



Adar — Iyar 5783
March — April 2023



Etrog

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Shalom Edinburgh

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Word From The Sofa

Nick Silk

Why do bad things happen to good people? I'm pretty sure that this is a question that has troubled religious thinkers for — well — pretty much since religion became a 'thing'. Whether it was deemed to be that the 'good person' had done something wrong to incur God's displeasure, or that the person had been bad in a previous life and so was reaping their reward in this one, the explanations have never been, to my mind anyway, that convincing. And that's what makes it even more horrible what

has happened recently in the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. I know you can't compare tragedies — every tragedy is a tragedy for those concerned, be that involving one person or, as in the case of the earthquake, tens of thousands. But if, for example, you look at the war in Ukraine, where there are also many people affected, it is the case that there are no natural forces at work. For sure you can ask why has God made people capable of inflicting such atrocities in war, but it is clearly the case that it is people that have caused the deaths in Ukraine. In Turkey & Syria, while there has been comment made about the quality of the buildings — clearly down to how people built them — the underlying cause, the earthquake, is a natural disaster.



How is it that God could allow such disasters to occur?

I remember reading once that for the earth to exist as it is, the tectonic plates and associated earthquakes are key to how the earth continues to evolve and maintain life. If the tectonic plates weren't moving, so I read, the earth would become sterile and life, at least as we know it, wouldn't exist. I can understand this, and that all the wonders of natural life are interdependent, and this interdependency includes the various forces of nature. However, if God really is omnipotent, couldn't God have devised a world where this wasn't necessary and natural disasters didn't occur? Of course, if God had done so, it's quite possible (pretty certain?) that we wouldn't have evolved as we were. And thinking of things I remember reading, it was in a popular physics book, I think, that I read how amazing it is that all the various fundamental constants in the universe are all in balance and have allowed the universe to be as it is. If any of them were changed even by a fraction, then things wouldn't be as we know them. The implication, at least as I remember it, seemed to be that we would still be around but would experience a very different world. Once again, I suspect that we wouldn't be around. As the Rabbis in the Talmud concluded, after they had debated whether it was a good or bad thing that God had created human beings, it would have been better if God hadn't created us, but given that we have been created, we should make the best of it.

That seems a bit of a negative conclusion, but I think that sometimes you have to accept that there are things that you can't change. And for us here in Edinburgh, there isn't anything we can do about the fact that the earthquake happened. But we can react to it, and at our most recent Council meeting we agreed unanimously to donate £500 to the appeal to help the survivors of the earthquake. It is only a small thing, but it is a practical action we can take and have taken to try and do our bit to helping those in Turkey and Syria. As the Rabbis said, we are on this earth and we have to try our best to 'do our bit' — be that in helping our family and friends, our local community, our synagogue or those in other parts of the world who are depending on us for what support we can offer.

Noa Wilkes' Bat Mitzvah

28 January 2023/6 Shevat 5783



Noa, with sister Yael and cousins Leo and Ida Köprülü

Mazel tov to Noa Wilkes, her parents, George Wilkes and Hannah Holtschneider and her sister Yael Wilkes on Noa's Bat Mitzvah. This joyful occasion was led by Rabbi Mark Solomon and shared with family, friends and members of Sukkat Shalom in person and via Zoom.

In a change from our usual venue — St Mark's Unitarian Church — we found ourselves instead in the Gothic-revival Rainy Hall, part of New Hall, the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity where Hannah is a Senior Lecturer in Modern Jewish Studies.

Here is Noa's thoughtful *d'var torah*, which she delivered and translated beautifully.

D'var Torah: Parashat Bo — Exodus 13:1-16

Noa Wilkes

Shabbat Shalom, and welcome to my Bat Mitzvah. The portion today is Parashat Bo. It contains the final 3 of the ten plagues: locusts, darkness and the death of the firstborn. Moses tells the Israelites

the preparations that they must make for their liberation, which involves taking a lamb for each household. With their staffs in their hands and sandals on their feet, they ate that original paschal lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, ready to leave on the first Passover night. At midnight the angel of death passed over the Israelites' houses and spared their firstborn children.

The section that I have chosen to read is at the very end of Bo, chapter 13, verses 1–16, which is about how the Israelites were to remember their liberation in the future. One of the ways they did this was to redeem their firstborn children and animals. In this way they would remember the loss of the firstborn children in Egypt, who died in the tenth plague and show gratitude that their own children were spared. Every time a mother had a firstborn son, or there was a firstborn animal in the flock or herd, the story would be told again and people would remember and give thanks for their liberation.

By doing this, the Israelites would metaphorically 'have the teaching of the Eternal One as a sign upon their hand and as a reminder between their eyes'. Jewish tradition took this metaphor literally, and this is the origin of the Tefillin. Tefillin are two black leather boxes with straps which are put on by adult Jews for weekday morning prayers, and are worn on the forehead and upper left arm. The portion that I am reading constitutes 2 out of the 4 passages written on small scrolls in the boxes. Remembering is passed down the generations, from parents to children.

In my portion, there is a child who asks questions, this is the origin for the simple child in the Passover Haggadah. Haggadah means 'telling' and is the book we read from at the Passover seder. They ask the simple question, "What is this?" to their parents, who then tell them about the Eternal One freeing the Israelites from Egypt. But, there is another verse in my portion, where parents just tell their child about these events without the child asking, this is the origin of the fourth child in the Haggadah, the one who does not know how to ask, so the parents must take the initiative themselves, and tell their child the story. Telling children things comes from the word *v'higad'ta* which means 'you shall tell', and this is the origin of the word Haggadah.

I find this part of the Parsha interesting because I like to ask questions about my family history and learn from my parents, like the children in my portion. Because of my love for learning by asking, I can relate to the child who asks questions and I also connect to the child who does not know how to ask because I enjoy having things told to me that I may not have inquired about, but I find are interesting.

Thank you to everyone who is here today, and those who are participating or listening on Zoom. Thank you to everyone who has helped me to get to this day, my family, friends, godparents and especially Rabbi Mark, who has spent the last year teaching me to understand my Parsha and read Hebrew.

Sukkat Shalom Annual General Meeting

19 March 2023, 3pm at St Mark's

Join us to elect, meet, or maybe even **join** our new Council; to hear about what's been achieved over the last year and to have tea and cake.

You can also hear about what our EcoSynagogue Group's been doing and discuss ways in which we, as a community and as individuals can put principles of sustainability and conservation into practice.

Also — would you like to consider becoming a member of Council?

Our growing community is run almost entirely voluntarily, our Council being key to how this works. It's important that our Council is representative of our community so, if you care about the future of Sukkat Shalom, and are a full member of Sukkat Shalom, please consider joining the Council.

Not living in or near Edinburgh is NOT a bar to becoming a Council member. We're committed to creating a meaningful community for all our members, including the 28% who aren't local. For this reason our monthly Council meetings are all held on Zoom.

By being on the Council, you'll be able to bring your own ideas and to contribute to decisions being made about how the community should be run. [Find out more.](#)

It would really help with the planning of the AGM if we receive expressions of interest by SUNDAY 5 MARCH — via contact@eljic.org or [0131 777 8024](tel:01317778024). Don't hesitate to make contact for an informal chat if you'd like one.

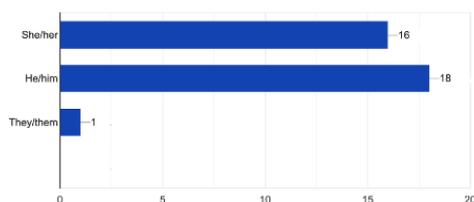
About Our Members

Jen Andreacchi and Han Smith

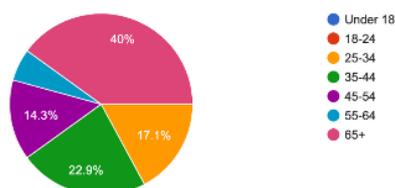
Recently, Sukkat Shalom created an online survey to gather information about the members of our community. So far, we have recorded 35 responses and have learned helpful information about our members! Here are a few graphics that illustrate these responses. Additionally, the results of the survey so far demonstrate that we have members who have been active in the community since the founding of Sukkat Shalom; alternatively, we have members that have joined in the last few months. We have members who would like to share some of their hobbies with other members. Popular hobbies include playing music, going on hikes, and cooking and baking. Finally we found that some members are interested in opening their homes for Shabbat Dinners and some could host up to 8 guests.

We look forward to receiving more responses and using these results to better the community! You can take the survey [here](#).

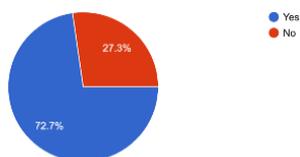
Which pronouns would you like us to use for you?



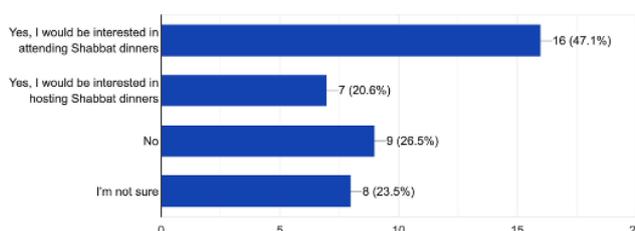
Select your age group:



Would you like to be put in contact with other members who live locally to you?



Would you be interested in attending or hosting community Shabbat dinners?



Kol Nidrei Appeal 2022/5783 — Where Are We Now?

Our Kol Nidrei Appeal closed on 31 December 2022 and the money collected is now with our chosen charities. We collected a record-breaking £4934 — up on the year before's then record of £4,500. The amount we've donated is actually £5,906 with the addition of £952 from the Gift Aid claim. This is a fantastic contribution from a small community that includes many people struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. Thank you everyone and thanks too to our efficient treasurer, Stefano Giossi.



We're pleased that all our chosen charities were personally recommended by our members. Here's an update on three of the four charities by the people who recommended them. Sue Bard will be updating on the fourth organisation The Parents Circle Families Forum in the June/July Etrog, as well as kicking off our Kol Nidrei Appeal for 2023/5784.

Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts

Gila Holliman

Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts was set up in lockdown in order to help keep people fed while they were struggling both financially and logistically in the crisis. Furloughed chefs, kitchen staff and local volunteers got together in unused kitchens and used surplus and donated food to create nutritious meals that were then delivered throughout Edinburgh by a team of volunteers. As the need grew, they continued to grow alongside and continue operating today in an expanded format.

I was drawn to this organisation for two reasons — it simultaneously reduces waste while creating a judgement-free service to those people who really need it. People in Edinburgh do not have to be referred or prove need, they can self-refer, and the deliveries are made mainly in volunteer cars so there is no stigma at all. Most of their effort is in creating what they call a 'day pack' which is a delivered full-day meal for individuals or families, but they are also now developing more on-demand services and have set up a Soup Kitchen in Granton on Fridays where they serve hot soup and bread at lunchtime. I've checked their social media and they have provided 1,668,057 meals to people in Edinburgh since April 2020.

On their fundraising page, they note that £15 will feed one person for a week, and £150 will feed that person for the whole winter. It's really wonderful to think about all the good Sukkat Shalom's donation is doing for the local community in this very challenging winter.

Lemon Tree Trust Update

Lindsay Levy

With the aim of 'transforming refugee camps and communities, one garden at a time' the Lemon Tree Trust supports the development of community garden spaces within refugee and IDP camps to grow food and flowers for redistribution to vulnerable families. Gardens offer a safe place and sense of community and provide a hub for women and their children to learn new skills and socialise.

The Trust was founded in 2015 and most of its work takes place in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In 2016 the Azadi Community Garden in Domiz 1 camp was established, and since then gardening activities have continued to roll out in the region until by last year they were working in ten camps and planning to set up gardening initiatives in more.

The tremors of the recent earthquakes in southern Turkey and northern Syria were felt across the region, even within the community garden in Domiz 1. Many of the gardeners in the KRI are Syrian and have family and friends in Syria and Turkey and in their latest newsletter the Trust appeals to those who can afford it to donate to the emergency fund through some of the many aid programmes that have been set up.

If you want to receive the Lemon Tree Trust newsletters and/or continue to support them on an individual basis you can find more information on their website at lemontreustrust.org.

Jewish Care Scotland

Nick Silk

Jewish Care Scotland continues to support the Jewish community in Scotland. While it is true that some of their services are more accessible to those living in Glasgow, such as their 'Welcome Wednesdays' which is a drop-in cafe session, we continue to benefit from having access to Jewish Care. Every week in our reminder we can see that their helpline is available to us for support, and Jewish Care continues to provide one-off grants to help with the cost of festivals, as well as providing grants during the current cost of living crisis. We advertise these grants in our reminders, and anyone can apply for them. It is worth saying too that I benefit, in my role as a co-chair, from having access to Jewish Care staff who can help with queries I might have. Jewish Care provides an important function in Scottish Jewish life, and it's really good that we have been able to help them with our Kol Nidrei appeal donation.

Interfaith Report

Nick Silk

27th January is Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) and once again this year it was commemorated in Edinburgh by an event hosted by Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA) at the City Chambers. We listened to the account of how Marie Jeanne Umutesi survived the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. It was a very moving account, particularly as she was joined by her sisters who had flown in from Rwanda — and of course her husband Iain, who is the Executive Director of EIFA. The event was also attended by pupils from the Longstone and Preston Street Primary schools, who showed us some of the artwork they had created to commemorate HMD.

I also went to the HMD event at Livingston's Howden Centre, which was hosted by West Lothian Council, in my capacity as a member of the West Lothian Faith Group. This event was also attended by school pupils, this time from secondary schools in West Lothian, and we heard from some of them about their work as ambassadors of the Anne Frank Trust.

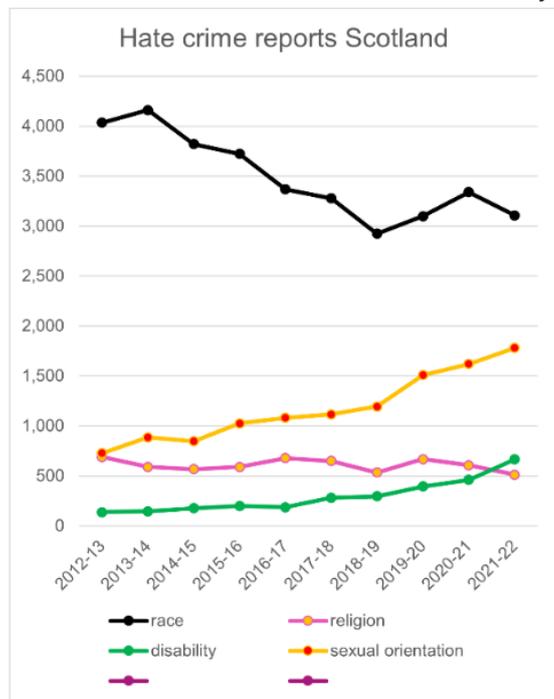
Antisemitism 2022

Gillian Raab

The Community Security Trust (CST) has recently published a report on the number of antisemitic incidents they recorded in 2022. The number of incidents in the UK was 1,652, and 34 of these were in Scotland. You can read the full report [here](#). The report contains many details of what happened, as well as discussions of how antisemitic incidents are determined. They are careful to exclude incidents that can only be defined as anti-Zionist, although they acknowledge that this distinction can be difficult. The majority of incidents are Abusive Behaviour (81% of all in the UK) with smaller percentages of Assault (8%), Threats (6%) and Damage and Desecration (4%). A worrying finding

in the report is the increased rate of antisemitic incidents where the offender was identified as aged under 18 (159 incidents). In 66 cases the young culprits used holocaust or Nazi-related rhetoric, leading to speculation that right wing ideas, spread by social media may be a cause of this trend. The CST also publish a report on Campus anti-semitism [here](#).

The CST figures for the UK and Scotland are high compared with the recent years. The Scottish average for the previous 5 years was just 22 incidents, compared to 34 this year. The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (ScoJec) has obtained more details of the Scottish incidents from the CST. Of the 34 incidents this year 30 were Abusive Behaviour, 3 Damage & Desecration and one was Literature. By location 11 were in Edinburgh, 9 in Greater Glasgow, 5 in Aberdeen, 2 in Lanarkshire, 1 in Dumfries & Galloway, 1 in Fife, 1 in Stirling, 1 in The Lothians & Scottish Borders.



The Crown Prosecution Service publish figures for all reported Hate Crimes in Scotland. See [here](#) for the for 2021-22 report. Until 2018 there was a breakdown of religious crimes with a Jewish component that was roughly in line with the CST figures. In the figure we show numbers by category for the last 10 years. These numbers put the antisemitic incidents in context. The highest rate is for those classified as racial that appears to be falling. The two rising categories are homophobic and those relating to disability, while religious incidents are steady or slightly declining.

What does Jewish tradition say about harming others with words? Thanks to the Rene Cassin organisation for pointing to these quotes in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 58b):

"Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani says: This, monetary exploitation, is given to restitution; but that, verbal mistreatment, is not given to restitution."

"Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said to him: You have spoken well, as we see that after the humiliated person blushes, the red leaves his face and pallor comes in its place, which is tantamount to spilling his blood."

Tu BiShevat — New Year of the Trees

Sue Bard

Our Tu BiShevat seder has become a cherished event in the Sukkat Shalom calendar. The eclectic history of this minor festival of the 15th of Shevat has appeared and disappeared in different guises over the centuries, inviting invention and projection, and opportunities for local customs to develop. Examples of the latter in Sukkat Shalom are the invitation of interfaith guests whom we were delighted to welcome again (including on this occasion, Tommy Shepperd MP for Edinburgh East) and Gillian Raab's creation of the [Tu BiShevat Haggis](#), marking the proximity of this festival to Burns Night. This (vegan) haggis contains the 'fifteen fruits' that a 16th Century rabbi noted 'the Ashkenazim' prescribed should be eaten and is delicious!





The origin of the 'seder' (order of religious acts) itself lies with the 16th century Kabbalists of Safed, for whom the festival became a celebration and interpretation of the 'Tree of Life'. This 'seder' with the addition of a communal meal has become popular in some progressive Jewish communities, including

ours. Our own seder this year — the first in-person since 2020 — felt special, animated and joyous.

Our cheder too celebrated Tu Bi Shevat with vigour.



Today, Tu Bi Shevat resonates as an ecological festival. Rabbi Mark Solomon, in his paper ['The Tu BiShevat Seder and its Meanings Explained'](#) writes:

Tu BiShevat in particular reminds us of our responsibility and debt to nature. The Torah abounds with reference to nature and the land and the imperative of living in harmony with its forces. Even in time of war the Torah forbids the destruction of fruit trees around a besieged city, "for is the tree of the field human to withdraw before you?" (Deuteronomy 20:20). From this the Rabbis derived the law of Bal Tashchit — "You shall not destroy," a fundamental principle of Jewish ethics that forbids us wantonly to destroy the world around us.

We welcome the organisation T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights in their *Plant Two Trees Action*. Every year, they invite rabbinical and cantorial students spending their required year in Israel Palestine to mark Tu BiShevat by planting trees both in a threatened Palestinian village in the West Bank and in Jerusalem. But at harvest time, in October (when we'll be celebrating Succoth) this period, which used to be one of festivity as well as hard work, will now be marked by terror and loss engendered by the settler aggression and violence that reaches a peak during this season.

Celebrating Sarah — Doctor of Letters



Sarah Broadie was a valued member of our community whose life and generous legacy to Sukkat Shalom have been recorded in earlier newsletters (see [Etrog 34](#) and [Etrog 39](#) for more). Here, Jonathan Broadie, her stepson, describes a recent 'bittersweet moment' in the aftermath of Sarah's remarkable life.

At the end of last year, I attended a Graduation Ceremony at Edinburgh University to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters on behalf of my late stepmother and member of Sukkat Shalom, Professor Sarah Jean Broadie. It was a beautiful day in so many ways and, for me, Marjory, family and friends, it was a great privilege to be involved in honouring such a towering figure. What follows is an extract from my response, given after being presented with the award.

"This is one of one of life's bittersweet moments! It's a time of joy for Sarah's family that she should be honoured at the university which first saw her potential, and provided her with the opportunity to teach philosophy, and to publish her first two major books. It was the start of a journey which took her to Texas, Yale, Rutgers, Princeton and St Andrews. Along the way, she became one of the most eminent philosophers in the world.



But her absence today is also a reminder of her unexpected death just 15 months ago. She knew of this honour before her passing, and we are very glad of that. For me, as her stepson, being here feels like a full circle has been turned. When Sarah joined the Philosophy Department at Edinburgh University she met my father, Frederick Broadie, a gifted philosopher and teacher. They became inseparable, and the rest, as they say, is history. Sarah once said to me, "because of

our age difference, sadly, your dad and I will never grow old together". But, as philosophers, into and through their prime, they tackled many of the major philosophical questions, and never stopped developing their fearsome analytical skills.

When Sarah died, we received messages from many former students, now scattered across the world. Their gratitude was plain to see. Her brilliance had been inspirational for them. She combined a unique set of talents, with a warmth and kindness we, and they, were privileged to know.

On behalf of her family, thank you for honouring Sarah in this way, and for providing that impetus which led inexorably to her becoming one of the greatest classical philosophers of her time."

Liberal Judaism's New-Look Thursday Evening Community Briefings

LJ established Community Briefings on Zoom during the pandemic as a way for communities to connect with each other and with LJ and to give and receive support. Post-pandemic, they're continuing but (following discussion with communities around the country) to a different format.

They now take place on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Thursdays of the month, each of them having a different focus:

Second Thursdays are Charley's Open House, open to everyone

Hosted by LJ's CEO, Rabbi Charley Baginsky, they're an opportunity to talk about Liberal Judaism, community and life matters.

Third Thursdays are Community Briefings with Guest Speakers, open to everyone

A chance to hear a wide range of external speakers letting you know about resources that can help you or your community develop, make connections and share experiences

Fourth Thursdays are Council Collab, open to Council members

Hosted by members of LJ's senior management team, they allow Council members in different communities to learn from each other and to commission specialist speakers.

Look out in each of our weekly reminders for detailed information and the Zoom links to join.

Liberal Judaism Matters — the Biennial

Friday 19 – Sunday 21 May

19 March 2023, 3pm at St Mark's

It's great to see that the LJ Biennial's back in-person again. While Zoom events have been a much-appreciated substitute — and excellent in their own right — there's nothing to beat the inspiration and stimulation of the in-person version. Especially for a small community like ours the chance to meet people from communities all over the UK and beyond, to have a real sense of being part of a vibrant national network and the chance to expand our fields of Jewish interest and knowledge is not to be missed.

Special guest speakers include **Rebecca Soffer**, co-founder of modernloss.com renowned for her pioneering work building a supportive community for individuals experiencing grief; **Rabbi Dr Lawrence A Hoffman**, American Reform rabbi known for his liberal religious views, scholar of Jewish liturgy and author of acclaimed liturgical guides, and his son **Dr Joel M Hoffman**, pioneer of applying modern translation techniques to ancient languages and author of several books on biblical interpretation with intriguing titles, such as 'The Bible Doesn't Say That: 40 Biblical Mistranslations, Misconceptions, and Other Misunderstandings.'

The two day programme (from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon) will include spirituality, music, new ideas and fun too. LJY Netzer will be running a **parallel youth track**, there will be a **professionally staffed creche**, and **dietary and accessibility** requirements will be met. The full programme will be available over the coming weeks and you can attend for the whole, or part of the weekend.

LJ say: *price should not be a barrier for attending any LJ event. If you'd like to pay in instalments, or require a bursary, please contact t.rich@liberaljudaism.org for a confidential conversation.*

To look at cost and programme options and to register, go to: liberaljudaism.org

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 CARE TEAM can be contacted at care@eljc.org and one of the small group of people who respond to emails will get back to you quickly.

OUR EXISTING CONFIDENTIAL CONTACT SYSTEM: Phone [0131 777 8024](tel:01317778024) 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](tel:07766141315) and by e-mail at marksolomon@outlook.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, email your mobile number to waadmins@eljc.org and ask to be part of the group. You must be a member or associate member of Sukkat Shalom to join.

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Scottish Charity Number SCO2567

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