



From the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community

December 2015

Kislev – Tevet 5776

- 4** Kabbalat Shabbat
MSG 6.15
- 11** Erev Shabbat
CC 7.00
- 12** Tea and Talmud
(Note time and venue!)
MSG 2.00
Chanukah Party at MSG
Children's Games 4.30
Havdalah and Chanukah
Lighting 5.30
Potluck Supper Bring food
to share (vegetarian and
permitted fish) 6.00
- 13** Philosophy Reading Group
(Note time and venue!)
CCM 3.00
- 18** Kabbalat Shabbat
MSG 6.15
- 26** Shabbat Morning Service
CC 11.00

January

- 1** Kabbalat Shabbat
MSG 6.15
- 8** Erev Shabbat
CC 7.00

Venues

- CC** Columcille Centre
2 Newbattle Terrace
- MSG** Marchmont St Giles
1a Kilgraston Road
- CCM** Christ Church Morningside
6a Morningside Road

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Word from the Chair

Chanukah is with us once again. I read a recent article in the BBC on-line magazine which recorded an interview by Sammy Samuels given to William Kremer for Outlook on the BBC World Service. Sammy Samuels, 35, is a member of a very small Jewish community in Yangon, Myanmar (formerly Rangoon, Burma), whose forebears arrived from Iraq and Iran in the 19th century.

By World War Two, when Burma was a British colony, there were 2500 Jews enjoying a wonderful life in the country. The synagogue was large enough to seat more than 500 people. It has three storeys and a Torah room where in its heyday the Community kept 126 Torah scrolls. When the Japanese came in 1942, the Jews of Rangoon were suspected as collaborators of the British. No evidence of collaboration was found and the community was left alone. But it was enough to make people afraid, and many Jewish families left. Then in 1962 the military took over and many businesses were nationalised. This led to a second exodus of Jews. The Jews who fled took their Torah scrolls with them and the community is left with just two.

Throughout all this, Sammy's family and seven others stayed. Sammy's grandfather felt very strongly that Jews should remain in Burma, for if they left the government would take over the synagogue. Sammy's father promised his grandfather the family would stay in the country as long as they could. When Sammy was growing up, there were only about 50 Jews left, and only 15 to 20 would come to the synagogue. Sammy's father, Moses, would say that numbers do not mean anything; what matters is the spirit. In 2002 Sammy went to Yeshiva University in New York. Eating Shabbat dinner with 500 others, Sammy reports that, strangely enough, he felt less Jewish than at home. If he did not go to synagogue nobody really cared or even noticed. But at home, who would open the building and say the prayers?

The synagogue is in the Muslim neighbourhood of Yangon, next door to a Buddhist monastery. Although there are only about 20 Jews in Yangon who were born there, as the country continues to open up, there is a growing community of expat Jews from around the world, who come to services for the festivals. Some visitors from Israel and the US ask whether it is safe because there are so many Muslims in the neighbourhood.

Sammy explains that actually they are his friends. Before festivals, like Chanukah, Muslim friends help clean the synagogue. Muslim friends came to Sammy's bar mitzvah and the Jewish community is invited to Muslim festivals, such as Eid. Sammy says they were all born in the country and share the Buddhist ethos of mutual respect. Sammy's father said that Chanukah is the one Jewish celebration that non-Jewish people can take part in, making it a great opportunity to reach out to other communities. In 2011, when the military junta was dissolved in Myanmar, Chanukah was celebrated at a Yangon hotel. About 120 people attended, including the Israeli and US ambassadors, and Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. The Minister of Religious Affairs, together with a trusted ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, lit Chanukah candles.

Similar events have been held every year since, this year sadly without Sammy's father, who died in the spring. Sammy has promised in turn to keep the Jewish spirit alive in Myanmar and keep the synagogue open. As his father did, Sammy tells visitors: the number does not mean anything.

The Samuels family, the Jews of Myanmar, and Chanukah, is a story for our times. Here in our small outpost of world Jewry there is no need to run scared of our Muslim neighbours. Friendly relationships and mutual respect are the springboard to a harmonious and cohesive national community here in Scotland. One can have nothing but admiration for the determination of the Samuels family to keep alive the spirit and practice of Judaism. Their light of Chanukah, so faithfully nurtured, has spread and increased. Long may it continue. Chag Chanukah sameach.

Norman Crane

Back-to-back Chanukah Parties for kids and grownups!

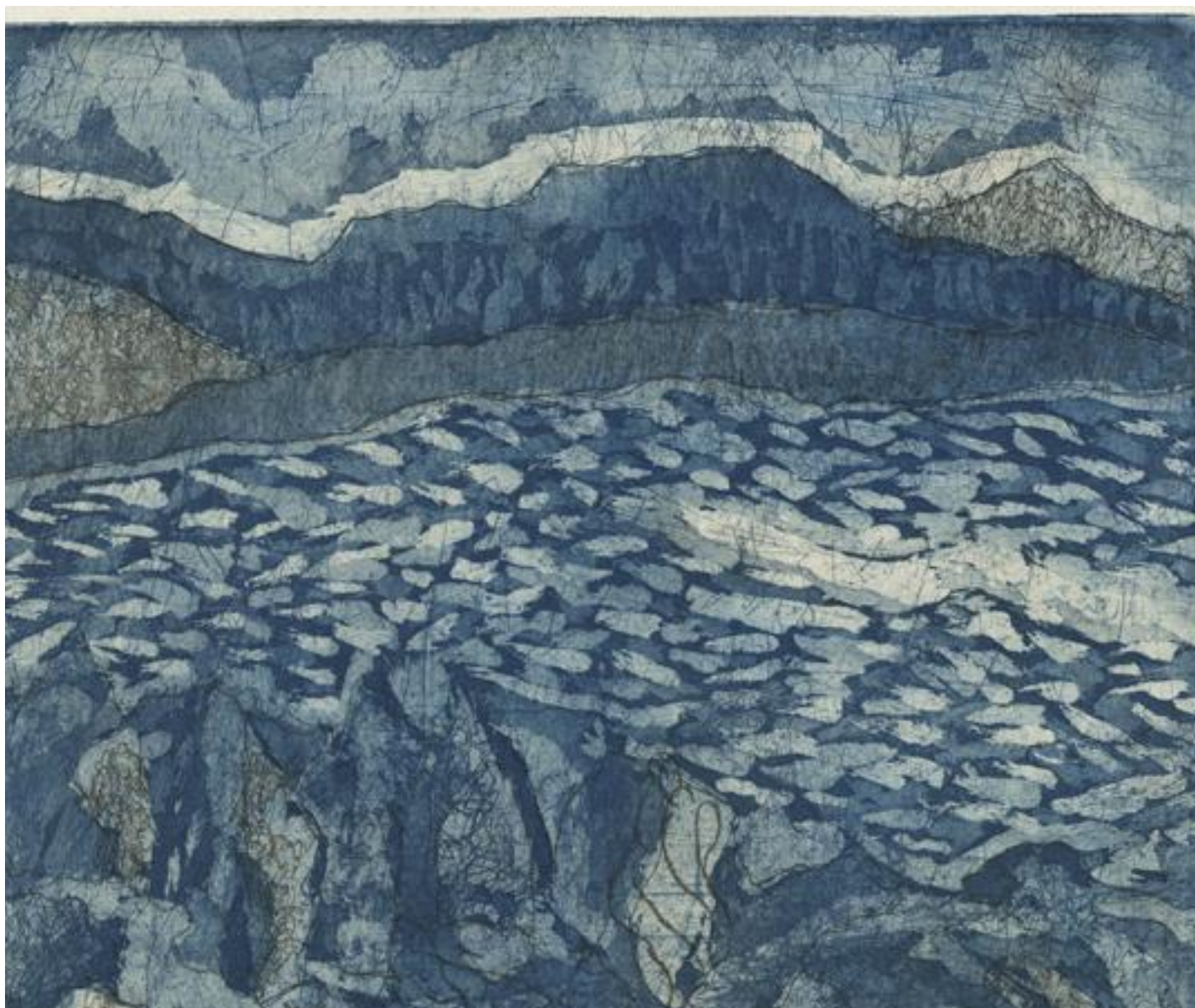
There will be a children's party from **4.30**, with games and crafts. (How far can you throw a latke?) Havdalah, and group lighting of all our Chanukiot will follow at **5.30** (come shortly after **5.00**). Once our candles are lit, we will share a potluck supper (bring something vegetarian or permitted fish).

Shining out Together

Our rabbi, Mark Solomon, has published his reflections on Chanukah in the [current issue of *Four Corners*](#). Why do we count up the days instead of counting them down? How might the ancient origins of this festival related to the origins of Christmas? And what might Chanukah mean today?

Miriam's Bute-iful etching: another RSA Success

Again, this year, Miriam Vickers has had work accepted in the Royal Scottish Academy Open Exhibition, a two-plate etching of Bute from Toward, in the Cowal Peninsula.



The Open Exhibition at the Royal Scottish Academy (on the Mound) runs to 14 February 2016, Rooms 6 and 7 (Upper Level) and Finlay Room (Lower Level), Mon to Sat 10–5, Sun 12–5. Entry is free.

Tree felling and pond clearing: Mitzvah Day at the Hollies

Mitzvah Day is an international initiative encouraging Jewish communities, schools and groups to engage with their local community in some form of positive social action. This year, Sukkat Shalom worked with Tiphereth, an intentional community whose members include adults with learning disabilities.

Tiphereth, in the Colinton area of Edinburgh, belongs to the international Camphill Movement, and is one of ten Camphill communities in Scotland.

Two members of Sukkat Shalom have adult children living in Camphill communities. Ben Naftalin lives at Corbenic near Dunkeld, and Annie Gutteridge lives at Tiphereth.

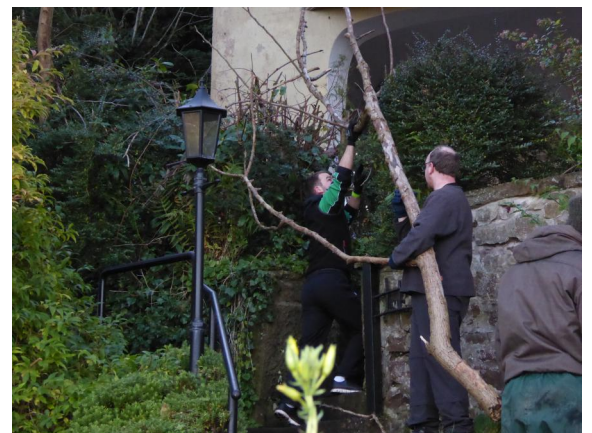
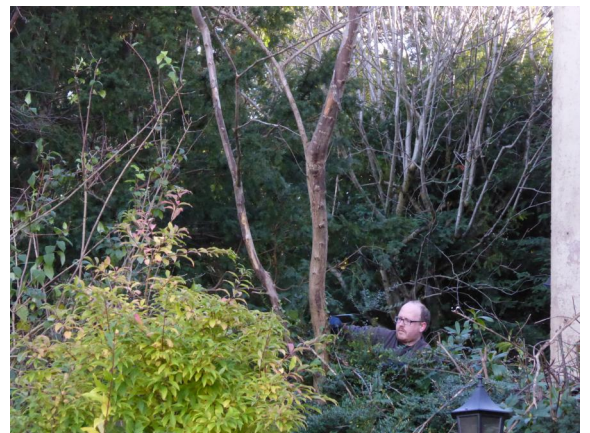
Sukkat Shalom was delighted this year to be able to work in the garden of the Hollies, one of the three Tiphereth households. Seventeen of us spent the day helping the houseparents, Ioannis and Line, manage their extensive and beautiful terraced garden. There was a good mix of established and newer members of our community.

Tasks included felling a tree, clearing a pond, weeding and mulching beds, clearing moss, pruning raspberry canes and planting bulbs. We had just about the best weather this November, and it was wonderful to be gardening in this lovely place. Also wonderful were the regular tea, coffee, scones, and home-made jam.

Line and Kate, the Tiphereth gardener, planned and prepared for the day carefully, and Kate was available throughout the day with help and advice, all of which meant that our time was productive and we could see the difference we were making. Line wrote to us afterwards: 'It was great having you. I was surprised how much was actually done! I was out in the garden yesterday and it just looks lovely — not a garden to be ashamed of anymore.'

Many of us felt we'd like to continue to work in the Hollies garden, and they would like this too. There will be another winter gardening session in the new year (date still to be confirmed), and, if enthusiasm continues, more in the spring and summer.

*Susan Bard (formerly Gutteridge)
Photos: Helen Zollinger*



Jewish Doves and Jewish Hawks all support Israel: Perceptions and Reality

Gillian Raab

A new study has been published (12/11/2015) on the attitudes of British Jews towards Israel. The survey was carried out by Ipsos Mori and sponsored by [Yachad](#). The results were analysed by a team led by City University, who have published a [summary and full report](#).

The research shows that British Jews are overwhelmingly supportive of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, proud of its achievements, and mindful of its security needs. But, given that, there is a range of attitudes to current Israeli policy. For example, 62% of respondents agreed that Israel should give up territory in exchange for peace, and 71% supported a two-state solution.

Now Yachad is not a neutral body. It is a UK-based NGO which defines itself as "pro-peace and pro-Israel" and campaigns for a two-state solution. But their report has been carried out by respected survey methodologists, who detail exactly how they obtained their data and evaluate it critically. A similar study was carried out in 2010 by the [Institute of Jewish Policy Research](#), a professional organization, with no political agenda. The findings of the new study are very much in line with those of 2010, where 66% agreed on ceding land for peace and 77% supported a two-state solution.

Of course, there was a range of Jewish opinions on questions like supporting withdrawal from the West Bank and Palestinian rights to a homeland (Dovish opinions) and opposite views, for example, opposing giving up territory for peace or rejecting the idea that Palestinians have a right to a land of their own (Hawkish opinions). To summarise this, the report's authors have devised a score of Hawkishness-Dovishness (H-D) score that can be derived for each of the 1,131 respondents to the survey. While the majority of respondents are towards the Dovish end of this score, there is a significant minority with Hawkish views.

The section of the report that I found most interesting was that where the Hawks and Doves reported on their ideas of what other Jews would think. The Hawks saw other Jews as Hawks too, much more so than the survey found. For example, 139 respondents at the Hawkish end of the scale were asked how many Jews would agree that "Palestinians have no legitimate claim to a land of their own". Their average response was 40%, whereas the data from the survey was only 14%. For those at the Dovish end of the scale the differences between perception and reality were smaller, although Doves also expected respondents to be somewhat more Hawkish than they actually were.

The *Jewish Chronicle* of 27 November (p. 39) exemplifies this bias in practice. Professor Geoffrey Alderman, who is definitely at the Hawkish end of the H-D scale, rubbished the Yachad report. Instead he quoted a figure from a market research survey conducted for the *JC*, claiming that 67% of British Jews supported Bibi Netanyahu. Now [that report](#), by Survation, has much less credibility than those I discuss above. Looking at their detailed report, we can see that fewer than half of Survation's 1,000 respondents answered that question, and only 311 (31% of the whole sample) would have voted for Bibi if they had had a vote in the Israeli elections.

What do these results mean for our community here in Edinburgh? We know that views on Israel can divide members of the community and thus we tend to shy away from even mentioning the topic. I would like to think that we might be able to have such discussions and try to understand each other better. The Doves need to understand the Hawks' real fears of rocket attacks and random stabbings of Jews in Israel, and the Hawks to understand that the Doves' concern for Palestinian rights is not incompatible with support, love and pride in Israel as a Jewish state.

Gillian Raab is treasurer of Sukkat Shalom and Emeritus Professor of Applied Statistics at Edinburgh Napier University. If you would like to get details of the H-D scale, and even to score yourself, please contact Gillian through the Contact Team.

Interfaith Service in Memory of Victims of Terrorism

There will be an interfaith service dedicated to world peace, jointly organised by the Consulate General of France and the Edinburgh InterFaith Association, in the evening of Sunday **13 November**, at St Patrick's RC Church (in the Old Town).

Rabbis Mark Solomon and David Rose will participate.

7.00 at St Patrick's (40 High St, Old Town; access from the Cowgate, or the High Street, near St Mary's Street).

Liberal Judaism welcomes Public Recognition of Growing Diversity

The [Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life](#), convened by the Woolf Institute and chaired by Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, has just published its report. "Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good" documents a society in which Christian affiliation is declining and both 'non-religious belief' and religious diversity are increasing. The report presents a vision of society "at ease with itself, in which all individuals, groups and communities feel at home, and in whose flourishing all wish to take part".

The Commission advises that we must all learn to understand and live with differences. It seeks to empower further both religious and non-religious activity in the public sphere. The new BBC Charter should mandate that the full range of religion and belief should be reflected. (Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* is mentioned by name.) All state-school pupils should learn about contemporary religion, philosophy, and ethics, by statutory requirement. "Time for Reflection," as a legal requirement in school, should replace the current requirement for collective worship. In framing counter-terrorism legislation, the Government should seek to promote, not limit, freedom of enquiry and expression, and should engage with a wide range of affected groups, including those with which it disagrees.

Liberal Judaism's chief executive, Rabbi Danny Rich, welcomes the report as furthering Liberal Judaism's goal that Jewish values and beliefs and those of modern society should be aligned:

We believe that if we fail to recognise the diverse nature of our society in our civic institutions, our national events, our legal system, schools and media, we risk alienating large sections of our community who will see themselves as 'the other'.

This in turn leads to them feeling excluded not just from the rights of British citizens, but also the obligations and standards of behaviour which go with being a full partner in British society. This is a huge a growing threat to us all.

This report is therefore a significant forward step and in particular we welcome its willingness to confront the inequalities which can arise when religious tribunals such as *Batei Din* fail to acknowledge the rights of women or comply with British standards of justice.



Photo: Wikipedia/Kim Traynor

