



March – April 2021

Let us know what you think of Etrog or send us your contributions by contacting the newsletter team at newsletter@eljc.org.

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Shalom**

Edinburgh Liberal
Jewish Community

Scottish Charity Number
SC035678

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Sukkat Shalom Contacts

Community Phone - 0131 777 8024

This phone number sends voicemail to members of the Contact Team

To reach the Care Team, call the Community Phone or email care@eljc.org

Contact Team - contact@eljc.org

Etrog Team - newsletter@eljc.org

Co-chairs: Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin. Gillian Raab and Nick Silk (chair@eljc.org)

Treasurer: and Membership: Stefano Giossi (membership@eljc.org)

Secretary: Gillian Raab (secretary@eljc.org)

Diary

All services and discussions have been cancelled in physical form for the foreseeable future. Rabbi Mark Solomon will be conducting services remotely.

Erev Shabbat (Friday 7pm)

Shabbat (Saturday 11am)

Havdalah: on Saturdays, times vary (currently between 6pm and 7pm)

He will also conduct the regular discussion groups online: **Philosophy** (currently Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed) on Mondays (1pm), and **Talmud Thursdays** (aka Tea & Talmud) at 12pm. You need to register for these – see link below for details.

To get links to all of these please [see here](#). If you need a password, please reply to this email explaining how you heard about us.

"Exploring Judaism" classes will be held every Sunday. The programme is [here](#).

Our 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@eljic.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.

Word from the Sofa

I am starting to write this on the morning after our AGM, when we reflected on the consequences of the Covid-19 lockdown for Sukkat Shalom. Of course there have been many ills that have affected us - especially illness and deaths of friends and relatives - but there have also been some bonuses for the community. Our members and friends have always been geographically spread, from all over Scotland and even two families living in England. But the move to having all our

services online has seen this expanding to include the congregations in Leicester and Manchester as well as people coming to services and study sessions from all over the world including the Netherlands, USA, Kenya and many other places.

People who find it difficult to attend our services are also better able to do so. The frequency of our services and study sessions has also increased from only once a week, with monthly visits from the rabbi, to twice-weekly services, a weekly Havdalah, and twice-weekly study sessions. For all of this we must wholeheartedly thank our super-Zooming Rabbi Mark Solomon who has kept our spirits up with a variety of ideas and thoughts over these lockdown months.

Another aspect of the last year, that most likely relates to lockdown, is that we have several new members of Sukkat Shalom. There has also been a sharp increase in people joining Rabbi Mark's Exploring Judaism class. People join the class to learn more about Judaism either because they are interested in becoming Jewish, or because they wish to have their Jewish status confirmed. Liberal Judaism recognises both matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance of Jewish status, provided people have had a Jewish upbringing and education in the context of a synagogue (see <https://www.liberaljudaism.org/lifecycle/jewish-status-conversion/>). Mark's classes have increased in frequency from being held in our living room only during his monthly visits, to being held every Sunday morning via Zoom.

Speaking to some of the new members of the class has made me think back to my own conversion to Judaism over 50 years ago and what it has meant to me since. My conversion took place via the US reform movement where, while still requiring a period of study, it was the responsibility of an individual rabbi and did not require to be registered with a central organisation or require me to write essays. My motivation was simple. I wanted to get married to Charlie and be accepted by his family. But I would never have gone through with it if I had not felt it was something I could embrace. As we all know, being Jewish is not just, or even ever, about belief. It is about joining the tradition of the oldest monotheistic religion in the world, and taking on the obligations and burdens that come with it. It is about festivals, food, rituals and giving structure to life and time. This last has been something I have appreciated more than ever during the pandemic. Of course being Jewish is also importantly about being part of a community who look out for one another as well as for all of humanity and trying to repair the world (Tikkun Olam).

I was thinking of ending this Word From the Sofa with something inspirational that would help us to get through what we hope will be the last few months of lockdown. Although I now see a flickering light at the end of the tunnel, as we get our vaccines, I have found this last (I hope) bit of lockdown has been harder than the start and inspirational words just don't cut it for me. Instead I found this poem by the performance poet Elvis McGonagall (<http://www.elvismcgonagall.co.uk/>) really cheered me up. I hope it helps you too.

Let the windmills of your mind grind to a halt
Be in the moment, escape time's measure
Appreciate the luxury of boredom
Find wonder in life's small, fleeting pleasures

Make headspace, embrace the commonplace
Wake up and smell the cat litter tray
Breathe and stretch, savour your lumbago
Gaze at the drab, dreich sky of Hancock grey

Tread lightly through last night's feline vomit
Heave ho your Hoover, sing a sea shanty
Weather bleak midwinter with Nordic Noir
Drown dry January's dregs in Chianti

Engage with your rage shouting at the news
You're King Lear on a sofa eating cake
Discuss some Schopenhauer with the cats
Then back to bed for a well-earned break

Perchance to dream of a brighter world
A sweaty mosh-pit of colour and noise
Where hope survives and Godot might arrive
To swap our sorrow for infinite joys.

Gillian Raab (Co-Chair)

Meet Sukkat Shalom's Council 2021

At our AGM, held on Sunday 21 February, we were sad to accept the resignation from Council of longstanding members Norman and Wendy Crane and appreciative of everything they have contributed to our community. We were delighted to welcome two new members of Council, Barrie Levine and Kyla Reid. The following existing members were proposed and seconded for another year: Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, Gillian Raab and Nick Silk as our four co-chairs, informally known as the 'sofa'; Stefano Giossi as our treasurer and membership secretary; Gillian Raab as secretary and Jonathan Broadie. Marjory Broadie, Helen Ford, Lorraine Hershon and Ricky Hogg,

We welcome ideas, comments, questions and constructive criticism, so please feel free to get in touch through contact@eljic.org, 0131 777 8024 and/or by using council members' individual ELJC email accounts.

All the current AGM reports can be read [here](#). Council minutes are accessible on the password-protected area of the website – please get in touch if you would like to see them.

Sue Bard

suebard@eljc.org



I've been a member of Sukkat Shalom for six years, grew up in London, have spent most of my adult life in Scotland and thank the late former MSP Margo MacDonald for saying 'You're Scottish if you live here' thereby resolving one of my identity crises at the same time that Sukkat Shalom was resolving my other one. I have four children and four grandchildren and love living by the sea.

Jonathan Broadie

jonathanbroadie@eljc.org

I'm a founder member of Sukkat Shalom, serving for seven years as Treasurer. By profession, I'm a Chartered Accountant and economist. I've previously been a member of Orthodox and Reform Shuls. For leisure, I love to spend time with my family, hill-walk, travel and read, and I'm a fully paid up member of cafe society!



Marjory Broadie

marjorybroadie@eljc.org



I'm a founder member of Sukkat Shalom, and a Council member since day one. Pre-Sukkat Shalom I was a member of Glasgow New Synagogue. Happily married to Jonathan, we're proud parents, parents-in-law and grandparents. By profession I'm a school teacher. My pleasurable pastimes include cooking, reading and theatre, but my passionate pursuit is travelling, so present plans on hold!

Helen Ford
helenford@eljc.org

I am human to three furbabies, an elderly guinea pig Rosie, and a pair of poodles, hyperactive miniature Frodo and standard Teddy, who is an Owner Trained autism assistance puppy. My hobbies include crafts, reading, training the dogs, travel, anything Disney, going to the zoo, the football or the cinema.



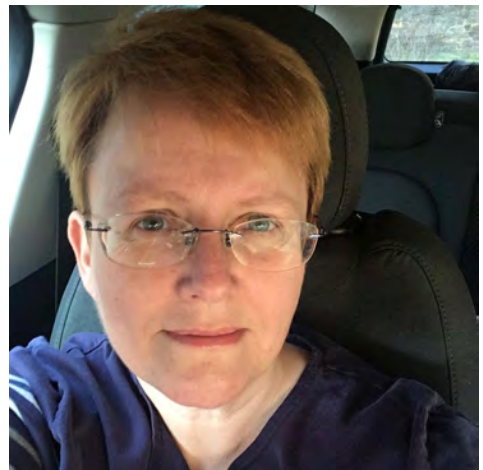
Stefano Giossi
stefano@eljc.org



My name is Stefano. I've been a member of Sukkat Shalom for about five years and joined the council back in 2018. I am currently the treasurer and membership secretary

Lorraine Hershon
lorraine@eljc.org

Lorraine lives in Northumberland with her husband, 4 sons and 4 dogs. She has taught in Cheder for 3 years and had been a member of ELJC for a lot longer. She likes cars, travel and playing Call of Duty with her sons. In her spare time she works in the field of family DNA and is also a director of a charity in Hexham.



Ricky Hogg
rickyhogg@eljc.org



I'm the right side of 64 and born in the Old Town, Edinburgh. Now living in East Lothian & married to Clare, we have four children Sarah, Jason, Hannah and Isla. I'm also Papa to Aliya and Jonah. I've been a member of Sukkat Shalom since its beginning and was part of the small Edinburgh Reform community beforehand. I've worked on various kibbutzim/moshavim as a volunteer starting way back in 1978 to 1985. After returning home to Scotland I went through the conversion process with Glasgow New Synagogue under Rabbi Pete Tobias. I'm also a Ba'al Tefillah graduate (lay leader) and along with others in our community help lead services when Rabbi Mark's away. Watching ELJC grow from humble beginnings has been a great joy. We are a diverse and dynamic community with a big heart. My other life joys are my road bike, my guitars and climbing/walking anywhere.

Barrie Levine
barrielevine@eljc.org

Based in Glasgow, I'm one of the further flung members of the community and also reasonably new, having joined a couple of years back. With a background in social work and higher education, I'm keen to contribute what I can to the community and perhaps reflect the interests of our more distant members.



Maurice Naftalin
mauricenaftalin@eljc.org



I used to be the self-appointed arm-twister-in-chief for "persuading" people to take office in the community. Last year, though, I paid for my failure to twist anyone's arm into being the chair, by myself becoming one-quarter of the joint co-chairs. Otherwise, I manage the community's IT, I'm the religious affairs convenor, and I sometimes help lead services.

Gillian Raab
gillianraab@eljc.org

I'm a semi-retired academic, working nominally part time and living with husband Charlie in a house conveniently close to St Mark's Unitarian Church where our services were/are usually held. We have two children and three grandchildren. The oldest granddaughter, Connie, will be celebrating her Bat Mitzvah over Zoom in March. In what little spare time I have from work and helping out at the shul, I enjoy going on geological walks, working in the garden and visiting North West Sutherland.



Kyla Reid
kylareid@eljc.org



I joined Sukkat Shalom last year, after several years of joining High Holiday services. Originally from Oregon, USA, I and my husband lived in China and London for several years, before moving to Edinburgh in 2015. I'm very excited to join the Council and become more involved the community.

Nick Silk
nicksilk@eljc.org

Hi, I'm Nick, I'm married to Kate and we have two boys, Andrew and David. I've been a member and fairly actively involved with Sukkat Shalom from the start and prior to that I was a member at Glasgow Reform Synagogue. Aside from attending services, my other weekend activity is watching Livingston football club.



Hello to new members Lizzie and Sandy Robertson



A warm welcome to Drs Sandy and Lizzie Robertson, who arrived in Edinburgh in August last year with their two young daughters, Ada (4) and Eilidh (2).

Sandy and Lizzie met at Manchester, where they were studying medicine and since they've been together have lived and worked in various places, including 18 months in Dunedin, on the South Island of New Zealand, which they loved. They came back to the UK to get married and be nearer family and for the last six years, they have been in London, where their children were born.

While Lizzie grew up in North London, Sandy is Scottish, was born in Linlithgow, moved to Belgium for a few years and then back to Dollar where his parents and grandparents still live. He was keen for their children to experience living in Scotland, close to their Scottish family, and the stage that Lizzie and Sandy were at in their careers allowed them to bring this about. Lizzie, who's a psychiatrist, is based at the Western General Hospital, where she has a wide-ranging teaching contract. Sandy, who has specialised in paediatrics, is working at The Royal Hospital for Sick Children in the field of paediatric emergency medicine. Both are working 80% hours, allowing each to look after their children for a day a week.

They could never have foreseen at the planning stage that this adventure would take place in the context of a pandemic, but they are making the best of it and despite all the constraints are

enjoying being in Edinburgh, particularly its parks and green spaces and easy access to countryside. They were lucky to arrive in the gap between lockdowns and appreciated the warm welcome from Sukkat Shalom, including cheder families.

In London, they've been members of Finchley Reform Synagogue (FRS) for the last ten years and are now, with the help of Zoom, enjoying being members of both the London and Edinburgh communities. Sandy's supervising rabbi for his conversion was Rabbi Miriam Berger, the Senior Rabbi at FRS and in those pre-pandemic days he pursued his conversion course online from the most southerly Jewish congregation in the world in Dunedin, New Zealand.

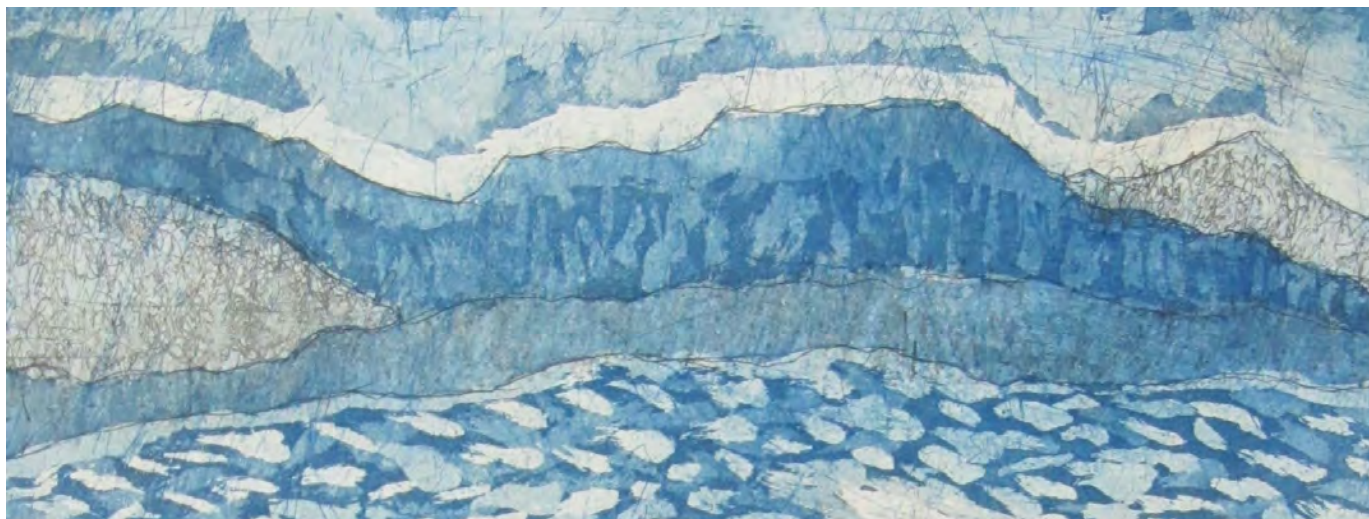
Both Lizzie and Sandy love walking and Ada seems to be following in their footsteps, having recently managed Arthur's Seat unaided. They have a family bike that can accommodate both children, and Sandy, who's a wild swimmer, is gearing up to take the plunge at nearby Wardie Bay.

Whether they decide to stay or move back to London at the end of their current contracts, we're delighted to have the Robertson family with us now and wish them the very best for their time here.

Sue Bard

Celebrating our Members' Creativity

Miriam Vickers, artist and Sukkat Shalom member, has kept working throughout lockdown. Edinburgh Printmakers, where she usually works, has been closed, so Miriam's been working mainly in watercolour. She was delighted that one of her earlier works, 'Isle of Bute from Toward, Argyll 2018' was selected for the Society of Scottish Artists' on-line winter exhibition, Tides Changing/Changing Tides. You can view the exhibition, which includes some lovely work, [here](#).



In December last year, Bobbi and Derek Harper were admitted to Liberal Judaism. Bobbi, a highly creative and skilled craftswoman, designed and made a siddur bag for Rabbi Mark.



The Hebrew in blue is Mark's Hebrew name, *Moshe Leib ben David Zvi u-Miriam* and at the bottom it says *todah al matnat ha-giur* – 'thank you for the gift of conversion'.

Bobbi explains:

'I made the bag in dupion silk for the outside but just a satin fabric for the lining. The top is simply a tie top and I've used Pride of Scotland tartan silk ribbon. The threads are a mix of silk and rayon. The tree and blessing are to signify that we have come out of the dark winter into the spring by finally managing to convert. The other side is Mark's Hebrew name, I included a hamsa for protection and added the word Peace which I feel is a major part of Liberal Judaism.'

Tu Bishvat – New Year of the Trees

Tu Bishvat – the New Year of the Trees – is one of the Jewish calendar’s four ‘new years’, Rosh Hashana, Nisan and the first of Elul being the others. The usual explanation for the designation of this date as the new year of the trees, is that it’s the time of year when the fruit of the trees begins to form. Tu Bishvat is seen as heralding spring, a symbol of hope that seemed particularly significant this year. Maybe it’s both the universality and simplicity of this concept that invites frequent reinterpretation. For much of its history, this day was observed by eating fruits associated with Israel/Palestine. For the kabbalists, with their concern for tikkun olam (the spiritual repairing of the world) this came to signify a way of scrutinising their spiritual selves. The 16th century kabbalists of Safed formalised this further, creating a special Tu Bishvat seder based on the idea of the Passover seder.

We can thank Rabbi Mark for first introducing this custom to Sukkat Shalom. It has become a particularly cherished event, which over the last few years has developed into an interfaith celebration. Of course this year was different from all other years, but it was good to hold our seder with the Leicester and Manchester communities and to see the efforts that people had gone to make their own Tu Bishvat seder plates.



This year, Rabbi Mark drew on the Hazon Tu Bishvat Haggadah. Hazon, which means ‘vision’ is a U.S. Jewish environmental organisation that explicitly links ‘Jewish values’ with a commitment to promote sustainable ways of life, focusing particularly on food systems. The evening ended with another innovation – a slide show of the trees that members of our three communities had chosen as being of special significance to them.



Trees have a special meaning for us, beyond even their place as symbols of nature, because of the famous injunction of Deuteronomy (20:19): “When you lead a siege against a city many days ... you may not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them”. This is the basis of *bal tashchit* (בל תשחית – “do not destroy”), a fundamental principle in Jewish ethics forbidding senseless waste or damage, even in war. It would be easy, then, to become dispirited at the seemingly endless reports of destruction of West Bank olive trees by the Civil Administration (Israeli military government) and Jewish settlers. These reports come from all observers in the area and aren’t seriously disputed by anybody.

We all have to find our own way of understanding how Jews, and the Jewish state, can commit acts so fundamentally at odds with Jewish ethics. But we can at least do something about it, by assisting those organisations and people (in normal years, volunteers from all over the world) who help Palestinian farmers to harvest their olives and to plant olive trees to replace those lost in the attacks. For example, the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/RabbisForHumanRights/>) for Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) shows the events of 12th February this year, when with 150 people they travelled to the village of Burin on the West Bank to plant olive trees with the villagers. What could be a more appropriate celebration of Tu BiShvat and the principle of *bal tashchit* than assisting RHR in this campaign?

Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin



Chinese Cookery Class

Sukkat Shalom member Kyla Reid spent over three years in China, first as an undergraduate in rural Yunnan Province in SW China, and then returning on a graduate fellowship to Nanjing. Kyla brought from her years in China a love of Chinese food, which she generously offered to share with us on Zoom during this year's Chinese New Year/Spring Festival.

Kyla explained how she learned to cook and adapt some of her favourite dishes before she left China, substituting for meat in a cuisine where meat, particularly pork, can be very prevalent. She added that this kind of adaptation is not uncommon in Chinese cuisine, occurring for example as a result of Buddhist influence.

Kyla demonstrated the preparation and cooking of two Sichuan dishes for us, Gan Bian Siji Dou (Sichuan Dry-fried Green Beans) and Yu Xiang Qiezi (Sichuan Fish-fragrant Aubergine), beginning by talking about the characteristics of Sichuan cuisine. Kyla's immaculate preparation and skill with the technology, combined with her unfussy approach and engaging style made this a really enjoyable, appetite-raising and confidence-building session that I'm sure all of us who were there will be putting into practice.

Gan Bian Siji Dou (Sichuan Dry-fried Green Beans)

Ingredients:

- 3-4 TBS neutral, high-heat oil (*vegetable or peanut oil — note that rapeseed oil will smoke*)
- ~400-500g green beans
- 1/2 tsp sesame oil
- 5-6 pieces chopped dried chili (*or 1 chopped and de-seeded fresh chili pepper*)
- Optional: 2 tsp whole Sichuan peppercorn (*aka “flower” or “numbing” pepper*)
- 2 TBS Sichuan preserved vegetable (*either Sichuanese Zha cai or Tianjin Dongcai*)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp minced ginger
- 2 TBS Shaoxing rice wine (*can substitute Japanese/Korean rice wine or dry sherry*)
- 2 TBS light soy sauce
- Optional: 1-2 tsp chili oil

Directions:

1. Prepare and measure all your ingredients in advance—you don't want to be distracted when you start to cook, as this goes fast over high heat!
2. Wash, dry and trim the green beans into 4-5cm pieces. Chop the Sichuan preserved vegetable roughly, into ½ cm pieces. Mince garlic cloves. Mince ginger. Measure out all ingredients or get jars/measuring spoons ready.
3. Heat a wok or deep pan until it is close to smoking. You know the pan is ready when a drop of water placed on the side of the wok immediately evaporates. Add your neutral oil. Heat until it shimmers.
4. Add your green beans and stir-fry over medium heat, stirring regularly, until the skin blisters (~4-6 min).
5. Remove beans from pan with slotted spoon, and place on a plate lined with paper towels to drain.
6. Add sesame oil to remaining oil in pan.
7. Add dried/fresh chili and Sichuan peppercorn to mixed oil and scald rapidly.
8. Lean back and add Shaoxing rice wine and soy sauce. Stir rapidly and watch out for the steam/splatter.
9. Quickly add preserved vegetable, and stir so it soaks up the remaining liquid.
10. Add ginger, cook 1 min stirring constantly.
11. Add garlic, cook 1 min stirring constantly.
12. Add the green beans back into the pan, and stir to combine. Drizzle with the chili oil if your using it. Remove from heat and serve warm with rice.

Yu Xiang Qiezi (Sichuan Fish-fragrant Aubergine)

(Note that 'fish-fragrant' refers to the fact that the sauce in this dish was traditionally served with fish – there is no fish, or fish product in the dish.)

Ingredients:

- 2-3 aubergines
- 2 TBS water
- 2 TBS La Doubanjiang (chili bean sauce or preserved black beans in chili oil)
- 2 TBS light soy sauce
- 2 TBS Chinese black vinegar (you can try to substitute with balsamic, but I really advise getting a bottle of the real thing. It's great on eggs, dumplings, sushi, fish—anything really!)
- 1 TBS Shaoxing rice wine (Can substitute Japanese/Korean rice wine or dry sherry)
- 2 tsp sugar
- 2 TBS neutral, high-heat oil
- ½ tsp sesame oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 TBS minced ginger
- Optional: ½ tsp ground Sichuan peppercorn

Directions:

- Slice the aubergine into finger-sized pieces, trying to get a strip of the skin on each piece if possible.
- Prepare the sauce: mix water, La Doubanjiang, soy sauce, black vinegar, rice wine and sugar in a cup. Stir well and set aside.
- Heat wok or deep pot over high heat until a drop of water sizzles and evaporates on contact.
- Add neutral and sesame oil and swirl to mix and coat the pan.
- Add aubergine and stir and cook until the pieces start to soften and the sides turn golden brown (~3 min).
- Add garlic, ginger and peppercorn, and stir-fry until fragrant (~30 sec).
- Pour in the sauce and mix well. Cook 3-4 min until the aubergine is fully cooked and the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
- Take off heat and serve warm with rice.



Seollal – Korean New Year

Seollal is one of the two biggest holidays in Korea, the other being Chuseok, which in [Etrog 28](#) I mentioned celebrating at the same time as Sukkot. It's a national holiday that spans 3 days to give people time off to spend with their extended family. We would eat tteokguk (rice cake soup) to celebrate the ageing of an extra year - as all Koreans, instead of ageing on their birthday, age on the new year - and other celebratory traditional food prepared by the family, including japchae (glass noodles), manduguk (dumpling soup), galbijjim (braised short ribs), jeon (pancakes) and a variety of colourful tteok (rice cakes).



Various folk games such as yutnori (basically a Korean version of dreidel), gonggi (colourful pebbles which you throw and grab) and go-stop (a gambling card game) will be played indoors, the latter only by the adults of the family. There are also outdoor games that are played more rarely now, such as neolttwigi (standing seesaw).

As with most Korean family gathering events, we would serve food and alcohol offerings to our ancestors and bow as a sign of respectful remembrance. The Seollal highlight for children of the family is that they would do saebae - bow in hanbok (Korean traditional clothes) to elders of the family, to signify the first ever greeting to the elders to wish them a healthy year. The elders will then give the children money, which they can go off to spend, if your mother doesn't take it away (as my mother did !). All these celebrations display the Confucian (elder respect) and Shamanist (folk religion) aspects of Korean culture.

In ancient days, the new year celebrations lasted 15 days, culminating to daeboreum (15th January on the lunar calendar which is also the first full moon of the new year), a day which is still now celebrated independently from Seollal as a 'smaller lunar new year.'

The full moon signifies the light which pushes away the darkness, so there are a lot of light-/fire-related festivities. This includes ganggangsoolae (ring around the rosy around a bonfire), jwibulnori (burning the grass by rotating cans of fire to exterminate pests, to ensure good crop growth), and launching lanterns into the sky.

As is customary to say during Seollal, 새해 복 많이 받으세요 (I wish you lots of luck for the coming year)!

Shinwoo Kim

New Cheder Heads

Our cheder has two new co-heads, Mor Kandlik Eltanani and Gila Holliman. They have now taken over from Adam Budd, who has taught at the cheder for the last decade, and has been its head for the last two years. At a special Shabbat service on 23 January Adam's work was recognised and Gila and Mor congratulated, as were the other dedicated cheder teachers; Katy Bromberg, Yael Budd, Dan Hershon, Carmen McPherson and George Wilkes. Rabbi Mark led the service, using the Liberal Judaism Youth Siddur, with participation from the cheder children, young people and teachers. We look forward to many more such services.



Gila says: I was born in Israel, grew up in the States and have lived in Edinburgh since 2006. My husband and I originally moved here on a work permit, having never been to Scotland before (or, in my case, anywhere in Europe!) and quickly fell in love with the city. We became citizens in 2013, shortly after our daughter Maya was born. We added a son, Liam, to our family in 2016 and are happily settled in Liberton.

Mor says: I was born and raised in Israel, and came to Edinburgh in 2011 with my husband Yakir to study for my PhD. We have two daughters, Tamara (7) and Danielle (3) and they are keeping us very busy. We live in Stockbridge and love exploring the city. We can't wait for good weather to return!



Purim Celebrations

Purim 2020/5780 was the last time that the community has met in person, so this year's celebration might have been rather overshadowed by our year in the pandemic. But in fact we had a couple of good parties – a very successful one for the cheder children, and a Megillah reading and Purimspiel for everyone, with a cast drawn from 3+ communities.



Grahame Gross as an enthusiastically villainous Haman



Above, clockwise from top left.: Phyllis Alden as Queen Vashti, Georgia Williams as Esther, Marc Schulz as Mordechai, Charlie Raab as Teresh.

Below: images from the cheder Purim party.



Mike Valencia z"l



Our community prayed for Mike through the last months of his illness that corresponded with the last months of 2020 and remember him now in our prayers as this new year progresses. The increased frequency of our lockdown services, the closing down of so many of the usual distractions of life and of course the nature of the pandemic itself have combined to bring about a different and very personal acknowledgement and awareness of sickness and death. The shiva for Mike conducted by Rabbi Mark Solomon at the Havdalah service on the 28th of November shone a gentle light on this longstanding and loved member of our community, bringing to the fore aspects of his character and his life that we hadn't necessarily known about.

What I've written here draws on that event and on information from and conversation with Heather Valencia, for which I thank her. It is also in part a personal reflection as Mike's life and mine coincided at various points in time and/or space. I've known of Mike for almost 50 years and for the last six of those have been getting to know him.

Mike was born in London in 1932. His father, Mordechai, was Sephardic, and his mother, Doris, came from a Polish Ashkenazic family. Mike, growing up in London during the Second World War, suffered a disrupted childhood and education. He was evacuated without his parents twice, to Devon and Newcastle (where he lived with a distant ultra-orthodox branch of his family) and also experienced being bombed in his own home. At 16 he left school and undertook ORT training (the acronym is Russian, standing for the Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades).

Founded in 19th century Russia it became – and remains - an international network of training schools for young Jews). Mike then joined Habonim, which at that time was a socialist, Zionist and secular Jewish youth movement; there he embarked on hachsharah, the process of preparing to go to Israel as a member of a gar'in –a group of young people intending to join a kibbutz. In 1952, Mike went with his gar'in to Kibbutz Gal'ed, which had been established in

1945 by German Habonim members and whose name commemorates Habonim members killed during the Second World War.

I was born in 1945, and grew up, like Mike, in North London. Like Mike, as a teenager I joined Habonim. But the 14 years that separated us meant that our experiences growing up were very different – Mike's marked by the immediate deprivations, insecurity and fear engendered by the war. Mike's attachment to Israel was strong and deep and would have been directly shaped by the Holocaust. For me, Habonim was a social life, not a way of life and my attachment to Israel was superficial.

Mike had intended to make his life in Israel, but at the end of his first year at Gal'ed his father became seriously ill and he returned to London. In the years that followed, he had various jobs, eventually going to college to continue his education. In 1963 he went to Hull University to study social policy. He gained his PhD there in 1970 and became a lecturer in the sociology department of the then new Stirling University. This was where, in 1972, our paths did actually cross when I enrolled at Stirling as a mature student, to study sociology.

Mike was regarded with much affection by students, who recognised an authenticity in him and among whom he had street cred for having been a London cabbie. In Stirling, Mike met and married Heather, who was a lecturer in the German Department and they had four children, Dan, Esther, Miriam and Naomi. Heather has said that Mike felt he was not cut out to be an academic and that it was after he took early retirement in 1992 that his life took on a different, and for him, more fulfilling shape.

Mike and Heather lived their whole married life in the village of Thornhill near Stirling. After he retired, Mike cultivated their garden with passion and filled their home with his own woodwork. By this time too, Mike had become actively Jewish again, a process generated by his young daughter Miriam. At the time (and corroborated recently by Heather) I heard accounts of how Mike travelled by public transport (two buses and a train each way) from Thornhill to Glasgow Reform Synagogue every Saturday – in the winter leaving and returning home in the dark. And I, a non-practising Jew in Stirling, was drawn to this person, and wanted to know more, but didn't know how to start that conversation.

After I joined Sukkat Shalom in 2015, I went to my first 'Tea and Talmud' session and to my surprise and delight, found Mike and Heather there. Finally, we were in the same place, at the same time and on the same page. Heather has said that Mike found his Judaism most of all when he joined Sukkat Shalom and that it became fundamental to his life. It brought him obvious pleasure in recent years to attend classes and services with his youngest daughter Naomi, whose own Jewish status has recently been confirmed, and whom we welcome warmly as a member of Sukkat Shalom in her own right.

Heather has particularly asked me to say that the cards and messages from members of Sukkat Shalom meant a tremendous amount to Mike when he was in hospital and that she and the family have appreciated the warmth and support they have received from Sukkat Shalom.

In the final months of his life, Mike and his family published his poems in a collection titled 'Archaeology'. These poems give expression to his sense of and search for himself as he lived his life and as he faced death, to his love of the natural world, and to his deep love for his family - Heather 'my woman of valour', his children, Dan, Esther, Miriam and Naomi, and his grandchildren, Mara, Joel and Leon. The last four lines of the last poem in the collection (titled simply 'Poem') are a fitting testament to him.

But now, towards evening, I have noticed a beam of sunshine
 between two green banks.
In it I will prepare a plot no bigger than my own span.
I will plant modest flowers and produce and watch them through
 the season.
And there will be nothing false.

Sue Bard

Sukkat Shalom's Twitter Account

We've had a Twitter account for some time, but we've never made much use of it. Now we intend to increase and improve our use of it as a supplement to e-mail (you don't really want more of that, do you?) for quick communications, reminders, and announcements.

Please consider following us – if you don't already – at: <https://twitter.com/SukkatShalom> to help us grow this useful platform, and add further to our community.

Carmen McPherson (carmenjmcpherson@gmail.com, @mrscjmcpherson)

Beyond the Food Bank

This was the title of one of the best among many good sessions at last year's Limmud. It started with a review of the following principles that should apply when we are working for and with people who are short of food. The session started by reviewing the following dignity principles.

The Dignity Principles

Embed all these principles in the work you do with those who are food insecure.

✦ **A sense of control** Having power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom you eat.

✦ **Able to take part in community life** Feeling able and welcome to take part in different aspects of community life, regardless of your financial situation.

✦ **Nourished and supported** Being able to enjoy food and access support that meets your needs.

✦ **Involved in decision-making** Feeling able to share your views and ideas and to have those views taken seriously in decision-making.

✦ **Valued and able to contribute** Feeling recognised and valued as a whole person with knowledge, skills and experiences to share.

You can read more about how these principles should influence food policies more widely at <https://www.nourishscotland.org/dignity-in-practice-project>

The session argued that food banks, as usually run, do not usually respect these principles. They do not give people who need food the ability to choose the food they would like or any control over what could be available. But there are other things that you could do as an alternative to dropping items into the bins at the supermarkets. I have added links to things mentioned at the Limmud session suggesting organisations you could support with donations or by offering to volunteer.

Pantries and Fridges are social supermarkets where members pay a small amount (£3-4) to receive £15+ of food per visit – choosing what they want, including fruit, veg, fish and meat. These can operate as franchises and some have wraparound services and a community café as add-ons. People find it restores their dignity to be able to pay a little towards their shopping and to choose what they want. <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/find-a-pantry/> will take you to a map where you can find local ones.

Surplus food redistribution includes organisations that work with local supermarkets to collect unsold food at the end of the day and redistribute it. The national organisation Fareshare has a local branch at the same location where some of us enjoyed a wonderful meal cooked by Syrian refugees last year. You can donate or volunteer for the local branch via the national web site <https://fareshare.org.uk/getting-food/fareshare-go-support/>

Community cook and eat programmes that are open to all and programmes that deliver homecooked, nutritious food and friendship to those who are housebound are also great projects to set up, involving local people in food preparation. The organisation **Foodcycle** <https://www.foodcycle.org.uk> coordinates such groups that do this from surplus donated food. Their web site does not list any Scottish projects, but it shows examples of interesting projects.

Gillian Raab

Prayer for Mental Health Awareness Shabbat

God of Understanding,

Help us to a deeper understanding of ourselves and one another, so that we become more aware of the challenges of mental health in our lives and the lives of those we love.

God of the spirits of all flesh,

Help us to realise how our bodies and minds work together to make us whole human beings, and to care for both our physical and mental wellbeing.

You are called 'the One who knows all thoughts' –

Help us to understand the ways we think, to know what disturbs us and what strengthens us, so that we can guide our thoughts in life-giving paths.

God of love and fear,

Teach us to observe our emotions, so that we see how they affect us, and we come to nurture feelings of joy and overcome feelings of pain and anxiety.

Shechinah, Divine Presence, you are called the Gathering of Israel,

Accompany us through days and nights of loneliness, especially during this time of isolation, and give us the strength to reach out to others for love, friendship and community, and accept the offers of friendship that come our way.

God of life,

Give us light to see how precious our lives are, how much we mean to others, and how our lives, even in the darkest times, are worth living.

Spirit of compassion,

Help us be kind to those around us who may be struggling with challenges of mental and emotional health; to listen, understand, comfort and support them with patience and good humour.

May we be kind to ourselves and to each other,

Amen.

Rabbi Mark L. Solomon, January 2021