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Etrog

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Sukkat Shalom
Edinburgh Liberal Jewish
Community
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Word From the Sofa

Sue Bard

In the recent BBC Scotland documentary 'Being Jewish in Scotland', the decline of the Jewish population in Scotland from around 20,000 in the 1930s and 40s to around 6,000 now was an inevitable theme — especially in people's memories of past Jewish life in Glasgow. There's tangible evidence too in the reduction of synagogues in Scotland over the last decades from 20 to just 6. The financial burden of synagogue buildings and the decreasing numbers using them create a vicious circle, whereby especially for Orthodox Jews, the lack of a local synagogue can itself cause depletion of the community.



Of course, it gave us a warm glow for Sukkat Shalom to be identified in the documentary as the only Jewish community in Scotland that's actually growing. Not only that, unlike many religious communities — Jewish or otherwise — our membership includes increasing numbers of young people and of young families — necessary, if not sufficient indicators of our potential to create a sustainable, long-term multi-generational community. In 2022 it was wonderful to celebrate new admissions and bnei mitzvah, and to welcome new members. But our actual numbers, while growing, are fragile; 130 full members and 26 associate members (most of whom are in the process of converting).

20 plus years ago, when our community was founded, a decision had to be made whether to invest in a synagogue building, or a rabbi. The (in my opinion) fortunate decision was made to go for the rabbi. In Mark Solomon we have a rabbi who brings our community invaluable spiritual and intellectual resources and creativity. And our community escapes the drain on finances and human energy that a synagogue building would make. Would you rather be worrying about rising damp or delving into the golden age of Hebrew poetry in medieval Spain?

No-one would have imagined covid 19 at the time — plagues and their effects (in our world at least) having been relegated to history — but in the event, the absence of a building gave us one less thing to worry about and left us with a nest egg at the end of lockdown in saved rent. We had a rabbi who got his head round the technology with amazing speed and competence, and within a few days of lockdown being announced, he and many other Progressive rabbis were leading multiple Zoom classes and events as if they'd been doing it all their lives. For many in our community, myself included, they gave our lives in lockdown a Jewish structure — a structure that my life as an adult

had never had before. In my case, it Judaised my home which became the place where I went to services, lit candles, prayed and studied. Our thriving parent-run Cheder was also quick to take to and adapt what they did and how they did it to Zoom, and it was good also to see whole families at Zoom services with children coming and going from the screen.

Post-pandemic, our community has re-introduced in-person services, kept Zoom only services and introduced 'hybrid' Zoomed/in-person services. Our Cheder, in consultation with its families, has established a programme of alternate Zoom-only and in-person only classes which seems to be working well. With the services, we're feeling our way, monitoring attendances, trying things out and seeking feedback. It's still early days. While our first in-person services were at Rosh Hashanah 2021, it's only since Rosh Hashanah 2022 that social distancing and mask-wearing have gone, that communal eating, drinking and singing have returned and that we've learned again how to be together in-person.

We're no longer living in lockdown but 28% of our members and associate members live too far from Edinburgh to come to in-person services and events often, or at all. Health, social anxiety and mobility issues make going to in-person services and events difficult or impossible for some. For some, their need to shield hasn't gone, and may never do so. Plus, even those who can go to and do enjoy in-person services, crave elements of the lockdown-era Zoom services that seem to be missing from the post-lockdown ones. These include the bonds that developed between the Edinburgh, Leicester and Manchester communities and the relationships that grew between Edinburgh-based and far-flung members when they were seeing each other regularly on Zoom. Many also enjoyed the greater and less scary participation that's possible in Zoom services.

At the moment, we're offering more services than we did before the pandemic, and more than any one person would ever go to (or could go to, as some of them clash with each other). This is good, in that we're trying to meet different needs and preferences, and to offer people choice, but also it runs a risk of fragmenting the community. Here are a couple of ideas to consider on how we could continue to benefit from both Zoom and in-person services and also nurture the strength of the community as a whole:

- Have occasional Super-Zoom services two or three times a year, billed as such, and led by Rabbi Mark, possibly coinciding with a 'special' or festival Shabbat, possibly including break-out kiddush rooms.
- Offer overnight and hospitality stays in people's homes and/or help with travel costs so that far-flung members can come to occasional in-person services and events.

Please add your own ideas and comments by emailing contact@eljc.com. [Back to top](#)

Abel Hershon's Bar Mitzvah

Abel's Bar Mitzvah, celebrated on 29 October, was a truly joyous occasion for our community, joined by the Hershons' Liverpool cousins and two London friends, one of whom, Bencie, had brought Dan and Lorraine together. Dan's brother in Majorca, step-mother in Somerset and more Liverpool family were with us on Zoom.

Abel's own unique presence filled St Mark's, and his original *d'var* reflecting his own wide-ranging and developing curiosity in the world won an ovation from the congregation, among them Samuel Duner from Sweden, surprised to be addressed in his own language.



Abel's *D'var* Parashah Noach, Bereshith Chapter 11, verses 1-9.

Gracias por asistir a mi barmitzvah (Spanish)

Merci d'avoir assisté a ma barmitzvah (French)

Dank u voor het bijwonen van mijn barmitzvah (Dutch)

Tack för att ni deltog i min barmitzvah (Swedish)

Todah she-batem l'bar-mitzvah sheli (Hebrew)

Thank you for attending my Bar Mitzvah.

How do you react when you hear several languages one after the other which you don't understand — did anyone get the Swedish or Dutch at all? Wait for the English — Ah, then all becomes clear! So weren't the Babylonians lucky to have, as the Torah says, "the same language" everywhere? Human nature at its best would say "yes, of course. If you take the central principle of Judaism to be, *love thy neighbour as thyself*, then surely that is easier when you understand what your neighbour is saying?"

But human nature is not always so pure. The verses in my portion are very clear when they reveal the people's motive for building a city "with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves". In that phrase *make a name for ourselves* the rabbis present to us a whole range of what *isn't* about loving your neighbour as yourself. In the first place, any attempt to climb up to heaven is a divine takeover bid: to try and prove themselves better than, or at any rate equal to God. We can already think of

modern parallels, from construction of skyscrapers for personal glory through to the worst extremes of celebrity culture.

It wasn't just the excessive *height* of the tower that God the world-planner objected to, but the plan of the city itself. The rabbis teach that one huge mega-city was not part of the original plan when God tells Adam and Eve, and later Noah just after the Flood, to "Be fertile and increase, and fill the Earth". But instead of having faith in God's scheme for the world, the entire population wanted to wall themselves in to Babel and protect against another Flood, while making a name for themselves. But a name to impress whom?

The commentator Abravanel explained that "making a name" for themselves involves the breakdown of co-operation with one's fellow, and fighting over who would do the best work and get the most credit for the enterprise of the tower. It was not about loving but exploiting your neighbour, even if the task killed them, as has happened with tyrants throughout history who have exploited workers to create monuments to their own power. The Midrash relates that, when a person building the tower fell from a great height and got killed, nobody took any notice, but if a single brick was dropped and smashed they would weep and wail as though it were a tragedy. As Harvey J. Fields put it: "Bricks became more important than individual liberties or lives".

The Italian scholar Sforino suggested that the goal of the tower builders was "the imposition of only one religion, one point of view on the world, one single political system." You might have thought God actually wanted only one religious world view, but God is more concerned with people's humanity to each other. What Sforino suggests happened in Babel is the creation of a dangerous and all-consuming nationalism, where any difference of opinion was banned.

God's "punishment" was actually more of a victory for freedom of thought and diversity of culture, what the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks called the "dignity of difference" by creating many different languages and, ultimately, many different countries.

I am actually very interested in different languages, countries, flags and cultures. I'm especially fascinated by microstates. These represent the greatest possible diversity for their size, and they seem to echo God's ultimate reason for putting a stop to what would have been the megastate of Babel. These tiny countries like San Marino, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Andorra and Monaco have survived without wars and have never tried to build monuments to their own glorification. You might say they have often used their quiet way of life to amass great wealth, but Judaism has no problem with wealth as long as it's used for good purposes and shared. I do believe that someone like Lord Sugar, for instance, can be one of the good guys. I'm sure that some of his fortune and some of the

wealth of microstates go to *tzedakah* (charity), as a very clear way of loving your fellow human being.

The diversity of language, culture and tradition created after the Tower might be regarded as humanity's strength, even its blessing. I suppose I feel blessed to be able to say to you all now, and especially to those people who have helped and supported me in learning and studying for my Bar Mitzvah, and in reaching this day:

Gracias — to Uncle Larry

Merci — to my Dad

Dank u — to my Mum

Tack — to my brothers Elkan, Isak and Elias, and all my extended family

Todah — to Rabbi Mark [Backto top](#)

Thank you — to everyone here today, for coming to join me in celebrating my Bar Mitzvah, and to everyone in Sukkat Shalom who has helped to make this day special.

Han and Jen's Wedding

Thank you to LJ's Simon Rothstein for allowing us to publish this article, which first appeared in LJ Today January/February 2022.



Two members of Sukkat Shalom, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community, have made history by getting married in Scotland's first ever Jewish same-sex wedding. Jennifer Andreacchi and Han Smith tied the knot in Lower College Hall, St Andrews University, in a ceremony conducted by Liberal Judaism's Rabbi Mark Solomon. The couple, in their mid-20s, are from New Jersey. They met at university in the States seven years ago. They fell in love with Scotland after spending a semester at St Andrews University and moved back to the country for post-graduate programmes; Han at the University of Edinburgh and Jennifer at St Andrews. They proposed to each other in May 2021, overlooking Edinburgh Castle.



Han said: *"Jen and I were surprised to learn that we were going to be the first queer Jewish wedding in Scotland. In part, we felt nervous to be representing such a significant event in Scottish LGBTQI+ Jewish history. Marrying Jen was always going to be one of the most magical days of my life... the significance of the day for other queer Jews made it feel that much more beautiful and surreal."*

Han has a Jewish parent and Jennifer has Jewish ancestry going back to a grandparent. However, as neither had Jewish religious upbringings, they both

went through a formal conversion process with Rabbi Mark Solomon as their sponsor. Jennifer added: *"The fact our wedding was also a history-making event makes it all the more special for us. Han and I have been working towards staying in Scotland permanently. We are surrounded by such a welcoming Jewish community at Sukkat Shalom — who have supported and celebrated us — and being married by Rabbi Mark just felt all the more meaningful."*

Liberal Judaism is at the forefront of LGBTQI+ marriage equality — successfully campaigning for a change in law, creating bespoke liturgy and becoming the first in the world to offer ketubot for same-sex couples and/or those who prefer a non-binary or gender-neutral format.

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Multiple Congratulations to Freyja Winter

Sue Bard

In Freyja's family, there's a story that her great-great grandmother was a Polish Jew who converted to Catholicism when she married and who thereafter hid her Jewishness. So far, it hasn't been possible to evidence this story, but its existence will have sparked Freyja's attraction to Judaism — an attraction that grew as she planned her first trip to Israel in 2016. She was heading to Israel after developing a love for the Hebrew language, which she was teaching herself for fun during 2016, and this was followed by a fascination with Judaism and what it is to be Jewish. In her own words, she was perhaps led to Judaism without really realising it. She has since travelled to Israel five times, and more recently has lived in an Orthodox household and completed an Ulpan



(language immersion course).

In Israel, Freyja focused on improving her *Ivrit*, working as a night-shift manager in a hostel and later in a kindergarten, living with Israeli flatmates, listening to famed Israeli singer Arik Einstein and going to lots of Shabbat dinners. She started to think about converting but was unsure about what that would involve. A few years on, back in Orkney, where Freyja's mother lives and where Freyja grew up, the pandemic arrived. Freyja, furloughed from work and unable to travel, had time to really think about conversion, and concluded that this is what she wanted.

Freyja read and researched extensively, eventually realising that she wanted and needed to connect with a Jewish community. It was with delight that she came upon Sukkat Shalom, saying *"I was annoyed with myself for not finding them sooner as I*

realised it would have been the best place for me to go." Having found us, Freyja wasted no time, embarking on conversion in April 2021, and being admitted to Judaism in November 2022. She found the process *"fascinating, fun and welcoming"* adding that she's continuing to attend the Exploring Judaism classes and relishing the prospect of further study. She chose the Hebrew name Rachav Rivka. Rachav figures in Joshua 2: 1-24 (Rachav and the Spies) and is a convert to Judaism. Rabbi Mark suggested the name Rivka, a character that Freyja could also relate to.

During her twenties, Freyja worked and travelled, including nannying in France and briefly, in 2018, living in Kerala. She also lived in London for four years, where she studied journalism and radio presenting. She continues to do some freelance writing, but she mostly works on her creative writing and earns a living working with her mum, who owns and runs the Stromness Bookshop (visitors to Stromness will have come across this fantastic Aladdin's Cave of a bookshop).

Freyja worked for five years at the Edinburgh Christmas Market and during summers at Queen Margaret University as a team leader mentoring and organising tours for Italian and Spanish teenagers. Now she's hoping to return to university herself in Edinburgh, to study Spanish and continue Hebrew on the side. When Freyja and I met on Zoom to have this conversation, she was one week away from the birth of her first child.

We're delighted to announce that just nine days later, on the 9 December 2022 Freyja's beautiful daughter Noa was born at Kirkwall Hospital.

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Welcome to New Member Ceceley Chambers

Sue Bard

Ceceley visited Scotland for the first time in 2019 on holiday with her husband Stephen and teenage children, Elliana and William. It was love at first sight for Ceceley and she announced to her family *"we have to live here"*. Luckily most of them agreed with her and three years and one pandemic on, Ceceley, Stephen and William arrived to stay, along with Great



Dane puppy, Stella. (Elliana is at George Washington University in the US). Ceceley gave up her dream day job as a Paediatric Palliative Care and Hospice Chaplain to move here, but six months later she says *"we absolutely love it — we haven't had a single regret."*

Some of you will have met Ceceley when she led a meditative erev Shabbat service at St Mark's in November — an introduction for us to Jewish Renewal practice. Ceceley grew up in Louisville, Kentucky in a secular family that didn't belong to any of Louisville's five synagogues. At 11, she sought out religion and became Bat Mitzvah at Louisville's 'traditional' synagogue, attracted by its beautiful building and by the music. Much later, as a young adult in Providence, Rhode Island (where she and her family lived for most of the last 15 years) Ceceley came across the Jewish Renewal movement, through which she did two intensive training programs: one on prayer leadership and one to become a Spiritual Director.

The Jewish Renewal movement was founded in the US in the early 1960s aiming to re-examine and reinvigorate Judaism after the Holocaust, drawing on Judaism's prophetic and mystical traditions, and also on Buddhism, Sufism and Catholic mysticism. Organisationally it's non-denominational, forming egalitarian *chavurot* (fellowships) for prayer and study. The movement became influential in the US, but has never gained much purchase in the UK, with just one *chavurah* in North London, so it was interesting for us to have the chance to experience a very different kind of service.

Ceceley has a Spiritual Mentoring and Grief Counseling practice. She works entirely online at the moment but is hoping to build up a local practice in Edinburgh. She has other irons in the fire too. She is a Reiki Master Teacher and also teaches courses on chaplaincy and spirituality, and she is writing a book about the lessons learned in her career as a chaplain. She also has a [website](#).

15 years ago Ceceley read an article about Buddhist monks running a bar in Japan where they dispensed drinks along with spiritual wisdom (on request). Since then, she's nurtured an ambition to do something similar. Now she and Stephen are in the process of buying a pub in Leith — The Bowlers Rest — where she hopes to do the same in her own unique way. Good luck to you, Ceceley!

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Celebrating Chanukah

Thank you to our Cheder for hosting our first in-person Chanukah party since 2019. The Cheder spent the first hour in their usual groups (aleph, beit and gimmel) preparing with



arts and crafts and performance pieces. Other community members joined them for a mass lighting of chanukyas followed by latkes, doughnuts, singing and performances. Wonderful to see so many young people there, from babies to teenagers. [Back to top](#)



Bernat Klein: Design in Colour

Rebecca Wober and Sue Bard

A retrospective on the textile designer Bernat Klein has opened at the National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, in the temporary exhibition space level 3 (free) showing until April 2023. Sukkat Shalom member Rebecca Wober, architect, features in a filmed interview in the house designed for the Klein family and has contributed an essay about Klein's creative collaboration with architect Peter Womersley, to the accompanying book *'Bernat Klein'**

Bernat Klein was born in 1922 in Senta, Yugoslavia (now Serbia) to an Orthodox Jewish family of textile wholesalers. From 1934 to 1939 he attended yeshivas, first in Czechoslovakia and then in Jerusalem. He left the yeshiva, but stayed on in Jerusalem, attending the New Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts where he was strongly influenced by the many ex-Bauhaus teachers and students that had fled Nazi Germany. He himself, by being in Jerusalem, escaped the fate of the rest of his family, who were deported to Auschwitz.



Bernat Klein's Tulip Petals rug

In 1945, Klein came to the UK, where he studied Textile Technology at the University of Leeds. After a spell working in Bolton, he moved to Galashiels in the Scottish Borders where he eventually set up his own textile business. At this time, he became part of a network of Jewish émigré designers who transformed British textile design in the mid-20th century and exerted an influence that is still alive today.

This exhibition, which includes documentary film, filmed interviews and a wealth of vibrant examples of his work, captures the innovation, power and range of Klein's work. He developed new methods of dyeing and weaving yarn, combining textiles that had never before rubbed shoulders — one example being velvet tweed — and introduced random dyeing, resulting in dynamic and unique colour combinations. He worked in and influenced many fields, including colour theory, fashion, fine art, tapestry weaving and interior design. The exhibition also documents Klein's commitment to making good design accessible and affordable in his move away from high fashion to the production of fabrics for home dressmaking, yarns for handknitting and the launch of his own mail-order catalogues.



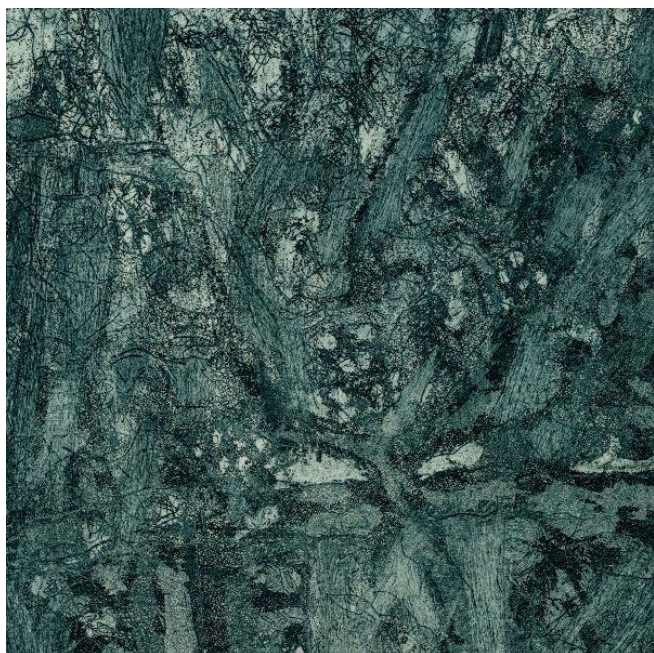
Bernat Klein's velvet tweed

* *'Bernat Klein'* is edited by Alison Harley and Mary Schoesser and published by the Bernat Klein Foundation 2022.

There's a talk on 'Refuge Britain: Stories of Émigré Designers' at the National Museum on 4 March 2023. To find out more about the exhibition, to buy the book, or book a place at the talk, go to: nms.ac.uk.

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Miriam Vickers on Show



Miriam Vickers, artist and Sukkat Shalom member has a print in The Scottish Society of Artists (SSA) Annual Exhibition. This piece, titled 'Back Green Lockdown Elder Tree' was inspired by what she saw from the window of her own flat during lockdown.

This year marks the 130th anniversary of the inaugural Society of Scottish Artists exhibition. They say: *to celebrate, we are taking a unique look at its vibrant history and showcasing a selection of works that have contributed to Scotland's artistic culture.*

The exhibition is in the Upper Galleries, The Royal Scottish Academy, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH2 2EL until 10 January 2023. Monday to Saturday 10-5pm, Sunday 12-5pm. [Back to top](#)

Liberal Jews for Justice in Israel/Palestine (LJJIP)

Maurice N aftalin



LJJIP is a grassroots organisation in Liberal Judaism, with no official status but with growing support within LJ — we now have members in around one-third of all LJ congregations. Our brief is to speak for social justice and human rights for Jews and Palestinians in Israel/Palestine. Our most recent event was late in November, when we organised a meeting on the issue of settlements and population displacement on the West Bank, attended remotely by more than 50 people.

There were three speakers at the meeting: first, Dror Etkes, an expert on Israeli land policies on the West Bank. He provided a very full overview of the processes by which the Israeli army and the settler movement continue to encroach on Palestinian land and to restrict Palestinians' civil rights, especially their freedom of movement and their ability to provide living space for their population.

The second speaker was Basel Adra, a journalist and activist who is one of more than a thousand people living in Masafer Yatta, a group of thirteen villages in the South Hebron Hills. The people of the South Hebron Hills have been under pressure for many years by the expansion of military training zones; earlier this year the High Court ruled that there are no legal barriers to the expulsion of the people of Masafer Yatta to make way for military training (for a historic summary see <http://t.ly/af0L>). Basel gave us a vivid description of the arbitrary and violent evictions and demolitions that the people of the area have suffered.

Our third speaker was Rabbi Mark Solomon, who spoke movingly of witnessing in person the immediate aftermath a house demolition in the South Hebron Hills. He concluded by citing the injunction from Deuteronomy against moving your neighbour's landmark or boundary. Of course, what we had learned from the previous speakers was that the enterprise of the occupation is focused entirely on moving the boundaries of Palestinian land, with the eventual aim of shrinking them to a few municipalities.

The speakers were followed by questions and discussion. Video of the speakers, accompanied by transcripts of their contributions, can be seen [here](#). For more information on LJJIP, please visit ljjip.org.

Interfaith News

Nick Silk

On 18th November I attended a "Religious Leaders Conference" hosted by the Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA). The theme of the conference was "Responding to the Cost-of-Living Crisis" and some 30 people attended. We heard from two speakers, Iain Johnston, the Director of Faith in Community Scotland, a community development charity working in some of Scotland's poorest communities, and Kate Polson, Chief Executive of The Rock Trust, Scotland's youth homelessness charity. Both speakers were really good, and while there was talk about how food banks and now warm spaces are needed, there was much concern — if not anger — that we have got to the state where this is the case.

There were two actions identified from the day. The first was that EIFA will try and help promote those faith communities which are already providing support to those in need,

such that members of smaller communities, like ourselves, can have an opportunity to help too.

The second action was to draw up a petition which members of faith communities can sign, asking for our elected representatives to take significant action to address the underlying problems. [This petition](#) has recently been launched and I would ask that you all sign it.

I'll conclude with two things which have stayed with me from the conference. The first is a quote from Iain Johnston, "*nothing about us is without us*". And the second is the story told by Kate Polson about how her charity actively campaigned for the emergency shelter in Edinburgh to be closed. This was because, while the shelter provided a service, the living conditions were poor, and in keeping it, the assumption was that those needing emergency shelter were being housed. By closing it, the action forced the issue such that better and longer-term accommodation was provided. [Back to top](#)

Island Hopping for Peace

Professor Joe Goldblatt

"So, who invented God anyway?" When a seven-year-old lassie asked me this question on the Orkney Island of Shapinsay I was, as we Scots say, gobsmacked. As I spoke about Judaism to over 500 children, in seven primary, junior and high schools, upon four islands over a period of five days, I received dozens of questions just as challenging as this one.

I began visiting the Orkney islands ten years ago when I was issued my senior bus pass. I was curious to see how far the then new golden ticket for Scottish transport would take me in my adopted bonnie land. On arriving in the magnetic north of our country, I discovered that whilst legally a part of Scotland the United Kingdom, the islands have their own individual culture, rhythms and values.

I was prompted to offer my services to local head teachers as a speaker on Judaism to help bring their religious, moral and philosophical education classes some genuine experiences from a man who has been a practising Jew throughout his entire life. To my surprise and delight, the teachers were enthusiastic and for many years I visited dozens of classrooms on the Main Island of Orkney in both Stromness and Kirkwall.

Last Spring my wife and I attended the annual Orkney Folk Festival in the Town Hall in Stromness and a very confident young woman came up to me at the post event reception and asked "*Where have you been?*" Recovering from my shock, I asked her



what she meant and she said she was a head teacher and she had not seen me in the Orcadian schools for a couple of years. I mentioned that due to the pandemic I thought perhaps that the schools needed a break from my services. Then she asked *"When are you coming back?"*.

A few weeks later I received a provisional schedule that would take me from Stromness to Rousay and then to Kirkwall, followed by visits to Shapinsay and the far northern isle of Sanday. On my first visit to a primary school in Stromness I performed a mock Jewish wedding where two teachers acted as the parents of the bride and groom and they role-played the negotiation of the dowry by arguing how many cows they would give for the privilege of the wedding to proceed. On an island where cows are not unfamiliar and precious in value these discussions grew heated until finally the bride's family accepted a grand total of 12 cows. At the end of the ceremony, as we lifted the tiny bride in a chair and the 120 children clapped along to the Jewish wedding song, I explained that I was not legally able to perform a wedding and the tiny six-year-old bride and groom smiled in relief.

My next travel by a small ferry from Tingwall to Rousay offered me a further taste of island life as the head teacher and a music specialist joined me for the 20-minute journey. The small 17-pupil school was immaculate and the creativity and learning taking place in the peedie (Orcadian for wee) classrooms was remarkable. One child whose parents owned a large farm asked me *"Do you have to be Jewish?"* persistently asking me *"What happens if you change your mind later?"* I explained that religion is like a tree with high and low branches. During one's life you may move from branch to branch. She then asked *"Where is your branch?"* I finally said *"I am on a low one."* She seemed satisfied with my answer as she smiled and nodded silently in agreement.

On my third day I returned to the Main Island and visited Scotland's third largest primary school in Kirkwall. Despite its size with over 500 students I was surprised by the level of silence and peacefulness I experienced in this large campus. The silence did not last long as the peedie bairns filed into the classroom and began to barrage me with their questions. *"What came first, God or the Earth?"* I then offered a scientific response (the Big Bang theory), a spiritual response (Adam and Eve), and even Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Survival of the Species.



My week-long journey concluded with a 48-hour visit to the islands of Shapinsay and Sanday. I learned that newcomers are most welcome upon these islands; however, resources for helping them acclimatise are scarce. According to one local leader, during the pandemic the island of Sanday experienced a 40% increase in population and schools and other services struggle to keep up with the demands of the newcomers who are mostly from England and

who are seeking a new and better way of life for themselves and their children.

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Mitzvah Day in Edinburgh: Sukkat Shalom and Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation Join Forces

Janet Munday (Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation)

At the start: Cairn the dog was a great help throughout!



For Mitzvah Day this year in Edinburgh, we chose to do a litter pick for the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. The Water of Leith is the main river running through Edinburgh, much loved by walkers, families and dog owners, and the Conservation Trust supports volunteers to deliver around 300 river clean-ups and habitat improvement tasks annually. As well as providing our Mitzvah Day activity this year, partnering with environmental

agencies such as this is a vital aspect of our Eco Synagogue commitments.

This was an excellent opportunity for volunteers from Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and Sukkat Shalom, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community, to work together, and we were very fortunate that the rain held off throughout the morning, after relentless downpours for several days. Amongst the litter items we found were wire, cigarette lighters and a frisbee.

Charlotte from the Conservation Trust told us that the Water of Leith will be featured on BBC's Winter Watch for 2 weeks from 16th January, so do watch if you can! [Backto top](#)

Jewish Book Week 25 February – 6 March 2023

Jewish Book Week promises a programme of 'over 80 talks, Q&As, musical performances, debates, workshops, staged readings and panel discussions' both in-person at King's Place, London and online. The programme seems to be being released in stages, with a handful of in-person events and just two online events advertised at the time of writing. Both look interesting and are free.

Golda Meir's Path to Power Wed 1 March 12pm. Biographer Pnina Lahav will talk about Israel's first and only female Prime Minister's recurring role as a woman standing alone among men, her complex relationship with feminism and the tensions between her personal and political identities.

Hannah Arendt & Isaiah Berlin: The Feud Thurs 2 March 10.30am on the full story of the conflict between two of the twentieth century's most important thinkers. Academic and author Kei Hiruta reveals how their profound disagreements continue to offer important lessons for political theory and philosophy.

For full information as it becomes available, and to book go to jewishbookweek.com and kingsplace.co.uk. [Back to top](#)

Shirei Nechama



Shirei Nechama ('Songs of Comfort') is a gentle, night-time Zoom experience created by Mich Sampson. It is 30 mins of music, readings and prayer based on the prayers in our siddur to be said just before going to sleep — prayers of protection, of setting aside things which have agitated us during the day, of letting go, and feeling comfort.

Attendees are welcome to listen with their camera on or off and use this as a time to wind down after a long day.

Please [register](#) to receive the Zoom link.

There is no charge for these monthly sessions, but if you'd like to gift Mich a cup of tea as thanks, see her [online tip-jar](#).

The next dates are: Monday 9 January, 8.30pm and Thursday 16 February, 8.30pm



Comfort from the night sky - see previous page

Community Care and Support

In these difficult times, we are here for each other, so don't hesitate to ask for any help and support you may need, including simply the need to talk.

OUR EXISTING CONFIDENTIAL CONTACT SYSTEM: Phone [0131 777 8024](tel:01317778024) or email contact@eljc.org and one of the small group of people who respond to calls and emails will get back to you quickly.

RABBI MARK SOLOMON would like you to know that he's available on [07766 141315](tel:07766141315) and by e-mail at marksolomon@btinternet.com if you'd like to talk to him.

OUR WHATSAPP GROUP allows people to be in direct contact with each other very quickly where help is needed. If you're not already on it and would like to be, email your mobile number to waadmins@eljc.org and ask to be part of the group. You must be a member or associate member of Sukkat Shalom to join.

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