



# Sukkat Shalom

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community

Scottish Charity SC035678 [www.eljc.org](http://www.eljc.org)

issue 60

December 2013

Kislev – Tevet 5774

## December

- 6** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 13** Erev Shabbat Service  
and Supper *Please bring  
a non-meat dish to share*  
CC 7.00
- 14** Tea and Talmud  
MSG Note venue 3.00
- 15** Philosophy Group  
MSG Note venue 4.00
- 20** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 28** Shabbat Morning Service  
CC 11.00

## January 2014

- 3** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 10** Erev Shabbat  
CC 7.00
- 17** Tu b'sh'vat Seder  
and Supper *Please bring  
a non-meat dish to share*  
MSG 6.15

## Venues

- CC** Columcille Centre  
2 Newbattle Terrace
- MSG** Marchmont St Giles  
1a Kilgraston Road

## 2014 January – March

Now available at

[eljc.org/index.php/diary](http://eljc.org/index.php/diary)

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## Community Phone

This phone number sends voicemail to members the Contact Team  
**0131 777 8024**

## Urgent Support

Only for use in emergency; alerts the whole the Welfare Team  
**0131 208 1447**

## Email Contact

Email the Contact Team and the Newsletter via the webpage at  
[contact.eljc.org](http://contact.eljc.org)

<i>Chair</i>	Norman Crane	<i>Treasurer</i>	Gillian Raab
<i>Administrator</i>	Catherine Lyons	<i>Membership</i>	Eva Wiseman

## Word from the Chair

Chances are, you'll be reading this when it's dark outside. It happens a lot this time of year. Some people without natural light in their work environment just never see daylight for a few weeks. It's no wonder that primitive peoples thousands of miles from the equator invested the Winter Solstice with significance.

We tend not to pay much attention to pagan, earth-bound festivals in the Jewish turning of the years. We party over Chanukah and hibernate over Christmas. Around these parts we mark the turning of the secular calendar with an enormous sense of belonging and hope. And then it's Tu B'Shvat and on to Purim. The days relax; the cold lets go a little.

But that does not mean that the Solstice was always of no Jewish consequence. Think of Adam and Eve, formed into being shortly after that first Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, born fully grown in the early Autumn, and now entering their very first Winter.

The tale of the First Winter Solstice comes from *Avodah Zarah*, the tractate about *foreign worship or idolatry*. The context of the tale is a discussion of the 'festivities of the idolators'. The *Mishnah* enumerates the Roman Winter Festivals, and in the *Gemara* R. Hanan ben Raba derives them from Adam's experience at that first Winter Solstice:

When primitive Adam saw the day getting gradually shorter, he said, 'Woe is me, perhaps because I have sinned, the world around me is being darkened and returning to its state of chaos and confusion; this then is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced from Heaven!' So he began keeping an eight days' fast. But as he observed the winter solstice and noted the day getting increasingly longer, he said, 'This is the world's course', and he set forth to keep an eight days' festivity. In the following year he appointed both as festivals. Now, *he* fixed them for the sake of Heaven, but the Heathens appointed them for the sake of idolatry.

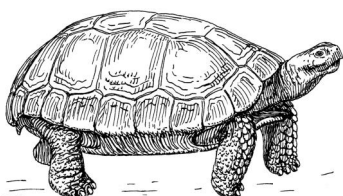
Said R. Hanan ben Raba: *Kalenda* is kept on the eight days following the Winter Solstice. *Saturnalia* on the eight days preceding the Solstice.

At first sight, it may seem odd that the rabbis are keen to note timing of the Roman festivals. But the point is not only to avoid unwitting idolatrous celebration, but also to avoid transacting business with 'idolators' in their towns during their festivities, and thus being complicit.

The Talmud was subject to extensive revision over centuries; we cannot know when last the Babylonian rabbis examined and polished this text, but whenever it was, it was long after the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and of those who founded a religion in his name. Yet no mention is made of Christmas celebrations in this discussion. *Avodah Zarah* has historically been a sensitive text for Christians; was the rabbinical condemnation aimed at them? Yet here it seems to be entirely focused on Roman pagan festivals. But whatever was intended, if there is a basis in the Talmud for not going shopping on Princes St for the next few weeks, that can only be a good thing!

As for me, I feel that I would rather be a tortoise at the moment. The unkind say that this is a description of my normal mode of procedure. O, to hibernate through the rigours of the solstice and the rest of the winter, and wake up in the spring sunshine! There would be an added benefit this year, for a tortoise is a fellow who carries his house on his back. As I write, I am surrounded, if not submerged, by boxes. The Chair is moving house and thinking how much simpler life is for a tortoise. The only consolation has been the enormous amount of help we have received from members of the community.

Norman Crane



## Burns Ceilidh Supper — tickets now on sale!

Our Burns Night Ceilidh Supper will take place on **Saturday 25 January**, at Marchmont St. Giles. Traditional food and a ceilidh spiced with klezmer from the Belle Stars Band, and songs by Robbie Burns sung by Mark Solomon.

Tickets are available by contacting Gillian, [treasurer@eljic.org](mailto:treasurer@eljic.org).

### Tickets

£15 adults

£10 students, and children 12 years and over

£5 children 5 years and over.

There is no charge for children under 5.

### A Bottle and a Friend

There's nane that's blest of human kind,  
But the cheerful and the gay, man,  
Here's a bottle and an honest friend!  
What wad ye wish for mair, man?  
Wha kens, before his life may end,  
What his share may be o' care, man?  
Then catch the moments as they fly,  
And use them as ye ought, man:  
Believe me, happiness is shy,  
And comes not aye when sought, man.

1787

Rabbi Burns

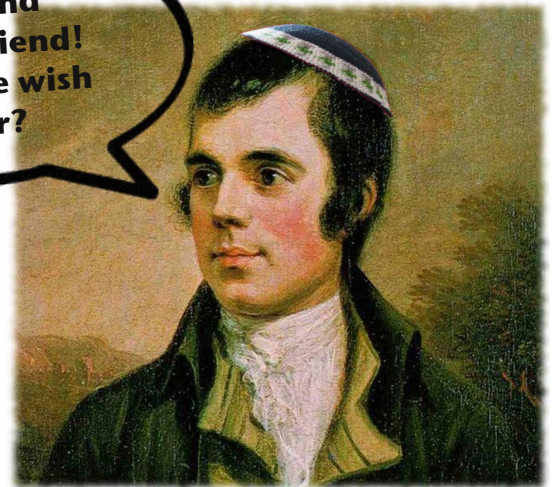
### Buffet Supper

Vegetarian Haggis, Neeps, and Tatties

Cranachan or Fresh Fruit

BYOB, whether alcoholic or soft drinks.

Here's  
a bottle and  
an honest friend!  
What wad ye wish  
for mair?



## Shear generosity, or, does this boy need a haircut?



This floppy-haired chap is Lachlan, Cathleen Ferguson's son. He's 12. He's decided that he wants to shave his head to raise money for Save the Children UK to help victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Please make a donation if you can, to donate to the Philippines and show your support for Lachlan. His goal is to reach £200 before Shearing Day, 15 December.

*Everyone I know tells me that I need a haircut so I figured, why get a boring old haircut when I can actually do something to help people at the same time! So! I decided that if I can raise at least £200 pounds to help out the people in the Philippines I will have my hair shaved clean off! So, c'mon, if you're one of those people who thinks I need a haircut, donate something and you won't be disappointed.*

[www.justgiving.com/Lachlan-Ferguson-Shaw](http://www.justgiving.com/Lachlan-Ferguson-Shaw)

## Chanukah party

On the fifth night of Chanukah, our cheder hosted our annual Chanukah party, with record numbers of children this year.

Croupier at the dreidl casino was Benjamin Staal, with lots of little ones flush with gelt.

Thank you to the cheder parents provided a fantastic spread of latkes, doughnuts, cheesecake, blintzes and, other delicacies.

New this year was a chanukiyah-shaped piñata made by Louise Primrose.

Photos: Gillian Raab



**For to be free is not merely  
to cast off one's chains,  
but to live in a way that  
respects and enhances the  
freedom of others.**

**Nelson Mandela**

**Rabbi Mark Solomon reflects on the life  
of Nelson Mandela, z"l**

I suppose practically every rabbi will say it, but *Shabbat Vayyigash* is the perfect parashah with which to reflect on the life of Mandela. Like Joseph he spent years unjustly imprisoned, and grew in wisdom and understanding, learning to interpret the dreams of those in power, so that a great country could be saved from disaster. Instead of seeking vengeance on those who had persecuted him and sold him into slavery, he revealed his brotherly love to them and sought reconciliation.



Photo: flickr/Domenico CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

## Mazel Tov to Melvin and Sharon!

We send our warmest congratulations to Melvin Davies and Sharon Zimmerman on the occasion of their engagement. Sharon is from Brazil, and Melvin is moving to Brazil this month for the wedding. Melvin and Sharon announced their engagement at the Shabbat service in Dundee on 26 October, where they celebrated with a special kiddush. During Sharon's visit, She and Melvin also went to London and were treated to a celebratory dinner by Rabbi Mark Solomon, and to visit Melvin's family in Birmingham.



*I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Paul Spicker for the lovely Shabbath Service he conducted and also many thanks to Esther Finlay for her continued support and help, Thanks to the Israeli Dance ladies and the Hebrew class for my birthday gifts and our engagement card and gift. A big thank you to Rabbi Mark Solomon for the amazing meal and reception. Last but not least to my dear family who are very happy for us and to learn of our amazing story. I will miss the Jewish community very much but promise to keep in touch and visit when we return back to the UK.*

*Thank you for everything. Best Wishes and Shalom!*

*Melvin Davies*

## Melvin tells us about Jewish Brazil, his new home

Sharon comes from São Paulo and works in Brasilia, Brazil's capital. Brasilia has a small Jewish community of 624. São Paulo, in the south of Brazil, has around 51,000 Jews. São Paulo is south of Rio De Janeiro on the Atlantic coast.

There are more than 107,000 Jews in Brazil. Most are in São Paulo (51,000) and Rio De Janeiro (30,000). The community is mostly Askenazi, of Polish and German descent. There are also Sephardim, from Spain, Portugal, and North Africa. Brazilian Jews play an active role in politics, sport, academia, trade, and industry and are well integrated in all spheres of Brazilian life. There are rarely any reported cases of anti-Semitism. There are schools, associations, and synagogues, and a vibrant Jewish culture. The oldest synagogue in the Americas is *Kahal Zur Israel* in Recife. Founded in 1636, it was eventually torn down about 100 years ago. But a replica has now been built on the site, which also houses a museum.

In Belem, which has about 900 Jews, there are two synagogues dating from the early nineteenth century, *Eshel Avraham* ('Abraham's Tamarisk') and *Sha'ar haShamayim* ('Gate of Heaven').



The oldest synagogue in the Americas, Kahal Zur Israel  
Photo: Wikipedia/Ricardo André Frantz

## Equal Marriage resoundingly approved in Holyrood

Rebekah Gronowski reports from the Equality Rally at the first Parliamentary debate

Last month saw a historical event which is likely to change the course of history in Scotland and elsewhere.



On 20 November, the Scottish Parliament passed Stage One of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill. The general principles were approved by a vote of 98 for, 15 against and 5 abstentions.

[The Equality Network](#) has been the driving force behind the campaign for Equal Marriage for the last five years, since it was established in 2008. Many of us have been involved in some way with the campaign, some more than others and some for longer than others. Our own community endorsed the principle of Equal Marriage and contributed to the SCoJeC submission to the Scotland-wide Consultation at each stage during the last twelve months or so. There have been 77,000+ responses to the Consultations, each of which was scrutinised by the Equalities Committee at the Scottish Parliament before the Bill was brought to the chamber. This is a major landmark in the history of Scotland, which has always been known as a fair and just country.

The Bill introduces same-sex marriage, available either in a civil, religious, or humanist ceremony, to be conducted by an organisation that chooses to conduct same-sex marriages. It also enables religious and humanist civil partnership ceremonies by organisations that choose to conduct them. The Bill allows trans people who married or registered a civil partnership in Scotland to get gender recognition without divorcing, or dissolving their civil partnership.

The Equality Network held a rally outside Parliament before the debate began, and we were joined by many of the MSPs who are committed to Equal Marriage in Scotland, some of whom made impassioned speeches of support. To those MSPs, and the others who voted with them, we say a big Thank You; your support is very much appreciated.

There is a long way to go before Stage Three is reached and passed. If you have not been involved before, there are still things you can do. See the Equality Network's [information on the Bill](#). There are photos of the rally in our [Sukkat Shalom Facebook closed group](#). To Tom and Tim from the Equality Network and all their staff I would like to say a big Thank You. One of the MSPs who spoke said it had been the best and most well-organised campaign ever seen since the Parliament first sat in 1999! That was an accolade indeed and is due to the dedicated team at Equality Network and other sister organisations. Well done one and all!

## Anyone interested in forming a Rosh Chodesh or Women of the Wall Group?

*Rebekah Gronowski*

Are there any women who would be interested in forming a Rosh Chodesh Group? Watching the Women of the Wall website and Facebook page, where we can see women from all over the world joining the Women of the Wall in spirit, and joining together to celebrate Rosh Chodesh wherever they are, it occurs to me that this may be something that other women in our community might also like to be involved in. We would need someone to lead the group (maybe on a rota). There is a WOW Prayer Book with a Service for Rosh Chodesh available through the WOW website.



Women of the Wall: Rosh Chodesh Kislef

There have been Rosh Chodesh groups in many communities for several decades that I know of, but I think the aims of Women of the Wall have served to focus the aims of women. Many groups now meet outside Israeli embassies.

If there is any interest, please get in touch, through the Sukkat Shalom Facebook group or directly. I am quite keen that this group is self-generating. It's not that I would not be part of the group. I just would not wish to run it.

### **Rosh Hodesh**

The first of each Jewish month — the celebration of the new moon, its slender crescent barely visible in the night sky — is a day historically associated with women's renewal and celebration.

In recent decades, Rosh Chodesh has become an occasion for Jewish women to gather for learning, ritual, and spiritual exploration, and to mark life passages. Rosh Chodesh groups, offer a women's space in time. (Some men's gatherings have begun as well, sometimes associated with *kiddush levanah*, celebrating the coming full moon.)

[RitualWell](#)



New Moon Photo: Wikimedia/Peyman rad CC BY-SA 3.0