

# Etrøg

Winter 5785



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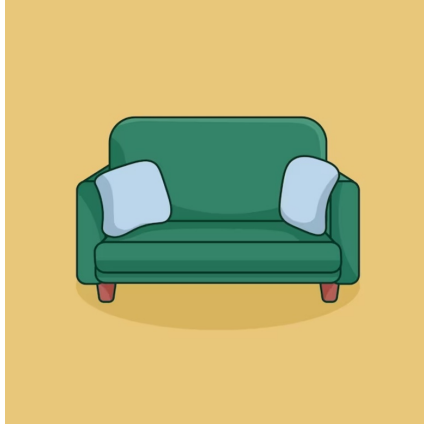
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# A Word from the Sofa

Sue Bard



It's good to be writing the first *Word From The Sofa* for 18 months. And the timing, coinciding with Sukkat Shalom's 20th anniversary (and also my own 10th anniversary of Sukkat Shalom membership) is apt, prompting personal and communal reflections.

Our newly updated website, with its easily accessible newsletters has been a great help with this, providing us with something of [an archive](#). The newsletters start in 2002

(earlier ones have been discovered in a local *geniza* and may be on the website by the time you read this), begging the question 'how old is our community?' The April 2003 newsletter reporting on 'our Sixth Seder' confuses things further for the vast majority of us who were not there 'in the beginning' – whenever that was.

The community's many formal name changes tell a story of their own. In 2002 it was 'Edinburgh Reform



Jewish Community' (under the auspices of Glasgow New Synagogue) and after a number of iterations, settled down for a long period as 'Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community'. But not forever, as following the alliance of the Liberal and Reform Judaism movements it will soon become 'Edinburgh Progressive Jewish Community.'

The community's informal name, 'Sukkat Shalom,' has been a constant since 2002 when Rabbi Pete Tobias wrote in that year's November newsletter "In our evening prayers we recite the words *u-fros aleinu sukkat sh'lomecha* – Sukkat Shalom, a shelter of peace, deriving from that phrase from the evening liturgy, seems a wonderful title for a Jewish community."

It is a beautiful but also aspirational name, reminding us every time it's spoken of one of our core values: we commit ourselves to building our community through mutual respect,

regardless of our differences.

The community was/is nomadic, pitching up over the years at Homeroyal House, at the Eric Liddell Centre, at the Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House, at the Columcille Centre, at St. Columba's by the Castle, at Marchmont St. Giles and at St. Mark's Unitarian Church.

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At the 2005 AGM, the community affiliated to Liberal Judaism, important reasons for this choice being its support for LGBTQI rights, its recognition of patrilineality and the generosity of the support that Liberal Judaism could offer.

Rabbi Mark Solomon first came on the scene at the end of 2005 as a 'foster rabbi' from Liberal Judaism, our newsletter reporting "we don't know in detail what the fostering relationship will involve, but we are very excited to have a new rabbi."

In 2010 he became our first and only LJ permanent rabbi, saying in his induction speech, "I am a travelling rabbi, I am rabbi of a travelling community, and we are all members of a travelling religion." The concept of a "travelling community" extended to cyberspace during and beyond the pandemic, and Sukkat Shalom now has many remote members participating in online services, classes and other events.

The first newsletter currently on record, dated October 2002, has Maurice Naftalin as the chair and congratulates Nick Silk for having led the Rosh Hashanah services. The community reports its first ever cheder session – in Maurice's house – with children coming from as far as Dundee. It also advertises the One World Festival Peace and Justice Concert at which "a representative from the Edinburgh Reform Jewish Community will be saying a few words on peace

and social justice." I wonder who that was!

In his induction speech, Rabbi Mark also said that he was "amazed and humbled by the energy and commitment of this community, and especially its council, in building a congregation and a cheder from scratch."

Browsing more than 20 years' worth of newsletters, I reflect on how many of the characteristics of Sukkat Shalom – its energy, vigour, warmth and embrace of diversity – were there from the start. And for this we have so much to thank our early members for, especially Maurice and Nick and Gillian for their unremitting commitment and hard work for all these years – as well as other longstanding members who give our community continuity and stability.

We must also thank our two inspirational, committed and energetic rabbis, Rabbi Pete Tobias at the start and Rabbi Mark Solomon, who

for the last 14 years has shared with our steadily growing community his passion for Judaism, his creativity, his intellectual curiosity and wide-ranging learning – and of course, his voice.

Our community is its members: longstanding,

newer and those who may be passing through. We cherish their diversity and appreciate the various and often long and difficult paths that many of us have travelled to find or re-find Judaism and the richness this brings to our whole community.

# A Poem for Sukkat Shalom

Ellen Galford



Let's travel back for more than 20 years  
to find a little caravan of Jews  
crossing the wilderness that some call the M8--  
all hailing from the east but trekking west  
to keep Shabbat beyond the River Clyde.  
The journey's tedious and often feels  
far longer than 40 days and 40 nights  
but gives them space to share their dreams  
and plan a congregation close to home  
that would be, to say the least, unorthodox.

Fast forward and you'll see those dreams come true  
in this long-memored city built on hills  
rich in history and wreathed by swirls of haar,  
home to once-competing kirks and smoky howffs  
that nurtured the Enlightenment with drams and pies.

Over time our footprints have been found  
in unexpected corners of the town  
from services in a small Marchmont room,  
and a start-up cheder in a house in Morningside,  
to a gathering of loved ones' graves  
sheltered by stone walls inside the Dean,  
to the bread of Tashlikh cast into the stream  
that flows down from the Pentlands to the Firth,  
and to halls that bear the names of Christian saints  
to make our blessings, read our sacred texts  
and mark the cycles of our lives and years.

What you won't find is any Satnav route  
or snapshot by some random drone  
to mark our whereabouts on Google Maps.  
And yet our diverse band of wandering Jews  
has found its way here and become one tribe  
without a need to march in lockstep or dictate  
one single path to seek the still, small voice.

We've reached here by so many different routes  
across the world or just across the street,  
to celebrate the paradox that all our differences  
unite us into something larger  
because there's no one here that isn't in some way  
miraculous....  
And we ourselves now form the fabric of a building—  
its sheltering roof and walls,  
the doors that open  
and the windows that bring in a greater light.

# A Single Meeting

Maurice Naftalin

For the 20th anniversary celebration I was asked to reflect on the history of our community.

I began to prepare by looking at images of community activities over the twenty years of our existence: big events, like the *siyyum* (adoption of the scroll) and the induction of Rabbi Mark; *simchot*—the weddings, *b'nei mitvot*, baby blessings, and admission ceremonies; Passover seders, *tashlich*, and, not least, the social occasions—hillwalks, outings to Melrose, barbecues, Burns nights. We've done a lot together! So much, in fact, that I decided I couldn't begin to do justice to our history in five or ten minutes.

Instead I chose to speak about a single meeting that took place right at the start of our formal existence as a

community. Until then, Edinburgh had been a kind of outreach group of the Glasgow New Synagogue, as it then was. But this was the point at which that arrangement had come to the end of its life, and people in the Edinburgh group had to decide whether to strike out on our own and make a new community. It felt like a big decision, because forming a new community is a lot of work: you have to raise the money—a lot of money—to buy a scroll, you have to make burial arrangements, write a constitution, set up a website, elect officers and a council, decide on the community's affiliation, set up a *cheder*, and so on. So there's quite a risk involved. Each person at that meeting had to decide whether to commit to taking part in this

big communal effort, an effort that would only work if everyone pulled together to make it happen.

We didn't know one another very well at that time, so it took a lot of trust: we knew that if that group effort didn't work, we would each individually have wasted a lot of work and energy and emotional investment. I'm still very proud of our community that made that commitment to being Jewish together, enough to trust one another and make the leap that would release the energy needed to do all those necessary things in the few months that followed.

I chose to talk about that one event because I still feel it was the most important moment, not only in fulfilling the formal requirements of setting up, but in laying the foundation for the kind of community that we wanted to create and that I hope we still are, and will continue to be: welcoming, accepting of everyone, and above all

committed to working together in spite of, maybe even because of, our differences. That's more important now even than ever before: I believe that the worst political and social dangers that we're facing now are rooted in isolation and a lack of trust in society. Conversely, societies in which people trust one another more are more prosperous, happier, more democratic, and more resilient. Our communal trust and commitment to one another is our small contribution to this greater good. Our communal trust and commitment to one another is a living resistance to this atomisation.

I'm proud to have contributed a small part to making that happen in our community up to this moment, and I have full confidence that the new generation of our leaders will carry it forward, strengthened still more, into the future.

# Sukkat Shalom 20th Anniversary Address

Rabbi Mark Solomon



*Sunday 24th November  
2024, St Mark's Unitarian  
Church.*

**F**riends, a community is, of course, a collection of its members, but a community is also a member – it's a member of a community of communities. So, as we give thanks today and celebrate our 20th anniversary, it's worth reflecting that we are, as Sukkat Shalom, but one of the Jewish communities in

Scotland and also part of a wider collection of communities, Jewish and otherwise, in our country. I want to say how wonderful and precious it is that we have among our honoured guests today Rabbi David Rose and the Chair, Deputy Chair and members of Edinburgh Hebrew congregation, our sister Edinburgh community – our senior Edinburgh community – and it's wonderful that as part of a



community of communities, we at Sukkat Shalom have been blessed with friendship from the wider Edinburgh Jewish community, and by the historic synagogue in Salisbury Road, its Rabbi and its members. I'm personally grateful for the warm friendship that has existed over these many years – nineteen years since I became Rabbi of Sukkat Shalom – between me and Rabbi Rose. So it's lovely that you are able to be here today together with other leaders of the Edinburgh Hebrew congregation.

We are, of course, part of the small community of Scottish Progressive synagogues, a community of two! I don't need to add to what has been said about the contribution of Rabbi Pete Tobias and Glasgow Reform. As with any community, there are people who are there all the time, and there are people who come and go and you don't see for a while. And so in the community of communities, there are

times of great closeness when we're in contact, and other times when we're not so much in contact, but nevertheless, we know that we have those companion communities, and we celebrate that, at least once or twice a year, by us travelling to Glasgow, Glasgow people travelling here; and it's lovely to have Fiona and Howard, among the most active members of Glasgow Reform, who continue to maintain that bond between our communities on the two sides of the country.

We are also part of an interfaith community of communities. It's wonderful that we have members of St Mark's Unitarian and Universalist Church here. St Mark's has been a wonderful home for us, first on our High Holy Days, the climax of our Jewish year, and then more recently as our regular home for Shabbat worship on Friday nights and Saturdays every month; as well as the Marchmont St

Giles community and the many others that have hosted us over the years: the Edinburgh Quakers, St Cuthbert's-by-the-Castle, and other communities whose space we have shared. We also welcome today the representative of John Armes, the Episcopal Bishop of Glasgow, a friend of our community, and give thanks for the fellowship that we have had with other religious communities, Christian, Muslim and others, here in Edinburgh over the years.

My late Rabbi, Raymond Apple, of blessed memory, of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, used to quip that every community has its pillars – and its caterpillars. The pillars are the people who are always there, who hold the place up. The caterpillars are the ones who creep in and out occasionally. Like every Jewish community, we are generously endowed with both. But I want to pay particular tribute today to

the pillars of Sukkat Shalom. Maurice and Nick have already spoken to us, and Gillian and Charlie came up to open the Ark. Among many others, I want to single out also Jonathan and Marjory Brodie, as well as Rebekah Gronowski, whom we have honoured today – not to be invidious. There are many other pillars of our community, some who would love to have been here but couldn't for health or family reasons, as we've heard, and some who have departed this life, whom we will honour when we say *Kaddish* in a few minutes' time. We have been particularly fortunate in the vision and the energy of those pillars of the community. I want to say special thanks to Gillian and Charlie, who are here in all weathers, schlepping the Sefer Torah from its secure home in their house, and hosting me every month – not a light duty, I might add, but one that Gillian and Charlie have carried out

these many years with the utmost graciousness and generosity. So a huge and heartfelt thank you from me, for both of you.

We are a small community, although thankfully, as Maurice mentioned, a much larger one than when we started out those 20 years ago. I know that some people have reservations about the BBC and the accuracy of its reporting, but in a programme that the BBC aired a couple of years ago called *Jewish life in Scotland*, there was a statement that took me personally by surprise. I don't know where the BBC got its information, but it stated that Sukkat Shalom (at that time – it might have changed since) was the only growing Jewish community in Scotland. I'm saying this in the presence of Pete and of David, and it's not to express any sense of triumphalism. I wish all communities in Scotland were growing, and perhaps they are, but for us it is

certainly a wonderful cause for joy that Sukkat Shalom has grown so rapidly beyond its original nucleus of members, and I just want to celebrate that today. We are particularly fortunate being in a major university city where people come from many parts of the world, including some where Progressive Judaism is a much more a prevalent force than it has historically been in the UK, so they have gravitated towards Sukkat Shalom.

We've been especially fortunate in young couples coming to join us and get married. We've had an extraordinary number of weddings, which I've had the happiness of celebrating over these past twenty years, as well as lots of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs – again, far more than many other communities of our size have the opportunity to celebrate; including just yesterday, as was mentioned, a double bat mitzvah for a mother and daughter, which was a

particularly joyful occasion. In thinking about our community of communities, I'd also like to mention our previous Bat Mitzvah just a few weeks ago, that of Rose Duffy, who stood here with her mother, Rebecca (who's with us today) and sang a beautiful *Etz Chayim*, as well as many other parts of the service that Rose sang with her glorious voice. I had hoped that Rebecca and Rose would adorn our service again today and sing *Etz Chayim*, but that wasn't to be, because Rose is a member of the choir at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, and today they're having a particularly busy day recording at St Giles' Cathedral, I believe. So that's the reason we haven't enjoyed that pleasure today. But it just goes to show how broad our boundaries are, how – if you like – fuzzy our boundaries are in a good way, so that we can embrace so many different activities and possibilities.

I want to pay tribute, not

only to our Jewish members, but to the non-Jewish spouses and partners of our members who, in so many cases, either come to show support themselves, or support their spouses and partners in doing so; who bring their children up Jewish, even though are not themselves, and come and join in our B'nai and B'not Mitzvah services. This, too, is part of what it means to be a modern, Progressive community: to embrace those beyond the traditional boundaries of Judaism, and engage in outreach to others. Another of the wonderful reasons for the growth of Sukkat Shalom which I must celebrate here with you today is the welcome that we have always extended to people from the LGBTQ+ community, and this is something that has helped to attract people who find a welcoming, affirming, supportive home here. I must pay tribute to those members who have always ensured that that is the

case, Rebekah and Nick very prominent among them, who have helped our community to be open and embrace developments like Equal Marriage here in Scotland, so that we were able to celebrate Scotland's first legal same-sex Jewish wedding in 2023, just one of the many happy events that we have been able to celebrate.

That points also to the large number of converts – a really extraordinary number of converts – that Sukkat Shalom has welcomed. We're not a proselytising religion. We don't go out looking for people, but they find their way to us in quite extraordinary numbers. Some then move on to other places. Some drift away from the community. But we must acknowledge the wonderful commitment that many of our gerim, our Jews by choice, show to our community, to the Jewish people and to Israel. Looking back over all the years, I want to make

particular mention of the COVID years, not that far behind us. Many of you will remember vividly how impossible it seemed initially that any kind of Jewish communal life could continue when we were locked down. I was in London; people were scattered all over Scotland, our members were unable to meet and yet, thanks to the wonders of Zoom and modern technology, we were able to come together in greater numbers than ever and on a more regular basis than we ever had before, and create a weekly sense of community on Friday evenings, Shabbat mornings, Havdalah get-togethers and celebrating Seder and festivals, despite the physical distance. We were able to continue and indeed, I think, strengthen our sense of community through all of that.

I hope we have gained the ability to come together and stay together through thick and thin; and right now, we

have to acknowledge, is thin. This past year-and-a-bit has been one of the most challenging and traumatic times in our short history as a community, as it has been for the Jewish people all over the world, and of course, particularly for Israel and for the people of Gaza and Palestine. This has been a time of unprecedented challenge and horror for so many people in different ways. We know that our community of Sukkat Shalom has always embraced people with differing views about the Israel–Palestine situation. Often it has been impossible to talk about, for fear of splitting the community. We know that tensions are always there, as they are in all Jewish communities, and indeed far beyond the Jewish community. It is at times like this that we need to come together and reaffirm our bonds as Jews, whatever our political views: some who want to support Israel in a time of trial with the utmost

loyalty and commitment; and others, driven by the deepest and highest principles of Judaism, to support the equal human rights of every single person, of every religion and background, and affirm the humanity of Palestinian people, their right to equal life and liberty and political self-determination, and affirm that this is a Jewish value. Sometimes it's hard to see how these diverse commitments – not only between people, but within the same person, within the same Jewish heart – can co-exist. And yet this is our job as Jews: to bring together the opposites, that constant sense of wrestling and striving with God, with the angel, with one another, with ourselves, to get through and to maintain a sense of covenant. It is that precious covenant that we come together to reaffirm today.

Before I conclude, I want to give particular thanks to the young couple, relatively new to our community, who

celebrated their *chuppah* here in St Mark's last year and have now taken on the very special responsibility of organizing today – that is Andrea Torres and Rolando Trappero. Rolando is out the back preparing the goodies for us to share, in just a couple of minutes now. But I'd like to thank you, Andrea and Rolando, for your willingness to serve on Council and to make today happen. It's a really wonderful gift that you have both given us.

In this week's *Parashah* of *Toledot* (don't worry, it's not the beginning of a sermon!), we read a story that is not as well-known as some of the other, more dramatic stories about Jacob and Esau. It's the story of Isaac digging out, once again, the wells that Abraham had once dug, but which had got filled up over time by the desert sand, so Isaac and his shepherds need to come and re-dig those wells to get the springs of water flowing

again. This is something that Judaism has done throughout its history, since those first wells were dug by our father, Abraham, all those millennia ago; and each generation, like Isaac, has come to scout out where those wells were – even when sometimes it hasn't been so evident – where the waters of life are still flowing underground, digging them out again, bringing out the fresh water of life, the water which is the Torah, our spiritual values, so that a new generation can drink afresh from those waters of life. Sukkat Shalom has tried to do its bit these twenty years in re-digging those particular wells from which we draw our sources of vitality. May we ever be able to rediscover and dig out anew the precious wells of our tradition so that we can continue for many, many decades hence to drink those refreshing waters of life.

And let us say, Amen.

## A Tribute to Rebekah Gronowski



At Sukkat Shalom's 20th anniversary service it was an honour and a pleasure to acknowledge the large and diverse contribution that Rebekah Gronowski, one of our founder members, has made to our community, to our music, to our interfaith work and to equality and diversity matters.

Rebekah arrived in Edinburgh in 1994 after a long and varied career

teaching music and religious studies in a range of secondary schools, concluding with four years teaching music at the Saudi-backed King Fahad Academy in London. Health problems caused Rebekah to leave teaching and she arrived in Edinburgh in the mid '90s to do a degree in Jewish Studies at the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity. She undertook her conversion to



Judaism with Rabbi Pete Tobias (who also conducted her *Bat Mitzvah* when she was 60) and was one of the early tribe of Sukkat Shalom's weekly travellers to Glasgow.

Rebekah was – and continues to be when she can – a colourful figure at Edinburgh Pride. In our July 2015 newsletter she wrote about that year's jubilant Pride celebrations of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 and of the same sex marriages that had since taken place and of the campaigning activities of the Equality Network with which she'd been involved, for LGBTQI rights in Scotland.

Rebekah has been a member of numerous choirs, and during lockdown discovered and gained great fulfillment from belonging to the incredible 'Choir of the Earth' in which mass performances were stitched together from individual performances all over the

world. The Choir of the Earth has outlived lockdown, and in January Rebekah is starting rehearsals for Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*.

Rebekah is a matriarch in her own right, heading an ever-growing tribe of two sons (one of whom has very sadly died), five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren and she remains closely involved in their lives, overcoming the obstacles of distance with Zoom, Facetime and photos.

Rebekah has designed countless beautiful certificates for our *Bnei Mitzvah* and has said that the certificates for the double mother and daughter *B'not Mitzvah* of Bernadett and Talia Khandakar presented to them on 23rd November are her last. We were delighted to present her with her own certificate in appreciation for her years of service and for her commitment to Sukkat Shalom for the last more than 20 years.

# *Chag Sameach!*

## A High Holy Days Photo Album

Sue Bard & Andrea Torres-Trapero





Visit the website to read  
Rabbi Elli Tikvah Sarah's  
sermons for [29 Elul](#) and  
[1 Tishrei](#) 5785.

# Introducing Rob and Samara

Sue Bard



Rob and Samara joined Sukkat Shalom in 2023, Samara as a full member, Rob as an associate member with an eye to conversion. In June this year Rob became Sukkat Shalom's first administrator, since when he's been working wonders.

Samara too is making her mark, having volunteered to join the council last September. We're delighted to have them both bringing their gifts of enthusiasm and creativity to our community.

Back in the day, Rob (in

Glasgow) and Samara (in Montreal) were ahead of the game, meeting online long before it was where everyone met. They hasten to add that they met professionally; he was a writer looking for an illustrator. Though the illustrator had been following his blog, which she says was "quite funny."

After a period of transatlantic travel and many meetings in Schipol Airport, they got together in Montreal where Rob worked as a librarian for the Jewish



General Hospital's Health Sciences Library.

Commenting on his time there, he says: "The JGH is more than a hospital; it's a really important and bustling community hub for Jewish people in Montreal. It was an enriching place to work, plus it was fun to watch bemused non-Jewish visitors wondering why the elevators would stop at every floor on Fridays!"



Hôpital général juif  
Jewish General Hospital

Samara's Modern Orthodox (and also interfaith) family and Montreal's large, confident and dynamic Jewish community with *shofar* blowing and *sukkah* building in public parks and every requirement for a Jewish life

readily available, were Rob's introduction to Judaism. He took to it readily, saying "who's bored by Jewish culture? It's inherently interesting".

However, Quebec's increasingly stringent language laws, affecting every area of life from healthcare to employment meant that they couldn't see a future for themselves there, and they decided to move to the UK. Theresa May's 'hostile environment' made this a far-from-easy process and has left both of them acutely aware that difficult as the process was for them, for so many would-be migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees it is a terrifying and merciless process.

Samara and Rob's chosen destination was Glasgow, where Rob, originally from the West Midlands, had completed an MSc in Information and Library Studies at the University of Strathclyde and had stayed on to work at the University

of Glasgow Library and in NHS Scotland. They also anticipated good opportunities in Glasgow for Samara, who'd studied art history at Concordia University in Montreal and then Comics, Illustration and Design at Mohawk College in Hamilton.

They both love Glasgow, but once there began to realise how much they missed their Jewish life and their queer community in Montreal. They say "we're queer individually and as a couple, but because we're male/female we don't read as queer to a lot of people in the UK, but Sukkat Shalom folk get it".

Samara started to search for a Jewish community in Scotland; Rob started to think about conversion. His first port of call was Rabbi Leah Jordan of Kehillah North London. She referred him to Rabbi Mark and the rest is recent history.

The work lives of both have changed since their move to Scotland. In 2019, Rob moved on from a full-time career as a librarian (moonlighting as a stand-up comedian) to become a creative writer-comedian (moonlighting now as a synagogue administrator). Some of you may have seen Rob at this year's Fringe presenting a Work in Progress screening of *Melt It! The Film of The Iceman* (2025) based on Rob's 2022 book about comedian Anthony Irvine aka The Iceman, whose 1980s cabaret performances would revolve around the melting of a block of ice.

In Scotland, after working in commercial art galleries as an art consultant, exhibition curator and deputy manager, Samara worked for four years in funeral care, but in 2022 began work

in a small but active death education charity in Edinburgh.

Samara and Rob are happy to have found Sukkat Shalom. Samara comments: “In my adult life, I’ve met many Jews who’ve been made to feel alone or unwelcome by a limited idea of what Jews are or should

be. I recognise Sukkat Shalom as a place where those Jews (including myself) can be, and I want to help it grow”. Rob says “we didn’t want to just be consumers of synagogue product. We wanted to be helping where possible.”

They are certainly doing that.



## Pictures

Top: Samara and Rob sign their *ketubah* in 2014. Credit: Alex L.

Bottom: Samara and Rob light the Hanukkah candles in 2023. Credit: Alan Dimmick.

# Bernadett and Talia's B'not Mitzvah

22 Cheshvan 5785 • 23 November 2024

Sue Bard



Sukkat Shalom recently celebrated a joint mother-and-daughter b'not mitzvah: that of Bernadett Khandakar and her daughter Talia.

Such an event is unusual, but in this case Bernadett's extraordinary route to Judaism makes it even more distinctive.

Bernadett grew up in the village of Petervasara in Northeast Hungary. In 1944 the Nazis, with Hungarian

collaboration, deported its entire Jewish community of 50 families to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where all except one individual perished. The one survivor was the rabbi's son who reached Israel where he lived and died in Petach Tikva.

Bernadett remembers the silence that surrounded this vanished community saying "I nagged my grandmother all her life" about the Jews who'd once lived in her



village.

Bernadett's sense of connection with Judaism persisted into adulthood.

While studying art and training to become a teacher of drawing and visual communication at Eszterhazy Karoly University in northern Hungary, chance incidents combined to result in the transformation of her sense of connection with Judaism to a consuming passion that would later focus on the visual beauty and magic of written Biblical Hebrew as well as its verbal meaning.

In 2008 Bernadett moved to the UK, settling in Edinburgh where she continued her art studies, completing a degree in painting at Edinburgh College of Art and, at the same time, teaching herself Biblical Hebrew. As Bernadett has described in her personal statement for aliyah: "My whole art study and practice was based on the very character of the Hebrew letters as marks of

individual sounds of speech, but also drawings with complex symbolism and concrete individual meanings. Thus, how I can adopt a Hebrew text as verbal expression and use it to create images of visual expression."

Bernadett was admitted to Judaism in 2018, along with her daughter Talia, then aged seven and her son Noach, then aged five. Her oldest child, Johannah, then aged 15, was encouraged to make her own decision in her own time.

Bernadett chose 'Tikvah bat Sarah' as her Hebrew name in memory of Petervasara's sole survivor.

Now, six years on, we have had the great privilege of witnessing Bernadett's and Talia's *b'not mitzvah*. Talking to them before the event, it was obvious how significant it was to both of them and how much they valued the tuition they'd had from Rabbi Mark and his creative support in how to structure this double *bat*

*mitzvah*.

Everyone who was present on the occasion, or who has watched the recording will have been spellbound by the sense of joy, harmony and also relaxed mastery that suffused this event.

The Torah portion Bernadett and Talia shared was *Chayyei Sarah*, with Bernadett reading Genesis 23:1-16, Talia reading Genesis 24:15 – 27 and the two of them reading Genesis 24: 62 -67 together, taking

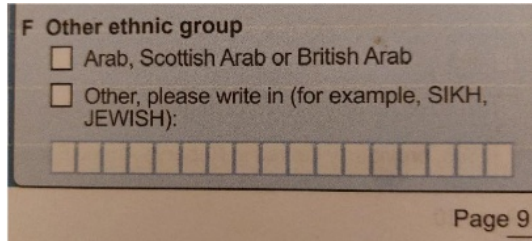
alternate lines.

Both of their very different *d'vars* expressed deep, thoughtful and personal responses to their portions. If you've ever pondered on what watering camels would actually involve, Talia's *d'var* will reveal all. For Bernadett, her *d'var* articulated the hard-won grafting of her personal family tree onto the Tree of Life - both a culmination of her long and difficult journey to this point and a new beginning.

Bernadett and Talia's *d'vars* can be read [here](#) and [here](#).

# Jewish Scotland: Census Results

Gillian Raab



**H**ow many Jews were in Scotland on 20/3/2022?

- Approximately 5,863
- Approximately 7,313
- Maybe more??

## The answers:

The latest Census of Scotland attempted to ask all people to answer questions about themselves and their circumstances on Census night – 20th March 2022. Since then, statisticians at the National Records of Scotland (NRS) have been hard at work producing results and making them available on their [website](#). According to the latest figures, the answer to the question above might be any of these:

## Why the uncertainty?

According to the Wikipedia page [Who is a Jew?](#): “Jewish personhood has cultural, ethnic, religious, political, genealogical, and personal dimensions.” The number 5,683 at the top bullet point comes just from the religious dimension: the number of people ticking the box Jewish in answer to the question “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?”

## Why approximate?

To be a statistician is great! You never have to be absolutely sure of anything... being reasonably certain is enough! In this case, the NRS make it clear that this is not an exact number, but it is a pretty good estimate. The number of answers to the question have been adjusted to allow for the small percentage of people who failed to complete the Census and to make sure that the results do not reveal private information about anyone. Another reason why the “true” answer might be different is that, uniquely, the religion question was indicated on the form as “optional”. It is estimated that 6% of people did not answer it, and some of them might have ticked “Jewish” if they had answered.

But the Census also asked about ethnicity, and thanks to pressure from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, the final option (Other ethnic group) contained a specific prompt that Jewish could be an answer. The full set

of results are not yet released, but in a recent [NRS blog](#) we learn that including “Jewish” by ethnicity, for those not answering Jewish to the religion question, would increase the estimate of Jews in Scotland to 7,313.

We are still not sure whether this number includes those who could have answered Jewish to another part of the ethnicity question (but not Jewish for religion). Further results will be available in 2025. But “Jewish” answers to the religion question do tell us about trends. The same question was asked in the 2001 and the 2011 Censuses and my [full report](#) includes a detailed analysis of the data currently available. The main points are summarised below.

## Trends in numbers answering Jewish as their religion

**I**n the 2022 Census the estimate of people answering “Jewish” to the religion question was 5,863, almost unchanged from the

previous 2011 Census where the figure was 5,887. But going back to the 2011 Census the number answering “Jewish” was 6,448, giving a 9% reduction over the earlier 10 year period. What might have slowed down the decline in numbers of Jews? The analysis of numbers by age group gives us a possible interpretation.

### Age distribution

**J**ews are over-represented in the age group 16 to 24 years compared to the whole population of Scotland. The most likely interpretation of this result is the popularity

among Jews of Scottish Universities, especially in Edinburgh and St Andrews. Numbers in the Jewish Students’ associations have increased and shuls have welcomed larger numbers of students to High Holyday services compared to previous years. The two 2022 Census output areas with the largest Jewish population were those containing halls of residence of Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities. It is suggested in the detailed report that excluding students from England and the Americas would show a decline in numbers from 2011 to 2022

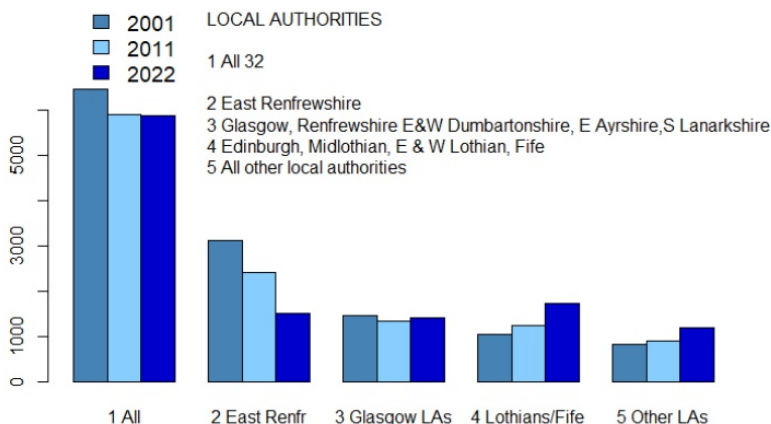


Figure 1: Number of people ticking the Jewish box for the question: “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?” at each of three Censuses of Scotland for all Scotland and four groupings by local authority.

comparable to that found between 2001 and 2011.

### **Numbers answering Jewish by area**

As Figure 1 (above) shows, there are large differences in where in Scotland we find people answering the Census religion as “Jewish”, over the last 20 years.

East Renfrewshire is the Local Authority (LA) with the highest percentage of Jewish people in Scotland (1.56% compared to 0.11% for all of Scotland in 2022), and has the steepest decline in Jewish numbers. Glasgow Reform Synagogue, the other Progressive Jewish Community in Scotland and Giffnock Synagogue, now merged with Newton Mearns, are each situated in East Renfrewshire. Lothians and Fife have the greatest increase. LAs in and around Glasgow have stable numbers, while more Jews are found in other LAs not in these groups.

### **What does this mean for Sukkat Shalom?**

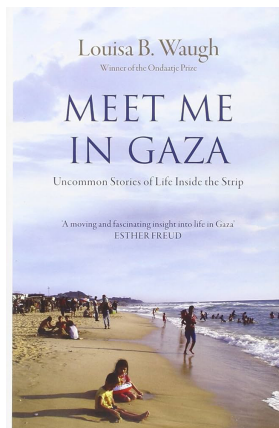
The last 10 years has seen our membership grow, with more younger members, including several student members. We hope this trend may continue and that some of the young Jewish people who have come here to study may stay on in Scotland.

The other big change in recent years has been the provision of online services, necessitated by the Covid19 pandemic, but now integral to what we do. We now have several members in remote parts of Scotland who regularly attend services online.

So the demographic change in Jews in Scotland seems very positive for the future of our community.

*This is the summary of a longer report [on the Sukkat Shalom website](#).*

## Book Review: *Meet Me in Gaza* by Louisa Waugh (2013)



*Meet Me in Gaza* (published 2013) is the title of writer Louisa Waugh's book that chronicled her time living in Gaza. Louisa describes herself as a *stravaiger* (one who takes a long stroll), whose journeys have taken her – as well as to the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza – to many rarely visited parts of the world. In Gaza, Louisa worked with the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. In *Meet Me*

*in Gaza* she set out to 'tell stories of ordinary life inside Gaza rarely published in the press.'

**Gica Loening** (freelance music practitioner and member of Sukkat Shalom) and Louisa are longtime friends. Gica belongs to a local reading and discussion group that had chosen to read *Meet me in Gaza* and that was privileged to welcome Louisa to join them in discussing her book. Here Gica shares her experience

of re-reading and discussing *Meet me in Gaza* in October 2024.

## Gica Writes:

I hold special memories of conversations back in 2012 in a small flat in Portobello, Edinburgh, with my friend Louisa Waugh, as chapter by chapter of *Meet Me in Gaza* was birthed. Each week she would share a new section or a paragraph with me. I was gripped by her intimate portrayal of ordinary peoples' lives – stories of love, sorrow, happiness, frustration and grief, where we might recognise something of ourselves, as opposed to distant polemics about 'terrorists and victims'. Louisa's vivid descriptions of street life in Gaza, gathered while she was there from December 2007 – April 2009, (after Hamas was voted in as majority government), are written for 'people who will never go to Gaza' as Louisa said in our

discussion, and to interrupt polarised narratives which plague mainstream media. Louisa's personal and compassionate approach invites us to newly attune and see life in Gaza afresh (as it was then), – to understand, as she puts it, that 'we are like you – we are as good and as bad as you'.

'Uncommon stories of life inside the Strip' range from fishermen's tales, to farming, taxi driving, encounters with journalists, human rights activists, students, and even lingerie traders selling their wares in the Lingerie Souk in the heart of the old Gaza City. A heartrending and tender picture unfolds of a land and a people with a rich cultural history, warmth, humour, and generosity.

After a space of ten years, I re-read *Meet Me in Gaza*, and the stories take on a new poignancy in the light of the ongoing Israeli war against the people of Gaza. Is anything left in the rubble



of the 1000-year-old hammam and the women who frequented it, so vividly described by Louisa? Where are the acres of luscious strawberry fields and the farmers who tended them? What happened to the family who eked out a living on the Erez border?

Louisa suggests that the pictures she has painted in her book can now be seen as a time capsule, because the places she has described have almost without exception, been destroyed. She feels that a narrative not often being heard is that of the deliberate destruction of culture in Palestine and Gaza, and of cultural memory, and this is a profound loss.

Louisa does not glamourise or idealise Gaza, just as she refuses to demonize Israel. She remembers it as a society with many problems and deeply patriarchal. She also witnessed a lot of aggression – hardly surprising in today's shrunken boundaries

of 25 miles by 6, and home to 2 million people. And with the advent of Hamas as the (then) new government, the wearing of the hijab, and restrictions on women's lives was increasingly imposed. But her love for the place and the people makes *Meet Me in Gaza* an immensely readable book that is alive with nuance and depth. 'They were the most hospitable people in the world' she recalls. 'I used to sit in cafes where people argued about who would recite the next poem. I was constantly invited out for dinner and coffee by my friends - I barely spent an evening at home.'

Louisa also described being profoundly disturbed by the levels of trauma that people were living with, and the fear she herself experienced listening to the sound of bombing by Israeli warplanes almost every night (in the first six months she was in Gaza). And yet despite the blockade, bombs, and restrictions endlessly

imposed by Israel, she says she witnessed less anti-semitism in Gaza than she has encountered in the UK, and also scrupulously avoids falling into either anti-Israel sentiment or any trace of antisemitism herself.

Talking with Louisa, ten years on from writing of the book, she reflects that ‘what I really wanted to do was talk about the nuances. Talk about the personality of Gaza and about how people manage to live there and keep their humanity.’ She

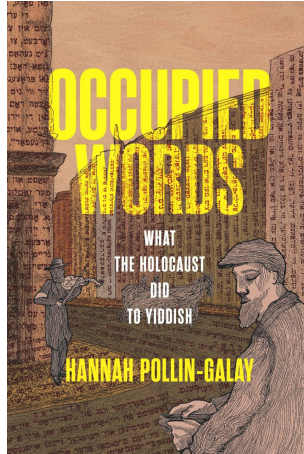
has succeeded in all of this, and *Meet Me in Gaza* is a book that reminds all of us to be more humane and to embrace disagreement and complexity.

*Meet me in Gaza*, published 2013 by The Westbourne Press, is easily available.

To find out more about Louisa’s life and work see Louisa Waugh’s website and blog <https://www.the-waugh-zone.org/>

# Book Review: *Occupied Words* by Hannah Pollin-Galay (2024)

Ellen Galford



This enlightening and profoundly moving book explores what happens to language—and what language makes happen—when cultures and communities are blown apart. In spite of being published by an academic press (with the unfortunately inevitable corollary of an academic cover-price), *Occupied Words* is eminently accessible. No knowledge of

Yiddish is required. It's an impressive piece of research, but also a powerful narrative in its own right, taking us straight into the dark times and places where this mutated language was spoken.

The book introduces us to the efforts of a varied group of individuals—many of them unknown to each other—who, even as they found themselves crammed into urban ghettos or deported to

the camps, began to take notes on the ways that Yiddish words were changing. They listened to the language of those around them, not only to the speech of their own compatriots and co-religionists, but to the commands and insults used by the Nazi occupiers. These lexicographers conducted their research in real time and horrendous conditions. Those who survived found ways to record the new words and usages they encountered. These range from the bitterly humorous to the obscene, taking in “code words” for sub-rosa activities, lyrics from rebelliously satirical songs, curt commands from those who controlled their daily lives.

After considering their contributions, the author moves on to a closer study of specific themes, such as the extensive vocabulary relating to theft. This was not a random choice. It hurls us into a world where the act of stealing food has become a

grimly inescapable fact of life.

Having covered the birth and evolution of this strange new hybrid language, she considers its literary afterlife, as reflected in the postwar work of two significant but very different writers.

The first, an Auschwitz survivor writing under the pen-name Ka-Tzetnik ("prisoner" in Holocaust Yiddish) shocked the world with his barely-fictionalised account—filled with savage neologisms—of systematic sexual abuse and exploitation in the camps. It was widely translated and became an international publishing sensation.

The second writer, in complete contrast, is the much-admired Chava Rosenfarb, a Socialist and Yiddishist, whose postwar poetry and prose reflect these violent upheavals in the mother tongue in a far more nuanced, universal but still uncompromising way. If I weren't now running

well over my assigned word-count for this piece, I'd happily quote her here and now. Instead, I'll leave the last words to Pollin-Galay herself:

“Though I began this project in 2014, I have arrived at the copyediting phase in the fall of 2023, a time of devastating violence in Israel and in Palestine. In this moment, at least two of my key terms—'occupation' and 'genocide'—have become more relevant and more debated than ever before. My book is about the Holocaust, not current events in the Middle East. But I hope that the spirit of empathic inquiry shown by the figures researched in this book can provide some broad source of inspiration in dark times. They do for me.”

•

Ellen Galford is an American-born Scottish writer of novels, non-fiction and poetry.

Professor Hannah Pollin-Galay is Senior Lecturer of Yiddish and Holocaust Studies in the Department of Literature at Tel Aviv University.

*Occupied Words: What the Holocaust Did to Yiddish* by Hannah Pollin-Galay is published by the University of Pennsylvania Press (2024).

# Film Review:

## *Between the Temples* (2024)

Shlomo ben Avraham



I can't sing" says Jason Schwartzman with untold sadness. This is a problem. He's a cantor. The story of a cantor who's lost his song is a good yarn. It feels folkloric like "the bird who lost its plumage" or something. For better or worse, it also feels familiar from a recent wave of independent "lost property" films such as *Pig* (2022) in which Nicolas Cage loses a truffle pig, *The Substance* (2024) in which Demi Moore's character is losing

her looks, and *I Used to Be Funny* (2023) in which a depressed comedian can no longer make her audience laugh.

Just as that comedian (Rachel Sennott if you're interested) is suffering from depression, Cantor Ben is in a similar state having tragically lost his dynamic author wife when she slips pointlessly on ice. Since then he's been in a stupor, listening on a loop to the 700 erotic voicemail messages

she left for him in life.

Schwartzman has never looked so wretched: gone is the cheerful hipster persona of *Bottle Rocket* (1996), *I Heart Huckabees* (2004), and *Bored to Death* (2009-2011). This performance is welcome and new, perhaps hinting at the type of role he'll embrace in the later half of his career. No charismatic Ted Danson for Schwartzman, but schlubby manchild numbness. It's a strong performance and its hard not to love the grieving character to which he brings life.

Carol Kane meanwhile, wants a *Bat Mitzvah*. Nothing unusual about that, if you forget the fact she's 72 and her name is O'Reilly. She was, however, born a Kessler and identifies strongly with her Jewish parentage, but as Communists they would never allow religious practice in her childhood (she describes herself as "a red diaper baby") and her future Catholic husband

would give Judaism short shrift. Her adult son is similarly dismissive of her late-in-life need for Jewish cultural support.

So O'Reilly comes to Ben for help: she was his music teacher when he was child and she's delighted to find he has become not only a cantor but one who prepares children for their *B'Nei Mitzvot*. Maybe they can help each other: he can help her relocate her Jewishness and she can help the cantor find his voice again.

*Etrog* readers will be glad to hear of a high level of accuracy for Jewish cultural detail. If you're tired of directors "getting Judaism wrong" you need not worry. The religious elements of the story -- the terminology, the prayers, the *Halakha*, the rules about conversion and *Bar Mitzvah* -- are exceptionally correct. True, you might expect as much from a Jewish creative team (director Nathan Silver, plus Schwartzman, Kane, most of the ensemble cast) but this

isn't always so. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, as wonderful as it is, and that stupid *Nobody Wants This* show are riddled with inaccuracies and plagued by stereotypes. *Between the Temples* is mercifully free of error. Two cheers for that.

The Jewish humour is serviceable. There's a scene in which a listless rabbi, in his office, is putting golf balls into the mouth of a *shofar*. "If anyone walks in," he says to Cantor Ben, "this is a non-kosher shofar." Then again, there's some mildly hack stuff that Woody Allen could get away with in the 1970s but feels a bit fusty today: "In Judaism, we don't have Heaven or Hell. We just have upstate New York." It's fine I guess, but y'know.

The humour oscillates between slapstick and pathos. When Cantor Ben can't get his words out to sing, he stands down from the *bima* and runs away. Literally, with *tallit* trailing behind him like a cape, then

tries to escape by pushing an exit door that needs to be pulled. Later, distracted by his grief and depression, he absently describes a *Bat Mitzvah* as "a great, anti-loneliness connecting thing."

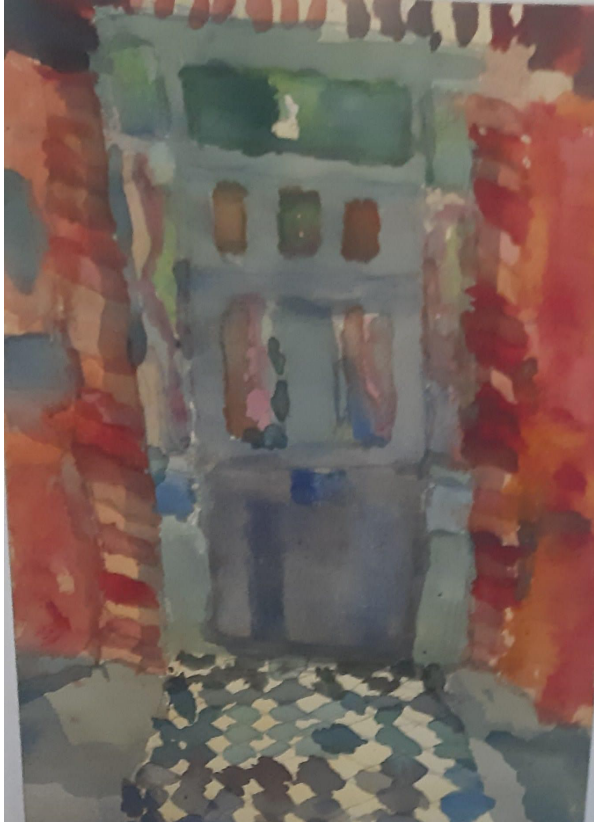
Around Schwartzman and Kane orbits a great ensemble cast. Specifically, could we all please rise for Madeline Weinstein? She shines so brightly in this film that I was moved to say "who is that?" only to find the Wikipedia moderators aren't sure if she meets the "general notability guidelines" to warrant a page. Come on, Wiki. She's young but has plenty of credits. Use this review as your "citation" so apparently "needed."

*Between the Temples* is a fine Jewish fable. It's overshadowed perhaps by a post-pandemic bounty of creative indie film, but it will delight any diaspora Jew sick and tired of kosher gags that make not a blind lick of sense.



# Cresswell Road, Southwest London (2024)

Miriam Vickers



*Cresswell Road, Southwest London* was painted from an on-site sketch in Richmond, Surrey where my parents lived when I was born. The front door would have been different in 1946, though the tiles path and red brick may well have been the same.

You can see my work at [www.s-s-a.org](http://www.s-s-a.org) and [@miriamvickers7](https://www.instagram.com/miriamvickers7).

# Composition (2021)

Charles Raab



Many of my pictures don't reflect scenes or represent objects, but are assembled from shapes that I think make a coherent whole.

Sometimes I label them "landscape" or "still life," but they are simply "compositions," such as this one. Please don't ask, "what is it?" It is what it is: a painting.

# Jewish Folk Tales: I Will Do As My Father Did

Introduced and illustrated by Samara



**H**ershel of Ostropol is a Jewish folk hero in the trickster tradition: a wise fool at the bottom of the pile who always gets the last word (and usually a donut as well). Though loosely based on a real historic *badchen* (Yiddish jester), the character took on a life of his own and features prominently in both Jewish folk tales from the Pale of

Settlement and in non-Jewish Ukrainian folk tradition. In good-natured and simple stories, Hershel triumphs over authority figures both Jewish and non-Jewish, over his own poverty and lack of formal education, and even over supernatural goblins. The victories are usually small ones, but to audiences feeling powerless and squeezed from all sides

(Jews living in the Pale, poor Ukrainian peasants, children of all stripes), they were, and still are, delicious. [SL]



Way back in 19th century Ukraine lived a man who is now known as Hershel of Ostropol. Hershel of Ostropol was a poor man who spent his days wandering from village to village, meeting new people and finding adventure along the way.

At sunset, one exceptionally icy winter's night, Hershel found himself wandering alone on a deserted dirt track. There were no houses or shelter in sight, just miles of darkening hills ahead.

Winter in Ukraine is bitterly cold, and anyone unable to find shelter would run the risk of not surviving the night. Hershel looked at the path ahead of him, tightened his jacket around

him and trudged on in the snow.

After wandering for several hours, Hershel's heart leapt when he saw the glimmering light of a house in the distance with plumes of smoke escaping from the chimney. With the thought of warming his feet by the fire and having some food in his groaning belly, he widened his stride.

When Hershel reached the house, he realized it was an inn.

Inside, the innkeeper and his wife were packing up for the night when they heard a knock on the door. The wife grumbled, "Who's wondering around here at this time of night? You answer, and if he cant pay, don't let him in!"

The innkeeper lumbered to open the door. The second he saw the shabby Hershel, he knew he wouldn't have money to pay. "I'm sorry, but we're closed."

"Please sir, please help a poor man survive the night. I just ask for whatever you can spare, I will sleep in

your barn with the sheep if I must.”

“Let me consult my wife,” said the innkeeper wearily.

But the wife would not hear of it, “If we give him shelter for the night, you know he will want food, and then soon enough we’ll be known throughout Ukraine as the charity inn and we’ll never see the end of old beggars like him. Get rid of him.”

The innkeeper stepped out into the cold and told Hershel, “I’m sorry, our barn is full. We cannot help.”

“Then would you be able to spare a morsel of food?” and observing the character of the innkeeper, added, “I will eat your stalest scrap of bread.”

The innkeeper pictured his wife’s reaction to this and said, “Sorry, there is no food.”

“No food? Who has ever heard of an inn with no food?” Hershel thought to himself.

Hershel contemplated the bitter night ahead of him if

he wasn’t given shelter at this isolated inn, and his blood began to boil at the selfishness of the couple.

“Look here, you have a nice home and warm shelter, and I can smell your leftovers from here. If you don’t help me, then I will do what my father did!”

He grabbed the innkeeper by the collar, and shook him. Now, this innkeeper was almost a foot taller than Hershel, but with the shock of his pounce and the desire for survival on his side, Hershel easily overpowered him.

“If you don’t help me, I will do what my father did!” he repeated. “I WILL DO WHAT MY FATHER DID!”

The stunned innkeeper hurtled through the door and hastily pulled out a chair for Hershel. He delved into the cupboards and laid out all the food he could find: dumplings, stew with hot bread, pickles, cabbage rolls, and *pampushky*, a delicious doughnut-like desert.

The innkeeper's wife stormed into the room and was furious to see her best food for paying customers being served to a beggar who didn't look as of he could pay for bath water. "What is the meaning of all this?"

The innkeeper didn't even stop to explain, he kept laying out dish after dish. "If we don't do this, he will do what his father did!"

The fear in his voice rang clear, silencing the woman.

The innkeeper and his wife watched as the hungry Hershel ate morsel after morsel of the scrumptious food. Hershel was hungry, but he didn't stuff himself. When he was full, he got up from the table and thanked the couple. The innkeeper politely showed him to the best guestroom and ran a steaming bath for him. Early the next morning, Hershel woke up refreshed.

He gathered his belongings and made his way out of the house. The innkeeper, who was already up, offered him some curd cheese pancakes. Hershel thanked him for his kind hospitality, but said he would be on his way.

The innkeeper hovered around the door as Hershel prepared to leave, and just as Hershel was making his way out of the gate towards the road, the innkeeper asked in a meek voice, "Sir, I hope you don't mind my asking, but what did your father do?"

Hershel turned around and answered, "On cold, cold nights like last night, when my father was unable to find any food, my father... went to bed... hungry."



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