atrocities and possible genocide against the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic minority populations by the People's Republic of China (PRC). On 9th December 2021 the Tribunal published its findings. The Tribunal was chaired by Sir Geoffrey Knight QC and its members worked, for the most part, on a pro-bono basis. It was established because



there is essentially no other mechanism to review the allegations against the PRC. As is stated on the Uyghur Tribunal website ([About - Uyghur Tribunal](#)), 'If it were realistically possible to bring the PRC to any formal international court – in particular to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – there would be no need for the establishment of a people's tribunal'.

The findings of the tribunal are comprehensive and the summary judgement runs to 63 pages. I am writing this report on the 9th December and I'm sure things will evolve in the coming days and weeks. However today it is clear that the findings are receiving a good degree of publicity and having had a look through the judgement, there are some key findings that, to me, stand out:

- Torture of Uyghurs attributable to the PRC is established beyond reasonable doubt
- Crimes against humanity attributable to the PRC is established beyond reasonable doubt by acts of: deportation or forcible transfer; imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty; torture; rape and other sexual violence; enforced sterilisation; persecution; enforced disappearance; and other inhumane acts
- On the basis of evidence heard in public, the Tribunal is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the PRC, by the imposition of measures to prevent births intended to destroy a significant part of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as such, has committed genocide

The summary judgement ([Uyghur Tribunal Summary Judgment](#) makes for harrowing reading and in previous issues of Etrog we have talked about actions we can take, and specifically mentioned the [Rene Cassin website](#) where further information is available).

One of the actions that some of us were involved in was encouraging the government to have a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022. I'm sure you'll have seen in the news in early December that the UK government announced such a boycott. Australia, Canada and the US have also announced a diplomatic boycott, which means that no government representatives will attend the Beijing Winter Olympics, in protest at the PRC's record on human rights.

Interfaith News

Nick Silk

On 9th December, EIFA (Edinburgh Interfaith Association) held its 'Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives meeting' on the subject of 'Faith and Environmentalism: From Justice to Action'. The Zoom meeting was addressed by Alyssa Gilbert of the Grantham Institute, Imperial College London. The key message, at least as far as I was concerned, was that it is not just governments that can have an impact on climate change. Alyssa noted that while it can sometimes feel a bit daunting in terms of what we can do as individuals, if we join together as a faith group, the impact we can have is much greater. But she also said that there are certainly actions that we can take as individuals. For example, if we are buying a new car, it is very much our decision as to whether we buy a petrol or an electric car. The Grantham institute has produced a document entitled "9 things you can do about climate change"; the title is pretty self-explanatory, and the link to the document is [here](#).

Interestingly, of the 30 or so participants at the meeting, three were from Sukkat Shalom, a further two from the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and Alyssa herself mentioned during the meeting that she is a member of a London shul.

A Warm Welcome from Poznan

Gillian Raab

In the first week of December this year I attended a workshop in the Polish city of Poznan, run by Eurostat (the EU statistics agency). I was fortunate to be accompanied by my Polish colleague, Beata, who acted as an interpreter. Poznan is a beautiful city with many splendid old buildings. Many others had been destroyed in the siege of Poznan in 1945 when Russian army ousted the Nazis ([see here](#)).



Poznan New Synagogue in 1907 (left) and in 2002 (right) as a municipal swimming pool

Before it was annexed to the Third Reich in 1939 the city had a Jewish Community of around 1,500, almost all of whom were deported either to the ghettos of other Polish cities or later directly to death camps. Before 1939 the city had three synagogues, two progressive and one Orthodox. Only the last still stands but it is much changed. After removing the upper portion, with its copper dome topped by a star of David, the building was converted into a swimming pool for the use of Nazi officers. After the war it

continued to function as a municipal swimming pool until 2002 when it was returned to the Jewish Community. Today it still stands but it is gradually falling into disrepair. To rebuild old buildings is difficult, but it is much more difficult to rebuild a Jewish Community.

The conference ended on Friday at lunchtime and we were not due to fly back to Edinburgh until the next day. Before I left Edinburgh I contacted the Jewish Community of Poznan via an email I found on this [web site about Jewish Poznan](#). I received a reply inviting us to attend Erev Shabbat at an address on the opposite side of the street where the synagogue still stands. We rang the bell at 5pm, as instructed, and were ushered upstairs into an elegant flat in an old building which we learned had been a former Jewish home. About a dozen people were seated round a table in the central room set out for a meal and we were invited to join them. With Beata's help I was able to learn a little about the Community and answer the many questions they had for us about the Jewish Communities in Edinburgh. The president of the Community, Alicja Kobus, was present and her portrait hangs above the dining table in the central room. She was clearly the driving force behind the rebuilding of the Orthodox Community 22 years before. The Community has around 30 members, some who survived the war in hiding and others who had moved to Poznan recently. A recent arrival was an Israeli who had found the Community the previous year on Rosh Hashanah and now leads services for them. We soon moved through to the next room fitted out as a synagogue where the service followed the Polish Orthodox siddur, differing very little from our Erev Shabbat service. Men and women were divided by a screen and, because there was not a minyan of men, kaddish was not included. It was Chanukah and also Rosh Chodesh, so special prayers for this were included as Rabbi Mark also did in the Zoom service he led on the same evening. There was an electric chanukiah on the corner balcony of the synagogue in the flat but we did not light any candles as it was well past sunset.



On left: Balcony of the corner room of the flat, that is now the synagogue of the Community. The former New Synagogue can be seen on the right-hand side of the picture. From Google street view taken 2017.

After the meal we all returned to the dining table where we made kiddush and partook of a delicious meal of soup, latkes (of course) pickled herrings, salads and a rich beef stew made with kosher beef. We learned that the food had been prepared by one person present who was there with her grandson.

She was an economist, but definitely the best cook in the Community, we were told.

As I was finishing this short article, I received an email from Alicia Kobus with much more information including a thesis from her granddaughter about how they re-established the Community and how they contribute to civic life there. For the next Etrog I hope to tell you a little more about them.

Exciting Volunteering Opportunity

Sue Bard

Are you looking for something new to do in 2022? **The Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre** is looking for facilitators for its very popular School Visit Service. This service gives students and teachers first-hand experience of Jewish religious and cultural life. It also offers insights into the immigrant experiences of the Jewish community in Scotland and a Scottish perspective of the Holocaust era.

While knowledge of Scottish Jewish history, Jewish religious practices and the history of the holocaust period would be an advantage, the most important thing is willingness to learn. Similarly, experience in guiding, while welcome, is not essential as full training will be given.

Eleanor Livingston (pictured in the synagogue with children) can thoroughly recommend becoming a guide. She says: *'It's been a pleasure to welcome students of all ages to the Heritage centre, particularly the older primary school students. They are always in awe when they see inside the synagogue building, especially the Torah Scrolls. They have so many interesting questions which I love answering and hopefully they come away from the visit, with a bit of an understanding of our religion, our history, our practices and our way of life'.*



Full information on what is offered to schools is available here: <https://sjhc.org.uk/school-visit/>

To find out more, email SJHC Manager Kerry Patterson on info@sjhc.org.uk

Community Care and Support

In these difficult times, we are here for each other, so don't hesitate to ask for any help and support you may need, including simply the need to talk.

OUR EXISTING CONFIDENTIAL CONTACT SYSTEM: Phone **0131 777 8024** or email **contact@eljc.org** and one of the small group of people who respond to calls and emails will get back to you quickly.

RABBI MARK SOLOMON would like you to know that he's available on **07766 141315** and by e-mail at **marksolomon@btinternet.com** if you'd like to talk to him.

OUR WHATSAPP GROUP allows people to be in direct contact with each other very quickly where help is needed. If you're not already on it and would like to be, text your mobile number to Sue Lieberman on **07939 014720** and ask to be part of the group.

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