

# SUKKAT SHALOM

EDINBURGH LIBERAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

## JANUARY 2005



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### Shalom!

This is a short newsletter, as Hannah is taking a well-deserved break, leaving Ricky and me as her poor substitutes (read that how you will).

December was a busy month, with services, the Chanukah party – an outstanding success, many thanks to everyone involved in organising it – and our communal visit to Glasgow. Nearly 30 people went from Edinburgh. We were very warmly received by our friends in GNS and everyone felt it had done a lot to strengthen relations between our two communities. I even survived giving the Dvar Torah, which is reprinted on page 4 (due less to my immodesty than to the need to fill an empty page!)

Meanwhile, the secular calendar doesn't stop. Although the business of our AGM on Jan 30th may be less weighty than our last meeting in September, it still has to elect the council and officers and fix the budget for our first full year of life – and we also may be able to bring news about the scroll dressings, which we are hoping will be religious art of outstanding merit. So please attend if you can – and please note that proposed amendments to the constitution must be with Ricky by 15th January to give the notice required by the constitution itself.

R. Aaron Goldstein, outreach director of Liberal Judaism, will join us on at least eight occasions in 2005 – a great demonstration of LJ's commitment to our community. His first visit will be on 3rd-6th February, when the Shabbat study session will be on siddur Lev Chadash, the LJ prayerbook. Details on page 3.

Lastly, I'm very proud to be able to report that the Kol Nidre appeal raised £1337. It shows that for all our work in building our community over the last year we have not become inward-looking – we know that that work must continue to go hand-in-hand with a commitment to Tikkun Olam, the mending of the world. The world is certainly due for some mending – let's hope it begins in 2005. Happy New Year!

Maurice

### Community Events

**FRI 7 JAN, 7pm – Erev Shabbat service  
Homeroyal House, 2 Chalmers Crescent**

Please arrive in good time; if you are early press "5" then "4" then "call".

**SUN 9 JAN, 3pm – Cheder, 11 Braid Avenue**

Topic this week: bar- and batmitzvah.

**THURS 20 JAN, 7.30pm – Council meeting  
36 Gillespie Crescent**

All Sukkat Shalom members welcome : please let us know if you intend to come:

**SAT 22 JAN, 11am-1pm – Shabbat and  
Holocaust Memorial Day service, St  
Columba's Church Hall, 14 Johnstone Terr**

The service will be followed by kiddush.

**SUN 23 JAN, 3pm – Cheder, 4 Merchiston  
Crescent**

The week's topic is confirmation.

**SUN 30 JAN, 4pm – Annual General Meeting  
Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace**

Full details will be sent out by post in January.

**FRI 4 FEB, 7pm – Erev Shabbat service  
Homeroyal House, 2 Chalmers Crescent**

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein will lead the service.

**SAT 5 FEB, 11am-4pm – Shabbat service -  
lunch - study, St Columba's Church Hall**

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein will lead the service.

The study session will be on siddur Lev Chadash. See page 3 for further details.

(Other event notices continue on page 2)

*A hasid complained to R. Wolf that certain persons were turning night into day, playing cards. "That is good", said the tzaddik, "Like all people, they want to serve God and don't know how. But now they are learning to stay awake and persist in something. When they have become perfect in this, all they need to do is turn to God – and then what excellent servants they will make for him!"*

Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim

## Events (continued)

### Events at the Community Centre, 4 Salisbury Road

**Sun 16 Jan** Supper Evening and Talk by Herbert Dryden on "Bonnyrigg's role with the Kindertransport" 7.30 p.m. Tickets £12.50 from 24 Cammo Grove, Edinburgh, EH4 8EX

**Sun Jan 9** Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society: Rabbi Nancy Morris, Glasgow New Synagogue. *Sexuality, Law and Leadership: Pushing the Boundaries of Orthodoxy.*

**Sun Jan 23** Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society: Professor Michael Berkowitz, Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London. *Facts, Myths and Lies about Criminality and the "Jewish Question".*

**Sat Feb 12** The *Edinburgh Star* is holding a dinner in celebration of its 50th edition. The *Star* has been very open to carrying material from our community, so this is an opportunity to support them in our turn. Tickets £20 from Sydney Caplan, 0131 661 3035 (vegetarian options available).

### Other Events

There will be a memorial service to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, at New College. The date is to be announced, either Tue 25 Jan or Thurs 27 Jan. All are invited. Contact Rebekah Gronowski, students@eljc.org or 07891 439 646, for further details.

## Notices

### Thanks

Elena, Naomi and I would like to thank Sukkat Shalom for the lovely welcoming card for Orli. She's doing well, and she even gives her parents some rest during the night!

Avery, Elena, and Naomi

### Party!

Phil and Catherine, Adam and Leora would like to invite all members of Sukkat Shalom to a Hogmanay party, 7-12pm Fri 31 Dec 2004, at 11 Braid Avenue. Weather and energy levels permitting, we will make an expedition to Blackford Hill to view the spectacular Edinburgh New Year fireworks.

## Liberal Judaism has appointed Danny Rich, as its new Chief Executive. He writes:

Dear Liberal Judaism member,

I am thrilled to be joining you as your Chief Executive.

I was born into South London Liberal Synagogue, was educated at the LJS (St John's Wood), served Leicester Progressive Jewish Congregation, and have been rabbi to Kingston Liberal Synagogue for nearly two decades. I could say much about the past but it is to the future that I wish to look.

Liberal Judaism can only thrive if each of its constituent communities is a centre of Liberal Judaism, and each constituent community will achieve its full potential if Liberal Judaism plays its part in facilitating the exchange of ideas, in doing efficiently what is best done nationally, and in providing a confident national voice and presence. Put in a sentence: Liberal Judaism and its constituents are one, the joint achievements of which are dependent on the several successes of each other.

There is much work to be done, bringing the values and practices of Liberal Judaism which are reflected in the work of our communities in four countries (England, Eire, Scotland and Luxembourg) to even more Jews and others who are seeking a means of living a Jewish life in the modern world.

This task requires each one of us to play a role. If you take part in your local Liberal Jewish community you strengthen it and Liberal Judaism, and if you participate in Liberal Judaism activities you contribute to its well-being and that of your local community.

In my first year of office I look forward to meeting personally as many members of Liberal Judaism as time allows but, before I do so or at any time afterwards, I invite you to contact me directly by telephone on 0207 631 9820 or by e-mail on d.rich@liberaljudaism.org. The demands of my post may mean you cannot speak to me immediately but your contact will initiate a personal response as soon as possible.

I look forward to our working together.

*Danny Rich, Chief Executive*

## Rabbi Aaron Goldstein

When Rabbi Aaron Goldstein visits us for the first of his 'regular' visits, he will be using the Liberal prayer book, siddur Lev Chadash, for the shabbat service on Feb 5th. After the service we will be having lunch – so please bring along some food – and then the subject of our study session, 'Getting familiar with the Liberal Judaism prayer book', will allow Rabbi Goldstein to lead us through the siddur.

Siddur Lev Chadash differs from the RSGB siddur in some of the prayers, to a certain extent in the content of the services, in the actual layout of the services within the prayer book, and in the fact that it includes all festival services (except for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). In addition to Rabbi Goldstein leading us through the siddur, we will be able to discuss the format of our services, and Rabbi Goldstein will also be giving some 'handy tips' for those of us who take, or would like to take, services. As we will be using siddur Lev Chadash for future shabbat services, please come along and find out more about our new prayer book.

Nick

## MESP2005

The 2nd Annual Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace will take place from 14th February to 6th March. There are many very promising events in it, some of them of special interest because of their Jewish content. A Jewish storyteller, Shai Schwartz from Neve Shalom, will be appearing along with Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari from Jerusalem. Shai would like to spend Friday evening, Feb 25th, with a Jewish family. Would anyone like to offer hospitality?

The One World Concert on February 19th will feature our Musical Director Rebekah Gronowski, leading Hebrew Songs for Peace. A two-day conference on Spirituality and Peace (4th-5th March) will have talks, workshops, readings, plenaries, and music and storytelling from many Middle Eastern spiritual traditions, including our own.

Copies of the festival brochure will be available at our services in January. It is also online, at our links page, at <http://tinyurl.com/6cmyo>. We also hope to welcome Festival visitors to our services while it is on.

## Book Corner on Food by Anat

Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food – An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day* (Penguin, 1999). No-one these days has the time, emotional energy or the large families to justify the often quite long and elaborate preparation of old dishes. The real reason for reading this book is the anecdotes and descriptions of Jewish life, festivals, shabbat and everyday life right round the globe. Fascinating old photos too. Should you feel inspired, the recipes are also authentic and often unusual. Some modern ones too.

The classic book on Scots cookery is still *The Scots Kitchen*, by F. Marian McNeill, originally published in 1920 but still in print. Totally authentic Black Bun, crowdie, pies, stews, scones, sweets etc. By way of contrast, Claire Macdonald's very excellent cookery books have good modern Scots recipes.

*Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (1986; still in print and in the Central Library) is Marvin Harris's intelligent, amusing, ecology- and anthropology-based look at food customs and taboos around the world. Splendidly researched by prominent U.S. anthropologist. You may have thought there was nothing new to say about kashrut... but there is. Just as fascinating on other food customs; Hindu beef ban, origins of U.S. love affair with the burger, and more. Roald Dahl fans will love the chapter on insects.

John Webster, *Animal Welfare - a Cool Eye Towards Eden* is a constructive approach to the problem of man's dominion over the animals. Anyone fed up with sentimentality on the one hand and the horrors of factory farming on the other, definitely needs this sensible book and its interesting research base. Prof. Webster tells you exactly how your milk or meat is produced down on the farm, what the options are for you and the farmer, what would or wouldn't be of real benefit to animals and very reasonably suggests that consumers get the facts clear and choose accordingly. Very easy to read, clear and well-written. Shechita gets a small and fairly mild mention; he certainly doesn't seem to think it the biggest of current animal welfare problems.

Liberal Judaism includes animal welfare in its concept of kashrut, so this book is pretty relevant to your next trip to the supermarket!

## Dvar Torah - Mikketz 5765

First, let me say how grateful I and the Edinburgh community are to Rabbi Nancy and GNS for this opportunity, and also how astonished and intimidated I am to find myself taking it up. For preparation I read parshah Mikketz - and the whole story of Joseph - more thoroughly than I have done for a long time. And what a story it is! It's all there - family intrigue, vivid characterisation, dramatic reversals of fortune, cliff-hanging suspense, family history, social history, psychological drama. The problem turns out to be choosing what to focus on.

One aspect of the story that seems to connect to the Edinburgh experience is the behaviour of Jacob's sons. In Mikketz, Joseph treats his brothers very strangely indeed, accusing them of spying, throwing them into jail, and then sending them back but keeping Shimon, as a hostage. He makes them think they are being framed for theft and later he really does frame Benjamin. What is going through his mind? One interpretation is that by his weird behaviour he is provoking them to consider their own record in the past, and that certainly fits with the standard of dysfunctional behaviour that Jacob's family has shown up to now. Family analogies are very powerful, especially analogies of dysfunctional families. In the months before the Edinburgh community became independent of GNS one analogy that was often used was of the teenage child whose time had come to leave home but was unwilling to make the break. That was an interesting idea: maybe those of us who were doubtful about it then should consider it seriously now, if only so that we can take from it a positive lesson that even the most fractious family, like that of Jacob, can reach reconciliation and harmony in the end.

Eventually, though, I found the strongest analogy in the years of plenty and of famine. By an odd coincidence, it really is almost exactly seven years since the Edinburgh community first met in its latest incarnation. We were amazed, in October 1997, to get more than 40 people for our first Erev Shabbat service. (We'd still be pleased by that, but not amazed any more). The seven years since then have indeed been years of plenty for us - not materially, but in what is now called social capital - the idea that social networks have value both to the people that they connect and also to society as a whole. Part of that value is that they show a model in which people achieve by co-operating rather than by competing, and think in terms of what they can do together rather than as individuals. In that sense the Edinburgh community really is rich. All we have achieved over the last year - buying and adopting a scroll, setting up a working cheder, achieving burial rights, exploring our religious identity and affiliating with Liberal Judaism, and in general establishing ourselves as a fully-fledged community - all this could happen in one year only because of the six

years before in which we got to know one another and built up the trust and solidarity which has carried us through this year of activity.

This is a somewhat frightening analogy, of course: in Genesis the seven years of plenty were followed by seven years of famine. So what's next? Well, one thing that puzzled the rabbis was that in Pharaoh's dream the seven lean cattle stood alongside the seven fat cattle at the same time. Perhaps we can take a lesson from that. Maybe we are experiencing famine already, at the same time as our years of plenty? Indeed, there is much that the world is hungry for, and that we should be hungry for too. This week a UNICEF report told us that nearly half of the children around the world - a thousand million children - live in poverty. That is a famine in every sense - a famine of food and more than that a famine of justice, which allows inequality to inflict such suffering. The world is hungry for peace too - again only this week we learned that in the Congo four million people have died in the conflict of the last six years - a tragedy comparable in scale to that of our own people. And how we hunger for peace in Israel/Palestine, where innocent civilians die every day in brutal military and paramilitary violence, and an entire people live in poverty. Perhaps most frightening to us personally is the vision of literal famine that threatens us all through the irreligious destruction of the wonderfully fruitful environment that God gave us to benefit from and look after.

That makes it sound as though I believe the lean cattle will indeed eat the fat cattle. But this time we don't have a dream sent by God to tell us what is bound to happen. Instead God has given us free will, to decide the outcome for ourselves. In our communities - GNS and Sukkat Shalom Edinburgh - we have social and spiritual plenty, and material plenty too. Just as Joseph used the riches of the seven good years to overcome the famine of his day, may we find the inspiration and the will to join with others to overcome the famine of our days.

*Maurice Naftalin*  
28th Kislev 5765/11th December 2004

PS. Since I gave this Dvar Torah I have become aware of the *Make Poverty History* campaign, which has ambitious goals for the year 2005 around the themes of "Trade Justice", "More and Better Aid", and "Drop the Debt". RSGB and Liberal Judaism are both very much involved in this campaign, which will focus on Scotland in July when the G8 meets. That would represent a great opportunity for GNS and Sukkat Shalom to work together in the direction I called for.