

# Kol HaKehilah

Rosh HaShanah 5783/2022

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Forgiveness



# Our Father, Our King, We Have Sinned Before You

By Rabbi Joel Levy

One of the reasons why humanity started “doing” God(s) was so that its moral judgments could be experienced as coming from outside itself; in order to add substance to the feeling that moral failing (sin) really counts. People who try to take God seriously are not judged only by themselves or by society, but also by a God who stands before, after and above the chaotic morass of human concerns. And when they err, disappointing and hurting those closer and further away from themselves, they also hurt their relationship with God. What occurs in the human realm reflects upwards into the divine. Isaiah imagines a God who simply will not listen to His blood-splattered people (59: 2–3):

**ישעיהו 59**

ב כי אם עוונותיכם היו מבדלים,  
בינכם לבין אלהיכם;  
ונחטאותיכם הסתירו פנים מכם  
משמוע.  
ג כי כפיהם נגאלו בדם,  
ואצבעותיהם בעוון;  
שפתותיהם דברו שקר  
לשונם עולה תהנה.

**Isaiah 59**

2. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you that He will not hear.
3. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness.

Damaged relationships in the human and the divine realms require constant attention and repair. When the Jewish People chose repeatedly, over millennia, to dwell with God, they were also choosing to live with divine disapproval and the constant quest for God’s forgiveness. Jews both seek forgiveness and provide forgiveness

to others, but they also seek forgiveness from God. The need for God’s forgiveness hangs perpetually over our lives, never more so than during the high holydays.

It is a cliché that the Inuit have 50 words for snow. This somewhat criticised idea can be traced back to the anthropologist Franz Boas, who studied the life of the local Inuit people of Baffin Island, Canada, in the late 1800s as part of his post-graduate geography studies. He suggested that the Inuit’s intimate daily acquaintance with snow led to the development of a refined lexicon which matched their experience. The same might be said about Jews’ relationship with sin and forgiveness. We have multiple words for sin and forgiveness because we have so deeply embedded them in our lives. We have a complex, nuanced vocabulary for moral failure and the choreography of repair.

I would like to start our journey into the complexities of forgiveness with the most regularly recited blessing for forgiveness, the sixth of the nineteen blessings of the regular daily Amidah, a blessing that is said three times a day:

**סידור תפילה – שמונה אשרה**

קָלַח לָנוּ אֱבִינִי כִּי חָטָאנוּ.  
מָחַל לָנוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ.  
כִּי מוֹחֵל וְסוֹלֵחַ אַתָּה.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹי.  
חַנוּן הַמְרַבֵּה לְקַלַּח:

**Siddur – Daily Amidah**

Forgive us our father for we have sinned  
Pardon us our King for we have transgressed  
For You pardon and forgive  
Blessed are You YHVH  
The source of grace  
Who repeatedly forgives

Sin and forgiveness are a normal part of life. Offending, upsetting and disappointing people are as natural as breathing. Between reciting this blessing at

Shacharit in the morning and then repeating it at Minchah in the afternoon we have had plenty of time to cause hurt. Normal clumsy daily human interactions involve countless moments of micro-miscommunication and micro-repair.

The 13th century commentator on the siddur Rabbi David Abudraham understands the different terminology used in this blessing as follows:

**ספר אבודרהם שמונה עשרה**

קָלַח לָנוּ אֱבִינִי כִּי חָטָאנוּ  
עַל שֵׁם (מִיֵּא ח, ג)  
יִסְלַחַת לַעֲמֹךְ  
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא לְךָ.”

מָחַל לָנוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ,  
עַל שֵׁם (שֵׁם)  
יִוֹלַל פְּשַׁעֵיהֶם  
אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעוּ בְךָ.”

וְסוֹמֵךְ סְלִיחָה וְחֵטָא לָאב  
וּמְחִילָה וּפְשַׁע לַמֶּלֶךְ  
מִפְּנֵי שֶׁכָּל זְדוּנוֹת שְׁעוֹשֵׂה הַבֵּן  
דּוֹמוֹת לִפְנֵי הָאָב כְּשִׁגְגוֹת  
וְנִקְלִים יֵהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו לְסַלַּחַם  
כְּמוֹ שֶׁחָטָא נִקַּל מִפְּשַׁע.

וּלְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ  
דּוֹמוֹת שִׁגְגוֹת הַעַם כּוֹדוּנוֹת  
כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מִשְׁלֵי כט, ד)  
”מֶלֶךְ בְּמִשְׁפַּט יַעֲמִיד אֶרֶץ”  
וְלִכְּוֹן יֵשׁ לִוְמֵר לוֹ  
”כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ”

לְפִי שֶׁפָּשַׁע גְּדוֹל מִחָטָא,  
וּמְחִילָה יֵשׁ לְבַקֵּשׁ מִכָּל אָדָם  
הַמְקַפֵּיד וּמְדַקְדֵק עַל חֲבִירוֹ...  
וְלִכְּוֹן יֵשׁ לִוְמֵר לָאָב  
שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְקַפֵּיד וּמְדַקְדֵק כָּל כֶּךָ  
סָלַח לָנוּ  
כְּלוּמֵר  
שֶׁאִף הַקַּדְדָה מוֹעֵטֶת לֹא תִשָּׂא.

**The book of Abudraham on the Amidah**

**“Forgive us our father for we have sinned”**

On account of (1 Kings 8:50)  
“and You will forgive Your people who have sinned against You”

**“Pardon us our King for we have transgressed”**

On account of (1 Kings 8:50)  
“and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You”

And (the prayer) linked

“forgiveness” and “sin” with “father”  
And “pardon” and “transgression” with “king”  
Because all the intentional sins that a son does  
Seem before the father like unintentional ones  
And it is easy from his perspective to forgive them  
Just like “sin” is lighter than “transgression”

But before the king  
The unintentional sins of the nation seem like intentional acts as is said (Proverbs 29:4)

“The king by justice upholds the land”  
And therefore it is appropriate to say to Him

**“for we have transgressed”**  
since transgression [*pesha*] is worse than sin [*che*]

and “pardon” is what we request from anyone who is exacting and meticulous with someone...

And therefore it is appropriate to say to a father who is not so exacting and meticulous,

**“forgive us”**  
In other words that even the minimal meticulousness should not remain.

The blessing links “forgiveness”, “sin” and “father” together in the first line, and in the second line links together “pardon”, “transgression” and “king”. The Abudraham explains this as follows: that from the perspective of a father, every wrong act that a child performs is a *shbagah*, a simple mistake. The father is concerned for the child’s long term development, and sees all of their life as a process of growth. All of the child’s misdemeanours are viewed from that perspective. Since “all the intentional sins that a son does seem before the father like unintentional ones ... it is easy from his perspective to forgive them”. Parents forgive their children naturally. Our kids can behave terribly in the evening, and in the morning we awaken ready to offer them a clean slate and a new beginning: “that even the minimal meticulousness should not remain.” Forgiving our children often comes as easily as breathing.

Conversely, from the perspective of the king (or as we might say, the state), “the unintentional sins [or errors] of the nation seem like intentional acts”, because it is the primary job of the king to uphold and maintain order and structure: “The king by justice upholds the land.” Given the king’s job description and responsibilities, it is appropriate for the king to take our transgressions really seriously, not to write them off lightly. And so in the presence of the king it is right for us to request not “forgiveness” but “pardon”. We acknowledge the real nature of our transgression and seek merely to lessen our punishment – unlike the case with our children, where we do not offer “pardon” by commuting their sentences, but fully forgive them, letting go of their sins entirely.

The Abudraham is exploring here the terminology of *selichah* (forgiveness) and *mehilah* (pardon) by thinking about the different ways that we can relate to God. God is described as both a father and as a king, and sometimes as both together; as in “*Avinu Malkeinu – Our Father, Our King – we have sinned before You!*” The commentary here rejects the idea that some of our errors in life are intentional/serious and some are unintentional/light. Instead he proposes that it all depends on the perspective of the observer or victim. For the very same act I can seek either forgiveness or pardon, or both, appealing to God as father and king!

As we trundle clumsily through life, hurting those around us as a matter of course, repair is often a simple matter of a quick apology; forgiveness flows freely and we continue on our path. At other times the damage hits harder, the victim of our insensitivity shifts into a mode where they are “exacting and meticulous”, even if we never intended to hurt. In those cases the repair process becomes more formal, demanding and elaborate. We will need to read the world sensitively in order to know whether we are seeking forgiveness or pardon, and we will need to begin that whole process with a refined realisation of the damage that we have caused. ■

As we trundle clumsily through life, hurting those around us as a matter of course, repair is often a simple matter of a quick apology; forgiveness flows freely. At other times the damage hits harder.

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## What Does Forgiveness Mean?

By Chazan Jacky Chernett

What does forgiveness mean? I am trying to work it out.

We are in a time of preparation for the Yamim Nora'im, where we read, sing, hear, daven, *S'litchah, M'chilah, Kaparah...*

The English dictionary shows:

1. To cease to blame (someone or something);
2. To grant pardon for (a mistake etc);
3. To free (someone from penalty);
4. To free from the obligation of (a debt etc).

The thesaurus shows: absolve, accept (someone's) apology, acquit, bear no malice, condone, excuse, exonerate, let bygones be bygones, let off, pardon, remit. Of course, these are not all identical in meaning.

The great Yamim Nora'im include our asking, particularly on Yom Kippur, for forgiveness for our sins (there's another word that has multiple meanings!), on both an individual and a communal level. We do this three times a day, every day, six days a week, too. We read in the Memorial Prayer for the deceased: *En tsaddik ba'aretz asher ya'aseh tov v'lo yecheta* – there is not one person on earth who does only good and never sins. Each year – no, three times a day – we are drawn by our tradition to an awareness of our own failings. We ask forgiveness from those whom we are aware that we have upset, or even just think we might have upset.

But asking for forgiveness is different from forgiving. Is forgiving always possible? Is it unhealthy not to forgive?

Bearing grudges is never healthy and harms ourselves more than others. Sometimes someone does something serious

to upset us and we cannot find it in ourselves to forgive them. We can try to understand what happened in their own life that caused them to do what they did to us. Is that understanding enough to be called forgiveness? If they have never sought our forgiveness or were not even aware that they caused us pain, how can we forgive them? Maybe they are not alive anymore to even ask for our forgiveness, so the discussion can never take place, however painful it might have been.

### If we seek constant forgiveness for our own sins, who are we in our frailty not to have the capacity to forgive others?

Moreover, how can a survivor of Auschwitz, for example, forgive those who inflicted those heinous crimes on them? How can we as a people forgive those who oppressed, persecuted and murdered us? How can we as a people forgive those who oppress, persecute and murder anyone! Is it enough to say they were following orders? Or that they receive their "orders" from "God"! I hardly think so, and it is decidedly sacrilegious to even mention it. But there are people who have found it in themselves to forgive, for example, a person who has murdered a relative. How?!

So what IS forgiveness? Here are the dictionary definitions again:

"To cease to blame." Is that possible? Where the harm has been done the person has done it. That is a fact. How can we say we don't place blame on the actions of someone who has performed the painful act or acts? We can't always put it down to the social mores of the time or the difficulties the person(s) experienced in their own childhood. They have to take responsibility for their actions. Where does free will come into it?

"To grant pardon." Is that possible? Yes, if we think the harm done is such that it can be pardoned.

"To free someone from penalty." But maybe there is no penalty.

"To free from the obligation (of a debt)." If the debt is to us directly we can waive it if we wish.

In all these things we act as judge. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the judge is God. When someone dies we say *Baruch Dayan Ha'emet* – Blessed is the True Judge. God is the judge of human frailty, the creator of all life. Earthly judges keep society behaving as well as possible within human law; but when it comes to moral and ethical issues, God is the judge.

We go away at the end of Hoshana Rabba (there is a cooling-down period after Yom Kippur) hopefully absolved of our sins, provided we have done enough work on ourselves to try and understand what things we have done wrong and try to put them right – which means asking forgiveness from those we think we may have hurt.

But what about our forgiveness of people who have harmed us – where they have not sought forgiveness from us, and cannot even seek it? How can we accept an apology that was never made? Psychotherapists will say we should find it in ourselves to forgive the perpetrator of even a serious hurt in order to gain our own peace of mind and closure, even

when they did not seek it; that unless or until we are able to do this it harms us for all our lives. Do I think God will have forgiven the person or persons who have done these harmful things? I have no idea. Maybe they were contrite before their demise but never sought forgiveness from the people they hurt. We cannot know. But if they are alive there is always the possibility of discussing it with them, however difficult it might be.

What we do know is that we are all human with human failings. Our lives, short and frail, are full of complexities, and relationships can be fraught with difficulty.

Jewish tradition gives us a constant reminder. God is the judge and the one who forgives. Six days a week, three times a day, we read "*S'lach lanu Avinu ki chatanu, m'chal lanu Malkenu ki pash'anu, ki mochel v'sole'ach ata*" – "Forgive us our Father, for we have sinned. Pardon us our King, for we have transgressed; for You pardon and forgive." This is part of the daily Amidah, following the petition for knowledge, understanding and common sense, then the petition for an ability to do *t'shuvah* – repentance or coming back. It is not only on the Yamim Nora'im that our consciousness and awareness is drawn to the need for us to be forgiven for what we have done! Our tradition has filled us with the constant consciousness of the need to be aware, repentant and then forgiven.

So if we seek constant forgiveness for our own sins, who are we in our frailty not to have the capacity to forgive others?

Having said this, I still cannot see how it applies to murderers or crimes against humanity, which are crimes against God.

So I still come back to my original question. What does forgiveness mean? ■

## Some Things Cannot Be Forgiven

By Richard Wolfe

We often hear on the news of a parent saying that as a devout Christian, they forgive the murderer of their child. I can understand what the parent is implying, that he/she can then in some way move on, that it is part of their religious belief, but I find it incomprehensible. My reaction is one of cynicism; is that response genuine or just one they feel driven to say? There are some actions which I could never forgive, and forgiveness simply could not be part of my response. I am suspicious of anyone who says they can. There must be some things which are unforgivable. I would never forgive anyone who was responsible for the death of one of my daughters.

Christianity has a core belief that individuals must forgive the sins of others so that God may forgive them of their own sins. There is divine intervention both for the sinner and for the sinned against. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." That is rather problematic if God does not intervene in life on earth (Voltaire had something to say on that\*). For Christians, forgiveness comes through Jesus. Christians forgive by faith, out of obedience. They must trust God to do the work. A different belief system to mine.

We place great emphasis on *teshuvah* and we seek forgiveness for the wrongs we do. "Do not hate your brother in your heart." We can do that with the lesser transgressions, but with the murder of your child? As I would not forgive the perpetrator, before Yom Kippur or not, the perpetrator will not be forgiven. So the question is, where is the line drawn?

Georgia and I have had different feelings about taking German citizenship. We both accept that Germany has done much, more than many countries, to come to terms with the past and make

amends. I have no doubt that their post-war actions are in many ways sincere. We both are fully committed to Europe and despair at the UK vote to leave. I have many German friends. Since Brexit Georgia has taken German citizenship (and for our daughters, Ruth and Hannah), but I will not. There are sins at a national level which cannot be forgiven, and the Holocaust is one. The current German population has nothing or little to do with the past, but I cannot forgive the German state. I still have a problem with Spain ... family belief is that our family fled Spain in 1492, and the earliest family name in our *Stammbuch* (family record) is Spanish.

I recall listening to a Desert Island Discs program featuring Rabbi Hugo Gryn. He was asked whether he could ever forgive the Germans and Germany. His response was that it was not up to him to forgive; that was God's domain. He (in my view) obviously did not forgive, and perhaps should also have called the proverbial spade for what it was. Genocide can be seen as a sin against God, so it is indeed up to God to forgive. But it is also a sin against man, against my relations, against his, and even if the Germans as individuals truly repent for their past deeds, can the state repent for what the state did? Is the state in some way just paying "guilt money"? And so I will not forgive.

A non-Jewish friend who is staying with us, Martyn C., was at school with many Jews. Before Yom Kippur they would come to apologise to him for their ill deeds, coerce him to forgive them – and then immediately start again with the same behaviour. Martyn still remembers what his "forgiveness" meant.

As I'm a man, there are many things which upset me, but a good sulk is all I need to get over them. I move forwards, but not always, and for some things I shall take my comprehensive lack of forgiveness to the grave.

I was recently asked whether I forgave EMS for their casting us out. Nothing to forgive. They did me a service. Perhaps I should go and thank them. ■

\* For those who might not remember: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."

## Seeking Meaning in Forgiveness

By Ruth Hart

About a decade ago, around this time, I was a guest at an ecumenical conference on forgiveness. The most vivid memory I retain was the consensus that, just as fairly simple and common English words mean different things in different parts of the Anglosphere, and are ripe for comedic or tragic misinterpretation, so do fairly common theological terms used in the monotheistic faiths, except that they are rarely so simple. It is probably obvious to everybody reading this that such terms as sin, atonement, repentance and forgiveness (let alone heaven, hell, redemption and salvation, which are not part of this essay but were among the examples which appeared at the conference) acquire various layers of meaning as they wander (or, perhaps, err, in archaic English) from Hebrew via Greek and Latin to academic English (or whatever language you speak, particularly if your mother tongue also had a mother empire), and hence to the language of the common man or woman.

If we consider only *selicha* – in modern Hebrew, “excuse me” or “do you mind”\* – we can see that although we were trained to say “sorry” from infancy, sorry does not mend it but it may explain it. The word *selicha* also means forgiveness, so perhaps we think that having uttered it, we deserve it, or at least it will get us a more lenient punishment. Subconsciously, this may be what public figures expect when they mouth the performative words in the hope of saving their marriages and careers. This kind of performance art is more akin to magic than *teshuvah*, so, while the rest of us may enjoy the show, we don’t believe our eyes or our ears. Those of us who are serious about seeking forgiveness (from God or other people) know that ordering the people we wronged to “move on” is not a substitute for chang-

ing our behaviour, and those who are serious about granting it should not remind the offender how magnanimous we are being.

If we want *selicha* from God, it is only fair to point out that it is not long since Tisha b’Av, when presumably the boot was on the other foot and we extended *selicha* to God if we were so inclined. Perhaps Abraham and Isaac entertained similar thoughts on their separate return journeys from Mount Moriah.

Le-shana tova tikatevu. ■

\*We won’t even get to *teshuvah* or *kaparab* on this page!

## “Know Before Whom You Stand”

By Daniel Borin

The prayers of Yom Kippur alternate between confessions of sin and pleas for forgiveness. All this intense breast-beating and grovelling surely has its limits. In what way do we feel better at the end of it? What greater awareness have we come to? Certainly there is satisfaction at having committed our time and suppressed all our usual desires for a whole 25 hours, and having done so in the company of our community.

Personally I am more moved and motivated by the slogan, written over the Ark in so many shuls, “Know before whom you stand”.

That simple phrase gives us total responsibility; we become both observer and observed, judged and judge. Before whom do we stand? We KNOW – or at least we are prompted to imagine. And if we keep that thought in mind, whyever would we want to offend ourselves by

hurtful or destructive behaviour against our friend or neighbour?

When we say “Ashamnu, bagadnu...” I have to think of A. A. Milne’s poem concerning the adult obsession with children being “good”:

Well, what did they think that I went there to do?

And why should I want to be bad at the Zoo?

—A.A. Milne, “The Good Little Girl”

“Know before whom you stand” is a message for the individual. Yom Kippur is very much about collective responsibility while not forgetting the tendency of the individual (e.g., Jonah) to run away from personal responsibility. Not for nothing do we say Ashamnu sometimes silently and sometimes aloud; sometimes as an individual and sometimes as a group – to remind ourselves that it is the same person who mumbles by himself and who sings with the community. But we need some help to make that connection. It is the music and the poetry and the rhythm and the repetition ... *Selach lanu, M’chal lanu, Kaper lanu* ... which bring us together, merging ourselves in the sea of kehillah and reaffirming what we never really forgot: “All Israel Are Responsible One for Another” (*Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh*). ■



From the Kol Nefesh tapestries: Parashat Abarei Mot. For more, see the articles by Gilead Limor (p. 7) and Meira Ben-Gad (p. 8).

## Of (Scape)Goats and Men Or the Art of Symbolically Casting Away Sin

By Gilead Limor

Our focus over the Yamim Noraim is (or should be) our *chesbbon nefesh*, our personal reckoning. We should be taking a deep look inwards at our self, soul, spirit and person, seeking where we fell short of our standards or expectations, and finding ways to improve – paths to personal forgiveness and redemption, so to speak. I also feel that the Yamim Nora’im services themselves should be seen from a metaphorical and symbolic angle, where the content of the liturgy should be an accessory to its spirit. A space where we – as congregants – find the parts of the service that resonate with us, and use them to channel our personal prayer, meditation or inner space, and find the answers we seek, from within.

In reality, and certainly in the present day, our focus during these Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur in particular, has waned somewhat, and become a much more materialistic and superficial ritual of asking forgiveness from our family, friends and community, and granting ours to them in return, wishing all to be inscribed in the book of life at the close. I feel that while this practical approach is much easier for people to grasp (or “fulfil the requirement”), the cost for this materialisation is that many of us have lost touch with the deeper essence of the High Holydays, and what we can gain from the profound experience of becoming immersed in a part of the service.

When we look at the expansive liturgy for the High Holydays, much of it speaks of ritual that we no longer have the capacity to practice. We no longer have a temple or tabernacle, we no longer perform sacrifices, and indeed our society has changed so much in 3500 or so years, that we no longer feel much of an affinity with our ancestral community. So we stumble across the words in our Machzor, not quite sure what to make of them, and promise ourselves to be better this coming year, because that is what is ex-

pected of us. What we are losing is the art of recognising metaphor within the liturgy, and using it to find deeper meaning on a personal level.

One section of the Yom Kippur service stands out as being particularly descriptive: the reconstruction of the service of the Cohen Gadol. I find this section rather difficult to metaphorise as every step is described in graphic detail, leaving the imagination very little space. Ironically, though, one of the central parts of this service is probably the most profoundly metaphorical throughout the entire Days of Awe: the he-goat for Azazel. I like to think of this goat as the prototype scapegoat: all the sins of the Israelite community are symbolically transferred to it via the High Priest’s hands, before an assigned Cohen leads it out into the wilderness and ultimately pushes the poor creature down a ravine to its demise, taking all the community’s sins with it. It doesn’t get more metaphorical than that.

I began this article with the intention of exploring the concept of scapegoat, but I soon discovered that one cannot study the scapegoat without delving a bit into the world of its namesake, the domestic goat. We don’t get to see many goats in England (their population is estimated at 100,000), but for those of us who grew up living on the cusp of the Judean Desert, goats were never too far away.

Goats are fascinating creatures. We tend to regard them as just another species of domestic livestock, but there is much more to them than that. The goat is one of the oldest domesticated species, having first become a farm animal 10,000 years ago. Goats are social animals, they will bond with humans, and will try to communicate with people in similar ways to dogs and horses. A goat’s usefulness to humans is particularly comprehensive: during life as a sustainable source of milk, manure and fibre, and later as meat and hide. A goat’s intestine can be used for violin strings and surgical sutures; goat

horns can be carved out as spoons or other utensils, or as shofarot. Goats have a fascinating ability to climb almost vertical mountain faces and trees!

Goats have a curious nature, and appear to eat almost anything. While they are a bit more discerning than we think, a lot of what goes in their mouth will travel through their digestive system. I find this point particularly fascinating: the goat eating pretty much anything can be seen metaphorically as absorbing anything directed at it, say for example the collective sins of Bnei Yisrael; you can see where I am taking this.

Let’s go back in time a few millennia. The goat is mentioned many times in the Torah, as it comprises a part of a typical Israelite household and livestock. It is referred to by seven different names: *ez* or *izza* (m. and f. respectively); *attud*, *tsafir*, *sa’ir* and *tayish* (for male goats); *g’di* or *g’diyah* (for kids); and more generically, *seh* (meaning sheep or goat) and *tzon* (a generic term to differentiate small livestock from the larger *bakar* – cattle). In most instances, the goat is mentioned in the context of sacrifice, though goat kids were also considered a prime delicacy when a distinguished guest came to visit. However, goat husbandry in the Israelite community went far beyond that. Goats’ milk was popular, goat skin was used for clothing and garments, while goat hair was woven into tent coverings and curtains, and used as stuffing for cushions. It is fair to say that goats were an important part of ancient Israelite community life.

However, the most bizarre use for a goat within the Israelite community comes in Leviticus 16: the he-goat that is chosen by lot to be sent to Azazel, symbolically carrying the sins of the Israelites: our prototype scapegoat.

As noted, a goat will eat everything, or at least appear to do so, and symbolically

Continued on page 23.

## S'lach Lanu, M'chal Lanu, Kaper Lanu: A Yom Kippur Thesaurus

By Meira Ben-Gad

*V'el kulam eloha s'lichot – S'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu.* Or as it's often translated, “For all of these, God of forgiveness – forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.” So we recite over and over on Yom Kippur, during our communal confession. The three verbs are so linked in our minds that we come to treat them as synonymous: three different ways of saying “Forgive us; wipe the slate clean.” But are they the same in meaning? And is “wipe the slate clean” what they mean?

My area of interest is the Bible, and so it's to the Bible that I turn naturally for insight into the distinction between *s'lach*, *m'chal*, and *kaper*. Here, it is a surprise to find that neither the verb *machal* nor its noun *mechilah* appear in the Bible at all. (There's a *mechilah* in the book of Isaiah which means a kind of cave or pit, and which seems to come from the verb *chalal* in its meaning of bore or pierce.) My Even-Shoshan dictionary links *machal* to the verb *machab*, which means erase (like the verb *machak* in modern Hebrew). So *machal* might mean, then, to erase the wrongdoing or hurt. But erasure is almost never complete: it nearly always leaves a sign hinting at what was there, however hard to read. So, too, forgiveness cannot ever fully erase the sin; but it allows for a rewriting of the damaged relationship – the creation of a new shared story.

What about *s'lach* and *kaper*? The former seems generally to mean “forgive” in our modern sense. At this time of the Yamim Nora'im, the obvious illustration to choose (from among many biblical examples) is Numbers 14: 18–20. This excerpt begins with the words of Moses, seeking God's forgiveness for the people after God threatens to destroy them following the debacle of the twelve spies. (All translations come from the JPS 1917 edition, with slight modifications.)

18. “The LORD is slow to anger, and plenteous in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression

[*noseh avon v'fasha*], though not clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.

19. “Pardon, I pray Thee [*S'lach-na*], the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Thy loving-kindness, and as Thou hast forgiven [*nasata*] this people, from Egypt even until now.”

20. And the LORD said: “I have pardoned according to thy word” [*Salachti ki-d'varecha*].

Does this mean absolute forgiveness, wiping the slate totally clean? The text is in some respects ambiguous. The parallel term to *s'lach* in verse 19 is *nasah*, “lift up”, which in the previous verse is spelled out for us as *noseh avon v'fasha* – “lifting up iniquity and transgression”, which suggests removal of the sin. Yet in our text, God's forgiveness extends only so far as to not destroy the people utterly; they will still be punished by being forced to wander in the wilderness until the sinful generation dies out. Forgiving doesn't mean forgetting; the guilty are never fully cleared. We're back to the limits of erasure, this time with biblical endorsement.

*Kaper* is the most interesting of the three terms. In the Bible, Yom Kippur – or Yom HaKippurim – isn't about (or at least mainly about) personal reflection. It entails a series of ritual performances designed to restore symbolic order in a world beset by the forces of chaos, both external (death and decay) and internal (wrongdoing, immorality, sin). *Kaparab* is a general cleansing performed for the community as a whole, not the specific individual sinner. Consider the ritual of the two goats described in Leviticus chapter 16, perhaps the focal point of the biblical Yom Kippur. One goat is slaughtered as a sin offering, while the other is sent off into the wilderness (this is the so-called scapegoat, illustrated by

Gilead Limor on the cover of this publication):

21. And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness.

The full Yom Kippur ritual has a number of constituent parts, each intended to atone for one element of the community or its sacred space: for the *koben gadol* (high priest), his household, and all the assembly of Israel; for the *kodesh* (“holy place”), the Tent of Meeting, and the altar. Those performing the ritual (and the people as a whole) must be in the right mental state for the ritual to work; but being in the right mental state is not in itself sufficient.

For another example, consider the ritual prescribed to avert bloodguilt if a victim of homicide is found in an open field, and the killer is unknown (Deut. 21). Here it is even clearer that *kaparab* is performed not for the sinner, but for the community, which would otherwise remain in a state of symbolic moral pollution:

8. “Forgive [*kaper*], O LORD, Thy people Israel, whom Thou hast redeemed, and suffer not innocent blood to remain in the midst of Thy people Israel.” And the blood shall be forgiven [*nikaper*] them.

Of the three terms, *kaper* seems to be the one that allows for the fullest, most complete expiation of sin (though with the recognition that further *kaparab* will always be needed; “sin crouches at the door”). Perhaps ironically, it is also the one whose original meaning and emotional import are most lost to us today. ■

## Saying Sorry

By Georgia Kaufmann

For the last two years or so I have been addicted to Korean television series, aka K-drama. As far as my highly esteemed husband is concerned this is an unforgiveable sin. For my part I feel no need to apologise. I find the insight into such a different culture through the lens of television endlessly fascinating. One of the differences that I have noticed is the Korean approach to apologising. Apologies are not a distinctive feature of American or British TV series, and certainly not of *Shtisel* or any other Israeli drama that I have watched. But in the world according to K-drama, whenever the social order is unbalanced, even in quite minor ways, it elicits an apology. Minimally, the offender bows their head and says with respect *joesonghamnida* or *mianhamnida*, if the offender has lower status; *joesongbaeyo* or *mianbaeyo*, if the parties' social status is more equal; or *mianbae*, if the relationship is informal. If the offence is grave the apology may involve kneeling, kowtowing and even prostrating (in period films set in the Joseon or Goryeo dynasties).

It has taken a while for what this means and how it differs from our culture of apology and forgiveness to percolate. I cannot think of a single instance, of the many apologies in K-drama that I have seen, where the other character responds with anything much at all, let alone a statement of reconciliation and forgiveness. I am aware that I am just watching a representation of Korean society, but there is evidently something quite different going on. In part, the difference is related to the nature of the social order and the difference between Western and Eastern culture.

For us, coming from the Judaeo-Christian culture, we focus on individual guilt and individual injury. On Yom Kippur, we collectively seek forgiveness for the sins and offences we collectively committed, but ultimately each individual's name is written down before the Gates close. Christians face their own sins, confess in the Catholic faith, and

bear the guilt and punishment individually. The sequence of events is: sin, confess, apologise, and then face punishment or forgiveness. It is the guilt for the misdeed that the offender has to grapple with; forgiveness or absolution is the gift of the victim(s) of the offence. Guilt is an internal emotion and struggle of the individual; being internal it can easily be ignored or denied.

Korea, like China and Japan, is a Confucian society. The collective is more important than the individual; hierarchy and order are considered to be the constituents of society. Breaking with harmony or hierarchy, or any other such transgression against the body politic, is enough to elicit a public apology. Apologies are not discrete acts between two individuals but are public, because it is not guilt (an internal emotion) that drives the offender but shame. Shame is public and can only be experienced with reference to others, whose harmony was disrupted by the offender's words or actions. In Confucian terms the process of an apology should start with identifying the misdemeanor, feeling remorse, promising to endure, and offering to repair. There is no expectation of forgiveness. There is no guilt in the sense we know it. The Confucian approach leads to greater collaboration, greater reconciliation, but depends on hierarchy maintaining harmony. By acting wrongfully and then apologising, the offender takes and bears public shame, i.e. loses face. Being ashamed is not the same as guilt, and there is no let up in it until reparations are made.

This is perhaps the essential difference. Forgiveness entails just that – absolving the guilt, forgiving the guilt. It behoves the offended party to forgive the offender. Shame, however, rests on the offender. Nothing the offended person can do or say removes that. It is only the sense of shame itself that can lead to its own relief, by impelling the offender to improve him/herself and not repeat the offence.

In Korea, China and Japan, public officials, well-known businesspeople and other public figures have bowed down to the ground and apologised. They have literally grovelled. It is seen as a necessary act. Here in the West, where shame has been spurned as psychologically damaging, and is no longer applied as a form of social control, unsurprisingly some of our politicians – like Johnson and Trump – have become shameless. If an individual lacks sufficient personal integrity and moral compass to avoid guilt through self-control, in the absence of shame there is no hope of controlling them.

I am still grappling with this, but I think what I am trying to tentatively argue is that our society has become like a therapeutic community. We feel bad about something we did, we own up to it, the act of self-ownership and insight is considered to be the same as contrition, and we expect to be forgiven. In the Confucian model, we would just bow down and apologise and live sincerely trying to repair the damage while carrying our shame.

Shame is a disturbing notion to embrace as a social good. For generations, shame has been used to control and coerce people. It kept women sexually and socially constrained, it forced non-binary, non-heterosexual people into lives of secrets, lies and danger. But a society where there is no shame is a society where Presidents of the USA can talk about grabbing pussy and gain votes. All cultures evolved ways to soft-police cultural norms. Guilt and forgiveness, apology and shame both achieve the same end: harmony. Too much of one, and too little of the other, are destructive.

By the way, if you want to see the best of K-drama, there's lots to choose from. But for the interplay of hierarchy and harmony with rising individualism and lots of genuflecting, I highly recommend *Something in the Rain* on Netflix. ■

## Forgiveness in Frankfurt

By Danny Kalman

The following article was published in the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) journal in August 2022. (I am a Trustee of the AJR.) The article has been adapted slightly from its original version.

I can't forgive those directly responsible for the Holocaust. Interestingly, my father never expressed ill feeling towards the subsequent generations of German people, or indeed Germany as a country. In fact he visited Germany on several occasions after the war and kept in regular contact with several old school friends. This attitude influenced my view of Germany to the extent that I am applying for a German passport. Through this act I feel I am reclaiming the citizenship of Germany that was taken away from my family in 1939.

I appreciate that other people will have a different viewpoint; and I know of some who would never visit Germany or even buy German products.

So, yes, I have forgiven Germany and its people. But I will never forgive those who perpetrated the Holocaust.

On Wednesday June 8th 2022 my brother and I met at Heathrow Airport to catch a flight to Frankfurt. We had been invited as guests of the City because our father Henry (formerly Hans) had been born there; he was lucky to escape in April 1939 (aged 16) with his younger brother Eric (formerly Erich) on the Kindertransport.

They arrived in England and were met at Liverpool Street station by a relative who had acted as their sponsor (guaranteeing £50 for each of them). She took them to her home in Sheffield. Fortunately their parents also escaped to England in July 1939, a matter of just a few weeks before the war started.

The city of Frankfurt has been inviting people born there to return to the city since the 1980s. They subsequently extended the invitation to their children. I

understand that Frankfurt is now the only German city which continues to invite (at its own expense) "second-generation Frankfurters".

Due to Covid our visit was delayed for two years but it was worth the wait! In preparation for the visit my brother and I received many emails requesting information about our family. In return we were given a detailed itinerary for our seven-day stay. This confirmed that all costs would be covered by the City of Frankfurt, including local travel and visits to museums. We were allowed a researcher who would identify all available records of the Kalman family (formerly spelt Kallmann).

We were told that we would be part of a group of 42 people travelling from the USA, Argentina, Israel, Sweden, France and the UK. My brother (who lives in Jersey) and I were the only ones from the UK. Many of the second generation were accompanied by their spouses and in a few cases by their children. However my brother and I decided that we would like to experience this momentous week together (it was the first time we had spent a week together since we were children in Sheffield).

As soon as we arrived at the hotel the participants on the programme met each other for the first time. During the meeting everyone had the opportunity to briefly share their family stories. It was extremely interesting to listen to them – so many amazing stories! Each one had a family member who had escaped from Frankfurt, albeit in many and varied ways and at different times.

A lot of thought went into the itinerary – a bus/walking tour of the historic centre; a visit to the renovated Jewish Museum; an invitation to a Friday night and Shabbat service at the beautiful Westend Synagogue; a traditional Friday night dinner and Shabbat lunch at Sohar's kosher restaurant; a visit to the remaining Jewish cemeteries where many of the partici-

pants' families are buried; and a visit to Frankfurt's Jewish school (the Philanthropin). Our father attended the Philanthropin for several years, as did his younger brother. It was closed by the Nazis in 1938 and reopened in 1968, primarily as a Jewish school. Our visit also featured a civic reception hosted in the historic Town Hall by local dignitaries, which included music, speeches, and drinks followed by a dinner.

There are three particular memories that I would like to share, as they made an indelible impression on both of us.

First, our researcher, Doris, found the addresses where our family had lived and took us to those places. We stood outside the apartment block in which they stayed between 1936 and 1939. We decided to ring the bell of one of the apartments in the building, and to our delight a young couple answered. They kindly invited us into their 3rd-floor flat, which they had purchased four months prior to our visit. They both spoke excellent English and they had recently returned home to Germany after living in London for seven years. They were genuinely interested and excited to hear that our family had lived there in the 1930s (I had documents to show them which substantiated this claim). The woman was a history teacher at a Frankfurt school and teaches the period covering the Holocaust. She invited us to her school so that we could tell our story to her pupils.

Danny (right) and his brother Mehryn at the Kindertransport memorial in Frankfurt.



The second striking memory was visiting the new Kindertransport memorial that is located near the main railway station. It is a children's roundabout but as a symbol of what it represents it hardly moves at all. Looking at this wonderful memorial, one of the programme's participants asked me how our father had managed to get travel permits for his parents to come to the UK. As I began to speak a crowd gathered, and telling our father's story was a very emotional experience.

The third memorable experience was visiting a school that had been selected by the organisers of the programme. My brother and I were taken to the school by several of its students. Around 25 students (aged 16–18) had been selected as they were working on a history project and they could speak English. They had been well prepared by their teacher and

were asked to write down questions in advance of our visit. I spoke for around 45 minutes about our family, sharing what had happened to them, followed by a lively Q&A session – the two hours spent together flew by. We also had the opportunity to ask them questions about their families. We asked if they had ever discussed the Holocaust with their parents or grandparents. It was interesting to note that about half of them had parents who were not born in Germany. The students were interested that I had decided to apply for a German passport. They asked how our father had felt about his early life in Germany before he was forced to escape to save his life. They also wanted to know about our impressions of Germany.

My brother and I have decided to arrange a stolperstein (pavement memorial) out-

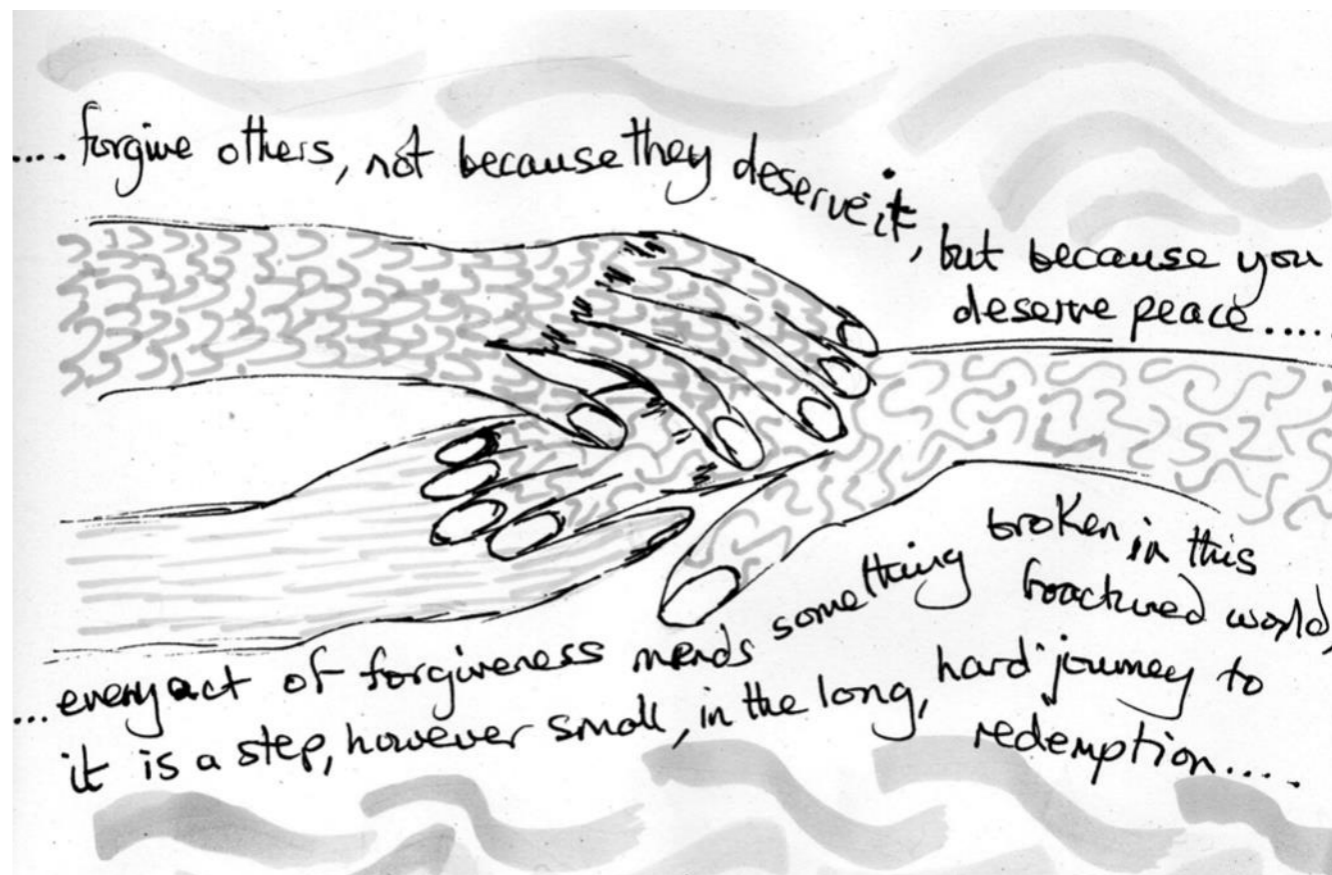
side the property we visited where our family lived before fleeing to the UK. We hope to return to Frankfurt sometime in late 2023 with our families for the ceremony.

Visiting Frankfurt has been an important and positive occasion for both of us. It has given us a far deeper understanding of our father's early life. We sincerely appreciate what the city of Frankfurt has done and continues to do to allow later generations to visit the birth city of their family members and get a sense of the lives they led there.

We would like to thank the organisers, the researchers, and the city of Frankfurt for their wonderful and genuine support in making our memorable trip a reality. We are already looking forward to our next visit. ■

## Forgiveness

Artwork by Hila Bram



## Memories, Realities, and Forgiveness

By Melanie Kelly

Earlier this year I had the privilege of being a participant on this year's March of the Living (MOTL). The March of the Living takes place (usually) annually around the period of Yom HaShoah, immediately after Pesach. This is a four-day trip to Poland in which participants learn about the rich history of Polish Jewry, culminating in the March itself – a three-kilometre walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau. The March is one of defiance and commemoration. We as a people were never supposed to survive, and during the period of the Shoah, hardly anyone who undertook the journey from Auschwitz, a concentration camp, to Birkenau, its associated death camp, did survive. That we can now walk from one to the other and then walk out again is never to be taken lightly. This was the first time the March had taken place since the pandemic. Usually, large groups of young people from across the Jewish world, and non-Jews with particular interest, gather together for the culminating March, many groups almost literally flying into Poland and out again, sometimes as a stop-off on their way to Israel. In previous years there have been upwards of 12,000 people taking part. This year

we were a select group of about 4,000; there were no representatives from the United States, who were still Covid-restricted.

It was my first visit to Poland. My paternal grandfather was Polish. I never met him; indeed, I'm named in his memory. He died when my father was about 8 years old, and due to the power of the brain to cauterise pain and trauma, my father claimed to have no memories of him. We believed the family was from Lublin, but recent evidence shows that many of the family ended up in the Warsaw Ghetto during the war. It may be that we had family in both locations, and my grandfather could have been from either. He died before the war, in 1938, and although my grandmother tried to keep in contact, once the war closed in, all connections were severed, and we knew no more. My father tried to return to Poland in the 1950s to see what he could find. By this stage he had completed his National Service, and when applying for a visa was told firmly that it was very unwise. As the son of a Polish citizen with military experience, there was every chance he would immediately be conscripted on entering Poland and it would be very difficult for him to get out.

The Poles considered him a Pole by heritage. My father's attitude, which I remember him talking to me about, was "they killed my family, they want to imprison me, a plague on them, we're not going and shouldn't have anything to do with them." My mother felt very much the same about Germany and Austria, along with Poland. Although her family was not from any of those places (they were mostly Dutch and Russian), she felt that there was no room for forgiveness. The hideousness of the Shoah impacted the whole of these societies. There could be no going back, and as Jews, we should avoid and snub all opportunities.

For many of these reasons, I had always shied away from the Holocaust, and as an educator avoided teaching the subject. I didn't consider myself enough of an expert, and felt reluctant to improve my own knowledge if this would mean having to visit the camps. Over the years as I've had the privilege of hearing from more and more survivors, I gradually realised this was a journey I needed to make, however difficult. I was supposed to go on MOTL in 2020, but this was the first opportunity post-pandemic. I spoke to my mother about it before her death at the beginning of March, and she'd finally started to understand my need to go and given me her blessing.

The thing that attracted me to the MOTL approach was that it wasn't an educational trip just about the Shoah, but also focused on the 1000 years of Polish Jewish history that preceded it. Those of us who trace their families to Poland were very likely to have a history there stretching far longer than we've lived in the UK. For much of that time life in Poland was okay. We can't argue it was good, but it was certainly no worse than other places and for many centuries better than most. At a time when Jews were being expelled from England in 1290, they were living safely in Poland!

The trip started in Warsaw at the Polin Museum, a large museum in the centre of

the city dedicated to the history of Polish Jews. We were restricted in our time, but it was fascinating. We then walked around Warsaw seeing the small curbside memorials to heroes and events in the war. One that struck me particularly was the memorial to Janusz Korczak, the Jewish Polish writer and educator known for insisting on accompanying children from his orphanage to the Treblinka extermination camp despite being offered sanctuary by a Polish underground organization. He has always been a personal hero and inspiration to me in my work and I was very moved to see the memorial to him. However, what I remember most is a father and son walking past. The son was young, 6 or 7 years old, and said to his father in English something like, let's stop, they're speaking English. The father replied in Polish something I didn't understand but which included the word *Zyd* (Jew), which was chilling.

The trip left me with overwhelming impressions of many aspects of Poland I hadn't previously appreciated. Much of the time I was confronted by the horrific contradictions between my knowledge of the Holocaust and prior understanding of Poland, and the reality on the ground. Situations in war are never easy, and I learnt a new appreciation for those Poles who did help Jews. Poland was the only country in the occupied territories where helping Jews was an automatic capital offence. Other occupied countries would have collaborators imprisoned, which would of course be horrific, but there wasn't an automatic understanding that it would lead to their deaths. Nevertheless, the Polish attitude to the Holocaust and their failure to accept any responsibility was also challenging. It is now illegal in

Poland to teach or speak about the Shoah as a Jewish genocide, or something that the Poles were in any way complicit in, which we know is a distortion of the truth. It was personally challenging for many of us on the programme to listen to the guides at Auschwitz talk about the Shoah as a purely Polish tragedy.

The most overwhelming challenge to my understanding of contemporary Polish life and the Shoah related to its geography. Poland is a massive country, with vast tracts of land between isolated villages that still look very much like the shtetls of our folklore. However, despite this excess of land, beside every camp or mass gravesite we visited we'd also find modern buildings abutting what was for us sacred space. Often these were new homes for families with gardens containing children's toys and trampolines. We'd be marching past in solemnity and the children would be playing in their gardens. How or why a family would choose to bring their children up in these environments is still something I'm confronted by. The contrast was stark and jarring.

On my return to London, within a few weeks I saw an announcement that the first Stolperstein was to be laid in London. Stolpersteine, or "stumbling stones", are part of the world's largest Holocaust memorial or art project. Started by a German artist, Gunter Demnig, in 1992, they commemorate the former home or last known homes of victims of the Holocaust. They are often found in cities around mainland Europe, but there had never been one here in the UK, primarily because mainland Britain had never been occupied by the Nazis. There are now some 75,000 of these small brass plaques

in over 20 countries. I went to the unveiling, in Golden Square, Soho, and the memorial was to a young art conservator living in London who tried to return to her family in Holland to aid their escape. Ultimately, they were all captured and only a brother survived. Ada van Dantzig was killed in Auschwitz in February 1943. Demnig, speaking ahead of the unveiling, said "A person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten. With this Stolperstein, Ada van Dantzig's name, inscribed into the urban landscape of Soho, will be remembered."

This finally brings me back to the issue of forgiveness. I don't think it's in our power to forgive something as large as the Holocaust. All we can do is come to some sort of acceptance, continue to learn and then to teach. We ask God for forgiveness, but in this case we probably feel more anger than anything towards God, and so who are we asking forgiveness for? Alternatively, it's about commemoration and memorialisation. It's about taking responsibility for our actions and the actions of people in our world. It's about being courageous in confronting truths we may not have direct responsibility for, and not ducking away from these challenges. I really don't have the answers here. My trip and the Stolperstein event have been a constant part of my thoughts since my return. I suspect I'll go back to Poland again and will not be so reticent to engage with Holocaust education and memory, but beyond that I'll see what opportunities present themselves. My parents could never forgive, and I'm not sure I can either, but I am keen to engage more in conversations and see where that leads. ■

Below: The Stolperstein commemorating Ada van Dantzig, photographed during the unveiling ceremony in Golden Square, Soho.

Right: A plaque Melanie left on the tracks of Auschwitz-Birkenau during the March of the Living, commemorating her family lost there.



### Honey for a Sweet New Year....

We're pleased to be able once again to deliver a gift of honey with this edition of the magazine. Huge thanks to the anonymous sponsors who have helped bring some sweetness into our homes for the past three Yamim Nora'im.

Julie Parker, our supplier, has been keeping bees across North and Central London for over 15 years. Her raw honey is hand-extracted, filtered and bottled. It carries the flavours of pollen and nectar from local flowers and trees. Nothing is added except the bees' hard work! Email [julieparkerbees@gmail.com](mailto:julieparkerbees@gmail.com).

Shana tova u-metukah!





# Community News

## Mazal Tov...

... To **Andrea Grahame** on the birth of a first grandchild, Fleur Essie Marie, daughter to Chloe & Robin Bernard-Grahame.

... To **Paul & Ros Collin** on the birth of their second grandchild, Poppy Hannah, daughter to Jason & Katie, a sister for Rafi.

... To **Jordan Marsh** on her engagement to David Maskill. Mazal tov too to parents **Marc Shoffren & Shelley Marsh** and sister **Eden**.

... To **Howard Feldman** and the Feldman/Fenster clan on the marriage of Leah Feldman & Alex Falkingham.

... To **Michael Shapiro** on his election as Master of one of the City of London livery companies, The Worshipful Company of World Traders, from October for one year. He is believed to be the first Jewish Master of this company.

... To **Daniel Burns** and **Miki Friend** on their graduation from university. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavours. Special congratulations to Miki as she begins a year as the Kol Nefesh NOAM movement worker!

... To **Hannah Kaufmann Wolfe** on receiving a BSc in Global Health as part of her medical studies.

... To **Eden Marsh Shoffren, Einav Diamond-Limor** and **Misha Sharpe** on completing A-levels. We wish them luck and joy in all their future endeavours.

... And to all the young people who finished GCSEs last year, as they begin A-levels, college, or apprenticeships.



*Clockwise from top left: Fleur, Jordan & David, Daniel, Miki, Eden, Einav.*

## Welcome to New & Returning Members!

**Margaret & Brian Levan**  
**Claudia Allen**

### Condolences

To **Hila Bram** on the death of her mother, Elizabeth Swerdlow.

To **Nicola Turner-Morris** on the death of her father, Harold Turner.

We wish both families strength and comfort.

יהי זכרם ברוך

# The Kol Nefesh Refugee Project

By Cheryl Sklan and Tanya Novick

The Kol Nefesh Refugee Project has continued apace, with Cheryl's weekly lunch club and our links to the New Citizens Gateway Jasmine women's group organised by Tanya and Kathy Lichman. We have also extended the KN project this year to reach out to refugees who are in hotels, awaiting resolution of their status by the Home Office. There are three such hotels in the borough of Barnet, including the Holiday Inn at Brent Cross. The Holiday Inn houses 150 adults and 100 children from all over the world amidst busy roads, in cramped conditions and a stuffy atmosphere, with no cooking facilities and little communal space. Only one of two lifts are working. Prepared food is provided in plastic containers. There is no safe way for the children to play outside, and they have few toys or activities, though school-age children do attend local schools. All this during the Covid lockdowns and in the recent heat wave! The adults are eventually given very small amounts of money. These are supposedly temporary arrangements, but there is very little onward housing available and the processing of claims is very slow.

KN is offering a monthly lunch club at Leonard Sainer/Jack Block, typically on the last Shabbat of the month after the Shabbat service, for residents from the hotels. We have already had three enjoyable lunches, including an informal meal and some exercises to get to know each other a bit more each time (and by the time you read this we'll have had a fourth). Each time we have had a team from KNM who prepare the food, set it out, clear up and take part in the activity, which has worked really well. We have raised some money for the food and fares for the participants. We have also been able to give financial help to individual refugees – e.g., help with fares to enable young people to attend English classes, art materials for an activity run by one of the residents (see the photos on this page), and help with school uni-

forms. We can respond to small requests very quickly.

At the July lunch Rabbi Joel, Susannah and Kalya were able to be with us, and this was a great opportunity to include more members of KN, to develop relationships and compare experiences of displacement and wandering.

We were delighted that one of the spinoffs of this activity was for two members to invite one of the families home for a meal. This was a great event and both families have begun to build a friendship.

We feel this has been a very successful development of the project, as it is involving more of our members and reaching the most vulnerable refugees. We look forward to more people joining us over time. We also will need continual fundraising for these activities. Ideas about the types of lunches we provide and maintaining a minimal cost for them would be appreciated. We are also happy to accept donated goods (toys, clothing, bicycles, toiletries).

Please get in touch with Tanya or Cheryl for more details, to volunteer to be in one of the teams, or to donate via KN.

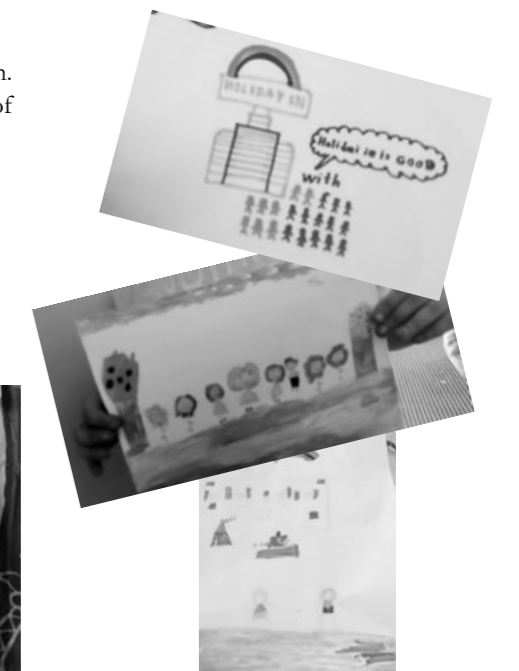
We wish everybody Shanah Tovah. Here's to the continuing development of the Refugee Project!

Cheryl Sklan  
cherylsklan20@gmail.com

Tanya Novick  
tanya.novick@btinternet.com



*Artworks produced by participants in an art class led by one of the hotel residents, along with some of the supplies provided by Kol Nefesh.*





## The Kol Nefesh Green Team

By Daniel Preter

We are living in unprecedented times, in so many ways. We are feeling the national and global changes due to Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine. And we have recently lived through a heat wave and drought the UK and Europe have not experienced before.

These are only the first signs of more to come. The long-term forecast is for warmer and wetter winters, hot and dry summers, and lots of storms in between. The world will need to adapt to the new reality.

But we also need to do everything to slow down the process of global warming, which requires bold and fast decisions by world leaders. Loss of biodiversity and plastic pollution are two other issues that are on par in terms of severity for our planet, and intricately linked with the first. There are things we can do personally to alleviate the situation, but most importantly we should urge our government and local authorities to introduce those needed policies. Leaders need to “see the light” and change the trajectory we are heading in. The life of our planet depends on it, as well as the health and prosperity of our children, and theirs in turn.

On an individual level, investing in companies that have environmental, social and governance portfolios (ESG) is a very powerful way to make a difference. This could be through our pensions and other investments. It doesn't matter what amount one has. The Kol Nefesh Green Team organised an interesting presentation on this subject a few weeks ago (the recording is on our website).

Our shul now also has a green policy (see the facing page), which was drawn up by a committee comprising mainly non-Green Team members, including Rabbi Joel. And we are proud to have achieved the Bronze award from EcoSynagogue for the changes we have introduced. The award was presented by the EcoSynagogue leadership panel, consisting of rabbis of all denominations at a very inspiring ceremony (see photo). Please also have a read of our new young person's space, so far written by Katya Driver and Erin Silk.

Please do get in touch with me if you have any questions, suggestions, or indeed want to join our lovely Green Team.

Shana Tova,  
Daniel



Daniel Preter accepting the EcoSynagogue Bronze Award on behalf of Kol Nefesh from Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, June 2022.



### Young Voices



*In this space, new to the Green Team, we'll share what some of our younger members have to say about green issues, and how they would like to help change the world for the better.*

#### Katya Driver:

When I grow up, I would like to see people and communities coming together to help solve issues, rather than fighting over them. I would like to see younger people coming up with great ideas and inventions that could help fix the climate crisis, and for politicians and companies across the world to take these ideas seriously and help possibly put them into practice. I would like to see people caring about the environment, and making small changes to their lifestyle that will reduce their negative environmental impact, and I would like to see young children being educated about climate change and the environment, and for them to learn about and appreciate the world they live in.

#### Erin Silk:

The thing that frustrates me most about today's climate change situation is the imbalance of action between young people and those in governmental roles. It feels like, to me, a young person who can't vote or have any sort of impact on those who lead my country, that we are the people who take the most action in reference to climate change. Those who don't actually have the power to enforce change from a position of authority - that can so easily be used for the constant bettering of our world in so many ways and is instead focussed on the economic profits - seem to care more about the future of humanity. This frustrates me endlessly because I'm aware: I'm aware of how climate change, and global warming, can and will affect my future and your future. So I hope that this is what my future looks like: the actions of those who don't hold power beginning to affect those who do, and that they start to realise the necessity of action, and the importance in a balance of action!

## The Kol Nefesh Green Policy

Approved by the Kol Nefesh Masorti Tapuz (Community Meeting), 28 June, 2022

THIS DOCUMENT comprises a formal commitment by the leadership in our community to improve the environmental credentials of our synagogue, and model behaviours and practices which reflect our values as a member of EcoSynagogue. This policy reflects new and existing procedures and measures within Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue (KNMS) that ensure issues highlighted in the EcoSynagogue Audit are addressed and taken forward regularly and strategically. (See “The Environmental Audit – Questions” from The EcoSynagogue website.)

### 1. Management

The KNMS Tapuz has authorised the KNM Green Team to investigate and improve on issues highlighted in the EcoSynagogue Audit. (See “Getting Started” – Environmental Impact Team & 5E's” from EcoSynagogue.)

The KNM Green Team will report regularly on its activities to the Tapuz.

The KNM Green Team represents different generations of our community and/or people with different lifestyles.

### 2. Prayer

KNMS promotes environmental activities as an expression of our concerns for the environment. We actively encourage the congregation to become involved in current environmental issues.

Special sermons about environmental issues are delivered at least once a year (the Green Team will liaise with the respective pelach to organise). However, the environment should be considered a periodic theme throughout the Jewish year, particularly during Shmita years.

Every year over the Yamim Nora'im we will do a brief check in with the community on what can be done for the environment – a kind of taking stock of the actions each member has done or could do in the coming year.

### 3. Teaching

The synagogue's Bar and Bat Mitzvah programme contains segments on *Bal Tashchit* (a prohibition on destroying trees which morphs into a broad prohibition on wanton destruction and inefficient resource use) and *Ts'ar Ba'alei chayim* (hurting animals). The monthly green allotment group has a running educational component throughout the year looking at environmental issues (e.g., Bal Tashchit, Shmita). General programming in our synagogue's shiurim explores environmental issues at Jewish and world environmental touchpoints. Environmental concerns are factored in when considering how to balance our provision of online and in-person educational events, and also when considering printing source materials.

### 4. Community

KNMS is committed to engaging with our community regarding environmental issues. We plan to continue to hold regular Green Lunches which will be vegetarian/vegan using local food sources. We have donated all plastic glasses and single-use cutlery and now use only reusable cutlery and crockery. KNMS does not bring in single-use plastics for in-house communal events.

We hope to pair up with another EcoSynagogue to organise events about local issues. We encourage our members to donate to Kol Nefesh specifically for green issues.

### 5. Communications

KNMS holds periodic events related to the environment, and these are a key part of our regular communications. In addition, we plan to raise the profile of environmental issues in our communications through asking young members, whose lives will likely be most impacted by these issues, to share reflections and calls to action on environmental themes linked to the Jewish year. We will also

ask members to share their experiences of making climate-conscious lifestyle changes to inspire others to do the same and to make these choices part of the normal culture of the shul. During the Shmita year, when there will be an environmental focus to our shul activities, KNMS publications will include additional events, articles and calls to action related to the environmental crisis.

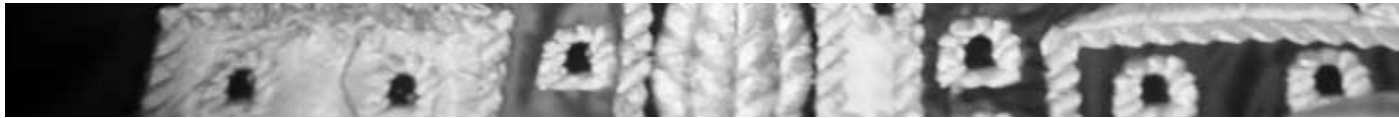
### 6. Land, Buildings & Consumables

As KNMS is currently a tenant of Langdon College, not all elements of the building, and our use of it, are under the control of the synagogue. Working with this, KNM has made several changes to our synagogue's activities and consumables with consideration to the environment. Over time, our KNM Green Team will review ways to improve on this further and put forward proposals for consideration and approval by the Tapuz.

The following measures have already been taken by KNMS:

- Paper use is reduced through double-sided copying/printing and digital distribution.
- We have moved to having no disposable cutlery and no new disposable crockery.
- Paper, glass, cans, and plastics are collected for recycling.
- Vegetarian, vegan or pescetarian food is preferred for our activities, including catered events.
- Any investment of funds by the synagogue will take account of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations.
- In our use of the premises we try to minimise resource use.
- Some of our carbon emissions are calculated and offset.
- We will make further suggestions to reduce our carbon footprint.





## B'nai Mitzvah

*Mazal tov to Isla Silk, who celebrated becoming Bat Mitzvah in May. We're pleased to reprint her thoughtful D'var Torah.*



### Parashat Bechukotai By Isla Silk

SHABBAT SHALOM EVERYONE. This week's sedra is Bechukotai. This is the last sedra in the book of Vayikra. In this sedra, the Children of Israel are on their journey from Egypt to the land of Israel and before they get there, God sets out before them two options: one of blessings, and one of curses.

The option they choose is up to them but depends on their behaviour. If they follow God's commandments, they will be granted peace, food, and many descendants. But, if they worship idols, and forget God's commandments, they will endure famine, war, disease and ultimately, exile from the land.

As ever in the Torah: so many unanswered questions! Firstly, why does God tell the children of Israel about the blessings and curses before they enter the land if they will only apply once they get there?

Maybe it's simply logistical. If you need to tell a group of people something, unless you have Alexa, you need to wait till they're all in the same room. Or maybe it's more spiritual. In the sedra, the children of Israel are all together with the Tabernacle, the Mishkan, in which the Shechinah, or God's presence, literally dwells amongst them. They are also reliant on God for all their daily needs: food, water, protection. But once they get into the land, they will all disperse into separate areas. Once they are in Israel, many of them will no longer have a physical connection to God through the Mishkan, and they will be reliant only on themselves and each other for food and water. If God "believes" this will weaken the relationship between the people and God, it makes sense for God to explain to them what will happen if they forget God before the separation occurs.

This transition from reliance to self-sufficiency still occurs in our everyday lives when children grow into independent adults. Becoming a Bat Mitzvah today means that I become an adult in the Jewish community, choosing what kind of Jewish life I want to lead and taking responsibility for those choices.

Secondly, why does God give the Children of Israel the choice of the blessings and curses when God has already seen their disobedience and lack of faith many times before? For example, in Ki Tissa the children ask Aaron to make them a golden calf

to worship whilst Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah from God! If they can abandon worship of God at the very moment of covenant, when can't they do it! Another example is, throughout their time in the desert the Children of Israel complain about the conditions instead of being grateful for the miracles that God has blessed them with such as giving them food and water when, if it hadn't been for God's merciful intervention, they would have died!

Similarly, why would a parent continue to give their children food, clothes, and love when they wilfully disobey them? Maybe because if a parent bullies their child into being whatever the parent wants them to be, the child doesn't develop the mind space to become who they want to be.

Thirdly, why do the people ignore God if they've seen the consequences of them not having faith in God before? Consequences like in the incident of the golden calf, where the Levites killed three thousand of the Children of Israel and, just to make the point clear, God also sent a plague.

Maybe it's because people focus too much on the short-term reward and forget the long-term consequence. Nowadays, everyone wants a holiday somewhere nice and sunny, but perhaps don't consider the effect their flight has on the environment.

It is affecting everyone and their wellbeing right now. Britain may not be as polluted as cities in for example China, where people in congested cities need masks. Because we don't see it, we continue acting carelessly. Maybe fear would make people consider how bad it could be and act right now. Everyone thinks that their individual actions won't make a big difference, but when everyone thinks like that then the collective impact is huge.

By contrast the children of Israel do not seem to be afraid of the consequences of their actions.

Maybe it depends on the punishment. If the punishment could affect your future, then most people probably wouldn't take the risk. But if you believe strongly enough that you are in the right, then you can make a change regardless of the consequences. For example, Rosa Parks knew that she would go to jail for

what she did, but she believed strongly, and made a huge change for the future.

Extinction Rebellion and many other groups, including historically, the youth movement that made migration to Israel a reality in the 1940s, risked sometimes fatal punishment to do what they believed to be right for the collective.

Similarly, in the sedra, the blessings and the curses are applied to the people as a whole, and either everyone will receive the blessings, or everyone will receive the curses. It's collective responsibility for individuals' actions. Even as the Children of Israel are on the verge of becoming more independent, both practically, in terms of growing their own food in the land, and spiritually, in having to take responsibility for following the mitzvot or not, they fail or succeed as a group.

Fourthly, why are there more curses than blessings? Maybe the fact that God has seen the Children of Israel disobey God before, explains why there are more curses than blessings. Perhaps God expects the people will forget the commandments and that is why God emphasises the curses more, to try to scare the Children of Israel into following the mitzvot. We can relate this to how teachers and students interact at schools today, because teachers will often threaten students with punishments rather than offering rewards for doing something well!

One reason may be that in between each set of curses, God waits to see if the curses have made them change their ways. It is only if God sees them continue to ignore the mitzvot that God then inflicts the next, worse set of curses.

But the curses aren't just longer than the blessings, they are set out differently. The curses gradually become worse starting with temporary consequences like famine, disease and war and ending with more permanent punishments, such as the destruction of the cities in the land and exile of the people.

However, maybe it is not the curses, but the opportunity for repentance that is the key message God is trying to get across. God knows the Children of Israel are going to sin but wants to let them know that God will always be there, waiting for them to repent. Then God will remember the covenant and forgive them.

And finally, why did God create a people with free will if God is just going to punish them for not doing what God wants?

I think that God created a people with free will so that instead of a robot-like people, God would actually have a people to educate and lead, because if they were robots, they would do everything God asked and so God wouldn't have anyone to teach or correct. God wants them to learn from their experiences and understand the consequences of their actions.

Even though the children of Israel aren't always loyal to God, most of the time, God is always ready to forgive them when they repent.

Today, as I become a Bat Mitzvah, I will have independent decisions and choices to make about what kind of Jewish person I want to be. But this moment is also about standing up as part of my Jewish community, about discovering how I can support others and be there for people when they need it, for the benefit of everyone. ■

## The Kol Nefesh Book Group/Culture Club



The Culture Club has a number of theatre outings coming up. We normally hold a discussion on the theatre premises or a nearby venue following the performance. Everyone's welcome to join us! Book your own tickets, but let us know you're coming so we can arrange a space of the right size. The contact for most events is Howard Feldman, [howard6@gmail.com](mailto:howard6@gmail.com).



**Thursday 20 Oct** (evening performance). *Jews. In Their Own Words*, by Jonathan Freedland, at the Royal Court Theatre.

**Tuesday 1 Nov.** *Good*, by C.P. Taylor, at the Harold Pinter Theatre (starring David Tennant).



**Thursday 17 Nov** (evening performance). *Pickle*, by Deli Segal, at the Park Theatre. A repeat of our outing from a few months ago.

## Yom Kippur Book Group Discussion



Join us during the afternoon break to discuss *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem*, by Sarit Yishai-Levi. Read the book or see the Netflix series in advance of the discussion.



## Bashert

By Chazan Jalda Rebling



Summer 2010, Jerusalem.

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Rosh Yeshiva of the Conservative Yeshiva (CY) in Jerusalem, invited Chazan Jacky Chernetz to teach a three-week course on the *nusach* (prayer melodies) for the Yamim Nora'im.

After life-long care-giving, first for my mum, later for my three children and finally for my dad, who had recently died aged 96 years, it was suddenly time to do something for myself. I decided to realise a dream: I wanted to study in Jerusalem. I had never before had the chance just to study *Torah lishma* – Torah for its own sake – in the Holy Land. I signed up, was approved, and I went.

In the CY's amphitheatre I met Jacky Chernetz.

So we two female chazanim, both of us old enough to be grandmothers, finally met in person after hearing about each other for several years. Jacky had flown back and forth over the ocean to New York to study for her cantorial ordination, and I had done the same. Jacky studied at the Academy for Jewish Religion, under the tutelage of Chazan Sol Zim and other wonderful teachers. I studied at the Alliance for Jewish Renewal, with Chazan Jack Kessler, also one of the *g'dolim* (great teachers and scholars) of our time, and other wonderful teachers.

Sitting there in the amphitheatre of the CY in the late afternoon, we shared our experiences and our dreams. Jacky told me about the one-to-one tutoring she had created to teach *nusach bat'filla* to lay prayer leaders, to enable their communities to sustain themselves, through her new European Academy for Jewish Liturgy (EAJL). I told her that's exactly what I do. I teach *nusach bat'filla* in different places in Europe to help small communities sustain themselves.

Then I raised a question: how is it possible to teach about sustaining community online? You can't learn how to create a *ke'hilla ke'dosha* – holy community – from the internet or from books. You can learn to daven only from a davener, as my teacher Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi z"l taught.

So we needed to create a Retreat – a place where people could live together for a short while to experience what it means to create such a community, and what it feels like to lead it in its davening.

This was the beginning of a wonderful deep friendship, and a wonderful, very professional collaboration.

Jacky is a musician and scholar; my background is theatre. In my first profession I was an actor and singer specialising in Jewish music from the early Middle Ages to modern times. And I am an alumna of the Aleph (Alliance for Jewish Renewal) ordination program. All Aleph students are required to do the DLTI – the Davvenen' Leadership Training Institute's residential programme, consisting of four five-day retreats over two years ([aleph.org/aop/davvenen-leadership-training-institute/](http://aleph.org/aop/davvenen-leadership-training-institute/)).

Two years later, in July 2012, we held the first EAJL in-person Retreat at Skeet House in Kent. EAJL invited Rabbi Marcia Prager and Chazan Jack Kessler, the founders with Rabbi Shawn Zevit of the DLTI's unique training programme. They helped EAJL to launch what has become another of the few dedicated experiences of its kind outside the USA. Seekers from very different Jewish traditions came. It was inspirational!

In 2013, Rabbi Joel Levy, KN's rabbi and the new Rosh Yeshiva of the CY, invited EAJL to teach another three-week course in the summer, which we did together. These three weeks are very intense. You never know who, or at what level your students are. And teaching *nusach* is not like teaching technical

terms, it takes your whole self. *B'chol levavcha, b'chol nafshecha uv'chol me'odecha* – “with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might”, as we say in the Shema.

Jacky and I learned we have each other's backs. We can trust each other fully and wholeheartedly. As teachers we fill in for each other. A blessing for the students, a blessing for our oral Torah of music, and a blessing for us. Working closely together for three weeks could be a challenge. For us it became a blessing.

Since 2015 we have taught every other year at the CY, and in the intervening years we offer a Retreat, now held in the beautiful Charney Manor near Oxford.

The summer of 2020 became a challenge: Covid-19 entered the world. We had to cancel the Retreat we had planned so carefully for about two years.

How could we find the blessing in the curse? I proposed an online learning day. But who could organise this within a few weeks?

EAJL is not only an Academy teaching *nusach*. EAJL brings together wonderful people with very different skills. And many of them are Kol Nefesh members!

Right from the beginning of EAJL's inception, Stephen Griffiths has been the rock behind the organisation. James Burns has been and still is a stalwart in managing its technical needs and is also our *mashg'ach*, kashering the kitchen for the Retreats. Liz Oppedijk of St Albans Masorti gave herself unstintingly to ensure the support of Masorti Europe and Masorti Olami as well as strategic planning. More recently, Liz Preter and Jay Schlesinger have joined the team. Together with our Sephardic teachers Moriah Ferrus from Barcelona and Isaac Montague from Oxford, and our dear

*Continued on page 23.*

## A Horse Tamed – The End of the Beginning

By Steve Griffiths

Back in 2008 I happened to be walking to shul with Jacky when she sought my views on a project that she wanted to initiate. Her basic plan was to develop a means to train *shlichei tsibbur* (prayer leaders) to enable them to support and sustain their own communities. A by-product of this work would be to preserve authentic *nusach* and ensure the correct *nusach* mode would be used at the correct stage of any service.

There were so many challenges and uncertainties. Who would teach? Where would the finances come from? How would the project be launched? What technology should be used? What fees should students be charged, and how should mentors be paid? And on and on. Jacky described her dilemma as “trying to tame a horse”.

So I went home and wrote five pages of A4 describing how to tame a horse. I argued that the problem should not be attempted as a whole, but by focusing on its constituent parts. I defined these as academics, finances and structures. Under each heading I suggested several options that would help shape our thinking. What emerged over many weeks, and with the help of dedicated supporters from within Kol Nefesh and beyond, was a solid foundational structure that could be expanded when opportunities allowed. And so the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy (EAJL) came into being.

Liz Oppedijk from St Albans Masorti took a managing director role, planning and guiding EAJL's strategic direction and liaising with Masorti Olami and Masorti Europe to secure financial support. Allan Myers and Andrew Bowman put the fledgling organisation on a sound legal and accountability footing, gaining EAJL formal status as a registered charity. Rabbi Chaim Weiner joined as a Trustee. James Burns became, and remains, EAJL's technical guru, working incredibly hard on the EAJL website and advising on the best practices for distance learning. Liz Preter was and still is invaluable

with marketing, social media and other forms of publicity. Richard Wolfe joined to ensure continuity with Masorti Europe while he was its Treasurer. And of course, we had the huge joy of Jacky working very closely with Cantor Jalda to ensure the level of academic training was of the highest quality.

So what was I doing while all this industry was occurring? Basically, I provided all the administrative support that underpinned everything else. I developed the forms needed to manage the one-to-one study sessions and to ensure there would be an accurate paper trail for all financial transactions. I also managed the many meetings we held to establish new ideas and develop new procedures. For every meeting, including of course the AGMs, I established the dates, developed and sent the agendas, acted as Minute Secretary and then sent a record of the discussion and decisions to all who attended.

As time passed, EAJL grew. In 2012 we held our first Retreat. Then, in 2014, Jacky felt the time was right to take EAJL's academic training up a notch. So I joined her on a newly created Academic Board, alongside Cantor Steve Robins and Rabbi Geoffrey Shisler, to develop a programme that would lead to the award of a Ba'al T'filla certificate. This was based on a candidate becoming a master of the whole *matbe'a t'filla* – the whole gamut of services throughout the year, plus all the modes of cantillation and much else besides. My role was to translate all the Board's ideas into processes and a prospectus that would enable any candidate to know exactly what the programme demanded of them both spiritually and academically.

In 2018 Jacky sought to take EAJL to the next level of academic studies by creating a programme that would enable EAJL to award a full Cantorial Semicha. So once again I joined Jacky, together with Jalda, Rabbi Joel and senior cantors from both Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions on a Cantorial Semicha Board. My role as

usual was to provide all the administrative underpinning and then to create the relevant prospectus and other papers based on the Board's advice.

The initial one-to-one study sessions, augmented by the Retreats, remain the core work of the organisation. But when we had to cancel the 2020 Retreat due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Cantor Jalda was determined to have some learning using the new Zoom technology. So were born the study days and group online learning courses that are now very much a part of what EAJL has to offer. I was not involved in planning or running these online events. But this is a good opportunity to introduce a dedicated new member of the team, Jay Schlesinger. Jay is an integral part of Jalda's online planning team as well as taking over, with Liz Preter, the administration of EAJL's increasing and exciting work.

And that is how EAJL stands today. From humble beginnings of just one-to-one study sessions, EAJL now offers Retreats, an EAJL track at the Conservative Yeshiva Summer School in Jerusalem, online study days and courses, the Ba'al T'filla Programme, and the Cantorial Semicha programme. I feel it safe to say that the horse has been tamed. This is now the end of the beginning for EAJL and the start of its entering into mature adulthood. I will not be part of this, as I am now retiring from day-to-day involvement. Jay and Liz P. are taking on all my administrative tasks. Jalda has taken over as Director of Studies from Jacky, and she and her team are fully focussed on the next stages of EAJL's story.

It has been a challenging and exciting journey, but I would not have missed a moment. Like everyone else, I have been inspired by the passion and determination that Jacky has always displayed. I have also been encouraged by the sheer dedication and selfless contribution made by James, Liz O., Jalda, Allan, Jay and Liz P. What a team and what safe hands to carry EAJL's work forward. ■

## Green Burial: From Sarah to Cyberspace

By Holly Blue Hawkins

This article originally appeared in *Jewish & Green: Cemetery Management for the 21st Century*, published by the Gamliel Institute. It has been adapted slightly for publication here.

We began as people of desert and oasis, traveling on foot or riding camel or donkey. Migrating with our livestock we dwelt in tents, and as urbanites our homes were constructed of native stone or bricks formed from native ingredients baked in the sun.

Our writings were either quite literally carved in stone, or inscribed on animal skin using hand-carved implements of reed or feather, with ink carefully ground from minerals mixed with drops of liquid.

Our relationship with the natural world, the forces of nature and the cycles of life – birth, growth, maturity and death – was up close and personal. We understood that falling out of balance with our environment would have devastating consequences...

Watch yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you swear and worship other gods and bow to them. And the Lord's wrath flare against you, and He hold back the heavens and there be no rain and the soil give not its yield and you perish swiftly from the goodly land that the Lord is about to give to you.

Deuteronomy 11: 16–17  
(Robert Alter translation)

With the first Jews came not only the first Jewish burial, but also the first transaction to purchase a permanent resting place for the bones of our dead. The transaction was witnessed by the seller's own people and fully documented. What is perhaps the first recorded real estate transaction is found in our source text.

And Abraham heeded Ephron and Abraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he spoke of in the hearing

of the Hittites, four hundred silver shekels at the merchants' tried weight. And Ephron's field at Machpelah by Mamre, the field and the cave that was in it and every tree in the field, within its boundaries all around, passed over to Abraham as a possession, in the full view of the Hittites, all the assembled in the gate of his town. And then Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the Machpelah field by Mamre, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And the field and the cave that was in it passed over to Abraham as a burial-holding from the Hittites.

Genesis 23: 16–20  
(Robert Alter translation)

From the Babylonian exile and the great scattering of our people across the whole expanse of the globe, despite diaspora we have carried the essence of our tradition, whether creating our own boundaries, or thrust into ghettos; risking disappearance by pogrom, holocaust or assimilation.

**Our guiding principle of *pikuach nefesh* can and should apply to all our activities, including how we bury our dead.**

And yet somehow, we have survived as a unique people, to this very day referring back to our source texts – our original instructions – for cultural sustenance and continuity. The accents and costumes have changed, as have the dwelling places and expressions of social values. But the letters carved in stone or inscribed on parchment are still decipherable, soul-

nurturing messages across the spans of time, space and cultural evolution.

The Green Burial movement is a direct response to consequences we are witnessing in our environment. The “gods” referred to in Deuteronomy are revealed in values based on acquisitive exploitation of natural resources without regard for consequences. Our Jewish response to the climate crisis provides us with the opportunity to make a marriage of our ancestral practices in the care of our dead with the environmental imperative to optimise the most advanced knowledge of appropriate use of resources – including the remains of our deceased – as offerings back to the natural world as sustenance.

We now understand that, done properly, the spent remains of our beloved dead bring with them the very life-sustaining nutrients that our soil – the microbiome of the biosphere – hungers for. Our very survival depends upon reversing the current trends exacerbating climate change. As we apply our Jewish lensing to contemporary challenges, the concept of eco-kashrut, which up until now has been applied only to activities involving food (and by extension to packaging and single-use serving implements), can be applied to a wider array of activities with consequences for good or ill over the long haul.

Our guiding principle of *pikuach nefesh* can and should apply to all our activities, including how we bury our dead, so that the biotic community resident in our gut microbiome can survive and feed back into the Wholeness – the mycorrhizal networks that are the very lifelines upon which the survival of entire ecosystem depends. In this context *kevod ha-met* takes on new meaning: by honouring that which appears “dead” to our understanding, we feed life back into a hungry soil that is nurtured by us giving back our “dead” in as environmentally restorative a means as we possibly can. ■

## Love in the Time of Tyranny

A Special Discussion Hosted by Kol Nefesh Masorti

**Everyone's Welcome!**

In 2020, Andrew Levy, a member of New North London Synagogue, brought out a book which makes a radical new argument: that Shir HaShirim (the Song of Songs or Song of Solomon) is as much a critique of King Solomon as it is a love poem.



Please join KN's Nahum Gordon in a Zoom conversation with Andrew on Thursday, 29 March 2023 at 7.30pm. Together they will explore Andrew's motivation for writing his commentary and how he arrived at his radical conclusions.

We recommend reading Andrew's book (available on Amazon) before the Zoom session.

*Continued from page 7.*

this may have been seen as the goat having the capacity to absorb the sins of an entire nation and take them with it to the wilderness. Therefore it was the perfect choice for this unique role in the Israelite community's collective quest for forgiveness.

When we refer to the term scapegoat, the first thing that comes to mind is almost never a goat. Scapegoat is a term to indicate a person who is blamed and punished for the actions of others, rather than those others accepting the consequences of their actions. So the first names that come to mind include Alfred Dreyfuss, Leon Trotsky, Yoko Ono, Boston Red Sox player Bill Buckner, Rasputin, and Jesus, to name just a few. The Devil and God are probably the two most popular scapegoats, being blamed for just about everything, and of course, we Jewish people know only too well the consequences of scapegoating, having been on the receiving end for millennia.

Thus our prototype scapegoat has taken on new meaning, and scapegoating has become common practice among those who will happily see others suffer for their own transgressions.

The only question remaining is a moral one: how do we, as individuals, a religion and a community, view the process of transgression and redemption? Do we try to find fault elsewhere and take it out on the poor goat as our forefathers did in the desert, falsely absolving ourselves from real wrongdoing, only to resume our unsavoury deeds after Ne'ilah? Or should we recognise that the liturgy that leads us across the Yamim Nora'im is there to provide us with our personal inner goat, allowing us to engage in our individual *chesbon nefesh* and to seek personal forgiveness from within? ■

*Continued from page 20.*

friend Chazan Bex Blumenfeld from Oxford, within a few weeks we created a great online programme. This Online Learning Day became such a success that we decided to continue this programme with our great online team.

After Liz Oppedijk, Jacky, and Steve decided to retire, our current team has been ready to continue their work. If you look at the amazing EAJL website (<https://www.eajl.org/>; thank you James Burns!) you can watch how we grow.

During the first year of Covid, Jacky asked me to take over from her as Director of Studies. There was only one problem: I am not a British citizen and I was not a member of Masorti UK! Immediately I was invited to join Kol Nefesh, and of course, as such, I am now a member of Masorti UK. What a blessing for me. To be honest, Kol Nefesh is the Jewish community a chazan dreams of. A singing community dedicated to Torah li'shema – a learning community. A Jewish community where the rabbi respects the nusach and understands how important the *shlichei tsibbur* are. Everybody is invited to contribute according to his or her skills. And you do. Kol Nefesh is a role model of a Jewish community ready for the future of our wonderful 3000-year-old tradition.

Another blessing in my life. This all feels bashert. And it all started in Jerusalem in 2010. ■



THIS ROSH HASHANAH, we look forward to being able to join together and celebrate as fully as we have been able to for some time. Throughout the pandemic, CST has been here, working to continue to protect our community, navigating the many challenges that the last two-and-a-half years have provided.

Reports of anti-Jewish hate in the UK reached an all-time high in 2021 when Israel was at war; events in Buffalo, New York and Colleyville, Texas have shown that extremists from across the ideological spectrum often hold antisemitic beliefs at the core of their worldview, and are prepared to carry out terrorism at any time, anywhere. We know from bitter experience that hatred festers in times of economic uncertainty and that, unfortunately, the Jewish community suffers the sharp edge of society's need to find a scapegoat. We must be alive to the dangers that confront us.

In light of these realities, and as the world returns to something approaching what we knew before, CST's commitment to guaranteeing the safety of our community to the best of our ability is unwavering. This is a duty we always approach with a great sense of responsibility, humility and pride. After a period when all activity has been somewhat limited, we emerge strong, focused and ready to play our part in facilitating the thriving of Jewish life in the New Year.

To fulfil this purpose, we rely on the work and dedication of our fantastic volunteers. They are the people without whom our entire mission would fall apart.

Our volunteers receive the most up to date training in modern-day security tactics. On our training courses you will be given the knowledge and skills needed to not only protect yourself, but the friends, family and community you are perhaps sitting among today. Our dynamic sessions, delivered by expert instructors, will not only educate you on the various threats to the Jewish community, but also how to combat them. Physical training in self defence, problem solving under pressure, teamwork, camaraderie and fun are all components of the course. All CST's training courses are free of charge.

If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a CST volunteer security officer, or any other training offered by CST please contact us at [recruitment@cst.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@cst.org.uk).

From everyone at CST, we wish you a safe, happy New Year and meaningful fast.



## A Rosh HaShanah Message from Masorti UK

THE MISHNAH TEACHES that there are four new years in Judaism: one in Nisan, one in Elul, one in Tishri and one in Shevat (the last two are familiar to us as Rosh Hashanah and Tu Bishvat). I'm interested in the differences between the Nisan new year (closely associated with Pesach) and the one we're about to celebrate – Rosh Hashanah.

At both times of year, the Torah commands the Israelites to make a sacrifice. At Rosh Hashanah, the commandment is simply to "bring an offering by fire to God" (Lev. 23). But in Nisan the kind of sacrifice is very specific:

This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Speak to the community leadership of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. But if the household is too small for a lamb, let it share one with a neighbour who dwells nearby...

[Ex. 12:2ff]

This is the Pesach sacrifice. It takes place at the time specified by the Torah as the beginning of months, and at the moment of the Jewish people's rebirth during the Exodus from Egypt. I'm fascinated that this sacrifice – unlike the one at Rosh Hashanah – does not take place in the Tabernacle or Temple, and is

inherently communal in its celebration.

This year Masorti Judaism has also seen lots of new beginnings, and they too have been intensely communal. Noam has bounced back with summer camps and Israel tours for hundreds of young people, and more year-round youth work in the community than I can ever remember. We've launched an exciting new initiative to create networks of young adults, build relationships between them, our rabbis and our communities, and help them shape the Judaism they want at a time of life when they're not sure if synagogue is for them.

And the Masorti Judaism team has supported our communities with leadership training, professional advice, helping leaders share and problem-solve through networks like the synagogue chairs' forum, and training and recruiting new rabbis.

Just as the Torah marks the Israelites' new beginning with the Pesach sacrifice, our new beginning is all about community, relationships and working together to create genuinely meaningful Jewish life.

Shanah Tova from everyone at Masorti Judaism!



Matt Plen  
Chief Executive,  
Masorti  
Judaism in the  
UK

## From the Convenors

Dear Friends,

As another year ends and a new one begins, we are delighted to see that our community continues to punch above its weight, resuming the levels of in-person activity we had before the onset of the pandemic and complementing this with a varied online menu of learning opportunities. The return to normality has proceeded as smoothly as possible, and that is entirely down to the tireless efforts of our pelachim (committees and member groups) and so many of our members.

And we continue to grow! Since we wrote the last convenors' message, we've welcomed back Brian and Margaret Levan and have also been joined by Claudia Allen.

This is our last Rosh Hashanah message as convenors, as our term in this role is now coming to an end. It has been a privilege working with the pelachim in keeping Kol Nefesh moving forward, and we are particularly proud of the Pelach Fair that was held in May. It was a wonderful example of the warmth, caring and commitment that makes our community so special.

During our almost two years in the role, we attempted to navigate the stops and starts of lockdowns, social distancing, masks, Zoom fatigue and "re-opening". It has not been easy, and it is likely that we have made more than a few mistakes along the way. Nevertheless, at every stage, we always tried to do what seemed to be in the best interests of Kol Nefesh and its members, and to preserve the special character of our community.

We should not lose sight of the reality that the pandemic raised serious questions for religious communities around the world, not least for synagogue life. Congregations in North America

and Europe have seen membership levels drop and questions raised about their purpose and what the new normal will be like. Kol Nefesh, in our view, has managed to meet this challenging period with amazing resilience.

In this vein, being convenors has only deepened our respect for the convenors who came before us, as well as for all the members of our community who give so much of their time and energy to keep the show on the road and in so many different areas! Whether it's tefillah, leynung and services rotas, kiddushim, communications and website, family activities, Talmud Torah, or cultural activities, Kol Nefesh is lucky to have people who bring such a drive to sustain a vibrant and caring kehilah.

Nevertheless, it is important for those members who are not active right now to ask themselves at this time of year, as they undertake *cheshbon nefesh* (the soul-searching we all perform during the Yamim Nora'im), whether there are areas where they can contribute their time and energy in particular. We are simply too small a shul to expect things to just happen while you watch from the sidelines. Our rich menu of services and activities all take place because of people who already devote a great deal of energy to Kol Nefesh. How can you lessen their load?

It has been our privilege serving as convenors and we wish those who follow us in the role the greatest possible success. Shanah Tovah!

Philippa Gamse & Gabi Peretz



Patsy Aronson  
wishes the whole  
community  
a Happy, Healthy  
and  
Peaceful New Year

Lisette & Daniel  
wish the Kol Nefesh  
community  
a peaceful and healthy  
5783

Shibby Allen would like to wish  
everyone at Kol Nefesh  
a Shana Tovah and a hope  
that the new year will add  
sweetness to your life

Best wishes to the  
community for a  
happy, healthy,  
safe  
and peaceful  
New Year

Warm good wishes  
to the whole  
community  
for the New Year

The Shapiro Family  
wish everyone  
a happy, healthy,  
peaceful, and fulfilling  
year ahead

Mark & Tanya  
Novick  
wish the community  
a Shana Tova  
U'Metuka

Rochelle & Ian Bloom

Helen & Robert Stone

Wishing all  
the community  
a healthy and happy  
New Year

Georgia, Richard,  
Ruth & Hannah  
wish everyone  
a Happy New Year  
and well over the fast

Wishing you all a happier  
and healthier New Year  
and well over the fast  
Kathy Lichman

Marc & Hayley  
Herman



# Kol HaKehilah

The Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue Magazine

Rosh Hashanah 5783/2022

## FORGIVENESS

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*In this issue:*

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We are also grateful to The PrintHouse for their friendly, efficient, and professional service over the years. Please do consider using The PrintHouse for all your printing needs.

If you'd like to be involved in the production of the next issue – or if you'd like to suggest a theme – please let us know! The next edition will be Pesach 5783/2023.

The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of KNM.

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KOL NEFESH  
MASORTI  
SYNAGOGUE



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