



Iyar — Tammuz 5783

May — June 2023



Etrog

The Newsletter of Sukkat
Shalom Edinburgh

- [Word From The Sofa](#)
- [Adèle and Catherine's B'not Mitzvah: a new version of the 'Auld Alliance'](#)
- [Sukkat Shalom Baby News](#)
- [One single unified Progressive Jewish movement for the UK?](#)
- [Purim and Pesach Pictures](#)
- [Counting the Omer](#)
- [Yom HaShoah 18 April 2023, 27 Nisan 5273](#)
- [My March of the Living](#)
- [Reflections on 'Shoes: Collection of Writings' by Zelda Alexander](#)
- [Kitchen Kehilla](#)
- [Welcome to Nina Olshan](#)
- [Rebekah and the Choir of the Earth](#)
- [Meet Sukkat Shalom's Council 2023/2024](#)
- [Community Care and Support](#)

Word From The Sofa

Maurice Naftalin

The day before writing this piece, I was at St Marks for the B'not Mitzvah of Adèle and Catherine Berkani, twin sisters from a French family with a deep and long connection with Scotland, and particularly h Edinburgh. It was a wonderful occasion in many ways: the delightful personalities and confident assurance of the girls, the obvious warmth and closeness of the family, the multilingual and multicultural flavour of the service and— not least!—the ample and delicious kiddush that the family treated us to afterwards.



The parasha for the girls' portion yesterday was Kedoshim, the Holiness Code. In her drasha, Adèle told us that this parasha is at the very centre of the Torah, and Catherine discussed the verse at the very centre of the parasha: Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The girls' commitment to this idea was inspiring, and Rabbi Mark, speaking afterwards, drove the point home with a call to see ourselves in the other, breaking down barriers of separation and otherness between individuals and communities.

Then, in the order of our service, we came to the communal prayers: for the King and the government, for this Jewish community, and for the State of Israel. I've noticed some people in our community sitting out the first and last of these, and yesterday, because of what had gone before, I felt particular sympathy with them in respect of the prayer for Israel.

I'm never comfortable asking for a blessing on any state, but yesterday I felt particular disquiet at the call for Israel's leaders and citizens to fulfil "the aims of the founders, to develop the land for the benefit of all its inhabitants, and to implement the Prophetic ideals of liberty and justice." I couldn't help thinking of a meeting that I recently helped to organise for LJJIP (Liberal Jews for Justice in Israel/Palestine), in which two speakers from Israel told us about the situation of the Arab-Palestinian minority there. They presented a compelling picture of discrimination and neglect, both historical and current, that made it all too clear that no Israeli government yet has been guided by Lev 19:18 or by the call to see themselves in the other. (If you're interested, you can see a [recording of this meeting](#).)

Of course, the prayer doesn't deny this situation: it looks backward to the foundation of Israel as "a haven for the oppressed", and forward to a future in which its leaders and citizens are inspired with faithfulness to "the aims of the founders". The history of the Arab-Palestinian minority and the current political direction of the government combine to give the prayer an unintentional but strong ironic tone.

But we shouldn't despair: the Haftarah this week was from Amos, a prophet whose egalitarian message and denunciations of unjust government make him sound remarkably modern. And even Amos's portion ended on an optimistic note, foreseeing a day when the nation would be restored in peace. In the same spirit, we can point to the protests in Israel and imagine them looking beyond their current focus of defending Jewish civil and political rights to where they see, and begin to remedy, the plight of "the stranger in their midst". And we can read the Prayer for Israel without hearing the irony in its words.

Adèle and Catherine's B'not Mitzvah: a new version of the 'Auld Alliance'



In May 2022 the El Ghouzzi-Berkani family of Paris contacted us about the possibility of their twin daughters, Catherine and Adèle becoming B'not Mitzvah in Edinburgh. It seemed an unusual request until we understood the family's longstanding bonds with Scotland, established over three generations. The planets were aligned from the start, as the French Easter holiday weekend that they had in mind was already one of Rabbi Mark's

scheduled weekends.

Catherine and Adèle rose to the challenge magnificently, adding their own hard work and commitment to the support of their family and Rabbi Mark. The result was the thoughtful and different perspectives they each brought to their *drasha* (see below) and the accomplished shared chanting of their *parasha*. Thirty-plus family members had come from Paris, participating in a

service that combined gravitas, warmth and joy, and included novel (for Sukkat Shalom) elements of the family's own Sephardi tradition.

Thank you to the El Ghouzz-Berkani family for providing the bountiful kiddush that similarly combined Sephardi and Ashkenazi delights – the filled pastry 'cigars' and *chakchouka* made by Adèle and Catherine's grandmother, and the smoked salmon, pickled herring and bagels equally enjoyed.

It was great to hear that Catherine and Adèle rated their B'nai Mitzvah 'one of the best days of their lives'.

Drasha on Parashat Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:1 -20:27)

Adèle and Catherine

29th of April 2023 8th Iyyar 5783

Adèle:

The Parashat Kedoshim that we read today could be considered as the heart of the Torah, the geographical centre. If we unrolled the Torah scroll and pointed to the centre, not only would we come across Parashat Kedoshim but even more precisely, if we pointed to the middle of the Parasha, we would come across verse 18: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' This is the most famous verse and surely the most difficult to explain – so I'll leave it to my sister.

I would like to look at the overall interpretation of the Parasha.

Kedoshim, Kadosh is usually translated as holy. To practise holiness, this Parasha gives us a series of commandments. And what we notice is that in each verse the ritual and moral aspects are mixed: you will respect your father and your mother and you will keep my Sabbaths. There is the moral aspect (respect) and the ritual aspect (keeping Shabbat). In this Parasha morality and ritual are intimately linked.

There are different ways to interpret this. There are some Jews who will strictly and literally respect the rites. That is their way of living their Judaism, and that will be enough for them. Other Jews, to whom I think I and my family belong will focus their Judaism more in on actions of volunteering, activism, and justice.

But is being a Jew doing the ritual or being a good person? Or to put it in English: to do the *rite* or to do the *right*?

For me, this Parasha gives us a clear answer to this question: holiness is the mixture of moral rigour and ritual depth. The rite reinforces the ethics.

So for me what does that mean and how can I apply it in my life as a young Jew?

I understood while preparing this Drasha that morality should not be conditioned by my mood, and many will understand what that means. In fact, respecting the law is not enough. It must be done morally.

Becoming a bat mitzva leads me in this direction: accessing my religious majority, setting an example, being responsible for my actions and my words, being open to the world, tolerant, accepting differences, defending my ideas but also defending others.

Catherine:

Thank you Adèle.

'You will love your neighbour as yourself.' You will love your neighbour is easy to understand, but what does "like yourself" mean?

If I had to sum up this chapter with one word, it would be "love." The first part of this chapter ends with verse 18: "And you shall love your neighbour as yourself." The second part, meanwhile, ends with: "And you will love the stranger as yourself." This refers to what the Hebrews experienced: "For you also were strangers in the land of Egypt." It seems that these two commandments should be understood in parallel, the two complement and explain each other. Jewish people must love by understanding what someone else is going through because at some time he has experienced, or will experience it himself.

Another interpretation would be to say that we often detect the faults of others ... we often even know how to solve them. But the reality is quite different. We often have our reflection in front of us (well ok, bad joke as far as we are concerned!), and the problems that we detect in others are generally present in our lives ... The Torah teaches us that we must love our neighbours "*kamokha*" (like yourself), because just as we quite easily close our eyes to our own faults, we must do the same with our neighbour. So we can, with G-d's help, try to love our neighbour more.

This is the path I want to take at the dawn of my religious majority. And even though I have a long way to go to get there, I know that with the help of my parents, my sisters, and my family, I will get there.

Adèle:

We would like to take this opportunity to make some special thanks here.

As you will not have missed, we are in Scotland, in Edinburgh. For those who know us, our family and friends present, or on Zoom, this isn't very surprising. For those who don't know us, without going back to our grandfather's 20s, where it all began, it's enough to say that Scotland represents a haven of peace for us, a place where the five of us feel very GOOD.

Catherine:

So celebrating our Bat Mitzva here made sense. Of course, it was not the simplest organization you can imagine. Brexit and the difficulty of not having a passport has deprived us of our aunts and cousins. But we intend to catch up in Paris.

Adèle:

We would like to begin by thanking Rabbi Mark and Sue Bard and the Sukkat Shalom community who welcomed us last October and directly adopted us as part of the community forever. Your welcome, your help in the preparation of our Bat Mitzva, the services on Zoom, allowed us to feel comfortable with you from day one. Thank you so much.

Catherine:

Special thanks for our Oncle Laurent who made an express round trip and takes the plane back to Paris in a few hours. Thank you. It means a lot to us to have you with us today.

Adèle:

Dad, Mum, we played rock paper scissors to find out who would say thank you to whom.

I won Dad. Dad, thank you so much for always being there, seeing when I'm angry, and understanding my character a little more than some people.

Catherine:

Mum, thank you very much for helping me in the preparation of the Bat Mitzva, thank you for always being there for everything. If I have a problem you solve it every time, you comfort me, and you must know that nothing is lost until mum searches for it.

Both together:

Thank you to everyone who is helping us celebrate here in the synagogue or on Zoom. Shabbat shalom!

Sukkat Shalom Baby News

Congratulations on the birth of Aaron Peter Reid



Matthew, Kyla and Tova Reid recently welcomed baby Aaron Peter into the family! Everyone is doing well, and Tova is loving being a big sister.

Amelia Linda Silk's baby-naming service



At eight months old, Amelia was given her Hebrew name, Ahava (meaning 'love') bat Asher v'Rivkah. First child for Andrew and Rebecca, and first grandchild for Nick and Kate. Amelia was fully in command of this celebration, held on Saturday 25 March at St Mark's. It was good to see so many people there, including members of Rebecca's family and the Silk family who'd travelled en masse from Nottingham. We had not just one, but two rabbis in attendance – Rabbis Mark Solomon and Peter Tobias who together delivered a beautiful service.

One single unified Progressive Jewish movement for the UK?

[PRESS RELEASE MONDAY 17 APRIL] Liberal Judaism and The Movement for Reform Judaism today announce that they will be working together to create one single unified Progressive Jewish movement for the UK.

Shock waves hit Sukkat Shalom – and doubtless every other LJ and MRJ community – with this announcement, which spawned a range of reactions and a host of questions. We hope that our two articles, by Rabbi Mark Solomon and founder Sukkat Shalom member Gillian Raab will help us all understand the background of and reasons for this move, and what it may offer for the future. Let's hear your views too via newsletter@eljc.org.

A Welcome Progressive Move

Rabbi Mark Solomon

On Monday 17th April I was standing by the ruins of Crematorium II at Birkenau, sunk in the kind of mournful reflections you'd expect, when a message popped up from Rabbi Charley Baginsky, asking if she could call me. She was meant to go on the March of the Living, but I had substituted for her at the last minute, since – for reasons I didn't inquire about – she needed to be in the UK that week. She wanted to let me know, a little before the news broke, about the proposed union of the Liberal and Reform movements into a new Progressive Judaism. Charley wanted to assure me that the Liberal Beit Din, which I chair, would continue as it is for the time being. I simply texted back that it was excellent news, and there was no urgent need to speak. Within an hour or so it was public knowledge, and I knew exactly why I'd been given the unexpected opportunity to join the March of the Living.

Soon after the start of the Jewish Reformation in the early 19th century, different tendencies developed, some favouring minimal, gentle reform – services with organ accompaniment and minor changes to the liturgy – others a more radical version – abolishing circumcision and moving the Sabbath to Sunday. When German reformers took their movement to the United States, a relatively radical version took root, while in Europe, a more traditionalist form was dominant. The British Reform movement generally followed the conservative Continental trend.

By the late 19th century all synagogues in Britain were feeling a bit moribund and losing the allegiance of the young. The young Lily Montagu wrote an article "On the Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today" which galvanised a group of advanced thinkers, led by Claude Montefiore, to found the Jewish Religious Union for the Advancement of Liberal Judaism, and thus our movement was born in 1902. Some of its inspiration, and its first rabbi, Israel Mattuck, came from the more radical American wing of Reform. From the very beginning, (relative) equality of the sexes, a universalist, ethical emphasis, and a creative approach to liturgy were prominent.

Various proposals and attempts were made, over the years, to unite the two movements, which failed due to entrenched cultural issues, several significant differences in religious policy, and possibly a sense (on the Reform side) that as long as the Liberals were way out to their left, they could present themselves as a more mainstream, traditional option. The growing Masorti movement in recent years has, to some extent, occupied that moderate-traditional space; and meanwhile, one by one, the differences in policy between the two movements have vanished.

The three most notable differences, within the last twenty-five years, have been 1) the Liberal acceptance of patrilineal Jews, when the MRJ clung to the traditional definition of Jewish identity through the maternal line; 2) Liberal rabbis officiating at blessings for mixed marriages, which

Reform rabbis were barred from doing; and 3) the embrace, by Liberal Judaism, of same-sex commitment ceremonies in the early 2000s, when the issue was still deeply divisive in the Reform movement. The story of the last 15 years or so has been – to oversimplify slightly – the adoption by the MRJ of the Liberal position on all these issues. To put it bluntly, LJ has won the religious argument for maximum inclusion and equality.

At the same time, Liberal Judaism has moved gradually towards greater traditionalism in liturgy and ritual. One tiny example: the first time I chanted from the Torah in The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, in the mid-1990s, people walked out in protest – that wouldn't happen today, when all rabbinic students at Leo Baeck College are required to learn biblical cantillation.

Since I joined the Progressive world in 1992, I have believed (and told anyone who asked) that the day should and would come when the two movements united to give Progressive Judaism a stronger, more confident voice. There will be many questions to address in the coming months and years, but I'm delighted that we have reached this point. I hope we will be filled with a new energy to carry the Liberal/Reform/Progressive message to more Jews and to the wider world.

Progressive Judaism

Gillian Raab

On 19th April 2023 Liberal Judaism and the Movement for Reform Judaism announced that they would be working together to form this new movement in the UK. They stressed that this was not a merger, but a fresh start where each organisation would contribute. There would be no immediate changes that will affect any congregations affiliated to either movement. Each would continue to use their own siddurim for their services and refer decisions (e.g. for conversions) to their customary Beth Din (Rabbinic Court). In this short article I will say a little about the histories of the two movements and how we, as Sukkat Shalom, decided to affiliate with Liberal Judaism when we became an independent congregation in 2004.

Progressive Judaism originated in early 19th Century Germany. It challenged some of the beliefs, rulings and practices of Orthodox Judaism, while remaining rooted in Jewish texts, values and traditions. The West London Synagogue (Reform, founded 1842) was the first progressive community in the UK. Services were conducted in English as well as in Hebrew, decorum was important and women initially sat in the balcony. Other progressive synagogues followed but it was not until 100 years later that they came together to form what is now the Movement for Reform Judaism, to challenge the Board of Deputies who refused to accredit their educational provision.



Liberal Judaism has its origins in the Jewish Religious Union, founded in 1902 by Claude Montefiore along with Lily Montagu. Lily Montagu worked to improve the lives of Jewish working girls in London, organising Shabbat afternoon services for those who were unable to attend on Shabbat morning. From its origins the Liberal movement has been more radical. Initially the wearing of tallitot and even kippot was discouraged at Liberal services. Many traditional practices, even B'nei Mitzvah, were discouraged. Liberal Judaism was the first movement in the UK to accept patrilineal Jews in the 1950s, and has long respected gender equality in participating in services.

As time has passed since their origins, the two movements have converged. Liberal services are now more traditional, while the Reform movement has become more liberal. Both respect total gender equality in taking part in services. There are now no differences in the rulings of their rabbinic courts or in the types of services they conduct, although these may vary according to

individual rabbis and congregations. Rabbis of both movements are trained at the same institution, Leo Baeck College, and there are many other co-operative ventures.

Now let us think back to 2004 and our small band of Edinburgh Jews who had formerly been members of what was then Glasgow Reform Synagogue. Fed up with schlepping through to Newton Mearns to go to shul or take our kids to cheder, we decided to set up our own congregation. You can read more about this [here](#). We asked representatives of the Liberal and Reform movements to come to Edinburgh to talk to us. They came and we were impressed with what each had to say. Issues that influenced our decision to go with the Liberals, despite our Reform background, included the question of the status of children of Jewish fathers and ceremonies for LGBT Jews. At that time the Reform movement required a formal conversion for patrilineal Jews and did not conduct same-sex marriages. There is now no difference between the movements on these issues.

We have been very happy with the support we have had from Liberal Judaism. Aaron Goldstein, now the rabbi of the Ark synagogue in London, visited us when he was a rabbinic student and helped us find our feet. It was through Liberal Judaism that Rabbi Mark Solomon became our part-time rabbi, now the life blood of our community. I look forward to the steps that will be taken over the next two years to bring the movements together to build a stronger Progressive Jewish movement in the UK.

Purim and Pesach Pictures

Purim has acquired resonance in our community (and probably many others) as the last time we got together before the pandemic. Good to see the cheder children's Purim performances and exchange of mishloach (small gifts of sweet things -often homemade - exchanged between friends and neighbours at this festival)



Thank you to the cheder for the Purim photos!

Our community seder was full to capacity, with 100 guests, and a waiting list. It was a memorable evening, ebulliently led by Rabbi Mark with much singing. The food, supplied by Brambles Catering, plus community contributions, was excellent and plentiful. Huge thanks to Gillian Raab, who was organiser-in-chief and thanks also to everyone else who pitched in to make the evening such a success.



Thank you to Andrea Torres Trapero for the Pesach photos!

Counting the Omer

6 April – 25 May 2023 15 Nisan – 5 Sivan 5783

Ellen Galford and Sue Bard

Counting the Omer, which is going on at the moment, is a Jewish custom of uncertain age and origin that begins on the second day of Passover – the period when barley was harvested – and ends seven weeks later at Shavuot, the time of the wheat harvest. Scholars, sages, mystics and others have added meaning to each day and week within this period, starting with the attribution of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt at the beginning and the meeting of God and Moses at Mt Sinai at its end. Over the millennia, mythical and actual events have been added, ranging from incidents during the 1st Century CE Roman occupation of Palestine, via the Crusades to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that began at Passover 1943.

In 2022 we borrowed the Japanese form of Renga – essentially a poetic conversation between two or more writers consisting of a series of short stanzas – for the exchange of texts every day throughout the seven-week period of the Counting of the Omer, including some current events and family memories as well as historic and traditional content.

WEEK ONE, days one, two and three went like this:

1. *Tell me, what is an omer?*
2. An omer is a measure,
and a sheaf of unthreshed stalks.
3. When the sickle is
first put to the standing grain
start to count the weeks.

You can read more on the [Sukkat Shalom website](#).

Yom HaShoah 18 April 2023, 27 Nisan 5783

Thank you to Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, especially to its chair, Hilary Rifkind for again organising this Holocaust Remembrance Day event in the Peace Garden, Princes Street Gardens. In the cool spring evening amongst the newly blossoming trees, many of us from both Edinburgh's Jewish congregations gathered to hear an address from City of Edinburgh Lord Provost, Robert Aldrich followed by a service led by Rabbi David Rose.



Gidona Henderson, of EHC read her personal and moving 'Reflection on the Jews in Amsterdam during the war, through the eyes of my family'. Michael Elam, of Sukkat Shalom, read, resoundingly, extracts from Siddur Lev Chadash on 'Suffering' by Leopold Zunz and Buchenwald survivor Eugene Heimler.

On this evening we also remembered the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Jewish resistance that began on the first night of Passover, 18 April 1943 and lasted – against massive Nazi attack – until 16 May.

My March of the Living

Rabbi Mark Solomon

Five days getting up at 5:45 am or earlier, at least sixty painful kilometres on foot and hundreds by coach, two vast death camps, mass graves in a forest, the Warsaw Ghetto and Krakow Ghetto, two state-of-the-art museums, historic synagogues, a famous 1930s yeshivah and a new community centre; 250 Jews from the UK amidst around 10,000 from around the world, a marching torrent of Jewish life and youth tracing the paths of enslavement and death – how to sum this up and give you a sense of the extraordinary, harrowing, overwhelming, life-affirming trip I was privileged to take in April?

The March of the Living has been an annual event for 35 years, the UK delegation has been going for about ten years, and only in the last three years has this included a multi-faith bus. The thirteen of us rode in bus H (for Holy, of course) and were inevitably dubbed the God Squad. As well as our irrepressible bus leader Talia, our educator Richard Verber, and our rabbinic leader Harvey Belovski, of Golders Green United Synagogue, we included Lady Elaine Sacks, widow of my former teacher Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Bishop of Willesden Lusa Nsenga, the Dean of Coventry, a prominent Quaker who is director of the Anne Frank Trust, and social activists from the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Baha'i communities. Together we laughed a lot, wept a lot, discussed moral and theological issues, shared our horror and incomprehension at the inhuman cruelty of which so many were capable, and our wonder at the heroic resistance shown by so many others.

The trip was not just about the Shoah, although that was the central reason we were there. We also learnt of a thousand years of rich Jewish culture in Poland, and of the rebirth of Jewish communal life today. In Krakow itself we walked around the old Jewish district of Kazimierz with its famous synagogues and historic graveyard, resting place of the famous Rabbi Moses Isserles, and met with the leaders of the new Jewish Community Centre, which has opened its doors in the last year to thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

An hour's ride away we walked through the gates of death at Birkenau, along the rails where the Jews of Hungary, of Salonika and so many others were selected, some for death and some for slavery. Like most of us, I had seen the films and images, read the histories and testimonies, but standing beside the ruins of the crematoria, or (in Auschwitz I) inside the very gas chamber itself, seeing the ghastly piles of suitcases, shoes (adults' in one room, children's in another), women's hair by the ton, the family photos the victims brought with them – all this stuns the mind and rends the heart with a new immediacy.

In one wooden barrack in Birkenau we listened to 94-year-old survivor Arek Hersh, who was a prisoner in that same barrack as youngster, marched out every day as part of a fishing detail, sending fish back to the Reich and occasionally risking a beating, or worse, by stealing one for themselves, to cook in secret in a corner of the barracks. In the camp at Majdanek, two days later, we were accompanied by a sprightly 90-year-old Agnes Kaposi, who had also survived Auschwitz and showed us how, in the narrow space between tightly packed bunks, the women in her barracks had hidden children and bathed them with the scarce water so they wouldn't sicken with the diseases endemic in the camps.

In the small village of Markowa we learnt the story of the Catholic Ulma family, who paid with their lives for hiding Jews; the museum there documents hundreds more Poles who risked, or lost, their lives helping Jews to survive. Everywhere we went, we were confronted with burning questions. Is it right to celebrate the Righteous among the Nations and gloss over the many who helped the Nazis in their genocidal aims? Should we judge the Jewish ghetto leaders who cooperated with the German overlords to preserve a semblance of social order, forced to make "choiceless choices"? What did the youthful militants of the Warsaw ghetto uprising achieve, when all were doomed to

death? And always – what would we have done if we were there? What lessons has humanity learnt from the events of those years?

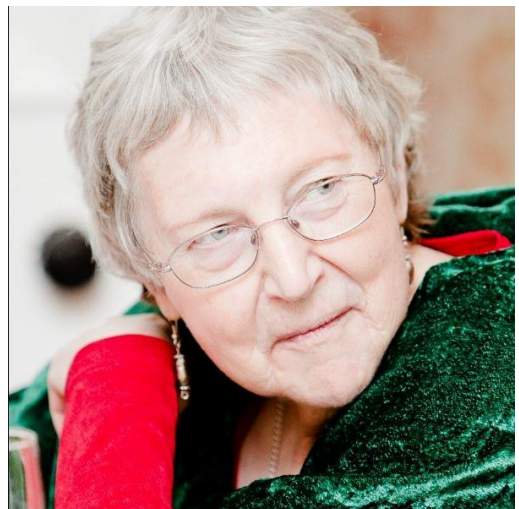
The March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau, and even the three hours or so waiting for it to start, was a joyous experience. Groups from all over the world gathered alongside their signs – youth from Florida counties and midwestern colleges, the Israeli Bar Association in their court gowns, Jews from Panama and Lithuania, women in hijabs from Bahrain and Morocco, Japanese lovers of Israel and friendly (probably Messianic) Poles, elderly survivors, Israeli scouts in their uniforms, assorted politicians including the President of Italy – a marvellous motley gathering. Among the throng were Lubavitcher youth trying to get secular Jews to put on tefillin, and I decided to do so to show our multi-faith group what it was about. Laying tefillin and saying the Shema among the barracks of Auschwitz – what better way to show that Hitler and his henchmen failed, and we have survived, not just physically but spiritually.

That's just a fraction of the story I could tell, and I hope I'll have the chance to share more words and pictures, to give you a flavour of what it was to be there, and maybe encourage some of you to go yourselves.

Reflections on 'Shoes: Collection of Writings' by Zelda Alexander

Sue Bard

I met Philip Michaelson in 2015 when he'd just joined Sukkat Shalom, having moved to Edinburgh to be near his son. His wife, Zelda Alexander had recently and unexpectedly died. We had coffee together and he spoke about her. Zelda (not a common name) was also my mother's name; she like Zelda Alexander had died in 2014 and I had an instant sense of connection. We got onto the subject of where our families were from. My maternal grandparents had come from Riga. Philip said 'You'd have been interested in Zelda's family research. Her parents came from Latvia.' I understood that Zelda's research had been a long-term undertaking; a major piece of unfinished work that Philip now saw as a priority to bring to some kind of completion. I said I'd be really interested in hearing more.



Fast forward seven years, and I receive three volumes of Zelda's writings from Philip and Debra Davies, Zelda's daughter. I read and re-read them late into that and following nights and was touched to be invited to join a group of friends and family online to discuss Zelda's work. Thank you, Philip and Debra, for sharing Zelda's writings with me, for inviting me to the online discussion and for welcoming my reflections.

As Philip explains in his foreword, 'Zelda wrote the pieces contained in this collection separately over an extended period of time. As their number grew, the idea of producing a single coherent collection based on the interwoven connections of time, place and family gradually emerged'. Zelda had begun to discuss and work on this possibility with a literary agent, a process cut short by her death. Now, through Debra and Philip's work, the original idea has been progressed.

Zelda Alexander's parents both emigrated from Latvia to South Africa in the late 1920's, during the period from 1921 until the mid- 1930s when Latvia was a progressive, democratic republic. They emigrated primarily for economic reasons, followed by or coming with other family members. Zelda's father's sister Ray (aged 16) fled for political reasons; she was working underground for the

Communist Party of Latvia and was wanted by the Latvian police. South Africa (unlike the United States and the UK, who were operating stringent quotas by then) was encouraging immigration - even from Jews – to boost its white population. Though Zelda's paternal grandmother only just made it, arriving in South Africa two weeks before South Africa's own Immigration Quota Act came into force in May 1930.

The Holocaust came with devastating speed and violence to Latvia with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union In June 1941 (just one year after the Soviet invasion and occupation). Within weeks, synagogues and people were burning, and by the end of that year tens of thousands of Jews had been murdered, mostly by shooting in the streets and then in the woods and on the beaches, resulting in the nearly total destruction of the Jewish population and culture. Only one person from Zelda's mother's extended family who'd remained in Latvia survived – her sister-in-law, Jessie (or Gela). She was the recipient of the shoes that title the collection, and which Zelda (aged 7) remembers helping wrap up to send her when the South African family learned in 1946 that she was still alive. Extraordinarily, when Zelda and other family members visited Latvia in 1997, by chance they met someone who'd known Jessie then and 'had bought shoes that came from Africa'.

This collection is a family story, but the depth and range of its political and historical context make it much more than that, as do its timescale and geographical reach, from post WW1 Latvia, via South Africa, to Zelda's last journal entry in the summer of 2014 in London. In her writings, Zelda drew on a range of sources including her journals, recorded conversations, correspondence over decades between family members, her activist Aunt Ray's diaries, archival research and contextual reading. The visit to Latvia in 1997 by nine family members from three continents, described by Zelda as 'life-changing ' was so significant, not just because of what Zelda learned there, but also because being there changed how she understood and felt about what she already knew. The visit to Latvia is itself the subject of Volume 2 and is referenced in the other two volumes.

The quality of Zelda's writing animates her subject matter and makes her work a pleasure to read, if at times a harrowing and demanding one. She employs a variety of voices, using the third person for reflective autobiography and this is the mode in which the collection begins. Volume 1 is entitled 'Lara's Story' and is Zelda's own story. Zelda is Lara – short for 'Leonora'. Zelda's mother (we never learn her name – nor the name of her father) was the youngest of 13 children; her oldest sister, Leonora, effectively mothered her until their mother died, terrifyingly, of cancer. Leonora's own grief and responsibilities resulting from their mother's death removed her physically and emotionally from her youngest sibling, aged just seven at the time. Leonora remained in Latvia and did not survive the Holocaust.

The Ashkenazi custom of naming children after the dead is employed here as a way of signaling a central theme of the collection; Zelda's mother's life-long deep depression that included attempts to take her own life. This custom was also the way in which Zelda came to connect emotionally with the Rosen family, the subject of the penultimate chapter of the collection. Holocaust statistics are overwhelming but discovering and telling the story of one 'ordinary' family drives home and makes familiar the nature of the tragedy that befell thousands of Latvian Jews.

As a child, Zelda's vision of her 'lost homeland' conveyed 'a cold, dark picture with many empty spaces – like old maps with "Here be Dragons" inscribed in places where no-one knew what was really there'. When Zelda started to find out about her parents' lives in Latvia before they emigrated, a very different and fascinating picture began to emerge, validated by the visit there in 1997. This discovery also conveyed a sense of what her parents – and especially her mother – had lost when they left.

Zelda is preoccupied by silence. She depicts how the effects of her mother's overwhelming fear of the stigma of mental illness and of the possibility of other people's knowledge of her deep depression imposed more strain - especially on Zelda as a child and a young person - than the condition itself. In her parallel uncovering of the silence that surrounded her family's past in the country they'd

emigrated from, and the nature of the Holocaust there, she comes to understand the extent of her mother's losses.

Zelda's writings are courageous, painstaking and sensitive in the way in which they approach these entwined currents of silence, raising as they do questions of how we remember and how we memorialise the past, especially once the past is no longer within living memory. In the case of Latvian Jewry, it's a question that Zelda raises poignantly: 'I recall my parents saying that a person only truly dies when no-one remains alive who remembers them. Until then, something of the dead person's essence endures in the world, a comforting thought usually, but who is left to remember in the aftermath of such a catastrophe when entire families and communities have been wiped out? '.

Through her research and writing Zelda has recovered memories of and for her own family that would also interest and enlighten many others – with or without a direct connection to the Holocaust – who seek to understand it. Let alone for others like me, whose families came from Latvia, and who also, like Zelda have only ever been able to envisage it as an empty space.

Debra Davies and Philip Alexander have generously allowed Zelda's writings to be posted on the Sukkat Shalom website. If you'd like to read them, you can access them [here](#).

Kitchen Kehilla

We want to talk about food! eating ,cooking, growing, shopping, selling, foraging, reminiscing, fantasising, storytelling, old ways, new ways. [Send us your thoughts](#) on this beloved subject.

We're not envisaging KK as a recipe exchange, though it may include them, but reminiscing already on pesach, we're kicking off with Phil Wiltshire's [charoset bonbons](#), currently going viral after our community seder, and Kerstin Stutterheim's incomparable [flourless chocolate cake](#) – great at all season.

Welcome to Nina Olshan

Nina's first encounter with Sukkat Shalom was at the High Holy Day services in September 2021, when we were emerging tentatively out of lockdown. Nina felt an immediate sense of connection with the community, meeting people who've now become friends, and at the beginning of this year, she became a member of Sukkat Shalom. Nina says she moved from London to Edinburgh 'slightly on a whim' taking advantage of flexible hybrid working conditions that allowed her to work from home - wherever that was - commuting to London once a month.



Nina grew up in Baltimore's big Jewish community, attending services at a Reform Judaism congregation and going to a Jewish high school. She's introduced some of the conviviality of that life to Edinburgh, where she's been hosting Shabbat dinners once a month for non-Jewish, Jewish and converting friends in her small flat in Leith where she says 'we gather round my coffee table in my not-huge living room and do miniature jam jar kiddush'.

Before moving to Edinburgh, Nina lived in London for two years where she was working with asylum seekers and refugees at Micro Rainbow, providing support to LGBT claims and getting people access to the services they need. With the fall of Afghanistan, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia

and the UK government's introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act, the pressure and frustration of the work was intense.

But now Nina is embarking on an exciting career change, having been accepted onto ScotGEM, an innovative four-year graduate entry medical programme that trains graduates from any academic background to become generalist doctors within NHS Scotland, focusing on rural medicine and healthcare improvement. The programme is a joint initiative of the universities of St Andrews and Dundee, so in September Nina will be moving to Dundee, but planning to return to Edinburgh at the weekends. Good news for Sukkat Shalom! And good luck to Nina.

Rebekah and the Choir of the Earth

This time two years ago, Sukkat Shalom member Rebekah Gronowski wrote about her career in, and passion for, **music** and how her discovery of The Self Isolation Choir transformed her life in lockdown. Since then, The Self Isolation Choir has become Choir of the Earth, flourishing as a global online choir, which by the end of 2022 had performed 60 choral works involving 10,000 amateur singers from 35 different countries.

Choir of the Earth is a wonder of human connection and collaboration achieved through digital technology. Singers learn each piece through live, online rehearsals with professional musicians. They record their own voices at home, submitting the recordings to a studio where they're combined by a single "techie wizard" person to create the full choir. The final mix is then played back in a concert performance and broadcast live via a shared link available to watch again.



In 2022/2023 Choir of the Earth took to the road, with an in-person UK and Ireland tour. On 18th March this year Rebekah sang with the choir in a marvellous selection of choruses from Handel's Messiah at St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh. Like all the singers, she was given the resources to learn and practise her tenor part, including online sessions the week before the event. The event itself was a triumph. And since then the Choir of the Earth has been awarded 2nd place in Britain's Top Choirs. You can listen and **watch here** – it's superb!

Rebekah, who is unstoppable, went on to sing in the Choir of the Earth Hallelujah Chorus, streamed on Friday 5th May at the start of the Coronation Weekend celebrations.

To find out more about the Choir of the Earth go to choiroftheearth.com. Links to all the concerts are on YouTube.

Meet Sukkat Shalom's Council 2023/2024

At our AGM on Sunday, 19 March the following members were proposed and seconded for the coming year: Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, and Nick Silk as our three co-chairs, informally known as the 'sofa'; Stefano Giossi as our treasurer and membership secretary; Gillian Raab as secretary and Jonathan Broadie. Marjory Broadie, Michael Elam, Helen Ford, Barrie Levine, Han Smith and Andrea Torres Trapero as members. Read about everyone below!

Lorraine Hershon, Rolando Trapero and Rebecca Wober left the council this year. We thank them for the contributions they made as members.

We welcome ideas, comments, questions and constructive criticism, so please feel free to get in touch through contact@eljc.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 can be accessed [here](#)

Sue Bard



I've been a member of Sukkat Shalom for 9 years, grew up in London, have spent most of my adult life in Scotland and have an enduring love affair with Edinburgh that has been enhanced by the discovery (better late than never) of its Liberal Jewish community. I have four children and four grandchildren and enjoy living by the sea.

Jonathan Broadie



I was born in Oxford but, just 6 weeks later, found myself on the platform at Waverley Station to begin life in what was to become my hometown. In Edinburgh, I was raised, educated, attended the Orthodox Shul and cheder, trained as a Chartered Accountant and as an economist, joined Glasgow Reform Synagogue, and met Marjory! I've been a Sukkat Shalom council member since the start, serving as Treasurer for 7 years. I'm a parent and a grandparent, and love spending time with family and friends. I enjoy voluntary work, travelling, hill-walking and reading, and I'm still a fully paid-up member of cafe society!

Marjory Broadie



I'm a founder member of Sukkat Shalom, and a Council member since the start. Before then I was a member of Glasgow New Synagogue. And long, long before that I was born in Malawi and raised there, and in Tanzania. It was growing up in Africa that my love for travel was fostered, especially to remote and far-flung destinations. By profession I'm a schoolteacher - retired now for 12 years but still doing supply teaching. Happily married to Jonathan, I'm a very proud wife, mum, mum-in-law and granny. I thoroughly enjoy spending time with our family and our friends. My pleasurable pastimes include cooking, reading and the theatre, but my passionate pursuit is travelling.

Michael Elam



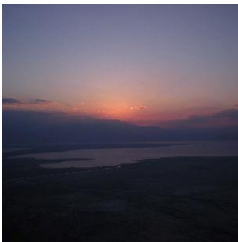
Michael is one of our new council members and also a new member of Sukkat Shalom, following his recent admission to Judaism. However, he's been very involved and active in Sukkat Shalom for a long time, among other things bringing his theatrical skills to Burns Night and Purim events. We're delighted now to have him as a full member of the community and the council

Helen Ford



I am Helen, I am human to gentle giant Teddy (a two-year-old Standard Poodle) who is an Owner Trained autism assistance dog). We live just outside Edinburgh. My hobbies include many crafts, reading, doing things with my dog, including a variety of training in different dog activities, travel , going to the football or the cinema. I also volunteer two days a week at Edinburgh Zoo where I help visitors. Along with Rebekah Gronowski, I look after Sukkat Shalom's Facebook page.

Stefano Giossi



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

Barrie Levine



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



I used to be the self-appointed arm-twister-in-chief for “persuading” people to take office in the community. Four years ago, though, I paid for my failure to twist anyone's arm into being the chair by myself becoming the then one-quarter, now one third of the joint co-chairs. Otherwise, I manage the community's IT, I'm the religious affairs convener, and I sometimes help lead services.

Gillian Raab



I am 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. 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.

Nick Silk



Hi, I'm Nick and I'm married to Kate. We have two boys, Andrew and David, and we now have a granddaughter, Amelia, who was born in August last year. I've been a member and actively involved with Sukkat Shalom from the start and prior to that I was a member at Glasgow Reform Synagogue. Kate and I both enjoy walking and, of course, playing with Amelia, and I'm also a season ticket holder at Livingston football club.

Andrea Torres Trapero



I'm Andrea, one of the new council members. I'm from Brownsville, Texas and now live in Edinburgh with my husband Rolando. Previously, I lived in Washington, D.C. where I was part of a multi-denominational community - **Sixthandl**. I hope to bring my social media/communication background to help Sukkat Shalom reach out further within Edinburgh and Scotland! My hobbies include landscape photography, making resin bookmarks with pressed flowers, and occasionally making some good Mexican food.

Han Smith



I'm Han (they/them), and I'm originally from New Jersey in the US. My wife, Jen, and I moved to Edinburgh nearly three years ago and fortunately found our way to Sukkat Shalom. I am a psychotherapist and doctorate student at the University of Edinburgh, and I am keenly interested in the overlap between Judaism and therapy. I am excited to be a newly appointed council member, and I look forward to bringing my unique experiences and skills to the community.

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** 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@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.





Sukkat Shalom

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish community

Scottish Charity SC035678

Web site www.eljc.org