Etrog

Autumn 5787

2026



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A Word from the Revolving Chair

Samara Leibner



I'm writing this during and just after the yamim noraim, the Days of Awe, as we look back over 5786 before stepping into Yom Kippur with a clean slate ready to move on to a new year. For the first time, the shul's membership year coincides with the Hebrew calendar year, so it seems especially fitting to look back over a year and consider what to bring forward with us, and what to build on.

Our community continues to grow, with visitors and new members coming in all the time: newcomers to Edinburgh, longtime residents discovering us for the first time, or people connecting or reconnecting to communal Jewish life to share it with their children, reclaim their traditions, and for all kinds of reasons. We've welcomed 12 new members and 9 associate members in the past 12 months. At a time

when most shuls are seeing their membership declining, ours is steadily growing. We are building something very special here, and we all play a role in that. It's endlessly inspiring how active community members are, how much is going on, and how eager people are to share learning, interests, skills and hospitality. The lay service leaders, Cheder, the Torah and Nevi'im study groups, this year's b'nei mitzvot, the singing group, and Rabbi Mark's study sessions and Exploring Judaism class are just a few examples. Community members' commitment to bikur cholim, visiting the sick, is especially impressive. It's also been lovely to see the Get Involved section in What's On gain traction, with volunteers stepping up to support in all the various ways that a growing community needs. As the saying goes, "it's nice to have one in the family", and with so many engaged, skilled, caring and creative people, it feels like we're rich with potential, no matter what comes our way.

As we are currently without a permanent Chair, Council members share duties. I've been ELJC's representative on the Movement for Progressive Judaism's new quarterly Forum meetings. This new regular meeting with representatives of all affiliated communities is designed to make us aware of existing and new resources, share work and best practice by various departments of the movement's leadership committees and shuls around the country, and share inspiration, concerns and ideas. I am proud to represent ELJC at these meetings and it is always interesting to hear from other community representatives.

However, part of building a flourishing community is speaking up for the values it's built on. This can be especially challenging when we find ourselves disagreeing with actions taken by respected leaders. I'm proud that Sukkat Shalom's Council sent a letter officially objecting to MPJ leadership's decision to co-sponsor and to stand alongside

outspoken Islamophobe Kemi Badenoch, Reform UK's deputy leader Richard Tice, and others, at the "Standing Strong" rally of 10 May in London. Standing against rising antisemitism is important, but we were not alone in our concerns about this event in particular. The New Israel Fund pulled its co-sponsorship due to the extremism of the speaker roster, which included Nigel Farage until a protest letter signed by over 2000 people led to his last-minute replacement with Reform UK's deputy leader. MPJ's Board Chair explained in his reply to Council that the MPJ Board and co-leaders had considered the impact of their presence at this event, and had heard from people opposed to it, but had decided to attend anyway. Our Council did not and does not condone that decision, and felt we had to speak up.

Council also reached out in an official capacity following the appalling attacks on Muslims in Leith, Broomhouse and Telford Road this past June. In addition to supporting the Edinburgh Interfaith Association's statement following the attack, we reached out to the affected Broomhouse Mosque and the Scottish Association of Mosques directly with a message of sympathy and solidarity from Sukkat Shalom. This was initiated by Council member Han Smith, and enthusiastically supported and worked on by all of Council. It is frightening to see xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric rising, and it is our duty to support our fellow minority groups in the place we all call home.

In this spirit, and building on Council member Nick Silk's work with the Edinburgh Interfaith Association, and past Chair Andrea Torres-Trapero's goal of Sukkat Shalom taking the lead on organising interfaith activities, we held an interfaith crafting session after Sukkot morning services to offer a relaxed way for communities to meet each other, while creating decorations for the sukkah or crafts to take home. This event

was first proposed by community member Alex Wilson, and it was my pleasure to help organise it with Council's support. It was a fantastic day, helped by beautiful weather. Special thanks to Cheder for making a trilingual welcome banner and for singing a beautiful welcome song in Hebrew and Arabic for our guests, embodying the Sukkot tradition of hospitality.

The Board of Deputies recently asked us to again consider affiliating with them, which we have never done. A productive discussion was had at Council, which resulted in the unanimous decision once again not to affiliate. Ultimately, the Board of Deputies have a stated aim to increase uniformity in the British Jewish community. We specifically reject this call for uniformity. At Sukkat Shalom, we don't agree on everything, we don't live our traditions in the same way, and we all come from different backgrounds. We recognise that "two Jews, three opinions" is our strength. We all have things to share and things to contribute, and we will all help carry Jewishness into the future. Joining a group pushing us toward uniformity would be the wrong choice for us. We are a vibrant, diverse, living, and growing community, and I'm proud to be a part of it and serve it alongside my fellow Council members.

Festivals
5787

Sue Bard



Tashlich at the Water of Leith on Rosh Hashanah afternoon.



Once again we had the privilege of being led by two inspiring rabbis, Rabbi Mark Solomon and Rabbi Elli Tikva Sarah in our Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot services and events. Their sermons are on our website and are well worth a read. Our small community attracted congregations of around 100 at the High Holyday services, including many visitors.

A highlight was the emergence of a small singing group which was a delight. It's set to continue and will be meeting monthly. If you're interested, and especially if

you have a bass voice, contact talitha.kearey@gmail.com to find out more.



Some singing group members: Sue Lieberman, Nina, Talitha.

Our cheder children helped to make a beautiful WELCOME banner for our guests. Cheder teacher Mor explained: "the banner says *ahlan wasahlan* in Arabic, which means 'welcome.' In Hebrew, a special font was used called 'multi-gendered Hebrew' which can be read as *bruchim habaim* and *bruchot habaot* at once, welcoming any gender. Fittingly, the cheder children and young people sang a song in Arabic and Hebrew called *Ahla wasahlan Bruchim Habaim* by Datia Ben Dor."

Sukkot

Xenophobic and Islamophobic attacks earlier in the year in Edinburgh, Scotland and in other parts of the UK prompted us to try to strengthen connections between our own congregation and other religious communities in Edinburgh, leading to a well-attended Sukkot Interfaith event. Adults and children enjoyed making decorations for our sukkah and sharing a communal lunch.





Rabbi Mark with visitors from Tiphereth Camphill Community who every year provide us with branches for our sukkah roof.

"The practice of gathering under the fragile, three-walled sukkah reminds us that true safety doesn't come from rigid, heavy structures, but from collective care, community, and standing together in moments of uncertainty."

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, *Life is A Sacred Text*

Kol Nidre
Our Chosen Charities
Sue Bard

Here are our Kol Nidre charities for this year, all of which were recommended by members of our community. Donations will be divided equally between these four charities.

Scottish Refugee Council
scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

The Scottish Refugee Council's mission is to increase public understanding of refugees and campaign for an end to discrimination, racism and prejudice.

Scottish Trans
www.scottishtrans.org

Scottish Trans is the Equality Network project to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland. The Equality Network is a leading Scottish lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) equality and human rights charity.

Hand in Hand
www.handinhandk12.org

Hand in Hand builds partnership and equality between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel through its growing network of integrated Arab –Jewish schools and communities throughout the country.

Outbrave Relief
outbraverelief.org

Outbrave Relief is a women-led, nonpartisan organisation that provides postpartum care

for mothers and newborns both in Gaza and in Israel's hardest-hit communities. The team is predominantly Israeli/Jewish but includes Muslim-Palestinian and Christian women.

PLEASE DONATE!

Please make your Kol Nidre donation by bank transfer, referencing the transaction as KN APPEAL. Thank you.

Sukkat Shalom Edinburgh
Liberal Jewish Community
SORT code: 301301
Account Number: 00974077

Or to donate by PayPal, please visit eljc.org/donate

Unusually, we have decided to donate for a second year running to Outbrave Relief, impressed with what they achieved in their first year of operation, and also with the quality of their communication throughout the year about what they were doing: read "The First Six Weeks" and "A Mother's Story" on the following pages. Thank you again to our member Janti Gibson who first brought this new small charity to our attention.

Kol Nidre
The First Six Weeks

Mirjam van de Giessen
Director, Outbrave Relief

Israel has the highest fertility rate in the OECD, at approximately 2.9 children per woman. Yet after leaving the hospital, mothers do not routinely receive a clinical postpartum examination until the recommended six-week check-up. For a country in which so many women give birth, and where families have lived through decades of repeated conflict and reserve-duty cycles, we believe those first six weeks deserve far greater attention.

Postpartum support should not begin only once something has gone wrong. Those first weeks offer an important window to identify concerns early, prevent problems from becoming more serious, and give recovering mothers guidance and confidence from the start.

During this year's extended hostilities involving Israel, Hezbollah and Iran, our community midwives provided home-based postpartum visits to families in Israel. Through these visits, our midwives bring professional assessments, breastfeeding and safe-sleep guidance, practical support and, perhaps just as importantly, reassurance directly into the home at a time when simply leaving the house can be difficult.



Delivering emergency baby beds to displaced Gazan families.

At the same time, we continued another project that had been months in the making: producing, shipping and delivering emergency baby beds for displaced families in Gaza. Drawing on the same baby-box principle familiar to families in Scotland, the foldable beds provide newborns with their own firm, safe place to sleep in circumstances where even something as basic as a crib may be unavailable.



A visit to a mother and newborn.

The need in Gaza remains immense. Many families continue to live in makeshift shelters without adequate hygiene, privacy, protection or basic comfort. Every season brings different hardships: winter brings cold and flooding; summer brings intense heat. Living in these conditions is particularly harsh for newborn babies and women recovering from childbirth.

Our work therefore continues on both fronts. We are preparing further aid deliveries for mothers and babies in Gaza, while in Israel we are developing postpartum group meetings where new mothers can meet with midwives, build community and receive continued professional support. The groups will allow us to reach more families while identifying mothers who may benefit from additional individual follow-up at home.

Working across borders during conflict means navigating logistical obstacles, changing political circumstances and systems that were never designed to make a humanitarian response easy. But this past year has also shown us how much can be achieved when we are simply

determined to make a difference.

I am enormously grateful to Sukkat Shalom for being part of that. Your support has helped us reach families in some of their most vulnerable moments, and to invest in the generation that will grow up after this war.

One Mother's Story: Postpartum Care During Conflict

When Maya (Name changed to protect the mother's privacy) was just 11 days postpartum, an Outbrave community midwife came to visit her at her home deep in the old part of Ein Kerem, Jerusalem. Like many older homes in the neighbourhood, theirs does not have a protected room, and reaching adequate shelter during a rocket siren can be difficult.

Those first days with her newborn had already been exhausting.

"It's wild to me that you get released from the hospital after such a huge event for the body and the mind, and then there's a new soul, and there are no more check-ups for the mother."

Until then, Maya's baby had not been sleeping independently. She had been co-sleeping while trying to navigate feeding, her own recovery, and the uncertainty that comes with caring for a newborn for the first time, while experiencing repeated missile sirens.

During the visit, the midwife was able to assess mother and baby, answer questions about feeding and recovery, and provide reassurance and practical guidance. She also talked the parents through safe-sleep practices and showed them how to swaddle their baby and gently settle him safely in his own crib.

The difference was immediate.

"For the first time in 11 days, we both had our hands free," Maya told us afterwards. "I relaxed for one hour."

But this was not an ordinary

postpartum visit. During the appointment, an air-raid siren sounded. Maya, her newborn baby and the midwife had to quickly make their way downstairs to the basement for protection. Once it was safe, they returned upstairs and continued.

For a woman recovering from childbirth while caring for a newborn, even the most basic aspects of those first weeks become considerably harder under such circumstances. What stayed with Maya afterwards was not only the practical help she had received, but the reassurance of having an experienced professional there with her.

The midwife, she said, "took so much off our minds" and gave them confidence at a moment when everything still felt new and overwhelming.

"It really changed everything."

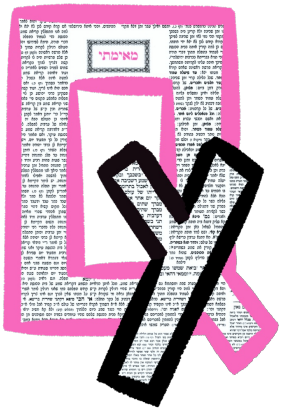
For Outbrave, this visit captured why bringing postpartum care directly into the home can matter so much during a crisis. Sometimes the intervention is medical or practical. Sometimes it is teaching exhausted new parents how to safely put their baby down so that they, too, can finally rest. And sometimes it is simply making sure that a mother does not have to navigate those first vulnerable weeks alone.

For the second year running, Outbrave Relief is one of Sukkat Shalom's member-nominated Kol Nidre charities. www.www.outbraverelief.org

LGBTQA+

Queer Yeshiva Reflections, 2026/5786

Ash Alexander



Not having been raised in a Jewish household, I didn't have the yeshiva experience growing up. However, as a queer adult Jew-by-choice, a similar experience is available to me now, through The Queer Yeshiva. It's a London-based organisation, originally an offshoot of South West Essex Reform Synagogue, but now offering community and learning to queer Jews nationwide and internationally. The Queer Yeshiva summer intensive has been the highlight of my year since 2023/5783, and at the time of writing, I have recently returned from the 5786/2026 intensive. For the past four years, the intensive has taken place on a Field Studies Council site in Cumbria called Castle Head, nestled in the idyllic countryside near the town of Grange-over-Sands, by the estuary south of Lake Windermere. It is a site of lush greenery, diverse wildlife, and a sense of serenity and calm. Throughout the year, the site hosts many different groups, including Outward Bound trips

for young people, nature researchers, and people seeking a retreat from the hustle of modern life. The staff strive to make everyone who visits feel uniquely cared for and valued. Being there brings the kind of peacefulness I typically lack in city life, and it's so refreshing to be there to study Talmud and practice *tefillah* in a specifically queer context, without fear of judgement. The Queer Yeshiva organisers (Roshim) select a passage from the Talmud in advance for everyone to study, across several mixed ability classes. Each class is made up of study groups (*chevrutim*) of two or three, who translate the passage together, and with the help of a weighty tome colloquially called the Jastrow Dictionary. The teachers encourage us to find not just basic definitions, but also the shared roots of different words, introducing layers of deeper meaning to the passage through our own queer lens. It often gives rise to interesting interpretations, making the Talmud feel very alive and prescient, as we continue the rich rabbinical tradition of exploration, questioning, and discussion. There is something about it that makes me feel very connected to these sages from centuries ago, like we are doing the same thing they did, and so we remain in conversation with our spiritual ancestors. It can be both playful and profound, both challenging and liberating.

The teachers guide the learners gently through complex patches in the process, but also constantly nudge us to wrestle with the text and the questions that arise. To ask "what does this mean to me?" is both deeply queer and deeply Jewish, and it is the very core of what Queer Yeshiva learning is about. After we finish our translation with our *chrevrutim*, the whole class discusses our interpretations, and all contributions are valued as part of the discussion. The conversation can be very broad-ranging, as our interpretations intersect with history, theology, ancient and modern politics, and the

myriad threads weave together into a rich and complex tapestry of thought. We rarely settle on a single definitive meaning, but that's the beauty of this kind of study, we get to hold and appreciate these multitudes, and celebrate the diversity of the queer Jewish experience.

I see new and familiar faces each time I return to the intensive. It is a joy to catch up with friends I haven't seen for a year, and also to make new friends.
Outside of our study, we have shared activities and workshops run by other attendees, and they offer great opportunities to bond and share knowledge and skills. This year, there were opportunities to practice yoga, learn about foraging and plant identification, be mindful in nature, make collage poetry, learn klezmer dancing, as well as three *tefillah* services each day. I was honoured to co-lead a *ma'ariv* service, helping everyone get cosy and relaxed before bed with gentle songs, prayers, and readings that emphasised connection and togetherness, while also holding space to feel the absence of those we miss.

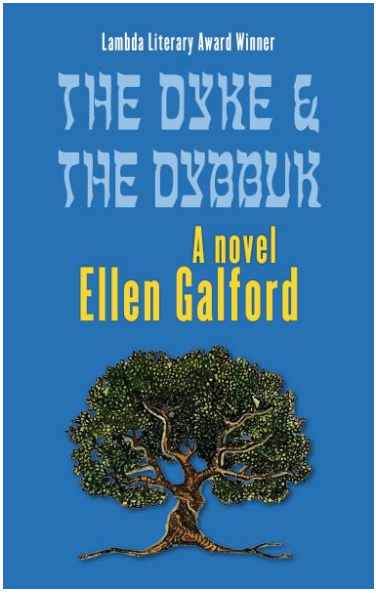
Unfortunately, the Queer Yeshiva summer intensive will now be taking a fallow year, probably running non-residentially next August, but it is expected to return to Castle Head before long. When it does, I will be eager to go back, because it's genuinely the most safe, held, and loved I've ever felt in any space, which is what keeps me returning to it every year I can. It feels like home in a way nowhere else does, because it's where I find my people.

www.yeshiva.lgbt

Books

In Conversation with Ellen Galford

Gillian Raab



Ghosts, spirits and demons from the underworld often have voices in novels; we need only think of Marley's ghost in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. But none is quite like Kokos who narrates *The Dyke and the Dybbuk*. She, that is Kokos, inhabits the persona of Rainbow Rosenbloom, a lesbian London taxi driver, as she drives passengers around London, Kokos's magical powers propelling the taxi to unexpected locations.

It is Kokos' assignment to continue the unfinished job of haunting the descendants of Gittel, the prospective daughter-in-law of Rebbe Shmuel ben Issachar. Back then, 200 years ago, he won his fight with Kokos and sealed her in a tree. The wedding went ahead and Gittel was fruitful and multiplied, as did a

further nine generations, the descendent of whom is Rainbow herself. Rainbow and Kokos have a rather cosy relationship: sharing ideas, tastes in food and comments on the films they see together. Rainbow is a film critic as well as a taxi driver.

I read the first edition of *The Dyke and the Dybbuk* when Ellen Galford gave a talk to the Lit (a.k.a. Jewish Literary Society) about it. I have read it again now and Ellen agreed to answer a few questions about the book just after Yom Kippur 5787.

Gillian: Where did the *dybbuk* Kokos come from? And have you ever had your own *dybbuk* to base her on?

Ellen: I used to say that I was a modern woman with a cluster of medieval *shtetls* in my head. I was brought up by one of my grandmothers, who always lived with us, the first American-born child of a large family who left the Russian Empire in the late 1880s. So her fears and superstitions were very much part of my heritage. I knew how to deflect the evil eye by saying *keyn aynhoreh*, practically before I could say anything else. While I had never, and have not yet, been possessed by a *dybbuk*, *keyn aynhoreh*, I certainly carried *dybbuks* and other uncanny figures in my head.

Gillian: When I came to reread the book I remembered everything about the *shtetl* scenes and about Rainbow and her friends and her aunts and what Kokos did to them, but I had much less memory of what was happening to the oufit that was in charge of the underworld, the corporate giant Mephistco. I think you were well ahead of your time in writing about what is happening to big business. At the end of the book the operatives all get the sack because they have been made redundant by new technology. What made you see forward so clearly?

Ellen: My working life was spent in publishing. In 1979, when we went from Scotland to

Rainbow's territory of North London, I was working for a large multinational publishing house, TimeLife Books, that has since been eaten up by about six different companies. So, even though we were the "creative" side of the company, we were very aware of and affected by the size of the company. It was an age which I still consider was an age of metastasised capitalism, an age we don't think we are out of now. So, this was the world I lived in when I was not being part of emerging lesbian feminist North London. There was no AI then; we didn't even have mobile phones. Mephistco's operatives all have "remotes", inspired by *Star Trek*. It was fantasy and science fiction and, like much of late 20th Century science fiction, it has now come true. There is that Jewish thing about time travel. We do it all the time now. Over the last ten Days of Awe we are time travelling constantly. Some of it is personal, some of it is political and some of it is theological.

Gillian: What led to the republication? Did you approach the publisher or did they approach you?

Ellen: They approached me. I thought that I was just a very minor part of lesbian and feminist publishing history, a little bit on both sides of the pond. But Sinister Wisdom, a US lesbian publishing house, approached me to include it in their Sapphic Classics series. They said they would love to publish it because alternative booksellers across the US had reported that it was among their most requested, hard-to-find and frequently out-of-print lesbian titles.

Gillian: How and where can we buy copies of the new edition?

Ellen: The new paperback can be ordered through bookshops via the publisher and via Amazon, and a Kindle edition is available.

You should read *The Dyke and the Dybbuk*. It won the Lambda Literary Award for Gay and Lesbian Humour in 1994. It is witty, funny and it will make you think. You will find out how Kokos and her pals go independent and outwit Mephistco.

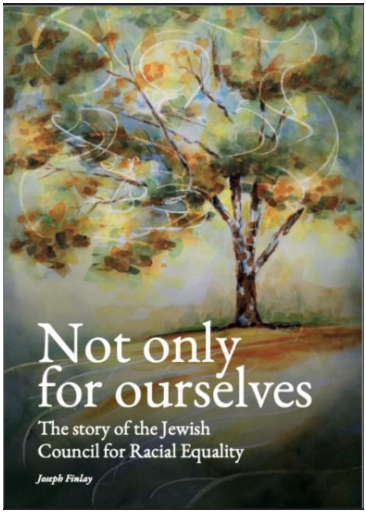
If you get the new edition you will find a new foreword by Ellen where she discusses how things have changed for Jewish lesbian feminists in the UK since 1993. She pays tribute to three rabbis: Rabbi Sheila Shulman זצ״ל , Rabbi Elli Tikvah Sarah who led our Rosh Hashanah services this year, and of course our own Rabbi Mark Solomon.

The Dyke and the Dybbuk is published by Sinister Wisdom: www.sinisterwisdom.org/dykeanddybbuk

Books

Joseph Finlay's *Not Only for Ourselves: The Story of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality* (2026 edition)

Helen Searle



Joseph Finlay's new book, *Not only for ourselves: the story of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality*, marks the fiftieth anniversary of JCORE'S foundation, but that is not the only reason to read it now. The book's foreword by Rabbi David Mason, currently serving as executive director of HIAS+JCORE, underlines the timeliness of its publication, with references to the racist riots of last summer and the then-Prime Minister's speech (which he walked back after the damage had been done) about Britain as an "island of strangers." New racist outrages appear in the news every day, alongside statements about the racists' "legitimate concerns."

In these circumstances it is more important than ever to look to our predecessors.

JCORE was founded as the Jewish Social Responsibility Council in 1976, by Edie Friedman. Friedman was an American immigrant, born in 1949, from a Reform Jewish tradition in which "Jewishness was expressed and discussed more through politics and social responsibility than through traditional religious observance," and Finlay emphasises that her opposition to the racism she observed in the US was founded in Jewish values rather than in American "patriotism." Her hope in forming the JSRC was to encourage the UK Jewish community to follow this example. This book details the ups and downs of what became the Jewish Council for Community Relations and then the Jewish Council for Racial Equality: from its birth under the Callaghan government and its embrace by the Jewish establishment to its experiences in the 1980s (pushed away by a hard-right Chief Rabbi while receiving GLC grants from the now-problematic figure of Ken Livingstone), its work on multiculturalism and systemic racism under Blair, and its turn to an emphasis on refugee work in the 2000s and beyond, which led to its current partnership with HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society).

Finlay is a postdoctoral fellow at the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, and his exploration of the intersection between antisemitism, anti-Black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of racism is one of the most interesting aspects of this book, and possibly the most uncomfortable. The UK Jewish community, traumatised by the narrowness of its escape from Naziism and unwilling to (to quote Edie Friedman) "stick their necks out" for other communities out of fear of losing their status as white, and the Black community, frustrated by a lack of solidarity and turning to the hateful message of Louis Farrakhan as an alternative, are both portrayed sympath-

etically; he recognises that like any minoritised or racialised group, Jews are both victims and perpetrators – sometimes simultaneously.

So what lessons should we take from this story? Firstly, we should stand in solidarity with other oppressed communities because it's the right thing to do; as the title of this book indicates, it is important to care about people who are not us. The other part of Rabbi Hillel's maxim, of course, states, "if I am not for myself, who will be for me," and the book also deals with the ways JCORE attacks antisemitism by presenting to members of other ethnic groups a model of Judaism and Jewishness which is less uncaring than that displayed by right-wing community leaders – Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits's response to the 1980s riots by poor and unemployed Black youth in inner cities, which might as well have been written by Norman Tebbit, being an example of this. Though this might sound transactional, it is more closely related to the American Jewish antifascist Shane Burley's concept of 'safety through solidarity' (I recommend the book of the same name): if you stick up for other people, they are more likely to stick up for you.

The book's short length makes it easy to read but also has disadvantages. While it is an interesting overview of the history of this one organisation it would have been nice to read more about JCORE's interactions with other Jewish left organisations, such as the Jewish Socialist Group. Likewise the relationship between other minority ethnic groups and the Jewish community. The author's forthcoming book from Manchester University Press, adapted from his PhD thesis, will hopefully deal with these issues in more detail, and seems likely to be another fascinating and useful read.

Not Only for Ourselves is published by HIAS+JCORE: www.hiasjcore.org/buy-your-copy-not-only-ourselves

Sport
Sport and Judaism?

Nick Silk



I was asked to write "something about sport" by one of the editors of *Etrog*; their comment was along the lines of "we thought that having an article about sport would be good and we immediately thought of you". I guess this was said to make me feel good – perhaps I'm viewed as an expert on sport (I'll come back to that later) – but once I thought about it, I started to get worried. What do I know about sport and Judaism? Not much, as it turns out.

The limit of my immediate knowledge, without reference to Google, was, well, pretty limited. I know that Judaism teaches that it is a good thing to teach your children to swim

and I thought that this was from the Talmud. However, I was also pretty sure that this isn't anything to do with getting your kids into swimming galas, rather it's to do with making sure that they don't drown. Google confirms this. I also remember Ronnie Rosenthal, an Israeli footballer who I thought played for Rangers a good few years ago. This is also pretty tenuous; I had no idea whether Rosenthal was in fact Jewish, but a quick look at Wikipedia would suggest that he is, since it says that one of his sons was *bar mitzvah* in Israel – albeit Wikipedia also tells me that he never played for Rangers (Liverpool, Spurs and Watford were the UK teams he played for if you're interested). So, I'm not doing so well so far. And even the one proper Jewish link I thought I knew of to do with sport turned out to be totally wrong. I had it in mind that there was a book on my mum's bookshelf by someone I used to know from the Nottingham congregation, Michael Billig, about Jewish footballers. Turns out it's to do with musicians (it's called *Rock n Roll Jews*).

By now I was starting to get really worried about my ability to write the article. I know that table tennis is one of those sports that us Jews seem to enjoy (and on a related note; if any of you out there fancy trying to get a Sukkat Shalom team together to play against the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation next year, let me know) and I'm pretty sure that volleyball is big in Israel. But so much for my expertise.

And then I remembered what I consider to be my finest sermon (one of the few, to be fair, and one of two I can remember giving) which I know I have mentioned on several occasions before. But, this is *Etrog*, with a much wider audience, so another repeat wouldn't hurt. The torah reading that day was one of those about how God demands that rituals have to be done in a certain way, or fires and brimstone will be the

result. It might even be the one about Nadav and Abihu, who were killed by God for giving the wrong type of fire offering (and while I think this sounds pretty good, being able to quote from the torah like this, the truth is that this was David, my youngest son's torah portion, which is why I can remember it).

Actually, to go off at a bit of a tangent, when I thought about my ability to remember (or not, in truth) torah quotes, and similarly sporting facts, it made me think about the often-quoted "10,000 hours of practise" that you're supposed to put in to get to "world class." Where would I put myself in this in terms of my suitability to write this article? Well, I reckon that since my *bar mitzvah* I've been to maybe two or three services a month. At say an hour and a half each (some shorter, some much longer!), that would be, say, four hours a month, so let's say 50 hours a year. For 50 years, that's 2,500 hours – so maybe a decent national standard at service attendance. As for football watching (and by that I mean live games), I've been doing that since I was 5 (that was in the days when Dad would lift me through the turnstile and so kids got in for free). Maybe 15-20 games a year if say I miss the odd home game but also go to a few away games. However, there were maybe 20 years when I didn't go to so many games, so if you say 18 games, of 90 minutes each, for 40 years, that's only just over 1,000 hours. Nowhere near world class: no wonder I got Ronnie Rosenthal's club wrong.

Anyway, back to my sermon, which was along the lines of how we scoff at how primitive it is for anyone to believe that offering the wrong sort of fire would lead to God killing someone, and indeed all the other things in the torah about doing the right thing to make the rains come and so on. But – I do the same sort of thing when I go to a football match (as I suspect do many other fans). If I didn't park on the

right level of the multi-story car park, or if I walked down the steps to the ground the wrong way, then that was obviously why Livingston (my team – along with Notts County, my childhood team) lost. So next time I'd have to make sure I did all these things right – otherwise another loss. And just for the record, I obviously get these things wrong quite a lot, as we quite often lose.

And this got me thinking. What other similarities are there between football and religion, or at least Judaism anyway? Well, the first thing to say is that, to my knowledge anyway, there aren't many of us football fans who are Sukkat Shalom members. I can think of four with whom I regularly discuss football. There's Jonathan and Marjory, who are Hearts fans, and Ricky, who supports Hibs. And here is the first similarity. Hearts and Hibs are rivals, so there can be a bit of an edge. At Livingston, we don't really have any specific rivals – maybe Inverness who were elected to the league at about the same time as us – but that's more just a bit of seeing how they're doing. So maybe this is a bit like other shuls; there are some you would never go to, and others where they're okay but not for me. You have your own shul, or football team, and that's who you go to. And by the way the fourth person is Tristan, who is more into English football, and used to follow Spurs, who I have a soft spot for as they were my dad's team, but he's now moved to Aston Villa – not sure how much I approve moving to a different team like that, but each to their own.

My favourite comparison about football and shul is that, in terms of going along, they're pretty similar. It's my shul, my football team, and while there are times when I don't fancy going (to either!), you just feel you have to go. It would feel wrong if you didn't go. And in terms of the "entertainment" you get, they're both pretty similar too. Sometimes you

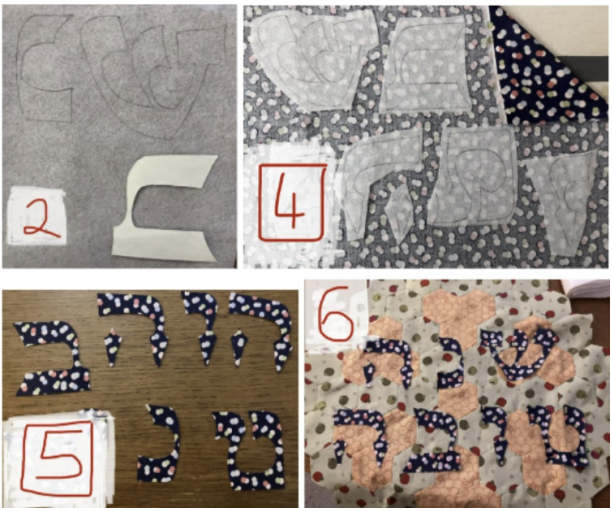
come away from shul feeling uplifted, or there was a sermon you related to. And sometimes not! And sometimes you go to the football and you won a really close game, or you saw a spectacular goal. And sometimes not!

And then there's the singing and the chanting. Each football team has its special song – well maybe not Livingston, but check out the "wheelbarrow song" for Notts County. And we've got Rabbi Mark with his fantastic singing, although I'm not sure that we have a signature tune. But we certainly do a fair bit of chanting at shul, sometimes involving "stuff" from the torah that can be a bit dodgy in terms of its content. And you can certainly get some dodgy chanting at football matches, although I'm not sure that we've ever questioned Rabbi Mark's parentage at shul before ("who's the *&!!* in the tallis" doesn't have the same ring about it!).

So, where does all this end. Well, I remember Rabbi Pete Tobias once giving a sermon about how, in olden times, when there wasn't much else to do in terms of "not working", that's one of the reasons why it was so important to have the sabbath restrictions on working, so as to ensure people got a proper rest. These days, there is plenty to do that isn't working, and maybe football (as one example) is as much sabbath rest as is going to shul. So maybe it's no great surprise that there are these similarities after all.

Crafts
Hebrew *Appliqué*

Caity Oddy



Something I learned quickly through my conversion process was that acquiring Jewish things in Edinburgh is not especially easy, and if I wanted Jewish "stuff" to fit my (admittedly quite colourful and vibrant) tastes I would have to learn to make it myself.

So in the first of these crafting columns, I will explain how to add Hebrew lettering to fabric. This is through a process called *appliqué*, and in fact the same process would work for embroidering any design you would like onto fabric, but I've found it very useful for adding Hebrew letters to *challah* covers.

Materials needed

- Set of Hebrew letters printed on thick card stock or you can trace the letters you need from a screen
- Fusible webbing. Edinburgh

Fabrics sell this as BONDAWEB

• Fabric for the letters and backing fabric to attach the letters to

• An iron and sewing materials.

Process

1. First identify the sticky and paper sides of your webbing. The sticky side will feel rough, the other will be more matt and is the paper.

2. Trace the letters onto the paper side mirrored (backwards). This will make them the right way round on the fabric.

3. Cut out the letters roughly, you will cut them properly once attached to fabric.

4. With the sticky side of the interfacing touching the back of the fabric for the letters, attach them by holding a hot iron in one place (don't move it around) on top for 10-15 seconds.

5. Once the fabric has cooled, cut out the letters exactly - you should now have all the letters you want to embroider, the right way round, in the fabric you want.

6. Remove the paper backing from the letters and place them in position on the fabric. Then to stick them down hold an iron over them for 5 seconds.

7. Now, you'll want to sew the letters down permanently somehow. This can be done with a sewing machine, or likely easier is to use a blind stitch* to do by hand.

8. And now you're done! You can attach backing fabric to make a challah cover, do the same and add stuffing for a pillow, make a tallit bag - the options are endless!

* A blind stitch can also be called an invisible stitch and is done by making stitches right at the edge of the applique shape and coving distance on the back of the fabric. A good tutorial can be found at www.thesprucecrafts.com.

Food

Time for Something Sweet

Noemie de Schuyte





As a Tunisian Jew on my father's side, when I think of childhood, I remember our traditions not so much through words or rituals as through tables: tables laden with food, conversation and the particular abundance of families who know that a meal is never simply a meal.

Only much later did I understand what my family had chosen not to speak about: the difficulty of leaving Tunisia, and the quiet grief of losing a homeland. There were no stories of exile, no lingering accounts of what had been left behind. Instead, there was food. There were gatherings. There was laughter. The ordinary was made festive.

Perhaps this was how they carried nostalgia: not by dwelling on what was gone, but by recreating it.

As in every family, some tables held a particular magic.

My favourite moments were at my parents' and at my uncle Claude and his wife Touny's home.

Moroccan by birth and married to my father's brother,

Touny had an extraordinary ability to conjure, from their suburban apartment outside Paris, the warmth and splendour of a riad in Marrakech. Her living room could become, for an afternoon, another world.

I had my own little ritual. Before anyone had properly settled in, I would go straight to the sideboards to inspect the pastries.

They were always there, arranged with an almost theatrical generosity: pyramids of biscuits, golden cigars, pastries glazed with honey, and soft chocolate cakes. I would count them, or try to. There were always more than I remembered from the last gathering. We were children, and we saw abundance.

Only later did I begin to understand what stood behind it: the hours of preparation, the generosity, the care, and the quiet determination to make sure that no one ever arrived at her table without being overwhelmed by plenty. That was her way of loving. And still is today.

I have never known meals quite like those since my childhood. They were exuberant and noisy, full of flavour and interruption, laughter and argument, stories told over one another and conversations that seemed to have no beginning and no end. The food was inseparable from the people around it.

Looking back, I think those tables were doing more than feeding us. They were preserving something. A taste. A gesture. A way of gathering. A memory of places that could no longer be returned to.

My aunt, whom I have always adored, has now entrusted me with two of her recipes. It feels important to pass them on.

The first is for her Moroccan walnut cookies, called Ghribas. The second is for Tunisian harissa cake. These are sweet and so delicious!

Two recipes from two sides of a family, and from two countries whose flavours became part of the same childhood tables. Hope you enjoy!

Harissa Recipe
serves six

Despite the name, this is a semolina-almond sponge cake soaked in syrup, not chili paste.

Ingredients

Cake:
3 eggs
100g sugar
100g fine semolina
160g ground almonds
100ml vegetable oil
50ml orange juice
2 tbsp of orange blossom water
A few drops bitter almond extract

Syrup:
150ml water
100g sugar
5 tablespoons honey
2 orange slices

Method

Preheat oven to 170°C.

Beat the whole eggs with the sugar until the mixture turns pale and creamy.

Add the semolina, ground almonds, oil, orange juice, orange blossom water, and bitter almond extract. Mix well for a couple of minutes.

Pour the mixture onto a pre-oiled baking tray (or over a baking sheet if preferred) and bake for 25 minutes (check with a knife if it is baked and if not, add 5 minutes).

Remove the cake from the oven, cut into squares, and pour over ¾ of the syrup, then return to the (switched off) oven for 3 minutes.

Remove the cake from the oven and pour over the remaining syrup.

Unmould once the cake is well soaked through.

Optional: add grilled almonds on the top

Note: I prefer it with less syrup, which is why I don't cut it before pouring the syrup on. However, I've given you the original recipe, which you can adjust to your own taste.

Ghribas Recipe
15 cookies

Ingredients

1 cup vegetable oil
1½ cups powdered sugar
¼ teaspoon baking powder
3 cups flour
1 cup walnut halves, chopped into small pieces with a knife

Method

Pre-heat the oven to 160°C

Beat the walnuts, oil, sugar, and baking powder together, then add the first 2 cups of flour, one cup at a time.

Gradually add the 3rd cup of flour by hand to form the dough. The dough should not be sticky, thanks to the oil.

Flatten it by hand on a counter dusted with flour, to about 1.5 cm thick. They have to be thick to keep its shortbread texture.

Cut out shapes with a plain cookie cutter of 5cm diameter.

Tip: you can use a shot glass too. Deep whatever tool you use into the flour before you cut the cookie dough, so it does not stick.

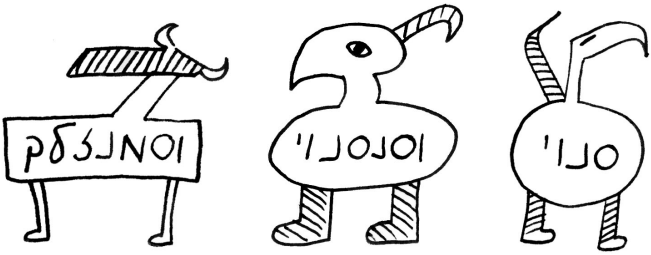
Bake for 12 minutes. Cookies are ready when they are firm. Let the cookies cool.

Optional: dust with cinnamon.

Folk Stories

The Hair in the Milk

Introduced and illustrated by Samara Leibner



What an image. *Eww*. Finding a hair in food or a beverage is considered bad luck in Jewish tradition, and this story certainly illustrates that.

Lilith is a major figure of Jewish folklore who has built a fan base among people, especially women, looking for re-enchantment in their lives. She's certainly got the It Factor: a high-profile first marriage (to Adam), great hair, and a glamorous position as the queen of sheydim (demons). However, her propensity for eating babies, killing women, and being way too much for the rabbis to handle means that when she appears in Jewish folklore, she's usually there to cause problems.

Women's tales, in Jewish as well as in other folklore, are a chance for women to take centre stage, pass on knowledge, and celebrate and model admirable behaviour. Lilith is often present in these tales, but she's the threat, not the ideal. Only the bravest, wisest, and coolest heads among midwives and *feldmestrins* can stand against

her when the advised protections against her fail or aren't respected.

This spooky story from Turkish Kurdistan's Jewish community illustrates what to expect, and what to watch out for, when you're expecting.

Once there was a woman who felt that she was about to give birth. They called the old midwife, who had learned the secrets of her trade from her mother and grandmother before her. Not long after she arrived, one of the servants served the expectant mother a glass of milk. Just as she was about to drink it, the woman looked into the cup, put it down with shaky hands, and all of a sudden fainted.

The midwife picked up the cup and saw that there was a long black hair in the milk. She looked around, but none of the other women had hair that was so long or so black. Then she knew what to do. She quickly poured the milk into a jug, the hair along with it. Then she corked the jug and shook it with all her might, using both hands. All at once there was a scream from inside it. Another might have dropped and broken it then, but not the midwife. Instead, she listened. And from inside the bottle she heard a distant voice crying, "Stop! Please let me go! I beg for forgiveness!"

The first impulse of the midwife was to carry the jug to the sea and throw it as far as she could. Instead, she took it outside and when all the doors and windows of the house were locked, she lifted the cork, set it down, and peered inside the bottle. Then all at once the head of a woman popped out. And the first thing the midwife noticed was that her hair was very black and so long that it fell back into the bottle. "Lilith!" the midwife hissed, and she started to pick up the cork to replace it in the bottle. But she found that it had become so heavy that she could not raise it even one inch. And then, for the first time, the midwife became afraid.

"What are you doing here!" the midwife shouted. "Set me free from this bottle and I will do you no harm," Lilith replied, for that is who it was. "First tell me why you have come to this house," said the woman. "I have come for the mother or the child, of course," said Lilith. "You know that. But now I will forswear doing any harm to them if you will only let me go." "That is not enough," said the midwife. "What more do you want?" asked Lilith. "First, how did you know that a woman was here who was about to give birth?" demanded the midwife. And Lilith replied, "As I was flying past, I smelled the odor of a mother's milk. I wanted to steal the afterbirth—we feed it to our children." "And what happens then?" asked the wise midwife. "Then the woman dies," Lilith whispered.

In a sudden motion the midwife grabbed Lilith by the hair, pulling her out of the bottle at the same time. The demoness struggled to get free of her, but the woman held on with all her might, for she knew that a demoness is helpless when held by her hair. When Lilith stopped struggling, the woman said, "Know that you will not leave here until you tell us how to save this woman from you once and for all!" And Lilith, seeing that she had no choice, said, "Take saliva from the woman's mouth and put it in a bucket filled with water." They did this. Then Lilith blew on the foam of the water, and at that instant the woman awoke from her faint. The midwife then said, "How is it that you did not fear to approach this house?" Lilith replied, "The mezuzah of the house is defective, and the people do not have an amulet (*segula*) against me hung on the infant's bed. Now, will you set me free?"

"Not yet!" said the woman, holding Lilith's hair just as tightly. "There is more that I want of you." "What is it?" Lilith asked. "That you serve this family in every way, especially the mother and

child, and protect them from every danger for three years." "And what if I do not agree?" asked Lilith. "Then I will throw you and the bottle into an old trunk, lock it, and cast it to the bottom of the sea, with you still in it!" cried the midwife, ready to carry out the threat.

Lilith saw that the midwife was a formidable opponent indeed. Her voice grew calm and reassuring. "I vow to do as you say, and to serve this family for three years. Nor will any demons dare to approach while I am here, for I am their queen." Then the midwife demanded, "Swear in the names of the angels Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof," and Lilith saw that there was no escape. For those were the three angels who had commanded her to return to Adam when she had left him and flown to a cave by the Red Sea. And she had vowed that whenever she saw or heard their names, she would do no harm.

So Lilith swore in the names of the three angels, and after that she did indeed remain captive there and serve as a faithful servant. For the words of a vow are sacred not only among men and the angels, but among the demons as well. She pumped water from the well, cut wood, and guarded the woman and her child at all times so that no harm came to them.

Long before Lilith left, the text of the mezuzah was repaired. And when she took her leave, she promised that she would never come back. Nor did Lilith or her daughters attempt to return to that house, and the family lived a life of peace.

This story is collected in *Lilith's Cave* by Howard Schwartz, 1988

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