



## Kol HaKehilah

The Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue Magazine

Pesach 5782/2022

Looking Forward

*In this issue:*

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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 Rosh HaShanah 5783/2022.

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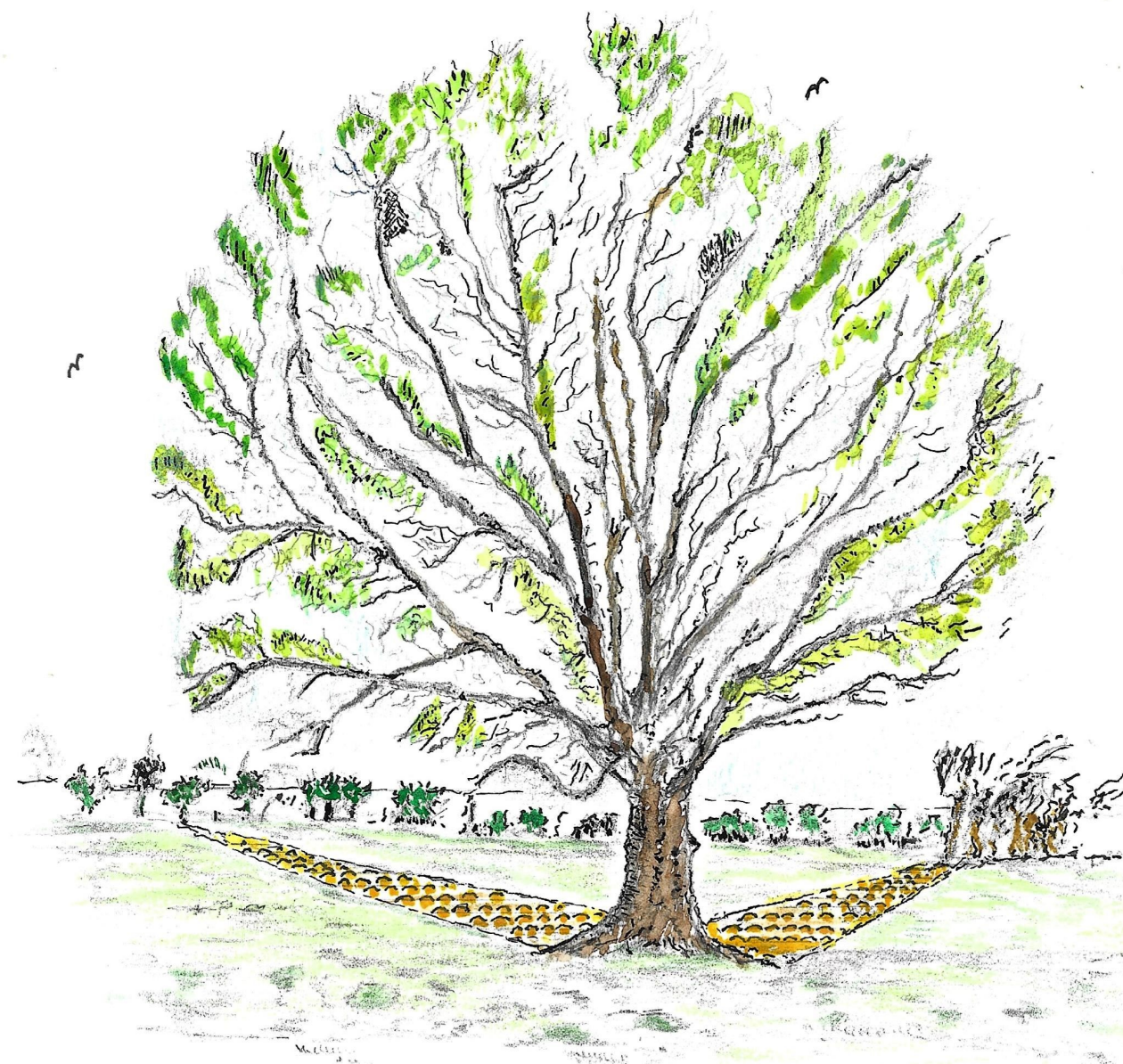
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KOL NEFESH  
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## Kol HaKehilah Pesach 5782/2022



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Looking  
Forward



## Looking Forwards

By Rabbi Joel Levy

We may look back on the last decades of relative stability and prosperity in the West and see them not as ushering in “The End of History”, as proposed by the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, but rather as representing a brief and anomalous blip in the normal human experience of uncertainty, upheaval and discord. Our small slice of the world is certainly feeling more insecure as we approach Pesach 2022. Despite the underlying long-term positive global trends spelled out by Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, no one could survey the scene of war, pandemic, economic hardship and political polarisation and articulate a naive faith in the inexorable rise of human wellbeing.

Try as we might, we simply cannot know the future. We may look towards it with yearning and attempt to glimpse a golden vista through the veils of time but our sight remains stubbornly clouded, our predictions resolutely insecure.

The Mishnah (Chagigah 2:1) instructs us not to try to look too far ahead; to keep our gaze on the here and now:

### משנה חגיגה ב:א

כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים,  
ראוי לו כאלו לא בא לעולם,  
מה למעלה, מה למטה,  
מה לפניו, ומה לאחור.

### Mishnah Chagigah 2:1

Whoever looks upon four things,  
it would have been better had he  
not come into the world:  
What is above, what is beneath,  
what came before, and what comes  
after.

At the time this text was written, in second century Palestine, the tools to analyse what lay above the sky, or below the Earth, or before human history did not exist. Things that lie beyond the reach of human knowledge, things which humans cannot really know, one should not waste

time, energy and attention trying to master. A person should spend their brief time in this world studying and mastering subjects that are knowable. This text suggests harshly that a life led with the wrong focus, looking at the wrong stuff, might not be worth living!

In a famous passage in the book of Genesis, Jacob calls together his sons one final time before he dies:

### בראשית מט:א

ויקרא יעקב אל־בָּנָיו ויאמר  
האֲסִפּוּ ואֲגִידָה לָכֶם  
אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם  
אַחֲרַי הַיָּמִים

### Genesis 49:1

And Jacob called his sons and said,  
“Come together that I may tell you  
what is to befall you  
in days to come...”

It looks as though he is planning to offer his assembled offspring a glimpse of the future, but what follows in the biblical narrative is actually a series of character assessments, blessings and warnings. Rashi, quoting Midrash Rabbah, says:

### רש"י על בראשית מט:א

ואגידה לכם  
בקש לגלות את הקץ  
ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה  
התחיל אומר דברים אחרים:

### Rashi on Genesis 49:1

“*That I may tell you*” –

He wished to reveal to them the  
End  
but the Shechinah departed from  
him  
and he began to speak of other  
things.

Jacob is prevented from knowing and then revealing the future. Humans simply cannot know the future; we should not presume that it will unfold according to our plans and desires.

The sheer unpredictability and seeming capriciousness of the world is a common challenge to all humans and all cultures. It is the shared backdrop to our lives. The process of accommodating that

shared reality differs profoundly from culture to culture. For early Judaism that unpredictability was experienced as stemming directly from the independent and opaque character of Israel’s God. Shifts in national fortune were understood in relation to God’s controlling hand. Israelite national success, mood and psyche were securely hitched to the wagon of God’s personality.

This does not mean that Israelite culture refused to look towards the future or that it promoted national passivity, acceptance and helplessness. Jews have often lived the most precarious of lives, but they have managed to look forwards towards the future with a ferocious combination of attitudes. I would like to mention just a few of these attitudes, which I believe still constitute a potent approach to dealing with uncertain times and an uncertain future.

### 1. Keep your feet on the ground.

#### משנה זבחים י:א

כל התדיר מחברו, קודם את חברו.  
התמידים קודמים למוספין,  
מוספי שבת קודמין למוספי ראש חדש,  
מוספי ראש חדש קודמין למוספי ראש השנה,  
שנאמר (במדבר כח:כג), מלבד  
עלת הבקר אשר לעלת התמיד  
תעשו את אלה:

### Mishnah Zevachim 10:1

Whatever is more frequent than  
another thing, takes precedence  
over the other.  
The daily offerings precede the  
additional offerings;  
The additional offerings of Shab-  
bat precede the additional offer-  
ings of Rosh Hodesh;  
The additional offerings of Rosh  
Hodesh precede the additional  
offerings of Rosh Hashanah.  
As it is said, “*You shall present these  
in addition to the morning portion of the  
regular burnt offering*” (Numbers  
28:23).

Jewish life tilts towards the prosaic. The mishnah above is used to derive the more familiar rabbinic statement “Something frequent and something

infrequent – the frequent comes first!”, which translates practically into a strong preference for the normal rhythms of daily life. This is the reason why we daven Shacharit before Musaf on Shabbat; because Shacharit is an everyday affair and so it is, in a profound way, more important. Maintaining the regular cycles of life, one foot in front of the other, is crucial, especially in the face of profound upheaval.

### 2. Envision a better future.

#### מיכה פרק ד

וְלָשְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ וְאִין  
מִחֲרִיד כִּי־פִי יִתְּנֶה זִבְאוֹת דָּבָר:  
כִּי כָל־הָעַמִּים יִלְכוּ אִישׁ בְּשֵׁם אֱלֹהָיו  
וְאֶנְחִנוּ נִגְדָּ בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

### Micha Chapter 4

But a person will sit under his vine  
or under his fig tree with no one to  
disturb him. For it was YHVH of  
Hosts who spoke.

For all the nations will walk, each in  
the names of its Gods, and we will  
walk in the name of YHVH our  
God forever.

The surrounding larger and more successful civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia emphasised the cyclic, repetitive and essentially static nature of the world. By contrast the Israelites inhabited a narrative which spoke of unsatisfactory current realities and divine promises that would ultimately be fulfilled. The prophets attempted to articulate, each in their own terms, what that more perfected world might look and feel like. They painted pictures of a world of justice, peace and social egalitarianism. They saw contemporary hierarchical society as a source of abuse and confusion that would ultimately be transcended. Israelites kept one seventh of their gaze on that ideal world and allowed it to inform their behaviour in the here and now.

### 3. Pray for a better future.

Praying about things that had already come to pass was frowned upon by the rabbis as “vain prayer”.

#### ברכות ט:ג

הצועק לשעבר, הרי זו תפלת שווא.  
כיצד?  
היתה אשתו מעוברת,  
ואמר, יהי רצון שתלד אשתי זכר,  
הרי זו תפלת שווא.  
היה בא בדרך

ושמע קול צווח בעיר  
ואמר יהי רצון שלא יהיו אלו בני ביתי הרי  
זו תפלת שווא:

### B’rachot 9:3

One who shrieks over the past,  
behold this is a vain prayer.  
How so?  
His wife was pregnant and he said,  
“May it be His will that my wife  
bear a male child,”  
Behold – this is a vain prayer!  
He was coming home from a jour-  
ney and heard the sound of scream-  
ing in the city, and said, “May it be  
His will that this not be those of  
my house,”  
Behold this is a vain prayer!

According to this mishnah, prayer is reserved for the future, for the realm of things that could yet turn out differently. We are told not to waste our breath on a fait accompli – we will need our breath to shriek about things that might yet turn out better! We should force ourselves to face forwards rather than dwelling on the past. We should only pray about things that we might be able to change. There is work to do in the world!

### 4. Continue to hope for a better future in the face of bitter disappointment.

#### תהילים כז:יד

קוֹה אֶל־יְהוָה  
חֹזֵק וְיִאֲמָץ לִבָּד  
וְקוֹה אֶל־יְהוָה

### Psalms 27:14

Hope in YHVH  
Strengthen yourself and let your  
heart take courage!  
And hope in YHVH!

#### בבלי ברכות לב:

אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא  
אם ראה אדם שהתפלה ולא נענה  
יחזור ויתפלה.  
שנאמר:  
”קוה אל ה’  
חזק ויאמץ לבד  
וקוה אל ה’.”

### Bavli B’rachot 32b

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chani-  
na said: A person who prayed and  
saw that he was not answered  
should pray again,  
as it is stated: “*Hope in YHVH;  
Strengthen yourself and let your heart  
take courage, and hope in YHVH*”.

The Talmud here presents a model of how to persist though disappointment.

How is it possible to face the future, be disappointed time after time, and to continue to face the future optimistically? Through thousands of years of exile Jewish hope was not extinguished. How is that degree of resilience even possible? Jews still say to each other “Chazak v’emats” – “Strengthen yourself and take courage!” – based on this verse. Be prepared to try, fail and try again!

### 5. Live to fight another day.

#### ויקרא יח:ה

ושמרתם את-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי,  
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֲתֶם הָאֲדָם נְחִי בָקָם:  
אֲנִי יְהוָה

### Leviticus 18:5

You shall keep My statutes and My  
ordinances, which a person will do  
and he will live through them: I am  
YHVH.

#### בבלי סנהדרין עד.

תניא  
א"ר ישמעאל  
מנין שאם אמרו לו לאדם  
עבוד עבודת כוכבים ואל תהרג  
מנין שיעבוד ואל יהרג  
ת"ל (ויקרא יח, ה)  
וחי בהם  
ולא שימות בהם

### Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 74b

It is taught in a *baraita*:

Rabbi Yishmael said,  
From where is it derived that if a  
person is told: “Worship idols and  
you will not be killed,” that he  
should worship and not be killed?  
The verse states “*And he shall live  
through them*”, not that one will die  
due to their observance.

The Talmud here presents a hard-nosed pragmatism. Jewish life over the centuries maintained its idealism whilst immersed in the raging exigencies of whatever the world was throwing at them in any given era. A recurring rule of thumb was “Live to fight another day”! An individual life is a marathon not a sprint; all the more so a huge multi-generational project like Jewish civilization.

As uncertainty returns, so we too will need to return to our ancient spiritual resources, so that we will be able to respond to new challenges with courage, faith and fortitude. I pray that our relative safety and prosperity over the last few generations have not tarnished our capacity for resilience. ■





## Looking Forward with

By Chazan Jacky Chernett



During the two disrupted years caused by Covid-19 we often asked, “What will it be like when we return to shul?” Now that regulations concerning mask-wearing have been relaxed somewhat, and the disease, although still rampant, is not as deadly serious as it was, we are witnessing an increase of attendance at Shabbat services. Some of us remain nervous, yet still come. Others are less wary and do not mask up. Some are still not returning.

As I write, I feel a great sense of joy, warmth (not from the open windows!) and relief at being back together. What has struck me is the number of people who are stepping up to lead services and leyn, to give divrei Torah, and generally step in with all sorts of contributions to the experience on Shabbat morning. It is this wonderful spirit of Kol Nefesh that shines through.

I am officially retiring as Director of Studies of EAJL (the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy) at the end of our Residential Retreat in July. Reflecting on this and the resurgence of our physical being together in my beloved shul on Shabbat has given me much to be thankful for as I look forward to the future of both the shul and of EAJL. This is because they are so interlinked!

When we started EAJL in 2007 it was Stephen Griffiths who grasped the wild ideas I was having and not knowing how to put them into operation. How could we create a facility with the vision of providing training for T’filla leaders so communities can sustain themselves? He wrote a paper, “Taming the Wild Horse”, and brilliantly took on the creation and administration of the study programme and its systems while also becoming one of its first students. Stephen and his wife Micky have created the Lincoln Inde-

pendent Minyan where he uses his skills as Sh’liach Tsibbur along with looking after Kol Nefesh’s yearzeits. As well as heading the Retreat organisation, Stephen has managed EAJL’s faculty of students and teachers world-wide with gentle firmness and humour, always with his exceptional excellence as a creator of education programmes. After all, he has trained RAF pilots for many years! Stephen will also be standing down with me.

A stalwart of our team is James Burns. James has a heart bigger than himself. He looks after the IT and has recently launched our excellent new website, making it so much easier for people to pay online and to access our programmes (<https://www.eajl.org/>). Another string to James’ bow is his training by Rabbi Chaim Weiner (one of our Trustees) as mashgiach. At the Retreat James can be seen koshering the kitchen and ensuring everything is as it should be. James has also learned the art of Sh’lichut Tsibbur, particularly when Daniel was studying for his Bar Mitzvah. Daniel has led many services for NOAM, Kol Nefesh, and the Union of Jewish Students. And we are thrilled that Sarah led Musaf for the first time at Miriam’s Bat Mitzvah (watch this space)! Thankfully, James is still continuing with the EAJL team.

Another member of our team has been Liz Oppedijk, from St Albans Masorti Synagogue. Liz took on structure and guidance and has been a rock of support. Liz did her Master’s degree in charity management, using EAJL as her model. She was also chairman of Masorti Europe. She has now had to stand down as she needs to develop her therapeutic programme of chair yoga, which is quite brilliant, helping so many people.

EAJL has a wonderful Board of Trustees which includes Allan Myers, our indefatigable accountant, constantly there to keep us financially savvy and on course with all the regulations of the Charity Commission. Allan has brought in our new Finance Manager, Jackie Greene

(who took over from Anna Kinchuck, Masorti UK Finance Manager – also a KN member). Allan is also a highly experienced Sh’liach Tsibbur and leynner and a huge support. He has agreed to continue with EAJL (with enormous gratitude, I heave a sigh of relief!).

Other trustees have included Andrew Bowman keeping his legal eye on us. Andrew is a superb leynner and also a Sh’liach Tsibbur. I can’t think of Sedra B’shallach without his Song at the Sea. He has stood down now as he feels we are legal enough, I think.

Richard Wolfe has also been a Trustee, specially during his time as Treasurer of Masorti Europe, where he championed our cause, bringing us to the status of one of the five arms of Masorti in Europe.

Rabbi Chaim Weiner, Av Bet Din of Masorti Europe, continues as a Trustee, as does Rabbi Joel Levy, Rosh Yeshiva of the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem and, of course, our own beloved Rabbi. And Stephen Griffiths is coming on to the Board of Trustees, ensuring continuity of purpose and governance.

As you can see, Kol Nefesh members have played a huge part in EAJL’s development. And this isn’t even mentioning the very many students who continue to give their soul-skills for the benefit of the community.

Looking forward – the wild horse has been tamed and the eagle is flying even higher (it has had good pilot training)!

Chazan Jalda Rebling (yes, she is a member of Kol Nefesh too, even though she is in Berlin) is my right arm and wonderful colleague who has taken over from me as Director of Studies. We have worked together on the Retreat project and also the Summer School Intensives at the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem for twelve years. And we are still working together behind the scenes. Jalda is working with the fabulous new EAJL team.

Guess who...

- Jay Schlesinger, forensic scientist and Ba’al T’filla student, with his exceptional skills and vision, is taking over from Stephen Griffiths. Jay is already coming up with all sorts of ideas for development as we grow. This is as well as having taken over the T’filla Pelach at KN from Simon Gordon (EAJL’s third Ba’al T’filla graduate!).
- Liz Preter – events guru and everything else – is working with Jay on planning, marketing, and generally promoting EAJL. Liz is also a superb EAJL-trained Sh’lichat Tsibbur and teacher herself and, having been a co-convenor of KN, knows what community-building is all about.
- James Burns, who is continuing (see above).
- EAJL has spread its wings to include Sephardi as well as Ashkenazi tracks, both for its online and Retreat programmes and the Yeshiva Intensive. The core of EAJL training is personal one-to-one mentoring, of course, for which there is no substitute. Towards this end, Chazan Bex Blumenfeld, Moriah Ferrus of Barcelona (an EAJL S’micha student), and Isaac Truehertz (Sephardi Egalitarian Minyan) continue to be consultants on various programmes.
- The Va’ad (committee) of the Ba’al T’filla and S’micha programmes are Chazan Jack Kessler, Chazan Dr Brian Mayer, Chazan Ramon Tasat (all heads of cantorial schools in the USA), Chazan Jason Green (Canada), Chazan Stephen Robins, and Rav Chazan Geoffrey Shisler – and, most important, our Rabbi Joel Levy. This is indeed a star-studded group, which it has to be if we want to continue to maintain the high standards we set out to achieve.

In writing this, I realise how great an influence Kol Nefesh has had on EAJL, and EAJL has had on Kol Nefesh. If our services are to be soul-inspiring and help our people to express themselves in their own t’filla, we can’t be complacent about it. Coming back to shul after the pandemic shows us how much we missed during lockdown, and how much we can still soar.

There is so much to look forward to! ■

## Looking Forward—At Last

By Paul Collins

I would like you to join me you on my journey that ended up as the front cover of the magazine. This tree sits on a raised area in Canons Park. It grows next to a hint of a causeway that, when the house was not occupied by North London Collegiate, was a private access for the Lord of the Manor to get to church easily.

My belief is that most of what we do is autobiography. I first drew the tree in April 2020. In my 6am isolation walk each day, this tree was a dominant feature of my routine. It was also the last sketch that I undertook for almost two years. Until I picked it up again recently, I did not realise that the tree had no leaves. It was lifeless. It therefore reflected my own mood at the time.



Now, fully inoculated two years later, I was ready to approach it again. I split the causeway into two, embarking on a journey from the tree. The tree is also awakening, and leaves are appearing.

In my current interpretation, to fit Robert Frost’s words, the tree now provides a choice:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both...*

I have just reread my article entitled “Dislocation” from September 2020.

So let me quote myself:

So, where do I go from there, in this environment that was now my personal physical and mental boundary? It was time to create a strategic plan. In management terms I should look for strengths (none), weaknesses (many), opportunities (none), and threats (COVID). This SWOT model did not help, nor could I find one of the many models I had learnt that were appropriate. I had spent years learning this stuff and nothing helped or came close to fitting. This experience was new.

It was a miserable contribution, and ‘Looking Forward’ now is certainly requesting a more positive approach. The road I took led to art galleries, reasonably empty matinees and back to shul.

The building contained people, i.e., friendly faces. However, the initial experience was frightening given the reclusive nature of my existence. So, opportunities moved from none to many and there are certainly/hopefully no immediate threats.

So, my question is, what am I looking forward to?

Certainly, an acceptance of self in this new environment and a realistic expectation that the circumstances will change for the better. As I write, this optimism is tempered by the 24-hour news channels, and I cannot even get close to predicting what might be at the time this magazine is distributed.

Putting that aside:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference. ■*

# Keeping Time, Marking Time

By Debbie Diamond

Many years ago, I was sent an article detailing the benefits of learning a musical instrument. It began by listing several famous people, all at the top of their (totally unrelated) professions. What they had in common was one thing – they had all learned a musical instrument to the point that they could have chosen to become professional musicians (but presumably their IQ scores are just that bit higher than mine).

It was a comment made by Condoleezza Rice (who could have become a concert pianist) that resonated most strongly. She explained that her musical training gave her the ability to think in the present and in the immediate future simultaneously.

The best parts of life elicit anticipation. In fact, the anticipation is often more exciting and enjoyable than the reality. It is the anticipation that leads us through the present. We go about our daily lives but one eye is on the future. Some people, upon returning from a holiday, will immediately book their next one. The return to the office is then accompanied by a constant anticipation, and every work day leads to the next holiday.

It is precisely this ability to look forward that Covid has eliminated. We have become so accustomed to everything being cancelled that we stop ourselves from anticipating. We don't allow ourselves to look forward to anything. The disappointment, again and again, has become unbearable. And so, in order to protect ourselves emotionally, we have learned to live entirely in the present, one day at a time. Very early on, in the first lockdown, one of my neighbours asked me something regarding the future and I said that I was deliberately keeping that door shut, I simply couldn't think about that.

This is a coping mechanism, a way of surviving. I'm sure we were all affected in different ways, and so we all developed slightly different coping mechanisms. Personally, once my daily teaching ended at the end of term in December, I could-

n't get out of bed. The daily routine wasn't there, and there was nothing to anticipate. I needed to look forward to something, even though I didn't know what.

Looking forward to events, and the events themselves, give us time markers. We don't count time in the past. We don't say – it's been 7 weeks since my birthday. We say – 7 more weeks and then it's my birthday! Or holiday, or Bar Mitzvah, or graduation, etc. When the events don't happen, or the way in which we celebrate them needs to be modified, our anticipation is lessened or eliminated, and time is experienced differently. I found myself writing the date, and then realising that I was inaccurate not only by days but by months. I had not had any of my regular time markers for several annual events, and as a result I had no idea what month we were in or even which season. Was it spring or autumn? What did I do for the summer? Has it passed or is it still to happen?

After the lockdowns, when concerts resumed, every musician I know experienced stage nerves. I wonder if this is because our ability to succeed on stage rests precisely on the skill Condoleezza Rice identified, our ability to think in the present and in the immediate future at the same time. This skill had been suspended for months. Not only had we not been using it through performing, we had been actively suppressing it in daily life. Even though we couldn't identify what was happening, we all felt very nervous.

As performers, our usual skills quickly returned. Real life is different. As I write this, I am in a plane crossing the Atlantic, and as a family we are going to Toronto for the first time in two and a half years. Our last significant family time marker was Amiad's Bar Mitzvah, and that was the last time my kids saw any of their extended family. Little did we know that February 2020 would become such an auspicious date. Since then, Einav and Amiad have grown from children to young adults. Amiad is now taller than me

and will be gazing down on his grandmother. It is Einav's final year of secondary. Time has passed, despite the lack of usual time markers. It has felt like a void of Covid, marked only by the passing of school years and physical growth. Maybe we should rename it Covoid.

The anticipation of this trip came in measurable stages. In late December, we allowed ourselves a glimmer of hope and booked the tickets. My brothers were surprised that I was able to think beyond two days into the future. And anticipation has been measured not in days but with Covid tests. With each negative test, we permitted ourselves another degree of hope. Given that I teach in three different schools, the consistent negative tests were not only baffling but miraculous. When the negative PCR certificates arrived, we knew it was going to happen.

This trip will certainly be a significant time marker in our family. Seeing relatives after such a long gap will be wonderful. It will also be the first time that all four of us experience a Canadian winter together. It is impossible to describe minus 20 degrees Celsius, endless white, snow so deep you can't find the ground, frozen lakes that can be driven on, deer the size of small cars, and lakes dotted with ice fishing huts.

Will this trip become a time marker signifying the end of Covid? There are rumours that when we come back, we won't have to do any tests or any sort of isolation and possibly not even wear masks. All this vocabulary and behaviour that has become standard may disappear into the past. I like the idea of Covid being bookmarked by Amiad's Bar Mitzvah and a winter trip to Canada. But I'm not quite ready to allow myself to imagine a Covid-free future just yet. Looking forward to a time when we are free from it simply makes dealing with the current reality too difficult to bear. I'm going to stay in my protected zone and enjoy the present and the immediate future, without thinking too much beyond that.

# Spring Campaign

After Henry Reed\*

By Ruth Hart

Today is the spring campaign.

This is our candidate, he is the one.

That is the opposition, he is a scoundrel.

This leaflet is the manifesto  
and this is the one for houses with a mezuzah.

For today is the spring campaign.

Flowering currant, cherry and poisonous laburnum  
stretch eastwards to Jerusalem, westwards to the sea.

Do not get involved in arguments with voters.

Invite them to put their concerns in the survey.

That is the opposition watching you. Never let them see  
you hugging anybody or shaking hands.

For today is the spring campaign.

Cracked pavements, dustbins and irresponsible cynophiles  
stretch northwards to the wasteland and southward to where the biped beasts yowl in the name of their idols.

This is a swastika, it is red and turns towards the sun.  
Please do not take offence.

We will protect you from the other one.

Why do your people still vote for the other one?

For today is the spring campaign.

*\*If you're of a certain age, most likely you recognise the allusion from school anthologies. Feel free to write me an essay!*



Look Around. How much there is to see! Don't look Away.

Look Back, you say? Not to be advised. Remember what happened to Lot's wife.

Look Closely. Don't miss anything.

Look Down when you have to ... it's no good falling off the edge of a cliff.

Look Everywhere. You'll find what you're after eventually. Or you'll find something else.

Look Forward. (Duh.)

Looking Good. That's the way!

Look High, look low.

Look Into things. And out of things. (Like a cat.)

Look Just, I dunno. Like, you know, basically. What was I saying?

Look Kindly upon others.

Look Lively!

Look Mom, no hands! Whoops...

Look North. And east, and west, and south.

Look Out!

Looking Pretty fine. Yep, pretty fine.

Look Quietly. People are trying to read.

Look Right, left, right again.

Look Sharp!

Look Through things. And over things. And under things.

Look Up.

Look Very, very carefully. What do you see?

Look What you made me do!

Look X is a hard one. Give us a break here.

Look Your best when you have to. Otherwise – chill.

Look ... Zippy? Zappy? Zesty? Okay, this is another hard one. Still, we got to Z. Not bad. I think we deserve a pat on the back. :)

By Meira Ben-Gad

LOOK . . . An Alphabetical Acrostic



# The Road Ahead

By Mike Fenster

In 2018 Timothy Snyder wrote a chilling book about Putin and Ukraine (*The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*; Penguin Random House). Snyder characterises one way of looking forward as the politics of inevitability – a sense that “the future is just more of the present, that the laws of progress are known”. This way of thinking holds that the changes already in hand will continue. Snyder describes this politics in Europe as “history brought the nation, which learned from war that peace is good, and hence chose integration and prosperity”. That doesn’t seem to have the ring of inevitability right now. Snyder contrasts this with the politics of eternity, an alternative way to see the future. It holds, not just that nothing changes, but something worse – that history is “a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past”. In his book, he explains how Putin’s Russia is promoting the politics of eternity, the idea that progress is a myth, and that truth and history must be distorted or suppressed to ensure that the past is restored. On that analysis, it isn’t surprising that Putin framed his war in Ukraine as necessary to de-Nazify the country – in the politics of eternity nothing can be seen to change even if that can only be claimed through untruths. It’s a sobering and frightening book, even if the terms Snyder uses to describe the two opposing views of the future are confusing.

I heard another viewpoint from Yuval Noah Harari on a recent Zoom event at which he was speaking with Snyder. History doesn’t determine the present or the future, Harari the historian said. There is no reason for history to repeat itself, no reason to only expect a circle of endlessly repeating events. Which is why Ukraine and Russia, after one and a half centuries of being “joined at the hip” under czarism and communism, can now choose two different futures even after a common history.

As we approach Pesach, we repeat an annual examination of our past and try to learn from that. When we recount the Exodus story, we are remembering that there is progress from slavery to freedom, even if that journey is fraught with dangers, diversions and delays. However we understand God, we feel that there was help for us as we made that journey. We feel that that we have made progress as a Jewish people; Judaism has flourished as a religion and as a civilisation for 3000 years. Yet a few days after Pesach, Yom HaShoah comes to remind us that history does repeat itself, that the same threats from the past come back to haunt us. And then Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut! It’s our Jewish History Month.

As we participate in the rituals, the services, the commemorations and the celebrations, what lessons do we learn from this history? In Snyder’s terms, is it the politics of inevitability where we know we can make progress away from the despair of the past, or the politics of eternity, the circle where nothing changes and we endlessly return to the same threats? The past few years in the UK have seen the return of antisemitism as perhaps the predominant parochial topic for the Jewish community (Covid apart); I feel this has been overshadowing so much else of value in our community, and, important as it is, it mustn’t be what defines our existence.

At the Zoom event, Snyder said that if there is a positive from this terrible situation in Ukraine, maybe it could help shake us out of both undue optimism and undue pessimism, and force us to be creative and to imagine multiple better futures which we can work towards. I pray that in the period between my writing this, and you reading it, the war and the killing will be over. And also, that we continue to be creative and imagine and work towards better futures for our communities. ■

# Following the Golden Thread

By Irene May

Looking forward, unlike looking backward, takes us into the unknown. All we have to make sense of any possible future is our subjective, sometimes grey, sometimes golden, experience of the past and present.

I’m reminded of the Yiddish newspaper that arrived from New York to the close-knit London community – Forverts, forever looking forward, even into the abyss, printed in New York, astonishingly, from 1897 to 2019. The newspaper and the social history it embraced, the literary giants, philosophers and public figures who contributed to it, reflected a now-vanished world. They included Isaac Bashevis Singer and Leon Trotsky, who were forever looking forward, aware of the impact of devastation through man’s inhumanity, yet wanting to believe in a better future.

Our fascinations with prophets, visionaries, idealists and dreamers from time immemorial all attempt to make looking forward bearable, or even something to anticipate with pleasure, like the coming of the Messiah to a holy community. By replacing uncertainty and fear of the unknown with hope, faith, a new truth, or a mystical or mythical belief that what is unknown can become known, even irrational ideas – like that which seized followers of the false messiah Shabbetai Zvi – can take hold of a whole generation. Our interest in magic, in the occult, in fantasy of all kinds, feeds our sometimes fertile or disturbed imagination, to dispel despair about the unbearable horror we have witnessed in our lifetimes, let alone through history. It perhaps appeals to our better nature to look forward, to how we can repair our troubled world by our own actions or an act of faith. If man is responsible for self-destruction he must be capable of self-renewal.

So we try to nurture creative imagination through positive faith or inspirational dreams. We want to trust ourselves that we can contribute towards a healed world, or at least, a more comfortable individual life.

Looking forward requires imagination, confidence, and emotional space for fantasy. Discovering through play that a positive and productive future may exist is not the unique privilege of the naive child. To remain truly alive, adults must suspend disbelief. Just as the child builds a tower with his own hands which may collapse before his eyes, adults too can learn that risk-taking, by looking forward into the unknown, is a necessary part of life. But we can only let the risk in by allowing fantasy, however irrational, into our emotional life. To look forward we have to create the space.

When trusting ourselves to look forward, a spiritual dimension emerges which makes it possible to re-evaluate our relationship with faith and lack of it, between known and unknown, between trust and shame, between cynicism and compassion, between reality and fantasy.

Within the interwoven tapestry in which looking back and looking forward are somehow intertwined, like truth and falsehood, good and bad, beauty and ugliness, love and hate, we can be sustained. Some say we are actually reinforced through our knowledge and our ignorance, through our uncertainty and our wisdom borne of experience, through our vulnerability which is also our strength. In other words, looking forward positively involves an appreciation that the destructive and creative qualities which make up human nature are inextricably linked.

There’s a great array of books on looking forward, which first of all take us back to the ageless wisdom of western myth and memory, then onwards with words of hope in the changing world of the future. All of course linked by that everlasting golden thread. ■

# Looking Forward— Best Avoided If Possible

By Steve Griffiths

I have been practising yoga now for over 20 years, and teaching it for the last 10 years. I began with no awareness of what the discipline was about, but gradually came to understand that it was not really about all the postures and stretches, but about learning how to be still and how to quieten the mind. And above all else, to be “in the present”.

I do admit that this came as a surprise. Those who have never done yoga tend to see it as tying the body and limbs into knots; those who are fanatical about yoga, especially in fitness centres, tend to look down on those who are not. In fact neither attitude is correct. If there is one thing I have learned about yoga, it is that it is not a competition. Everyone can do yoga if they want to, but equally everyone can only do it within their physical and emotional limits.

Another surprise about yoga is that originally it was never about the postures. These were introduced much later as a means of disengaging the mind from the daily routines of thought in preparation for bringing the mind to rest. What makes the discipline totally different to basic stretching and exercising is the co-ordination of all movement with the breath. This encourages the practitioner to focus inwards on the movement, the part of the body being exercised and the deliberate and mindful inhalation and exhalation.

The natural next step, after completing perhaps 30 minutes of postures, is to bring the body to stillness and begin the practice of meditation. This is a huge topic that cannot be described here other than to say that, if practised regularly and patiently and with kindness to oneself, it does enable the mind to become

empty of extraneous thinking and the focus to be “in the present”.

So what has this to do with looking forward? Whether you define looking forward as the act of planning into the future, or as anticipating with pleasure something that has already been planned, looking forward comes with a government health warning that has the potential to increase stress and affect wellbeing: what if the planned event fails. What if the weather is bad, what if we miss the flight, what if someone is too poorly to participate, what if the provider goes out of business, what if... what if...

Of course, we must plan ahead for a holiday, a significant event or anniversary, a visit to the theatre, or any other activity that will not happen by itself. And having completed the arrangements, we can look ahead to it with pleasurable anticipation. But only so far.

In yogic thinking, happiness and fulfilment are not in the future, because the future may never happen as we plan it. We might measure eventual success by the excellence of the house we live in, the level of income we earn, the quality of the car we might one day drive. This line of thinking ignores the possibility that we can achieve happiness now, today, by being in the present and enjoying what we have, who we are and how we live. A mind that is still, quiet and deliberately emptied of thought, is a mind free of stress, a mind able to appreciate the joy of being alive, a mind capable of finding happiness without any material trappings.

By all means look forward if you must, but better to stay in the present as much as you can. ■

# Looking Forward 80 Years— To 2102

By Tanya Novick

What do I write to an unknown, probably as yet unborn person, in 80 years' time.....?

The last few years have seen upheaval in our lives. I personally have moved from our family home of more than 30 years to a flat, and we have definitely become retirees. We have lived and continue to live through turbulent political and economic times – Brexit, Covid, Trump, refugee crises, wars, economic uncertainty, international political upheavals.

Through all this we have continued to live our lives, for two years under lockdown, migrating to online spaces like Zoom where we can. Maintaining relationships, attending shul, funerals and parties virtually. Learning epidemiology, studying statistics, joining queues for vaccinations, self-testing for every sneeze and sniffle, isolation from loved ones and community. We can hardly draw breath before the next crisis is upon us.

I have the opportunity to lift up my gaze from the pressures of today to look to the future, into the next century.

The Association of Jewish Refugees marked its 80th anniversary in July 2021. To commemorate this milestone they have a special campaign, 80 Trees for 80 Years, which will see 80 native oak trees planted around Britain in honour of the refugees who found a safe haven from Nazi Europe.

My family will be planting a tree in memory of my late mother, Franziska Marion Lesser, nee Oschitzki, who arrived on the Kindertransport in 1939 and was fostered for two years by the Ford family in Lea, Wiltshire. The tree will be planted in the grounds of the local

school in Lea, which a small group of German Jewish refugee school children (amongst them my mother) attended in the early years of the Second World War. The planting ceremony has been delayed as the school is being renovated, but we hope to have a small ceremony in the late summer. We will also be “planting” a time capsule, to be opened in 80 years' time.

Planting trees is an investment in the future, a sapling that will grow into a mighty oak tree – “great oaks from little acorns grow”. The roots will grow deep and the branches high. Generations of future local school children will play in its shade and climb its branches. What do I want to pass on to those as yet unborn children and their families from within our time capsule? A biography of my mother and her family who perished, some photos, contemporary social history – how we live now. Our preoccupations. Daily life. The message that individuals and families can make a difference on a personal level and reach out to the stranger. That history repeats itself or that things can change for the better? That the political, health and technological upheavals we are living through may not be as earth-shattering as we think, and that other, maybe unnoticed, changes may be more significant? The fervent hope that we will have been able to save the planet from the worst of climate change and ecological depredation. And the prayer that in 80 years' time we will have learnt some lessons and made improvements to the way we live and behave towards each other, towards the environment and towards humanity. And that that oak tree continues to grow, deepen its roots, spread its branches, sow its acorns, host wildlife and continue as a symbol of steadfastness, diversity and lovingkindness. ■

## Looking Forward— The Future of Limmud in Europe

By Lisette van Lieshout

The Covid-19 epidemic has stimulated online communication to an extent we could scarcely have imagined. And this has been a great boost to communication between the small Limmud organisations scattered around Europe. Limmoed Nederland is playing its part in creating cross-European events. In spring 2021 we held a mixed Dutch-English event online for the first time. Our second online event, on Sunday 27th March of this year, attracted over 60 participants from Sweden to Belgium, who could choose between two tracks of five sessions each.

From this summer, Limmoed Nederland, as part of the European Limmud movement, will benefit from substantial EU funding. This support will be used over the coming two years to organise a number of Limmud events, some in-person with hybrid components and some fully online. They will take place in, and be organised by, different countries, thereby stimulating in-depth cross-European collaboration and exchange of speakers and participants. An important step forward for Limmud Europe!

The five English language sessions on the 27th March included sessions on the role of shlichei tsibbur, the life and poetry of 16th-century Rabbi Israel Najara, Israeli dance, and Yiddish music. And Alex Kovtoun from Ukraine reminded us of the huge Jewish presence there for over 1000 years. He reviewed the more recent developments since the collapse of the USSR and Ukrainian independence, and the decline of the Jewish population, especially the migration of many Jews to Israel. We learnt that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 meant the loss of most of the Reform Jewish communities from Ukraine. At the same time, there has been intense communal activity and coordination between the different Jewish movements.

Keep an eye out for the various European Limmud initiatives coming up over the next year, and do join us.

*Kol Nefesh member Lisette van Lieshout is chair of Limmoed Nederland.*

# Community News

## Mazal Tov...

... To **Ilana Fenster & Dan Simons** on the birth of **Ariella Hettie Fenster Simons**. Mazal tov as well to new grandparents **Mike Fenster & Aviva Shafritz, Shirley Fenster & Howard Feldman**, and new uncles **Leon Fenster & Joel Fenster!**

... To **Belinda Washington** on the birth of **Jonathan Francis Kofi Butt Philip**, son of Belinda and Theo Butt Philip, brother to Rachel.

... To **Ben Grant & Alison Pepper** on the birth of **Charlotte Miriam Pepper-Grant**, sister to Joshua.

... To **Gilead Limor** on the birth of a granddaughter, **Noga Kudriavtsev Limor**, daughter to Inbal Limor & Genady Kudriavtsev. Mazal tov to **Gilead, Debbie**, new aunt **Einav** & new uncle **Amiad!**

... To **Howard Feldman** on becoming a grandfather to **Juniper Zamir**, daughter to Leah Feldman & Alex Falkingham, a little sister for Robin. Mazal tov to **Howard, Shirley, and the whole family!**

... To **Benji Rosen & Miri Cabib** on their engagement.

...To **Zvia & Andrew Bowman** on the engagement of **Dora Bowman** to **Jack Cheyette**.

... To **Isla Silk** and the whole Silk family on **Isla's** upcoming **Bat Mitzvah** (in May).



*Clockwise from top left: Ariella Hettie with Ilana & Dan; Jonathan Francis; Isla; Charlotte Miriam; Benji & Miri.*



## Welcome to New Members!

**Benji Rosen & Miri Cabib**

**Adam Hayek & Danielle Berlin**

**Laurence, Hazel & Douglas Cohen**

**Chazan Jalda Rebling**



**And sorry to see you go...**

Goodbye to members who are leaving us. You're always welcome within our doors.

**Simon Posner, Darya Feuerstein, Elinor & Eytan**

**Rabbi Dr Barbara Borts**

## Condolences

To **Melanie Morris Kelly** and **Marc Morris** on the death of their mother, **Estelle Morris**, grandmother to **Harry & Samuel Kelly** and **Elisheva Morris**. We wish the whole family strength and comfort.

We also mourn the loss of **Sue Miller, Hettie Korman, Rhona Myers, and Rina Wolfson**. Please see pages 13–19.

יהי זכרם ברוך





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- Respecting different traditions

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EAJL.ORG**



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JOIN US at the EAJL T'filla Leaders Retreat, 7th July–10th July 2022 in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside. We welcome schlichei tzibbur – prayer leaders – of all levels of experience and from across communities of all traditions.

This is a residential seminar like no other. People come from all over Europe (and beyond) for an intensive weekend of learning, t'filla, music and working together. We leave inspired with renewed energy and knowledge to create an enhanced spiritual experience for our communities.

This year our theme is Rebuilding Community in the Aftermath of the Pandemic: Gathering Souls through Call and Response. Do join us to learn together how we can use this ancient form of communal, heartfelt singing to enhance and inspire our communities in t'filla.

Please visit the EAJL website for full details and to book your place, [www.eajl.org](http://www.eajl.org). Or email us with any questions at [info@eajl.org](mailto:info@eajl.org).

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## תהיינה נשמותיהם צורות בצרור החיים May Their Souls Be Bound Up in the Bond of Life



*THE KOL NEFESH COMMUNITY mourns the loss of four members, former members, or close friends of the community over the past months: Sue Miller, Hettie Korman, Rhona Myers, and Rina Wolfson. On these pages, we share reflections and memories.*

### Susan Miller, ז"ל

שיינה אטה בת סנדר ורבקה ז"ל

6 April 1951 – 10 December 2021

Sue grew up in Hendon, the daughter of Regina and Alexander Spalter, refugees from Poland who had spent the war years in Belgium. She trained to be a primary school teacher and was a supply teacher for many years.

I first met Sue when we moved two doors down from her, Hanania, Ben, Ali and Sophie in 1981, and soon became friends. Our children played in our street and in each other's gardens. They and we are still friends, 40 years later. They are more or less the same age, went to JFS together, still play football together, have children of similar ages and even go to schule together.

We introduced Sue and Hanania to EMS, and Sue moved over to KNMS. She was not a schule-goer, but was an integral part of the community. Sue and Hanania divorced but retained a good relationship. He died in 2008.

Sue had many interests, especially of the creative kind. She loved the theatre and amateur dramatics and joined several drama groups. We have seen her in



many productions, ranging from Shakespeare, through Wodehouse, to pantomime. Together, we also saw many professional productions in the West End and used to share outings (and adventures) to many productions with great actors (Jacobi, Branagh etc.). She had a strong artistic streak: she drew and wrote calligraphy. In the EMS days she inscribed the Bar/t Mitzvah, baby and chatanim certificates. Her house was decorated with theatrical posters and examples of her calligraphy. She loved to travel and was adventurous.

Sue moved to Hampstead Garden Suburb around 2009 after lovingly refurbishing her cottage and garden. She had an eye and a feel for the Art Nouveau/Arts

& Crafts period, so that the cottage retained its character whilst adapted to modern life. She loved living in the Suburb, entering into the cultural life of the area, attending U3A and Institute classes and of course her beloved am-dram! She made use of the special HGS bus with her Freedom Pass and she continued to regularly attend theatre productions in the West End and Hampstead.

Sue took up bridge and introduced me to the game. Five of us would meet every week in each other's houses for a game and during lockdown we were meeting twice a week online. Sue would chivvy us along to ensure we were meeting and organising the evenings. She could be quite a hard taskmaster and would get cross if I lost concentration during a game or made silly errors! When we met at hers, she would produce tasty tidbits on her inherited and vintage dishes that added to the sense of occasion. She loved Earl Grey tea and always had a stash of delicate teas for her guests. Sue was also a stalwart of the KN games evenings.

*Continued on next page.*





Previous page: Sue with daughter Ali.  
Above: Sue (left) with a fellow member of Hook's band in Peter Pan with the Garden Suburb Theatre.

We would also meet regularly over the decades as part of a women's support group, originally meeting monthly and then less frequently as we moved away geographically. Sue was always keen to keep the group going and would organise us into meeting.

Sue had several bouts of serious illness, but weathered them all. She continued to participate in her various activities and in looking after her beloved granddaughters. She had a quirky sense of humour and a strong feeling for social justice. She kept in touch with friends from her school days, from her original NCT group from 1975(!), her am-dram, bridge, women's and Shakespeare study groups and her extended family in South America and Paris. We celebrated her 70th birthday in April with a fun online party, which she thoroughly enjoyed. She did find lockdown quite difficult, but she got on with things. She was active and engaged to the end.

—Tanya Novick

## Hettie Korman, ז"ל

יוכבד בת זלמן הכהן ז"ל

26 July 1919 – 25 August 2021

Many of you will remember our mother/grandmother as the quiet elderly lady who came to shul, and we'd like to share some reflections on her time at KNM followed by a summary of the remarkable life she lived.

Having arrived in the UK as a refugee from Vienna in 1938, and subsequently belonging to Orthodox synagogues in Nottingham, Birmingham, Dollis Hill and Stanmore with our late father/grandpa Bernard, she embraced our move to Masorti, but always referred to Edgware Masorti Synagogue as the "proper" shul. She didn't seem too impressed by the idea of Kol Nefesh, perhaps largely owing to it not having its own building. It therefore came as a surprise when, in her 90s and finding it harder to walk to shul, she posited the idea of coming to Kol Nefesh with us.

At first, she would only come when getting picked up by one of her children or grandchildren. However, over time she seemed to actually enjoy the experience and began going by herself. In the end it was she who guilted us into going to shul, as if she were the long-time member and we were accompanying her. One Shabbat morning when getting her coat she said, "I'm not sure I actually need to wear a hat to this shul. Do you think it would be ok if I don't take it? It ruins my hair." This is when we knew that she felt truly at home.

This being said, she was still in her 90s and a woman of routine, so whilst she dropped the hat, she couldn't quite drop the idea of having a designated seat in shul, as was the norm in the Orthodox shuls she had attended most of her life. To remedy this, as many of you will remember, she unilaterally designated her own seat, always sitting in the same place in the second row on the left by the bannister. In a strange way, arriving in shul to sit next to her there reminded us of visiting Stanmore Synagogue with her and always going to her same seat, only now her seat was much closer to the Bimah!

Celebrating her 100th birthday at Kol Nefesh was a huge milestone and incredibly special for all of us. It was always Hettie's goal to reach the age of 100 and receive her card from the Queen. She was able to do so whilst still impressively healthy, living independently and surrounded by her family, community, and many cards. Things started to go downhill with her health and independence after that, but she didn't suffer too much and for that we are grateful.

Our mother/grandma was always looking forwards in life, and it is this strength that took her right up to the mighty age of 102. We want to thank you all for being a part of that journey. In her final years she loved our community and the davening, and of course sharing the experience with her family. It's very special to be able to give that feeling of community back to someone who has lived through so much.

Here is a brief summary of her life for those who want to know a little more about what came before Kol Nefesh:

Hertha (Hettie) Korman, neé Knoll, was born in Vienna in 1919 as an only child, and lived in the Leopoldstadt district with its large Jewish community (nearly 40%). She used to talk about playing in the Praterpark (Ferris wheel) after school, stopping by the café for *kuchen* on the way home and visiting the opera. She went to school on Shabbat morning but she and another Jewish friend were excused from writing.

It was a happy childhood until everything began to unravel under Nazism. One night, when she was 19, her father got wind that the Nazis were going door to door rounding up Jewish men for deportation. He didn't go home, but stayed out all night walking the streets of Vienna. By this time, Hettie and her mother had been forced to sweep the streets, watched over by SS men. On Kristallnacht itself in November 1938, they managed to escape, seeing the synagogues burn as they ran to the train station



with 16 suitcases and jewellery sewn into their coat pockets. The journey was treacherous, but Hettie and her mother eventually arrived in England. Here they worked as a domestic and a cook, Hettie having secured a visa and position by placing an advert in *The Times*.

Her father had said he had seen it all before in Poland and did not want to move, but Hettie persuaded them all to leave. Initially she had to leave her father behind, and waved goodbye to her grandparents at the station. She never saw her grandparents again. A few years later Hettie managed, with some difficulty and manipulation, to bring her father to Britain too, but he had a tough time here and died soon afterwards as the bombs fell on their home.

They had started their new English life in Nottingham, in a shed with no heating at the bottom of their employers' garden. However, they soon contacted the Jewish community in Birmingham where Hettie worked (illegally) as a bookkeeper in the kosher butchers, and eventually they opened a boarding house there as well.

But Hettie wanted a business of her own and opened a hat shop in 1947 in Kilburn, London. Hettie was indomitably tough and worked hard. The following year she married Bernard Korman, a tailor, who eventually opened his own tailoring shop and later a pharmacy two doors away. Bernard grew up in the East End and his family always saw Hettie and her *landsmen* as very different to the British Jews. She was always at pains to tell you that she ran her own business and was most upset when her husband had to become a director of her business in order for her to take a loan, as she was not allowed to do so independently as a woman.

As you can tell, her business was very important to her, and she later opened a second shop in Kilburn, switching to selling handbags and leather goods when hats dropped out of fashion for women. She continued this work until the shop burnt down in a fire when she was 60. But by then she was also the landlady and rented out the shop and the upstairs until she was in her late 90s. She was always heard to say "no-one tells me what to do, I always ran my own business".

After 50 years she went back to Vienna for the first time, where she defiantly stayed at the five-star Hotel Sacher. After this she visited Vienna regularly, often alone. She also loved Bad Reuthe, a spa

at the western tip of Austria. For her 90th and 95th birthdays we all visited Vienna with her, and she reluctantly showed us the places of her childhood.

She had a very small family of only two children, three grandchildren and partners, with no surviving extended family, many relatives having died in the Shoah. Family was important to Hettie and she travelled around the world, often with her son, visiting far away countries well into her 80s and 90s.

Hettie was always fiercely independent and tough, knowing what she wanted and, as she maintained at the age of 102, always doing exactly what she wanted.

—Shirley, Ilana, Leon, and Joel Fenster

Left: Hettie & Bernard.

Below: Hettie with Ilana, Joel and Leon.



## Rhona Myers, ז"ל

רבקה בת איידל ומשה ז"ל

14 May 1950 – 24 October 2021

The following is Allan's besped for Rhona.

In March 1965 I went to a disco at Stanmore Jewish Youth Club for the first time. I spotted a beautiful girl across the dance floor. I asked my friend, "Who is that?"

"It's Rhona Fisher," he said (as Rhona's mother wouldn't allow Rhona to use her real last name – Fischler). I asked her to dance. She said yes. The disco played "Concrete and Clay" by Unit 4 + 2. The

dance finished and I needed the bathroom. When I returned, Rhona was dancing with my best friend, Stephen.

And so it continued for many years. Rhona was my friend. She was my friend while I dated numerous girls – some of them her friends. She was my friend when I went to university. And all the while I dreamt of her being my lover – with her long black hair falling across my pillow. And then, one day in 1970, Rhona was alone again. She came over to my

house and I was able to tell her what I hadn't been able to tell her for five years.

We got engaged on 4 July 1971 – at an American Independence Day-themed party.

My connection to Judaism had sunk to a new low since my affiliation to Stanmore Jewish Youth Club, but Rhona, by then a travel agent, took me to Israel for our honeymoon. Over fourteen days, we

Continued on next page.



went on thirteen tours and we both became committed Zionists. A couple of years later, we even looked at a plot of land in Herzliya on which we dreamed of building a house.

But it was not to be. The Yom Kippur War came and dashed our hopes and we returned to England – me to carry on accounting and Rhona in travel. But we joined a shul, which became the genesis of Edgware Masorti, and Rhona became the shul secretary – firstly working for Chazan Jacky, then for Rabbi Chaim.

After our beautiful children came along



– Daniel in 1975 and Vicki in 1979 – Rhona took up homeopathy, eventually opening a clinic in Mill Hill. This was the beginning of her vocation to care for people. And, over the years, she spent time caring for many of them – Uncle Jack, Auntie Betty, her dad, Zelig, my stepfather, my mother and, finally, her mother, Ada. In the last year, it has been us – me, Hilary, Daniel and Vicki – who have had to return the compliment and care for her.

And, finally, all she wanted was to be with her family and friends – and that's what we did for her.

Rhona was someone who didn't ask for much and was happy with her lot. Yes, she loved luxury and couldn't resist a *metzia*, but her greatest pleasure was being with Joseph, Ben, Yonatan and Lia, which we were happily able on numerous occasions to do over the last four years. She told us recently that having had those last four years had been the pinnacle of her life and that she would have no regrets if her life had to end thereafter.

Rhona was someone who put other people's welfare above her own and that is why there are so many of those people here today.

—Allan Myers

Rhona and Allan were members of REMS from its earliest days. We ran the office from Brian's and my home in Stanmore and Rhona came to work with me even throughout her studies as a homeopath. Once she had qualified, she left to pursue her vocation. Rhona was a staunch support, kind and caring. She was an expert organiser and had a lot of experience in the travel industry. This helped in particular when our wonderful friend Rabbi Erwin Birnbaum (people will know him as the Rabbi of the Masorti Shul in Netanya) led a shul tour



to Budapest and she had no problem sorting out everyone's needs and issues. Also, her expertise came into the fore on a later trip to Prague and Theresienstadt.

Sadly for us, when Kol Nefesh came into being Rhona decided to stay with EMS although Allan, Daniel and Hilary came to KN (Vicki lives in Israel). Rhona was always strong-minded which, with Allan by her side, helped her to battle the cruel illness which eventually took her. May her memory be for a blessing to all who knew her.

—Chazan Jacky Chernett



Rhona in the 1980s; with all her grandchildren; and with Allan.

## Rina Wolfson, ז"ל

רינה דבורה בת רחל לאה ז"ל

16 October 1972 – 15 September 2021

*The following is from the hesped given by Rina's husband, Paul Harris.*

Whenever I have prepared an important speech or article I would frequently hand it to Rina to look at, and she would always put in something called ... grammar, so please forgive me if this sounds like a stream of consciousness.

I feel so lucky and proud to have been married to Rina. I am sad that we only had 15 years together but I am grateful for that time.



She was so many different things, a brilliant high-achieving student, a great teacher, communicator, writer, comedian, crocheter and, perhaps most surprising of all, a marathon runner.

She grew up in Liverpool, the third of four children to Ros and Bernard. She had many wonderful family anecdotes which

entertained us frequently, and the values and traditions that were the foundation of her upbringing were also the roots of our family life. She loved growing up in Liverpool and has written eloquently about it. Her parents supported her through good times and difficult times, they were always there for her and embraced and supported the choices she made. She was proud to be their daughter.

She was always close to her brothers David and Johnny and sister Hannah and their spouses. We could always tell which sibling she was talking to ... with David it usually sounded intelligent and humorous, with Johnny it was frequently downright irreverent and with Hannah it was endless laughter. At our wedding she described her siblings and their spouses as people you would definitely choose to be your friends. She loved leyning with her brothers at our Aufruf at Kol Nefesh.

She was a great teacher. Frequently when she would teach on a Sunday morning, I would come in the house and there was a real energy amongst her GCSE students, she had an innovative and original way of presenting material and the students all seemed pleased to be there. Over the years she designed and presented many different adult courses based on original themes and connections. She was deeply interested in Judaism but came at it with her own approach, her own interpretation and was definitely not shy at stating her opinion.

She also taught many Bat Mitzvahs and the children of a number of people here were taught by Rina. She worked to make each one an enriching and individual journey.

Rina ultimately found her religious home in Masorti, first at Kol Nefesh who made her feel so at home when she moved to London, and then at New North London where we joined as a family. She has also worked for Masorti in marketing and comms for the last few years and has been involved in a number of educational projects.

Rina was a blogger and writer. She seemed able to make words do things that many other people cannot. Her

magical prose was equally powerful in serious and comedic pieces. She wrote many times for the Jewish Chronicle, sometimes in her own name but largely as the Secret Shulgoer. She came up with the idea and visited over 50 different services. She reviewed a synagogue in New York, and even the alternative Friday Night service on a cruise we were on made it into the JC. One synagogue was so proud of her positive review that when we visited a few months later for a simchah we discovered the review blown up in a frame at the entrance. I even felt sorry for the woman at one congregation who took her seat when Rina popped out and said words to the effect of if you snooze you lose, as I knew that she would be paying for her lack of hospitality by being featured in the JC.

Rina wrote bravely about her cancer journey in a blog which attracted some 2000 people. She could be humorous and sad in the same sentence.

Rina loved taking on new challenges and learning different things. However I felt she might be taking this too far with the marathon. By her own admission she was not a runner. She was good at running the bath but that was it. However, six or seven years ago she informed me that she had applied for a lottery place in the London Marathon. This was about nine months before the race. Not couch to 5K, or 10K – the whole shebang. She said that if she got a place, it was clearly a message that she had to run. I did not quite see it in those terms. When she got the lottery place, which didn't even require her to raise money for charity, she embarked on a seven-month training programme which led to her completing the marathon the following April.

In many ways the marathon story says so much about Rina. She never did things by half measures, she always went for it. She loved the Beatles, she did not just know the names of all their songs, she knew the words. When she taught students their GCSEs, she never slept the night before their exams, or the night before their results. When she took up crochet, which she was so talented at, she went from baby hats to full rugs very quickly. On Rosh Hashana we never just had one or two types of honey, we had a

dozen, and you had to guess which country each one came from.

Throughout our married life we had many wonderful and fun times. We both motivated each other and she got me to try things I would never have done without her influence. We supported each other through good and bad times. She was very popular with my family (possibly more than me) and had a really good relationship with my Mum and brother. We were blessed with good friends and enjoyed so much in life.

We collaborated on a few successful comedy enterprises. We had a perfect blueprint for success. We would schedule a meeting in the lounge. She would bring her computer. I would bring pieces of paper. We would write down some ideas. I would pop out, and she would show me the product of the meeting. I did at least bring the paper.

I have left the most important people in her life to the end, her children. For a number of years it was just her and BZ before I crashed the party when he was about 9. BZ and Rina enjoyed a close relationship and he has been a fantastic support over the last year and a half.

Ava and Grace enjoyed very special relationships with their mum. She loved parenting, she loved finding different things to do with her kids, whether it be Lego, scrapbooks, art, baking, recreating famous pictures, and many other activities. She created amazing innovative senders and made each festival special.

Throughout her illness we have been blessed with the support of family, friends, our communities, the shul, school, and street, without which we could not have navigated this journey. It has been reassuring for all of us and I am so grateful for that.

Rina made me complete, challenged me and enriched my life. I am pleased her suffering is over and comforted that our memories and her words will be there forever to guide me and our family.

—Paul Harris



Continued on next page.

Rina was so many things to so many different people. Tremendously knowledgeable about Judaism, Hebrew, Aramaic, a strong feminist, a strong believer in community but not a believer in the traditional sense. An incredible parent, so full of wisdom and humour. Creative in every sense, with her crocheting, writing, career paths. I remember before she met Paul, she was dating someone and asked me if I thought he would be suitable long-term material for her. He was great in many ways but had absolutely zero sense of humour. I remember thinking – you are my funniest friend. How on earth can you contemplate spending time with someone who doesn't get your jokes? That in itself was humorous.

Rina was one of those people who was larger than life. I always felt smaller in her presence, not because Rina was intimidating in any way, but because I could never try to achieve even a quarter of what she accomplished effortlessly. Even when she was ill and confined to her house, every time I managed to drop by and visit it was always a party. It felt like the whole world was in her garden and the atmosphere was always full of life, joy, humour and happiness. The situation was absolutely dire (although you can imagine the colourful word Rina used), and yet she could always find something light-hearted, insightful and funny to say. It was a huge honour to know that she valued our friendship.

When I first met Rina, she had little to no interest in classical violin music. And then, one day, she had an epiphany, to use her own words, and became obsessed with violin concertos. I should add that this had nothing to do with me. I found it hilarious. When Nicola Benedetti performed the Beethoven violin concerto with OAE, I made sure Rina was coming and met her in the foyer afterwards. I'll never forget her wide eyes when, after the concert, Nicola casually stopped to stay hello and ask me something. Rina was actually speechless.

Years ago, Rina gave a shiur at Kol Nefesh about the book of Samuel and the story of Elkanah and Hannah. It was an interpretation I will never forget. The way in which she managed to construct

layers of meaning by deconstructing the Hebrew grammar of the text was sheer magic. I always wanted to get to more of her classes.

There was something about the way Rina used words, in her writing and in her speaking, that made everything she said and wrote memorable. So many little tidbits of advice over the years. "Children like solving problems." That meant, present an issue as a problem and let the child think of the solution. "Parenting is the most competitive thing you will ever do." That meant don't let yourself get caught out by this. If other parents try to criticise or compete with you, walk away. For weeks after her death, I kept hearing her voice and feeling so frustrated by the many things about which I'd never asked her advice.

During one visit, Rina said that she wanted to outlive all of the Covid crap because she wanted a thousand people at her funeral. Unfortunately Covid is still with us, but I did add up all the people who were standing at Cheshunt in person and all of the people who joined on screens all over the world. I think it did just about reach a thousand.

Knowing that she would miss so much of her children's lives was painful to the core. Rina likened her situation to the experience Moses must have felt standing at Sinai and catching a glimpse of the land in which he would never live. When Rina suffered a stroke, to me it was like the story of Job. Not only had she had to deal with cancer, not only through Covid and all the extra hardship that entailed, but then she lost her power of speech and the ability to write. Rina still had so much to give, to so many people. She was an exceptional person in every way – an extraordinary parent, a perfect partner for Paul, a pillar of so many different and overlapping communities. The world needs a Rina, and her family desperately needs her. I'm left with the image created by her brother during his eulogy. If anyone can argue with God about the unjustness of the situation, it's Rina. And I hope that Rina is giving God a really hard time.

—Debbie Diamond

I will always be proud and happy to know that I was the catalyst for Rina to become involved with Kol Nefesh. I had known Rina as she was growing up; my ex-husband was first cousin to her mother, Rosalind, and we used to visit her family in Liverpool regularly. We knew that an invitation to the Wolfson household would mean a warm welcome, stimulating conversation and delicious food. Rosalind and Bernard had brought up their four children with a knowledge both broad and deep that encompassed not only traditional orthodox Judaism but also the wider world. At various family simchas over the years, I had snapshots of Rina as she grew and developed. Even after my husband and I had separated, I was invited to and attended a family bar mitzvah and shared the joy in the celebration.

I heard via the family grapevine that Rina's first marriage had ended in divorce after a very short time and that she was now living in London with her young son. When I got in touch and went to visit her flat in Mill Hill, I first met BZ, who was then probably around five or six years old. Rosalind and I had chatted on the phone and she was lamenting the fact that Rina was no longer a part of a community, having rejected what orthodoxy had to offer. Single mothers are not always made to feel welcome in a traditional environment.

I invited Rina and BZ for dinner one Friday evening and we started to talk about communities and observance. By this time I had been a member of Kol Nefesh for several years, since its foundation, and held forth with zealous enthusiasm about the inclusive nature of our community. Having come from an orthodox background myself, I understood the feeling of exclusion that women experienced, especially if they wanted to play a full part in services and the running of a synagogue.

The timing was perfect! Rina was clearly searching for a group of like-minded, highly educated people with whom she could connect and share her extensive knowledge of Judaism. She started to attend Kol Nefesh services and, almost before I could blink, she had not only forged close friendships but had become

the co-convenor and a general *gantze macher*. She had found her community and her space to grow and flourish.

A few years later I was thrilled and delighted to hear that she was getting married to Paul. Rosalind and I hugged at the wedding, as she expressed her gratitude that Rina was again living a full Jewish life and had a future to look forward to with her wonderful new husband. We know now that this future was to be tragically cut short, although Rina and Paul did enjoy years of happiness together.

When I look back at Rina's life, I rejoice that I was able to help her, if only in a small way, to fulfill her huge potential and to allow her to pass on to others her wisdom and learning. Her way of teaching was uniquely accessible and engaging and she wore her depth of knowledge lightly. Who knows how many lives she has influenced for the better. I carry with me a memory of a very special person who managed, during her cruelly curtailed life, to leave a lasting impression on all who met her.

—Helen Stone

How many times can a person say that they have found a special friend in mid-life. Well, that was what happened to me when I met Rina, at the time she began coming to Kol Nefesh. This very beautiful blonde, clever, witty woman began coming to shul with BZ,

her young son. Recently divorced, she had chosen to come to a fully egalitarian community after the suffocation of an ultra-religious community she had lived in during her marriage. I knew immediately that this woman was going to be my friend. I too was recently divorced and we both had time to create new lives.

I knew it was a privilege to be friends with Rina. She was an exceptionally talented, brilliant, self-aware woman. There is so much to say about Rina but it's hard to decide where to start. I suppose it was the day she decided to stand for the convener of the synagogue. This was an amazing decision, mostly for us as a community, but for her too. Whatever Rina put her mind to she did brilliantly, whether it was leyning, teaching Jewish studies to young people in the community, leading quality shiurim, stand-up comedy at Limmud, crocheting ... it was all done to an amazing standard. The last set of her shiurim I went to was at New North London, and was on five meals that changed the Jewish people. These included the Last Supper and Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, and was as always brilliantly prepared and taught.

Rina's love of Jewish learning and Jewish life may have taken her to be a rabbi at some stage in her life. She met Paul Harris and they were a great match, soon married and soon had the twins. She had completed her dream of a family, and I think that had she been around longer she might well have become a rabbi, but that was not to be.

I will never forget Rina. I felt lucky that she counted me as her friend. The world will never be the same, and will always have a Rina-sized hole in it.

Her love of life, the 100% she gave to everything she did, her wonderful mothering skills, the effort she put in preparing her family for her death – all was amazing.

She chose well in Paul as a husband, and he was devoted to her throughout her illness. I know the family will go from strength to strength because of the foundations and love that Rina gave them. May her memory be a blessing.

—Cheryl Sklan



Never Forget

Remember the victims of the Holocaust by lighting a Yellow Candle this Yom Hashoah on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Purchase your Yellow Candle now at [yellowcandleuk.org](http://yellowcandleuk.org)

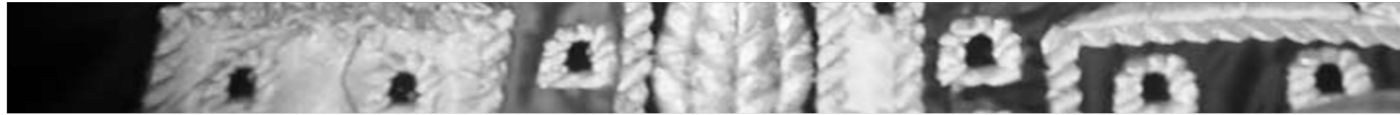


Once again, yellow candles for Yom HaShoah must be purchased individually this year.

Visit [yellowcandleuk.org/purchasecandle](http://yellowcandleuk.org/purchasecandle).

Remember to buy your candles at least two weeks in advance to be sure of getting them in time for Yom HaShoah, Wednesday 27th April 2022.





## B'nai Mitzvah

*MAZAL TOV to **Kyla Greenfield, Leah Greenfield, and Miriam Burns**, who celebrated becoming bat mitzvah over the past months. We're pleased to reprint their Divrei Torah, on Parashat Lech Lecha (Kyla and Leah) and Parashat Beshalach (Miriam).*

### Parashat Lech Lecha

#### Kyla Greenfield



**W**HAT I WANT to discuss today is the section of the parasha where Abram lies about the status of Sarah, when she is his wife passing her off as his sister.

The question for me is whether it is ever moral or excusable to lie or deceive? Despite the Tenakh's teachings against lying, the Torah rarely offers an evaluation of our forefa-

thers or their conduct and so this leaves the Torah's attitude towards the ethical nature of deception open to interpretation by the reader.

So, why are the patriarchs passing off their wives as their sisters? The explicit reason given in the text is fear for their own lives, but the deeper question remains of why the Torah includes such an unflattering portrayal of our patriarchs. A second and perhaps more challenging question is why the motif repeats itself three times in the Tenakh.

The location of the stories in the Torah makes the question of motivation even more problematic. Each wife-as-sister scene occurs directly after God has made some pledge of prosperity to the patriarch. It would seem that right after receiving God's pledge of safety, the patriarchs act in weakness or lack of faith.

So how can we say that Abram, and later Isaac, acted ethically when they identified their wives as their sisters? Could Abram as he was then have acted differently, could he or should he have trusted in God's intervention to save him? How is it he seemed to be rewarded by Pharaoh initially as a kind of dowry and then again when he realised that Sarah was not his sister but his wife? Surely passing your wife off as your sister just doesn't seem like the kind of thing our patriarchs should be doing. Not only does this happen once, as in Genesis 12:10–20, the portion that Leah will leyn, but again in Genesis 20:1–18 and then Isaac

does the same thing when he passes Rebekah off as his sister in Genesis 26:1–16. Although the reason at first glance appears to be fear is there something deeper happening here? As Abram says to Sarah, “I know what a beautiful woman you are, so if the Egyptians see you and think she is my wife they will kill me and let you live. Please say you are my sister that it may go well with me because of you and that I may remain alive.” Furthermore, in our story it would seem that Abram benefits, as the Egyptians want to gain her hand in marriage and shower him with gifts of livestock and servants. Then once again after Pharaoh is visited by a plague and returns Sarah. Surely the message can't be that deception pays, at least in the short term.

Or, was this never a moral dilemma, for Abram himself in Genesis 20:12 suggests that this was never really a lie, as they had the same father but not the same mother and therefore he was in fact her brother – but is this just an excuse?

Some modern commentators follow this line of thought, making a similar type of claim. Nahum Sarna, amongst others, says that there is evidence from Hurrian society, of which Abram and Sarah might have participated, that there was a status known as “wife-sistership”. A Hurrian could adopt his wife as his sister and give her special status and she would be treated as a blood relative of the husband's family. Abram asked Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she was of this special class, and the Egyptians understood this legality and did not harm the couple. As knowledge of this custom faded, the story is now understood to be about the patriarch's lying, but did its initial theme concern recognition of this special status? However, this theory does not feel compelling and does not explain the three wife-sister motifs in Genesis. I find it difficult to believe that these stories were not about deceit because the kings in each story responded as if they are being deceived and otherwise Pharaoh would have known this at the start and Abram and Sarah would have been protected.

Nahmanides is clearer and says directly that Abram was wrong and that he unintentionally committed a great sin by bringing his righteous wife into a stumbling block of sin, presumably on account of knowing that it was certain that she would be at risk of being placed in the harem. He goes on to say that Abram should have trusted in God, and that by leaving the land of Canaan and going to Egypt he had failed to trust in God to deliver him and his family from famine. He suggests that it was

because of this failure in faith that the exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children. Abram's deception of Pharaoh was, according to his way of looking at this, like Joseph's deception of his brothers. Looking at this in greater detail, deception seems to be a central motif of the Torah, starting early on in the garden of Eden, with each dishonest event seemingly causing others at a later date, affecting relationships over the generations and within families. If so, could this be the reason behind the repeating motif, telling us something very important about how we should act with others.

Also, if the Torah paints Abram in shades of grey what is this telling us? As I grow older I realise that basic definitions of right and wrong are more complex. I may feel differently to my parents and teachers. Decisions are not easy to make and at times flawed. I have come to understand that leaders, teachers, parents, cannot be perfect for as it says in Kohelet, “There is none so righteous as to do only good and never sin”. In our story perhaps it is Pharaoh when compared to Abram who comes out of this better, so maybe even our non-heroes have their good points too.

There are times when, like Abram, I have been tempted to lie because it would go better for me, even though Leah says I am a really bad liar and it is totally obvious. Like Abram perhaps I should trust in what my parents have said about telling the truth and having faith that this will in the end be better and less likely to cause more problems further down the line. This parasha has taught me that even the greatest have their failings and those that I like or value less also have their good points. Perhaps the message is that little in life and relationships is absolutely clear-cut and that in the end we need to accept the failings in all of us and learn to trust one another more. ■

### Leah Greenfield



**M**Y PORTION, Lech Lecha (“Go Forth”), recounts Abraham's (here known as Abram) journey out of the land of his birth, his first encounter with God, his journey to Canaan, his relationship with Sara, his argument with Lot and his eventual redemption from captivity by Abraham, the birth of his son Ishmael with Hagar, the covenant

between him, his descendants, and God, and God's commandment to circumcise the males of his household.

The piece I want to concentrate on is the quarrel between Lot and Abram. The English translation is as follows:

Lot, who also went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents,

And the land could not support them staying together;

for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together.

And there was quarrelling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.—

Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen.

Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate you from me: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north.”

Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt.

So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other.

It was clear from the preceding verses that they were both wealthy, so the question becomes, why couldn't they live together? Was there really not enough pasture for both of them?

Rashi says that the reason they couldn't live together was that there wasn't sufficient pasture for their cattle. Despite possibly having enough resources if these were shared evenly, something had happened so that the herdsmen were arguing over the land and straying into other's pastures. But who were these others? Was it Lot's herdsmen trespassing into the space occupied by Abram's stock?

Ramban draws our attention to the introduction of the Canaanites and the Perizzites in the verse. Why is this in here at this point? We know that the land was not empty, there were other people who used it either on a temporary or permanent basis. Could it be to suggest that while there was quarrelling there would be an opportunity for others to see this as weakness or a distraction, making them vulnerable to possible stealing of their livestock while they were busy arguing? Or had the herdsmen become greedy and were using land which was used by others? Was it also about the notion that one cannot steal from a non-Jew, something which would be abhorrent to Abram?

What we learn is that Abram tries to resolve the situation in different ways. Firstly he brought the issue to the surface, and he brings it out in the open so they could talk about the situation. At this point Lot did not respond by saying that he was sorry there had been arguments, he didn't try and resolve it or offer to talk to the herdsmen. Because for me there appears to be a break in the dialogue, Lot appears to be silent until Abram then tackles the situation and suggests a solution. Despite how angry he might have been with Lot, after all he was his nephew and he had brought him out of the famine and given him much of the wealth he now enjoyed, he sets out how they could divide the land between them. There are different ways he could have done this but he gives him the choice of north or south without

*Continued on next page.*

indicating if he had a preference. Lot then chose the best parcel of land, as it says in the text like the “garden of the Lord”. They then parted from one another with Abram seemingly showing no anger, resentment or disappointment. Was he hoping that somehow Lot might come to his senses, be more humble, offer a more equitable solution, or instead did he trust in God to somehow resolve this?

What should we take from this story? Particularly when so much of the world is arguing over land, religion, resources. Is it that we have to separate to survive or is it that there is a thing as too much wealth if we fail to use it properly?

I would rather we learn to think about how to resolve issues. Abram shows patience, kindness, flexibility, generosity and humility, yet he is practical at the same time. It also shows us “let there be no strife between you and me ...for we are kinsmen”—that no matter what, he still recognises Lot as his family and that takes precedence in his judgement and actions.

It is interesting that after all the arguments and how Lot treats Abram that Abram still gives in to Lot and lets him have the so-called “better land”. Was that because he still recognised Lot as his family, or was it just because it felt like the right thing to do?

After this, it would appear that Lot learns very little from the experience and fails to recognise the kindness that Abram has showed him and eventually settles near to Sodom and Gomorrah which are eventually destroyed.

However, after the argument and the choosing of land, it would seem that God sees how Abram treated Lot with patience and love and how Lot treats Abram back with unfairness and is unable to appreciate what Abram has done for him. The parasha then goes on to tell us that God bestows his blessing on Abram, perhaps recognising this, and tells Abram that all the land will be given to him and his descendants for all the generations to come.

Could this be the deep meaning of Abraham’s offer to Lot? It is only when he is willing to give part of the land away (“If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left”) that God tells him the whole land will be his (“All the land you see I will give to you and your offspring forever”). Is a blessing dependent on our actions? If this is a model about resolution of difficulties and ownership it may be that the meaning of this story is that we only truly own what we are willing to share. ■

## Parashat Beshalach

### Miriam Burns



**I**N THIS WEEK’S parasha, we heard how some amazing things happened to the children of Israel. Pharaoh finally set them free and let them leave Egypt; the Red Sea split in half to allow them to pass, before drowning the Egyptians; and God provided food and water whilst the Israelites were in the desert. But we also saw a lot of complaining from the Israelites, for example when they complained to Moses that they were hungry and thirsty.

So why is it that when so many good things happen, our instinct is still to complain?

We can see from our own lives during the pandemic, that there are lots of reasons why people might complain. The first is expectation versus reality. For the children of Israel, they thought that not being slaves anymore would be the end of their problems, but in reality, they had to do everything for themselves. All the decisions that people used to make for them were suddenly their responsibility, and they didn’t like this, so they complained. For us in 2021, when the government relaxed restrictions we had to decide whether to wear a mask, whether to book a holiday and whether to go to restaurants and parties. We thought we wanted freedom to make those decisions, but actually it led to lots of arguments and complaints, and we discovered that it’s hard to make those choices for ourselves.

The next big reason to complain is fear. What were the Israelites afraid of? Probably everything – running out of food and water, fear that their leader wasn’t up to the job, fear of being attacked by other tribes. For the last two years, we have been scared of getting really ill or dying from Covid, but when the miracle happened and we got a vaccine, some people were scared of that too, and complained that it had been rushed through, or not tested properly, or that it would change their DNA.

The third reason I want to look at is that people forget too soon. The children of Israel had an awful life but then they started to look back at their life in Egypt and forgot all the bad things. They compared it with their lives in the desert and decided that Egypt wasn’t actually that bad. In our day-to-day lives we do this too. We complain about having to wear masks, about sore arms from vaccines, about not being able to go on holiday, but if we look back to almost two years ago, the world was so much scarier – no vaccines, no treatments. We forget too soon.

So what do I think? Well right now I could be complaining about so many things, the fact that my bat mitzvah party has been postponed, that very few of my family and friends are here with me in shul today, but if I look at the whole situation today I can think about all the good things – I can still become bat mitzvah in my community with some of my friends and family present, and that maybe my party won’t be tomorrow but I can still look forward to it for later in the year. The children of Israel had the Promised Land to look forward to, and we can all have the hope that things will get better for us, wherever we are. ■

## What Kol Nefesh Means to Me

By John Lazarus

*This article originated as part of our Thought for the Day series on Zoom in the run-up to the past Yamim Nora'im. But its relevance transcends the timing.*

**L**ast week a non-Jewish friend asked me: if you are not a believer, why do you keep up certain rituals?

I found the question oddly hard to answer. I had never needed to articulate my attitude, nor consciously traced the trajectory.

I grew up in a suburb of Cape Town, a seaside village called Muizenberg. We didn’t travel to other schools; you lived there, you went to the local school on the mountainside. Recently, looking through annual Muizenberg school magazines produced by the pupils, I saw that virtually all the editors of the different sections had been Jewish; in the alumni report, it was the Jewish ones who’d remained loyal to the school; on the philanthropy list, all the donors were Jewish.

Muizenberg was often, with a chuckle, called Jewzenberg. It was a tiny homeland for us, where we could be Jewish without thinking about it. We were members of the Jewish tennis club, established because of quotas that excluded Jews elsewhere. We were in youth movements, and I remember the exhilaration, no embarrassment, in being part of a minority group. We could relate to one another no matter how our level of religious commitment differed.

All that changed when I came to do my doctorate in York in 1968. Because of the murderous attack on York’s Jews in 1190, often called the first pogrom, a cherem had been proclaimed on the city, and a Jewish community had never developed there. I found that the few Jews living in York kept their identity under wraps. In the school where I taught I

once gave a heavier-than-usual homework to my pupils – “Oh, sir, that’s Jewish!” they cried. After Muizenberg, I had arrived in a Jewless desert.

I made wonderful friends at the university, one of them Maurice Gold, but living on campus I felt stripped of my community; I saw no old people, no young children, and of course not just no Jews, but no old Jews, no young ones. One Canadian chap and I marked Chanuka together – but his latke recipe was terrible. After ten years in York, facing another Jewless Pesach, I cracked: I had met a Jewish woman at a teachers’ course in Leeds, and I shamelessly wheedled an invitation from her to her family seder. I arrived, bursting with excitement. They rattled through a few bits of the Haggadah, and then they all decamped to the telly to watch Eurovision. My tail between my legs, I phoned South African friends in London, and booked myself a seder with them for the following year – 1979.

1979 was my annus mirabilis – I got British citizenship, I was awarded my doctorate, and I found my wife. I had come down to London as planned, and just before Pesach I was also invited to another seder; I went to it, and there was Shelley; she was from Cape Town, and our families had known each other, but I’d never previously met her. I soon developed a routine of coming down to London every weekend, marking my pupils’ work on the train. We had a civil wedding six months later, and because of our jobs we instantly became the only couple I’d ever known who lived apart AFTER getting married. Months later we went to Cape Town and were married under a chuppa in the Swade family’s garden by the appropriately named Rabbi Herring, from Cape Town’s Great Synagogue. This was indeed a homecoming.

In late 1980, setting up in Willesden Green, we worried about how to create a Jewish family. The relationship with Israel had always been strong. But by ourselves we weren’t equipped to generate a full sense of Jewish identity in our kids. We felt we needed the framework of a Jewish school. We searched, and found, JPS, in Maida Vale. Our kids went there; I became Deputy Head, and worked in Jewish education for several years after-

wards. The kids moved on to JFS. For the Yomtovim we took them round the corner to Brondesbury shul.

But the United Synagogue let us down badly over Ilan’s Bar Mitzvah, and Maurice told us about Kol Nefesh. We’d never HEARD about Masorti before. At a meeting in Eileen’s house we met Rabbi Joel, in the days when he still wore half a kippa. In shul we heard Jacky leyn. We were hooked! Mira had her Bat Mitzvah there, and she leyned, just as the boys had.

Kol Nefesh doesn’t judge or impose, it offers examples. It is both a thinking community and a free-thinking one, literate, searching, curious – and musical, to boot! We are not very active members; we were never regular shul-goers, but we value coming when we can, and taking our turn on the kiddush or security rota. We don’t think of ourselves as “Jewish lite”, though others might. Almost everything we do affirms our Jewishness in our terms.

And the kids? Mira insists she will only ever move out of London to a town with a synagogue. Ilan has made aliya and married an Israeli woman; they live just outside Jerusalem. Micha’s partner is a woman from his good friend Roni Tabick’s Masorti community in Stoke Newington. Our boys speak good Ivrit; Mira can read it, and she can daven.

After growing up in Muizenberg and then finding myself deracinated in York, I had started a process. Looking back, I see that I had been circling round and round on the M25 of Jewishness, never getting to the centre until, with Shelley, I parked right here at Kol Nefesh.

Remember my non-Jewish friend’s question as to why I keep up my identity as a Jew despite not being a believer? The answer is the community we now belong to, which maintains it and extends it. You can be Jewish in the middle of the desert, but the Jewishness blooms only when you are in a community. Without Kol Nefesh our identity would be paler, less supported, more gestural. Being in it, I feel secure, and at home. ■



## Tikkun Olam

*In this space, we normally report on how the funds raised through the most recent Kol Nidrei Appeal supported the community's chosen charities. For 5782, instead of the normal Appeal, Kol Nefesh launched a new initiative – a Giving Circle. Huge thanks to Jeremy Kelly for leading this exciting but challenging project.*

## The Kol Nefesh Giving Circle

By Jeremy Kelly

AT LAST YEAR'S Kol Nidre Appeal, we asked for support towards establishment of a new initiative – a Kol Nefesh Giving Circle. A small group formed to discuss the mechanism and initial disbursement. The following is a summary of the issues agreed at a meeting held in January to discuss a way forward with the project.

The group agreed that it would meet twice a year to discuss disbursements, and aims to recruit members of the shul who will be invited to make periodic donations into the fund. It will ask KNM to hold the funds on its behalf and collect gift aid reclaims. It was agreed that the Kol Nidre Appeal is not part of the Circle's remit, but it would be open to inclusion if the Convenors felt this was appropriate.

We discussed a strategy for fund giving and agreed that it would be divided as follows:

- 50% of funds raised are committed to an issue or charity for a minimum two year period (subject to review) with the aim of forming a holistic relationship for giving and volunteering (if possible).
- 40% of funds are disbursed after discussion by the group regarding the "issues of the day" at the point of meeting – and subject to recipi-

ents meeting the values of the Circle and agreement of a majority of members.

- 10% of funds are retained for emergency disbursement during the course of a year – issues to be determined by remote consultation with members.

We agreed that Giving Circle members are members by nature of the fact they contribute. Every contribution is treated equally in respect of votes; i.e., each contributor has an equal share of the vote. This means that families are treated as one vote if contributions are made as a family. However, each person in a family can contribute individually and receive a unique vote.

The Kol Nidre Appeal funds from the 2021 appeal will be used to make the initial disbursement, and the to promote the Circle to our members. This was felt to be an effective illustration of the type of charities the circle supports.

I will update the community further after Rosh Hashanah. If anyone is interested in being involved, please contact me at [jmkelly1965@gmail.com](mailto:jmkelly1965@gmail.com).

Thank you!

—Jeremy



## Mishpacha Pelach (Families) Through the Year

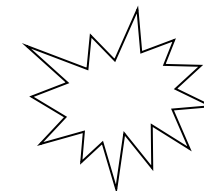
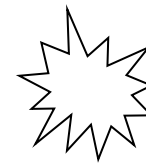
KN FAMILY SESSIONS this year were planned together with our youth committee (many thanks to Amiad, Beni, Erin and Isla for being part of this). We've really enjoyed being able to reconnect in person again.

We started with Havdallah and pizza-making in November. Then, NOAM led Chanukah fun with the now-famous doughnut bobbing in December. There was a Tu B'Shevat walk on Stanmore Common in January – including singing Happy Birthday to the oldest tree in Middlesex! In February and March we made and delivered Mishloach Manot, and we'll have NOAM Shabbat sessions in April. Many thanks to all the kids and parents who have taken part and helped out at the sessions.

We've also been thrilled to welcome three new babies: Ariella, Charlotte and Jonathan!

Looking ahead, we've had requests for a movie night, Families Friday Nights and summer picnic/tea. We're looking for volunteers to help lead on these. Please let us know which you would like to help with, or if you have another idea to add! Contact us via the KN administrator, Elaine White, on [admin@kolnefesh.org.uk](mailto:admin@kolnefesh.org.uk).

—Adele Silk & Liz Preter



## From the Green Team— Looking Forward to a Better Future

By Daniel Preter

AFTER TWO YEARS of living with Covid we all looked forward to living in a world a little bit more "normal". And along came the Ukraine war.

My thoughts are with the Ukrainian people, whose hardship and bravery are unimaginable. The need to flee from your own country in order to survive is only too well-known in my family. My father's family fled from Poland to Russia (!) when the Nazis invaded their country. One feels powerless looking at the horrendous pictures, and sending money and goods and opening your house to refugees seem to be the only things we can do. They won't stop the war and the terrible aggression.

This is of course not the only crisis in our world. On a more global level the climate crisis and depletion of natural environments is continuing relentlessly. This is something that affects every country and all people on the globe, and looking away now is exactly what must not happen. The war in Ukraine has also made us aware of our total reliance on oil and gas, whether it's coming from Russia or elsewhere. The work to preserve our natural world must continue regardless, as it safeguards the survival of all humanity.

The Kol Nefesh Green Team has been busy in the last few months. We had some fascinating talks on carbon storage and Greenpeace Israel, and there are more in the pipeline. I was particularly excited by a presentation from SPNI, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, who do some fantastic work to preserve the amazing natural spaces Israel has to offer. We also had a beautiful green lunch and a series of well-attended green walks.

With KNM members who are not part of the Green Team (including Rabbi Joel), we are currently working on a green policy for the kehilla. KNM is part of EcoSynagogue, which means we have committed to being more environmentally conscious and proactive as a community. The working group is looking at the EcoSynagogue audit, which is a detailed questionnaire probing all aspects of synagogue life. We will come up with a green policy proposal coming out of these discussions.

One suggestion was to have a quarterly article written by younger members of the shul. The theme should be "things that should change when I grow up". I am sure there will be lots to talk about in these....

Chag Sameach,

—Daniel



## From the Convenors

Dear Friends,

It goes without saying that the past two years have been incredibly challenging for us all. In the spirit of “looking forward”, we won’t list them again – we’re all too familiar with the toll on each of us as individuals, on our families, on our friends and on our communities.

But now it seems that with the final lifting of COVID restrictions, and in the hope that most of us can find ways to “live with” this virus, we can start to move forward again and plan for the future of our shul.

And we do have a potentially very exciting future. Firstly, we’re growing! Since we wrote the last Convenors’ message in the Rosh Hashanah issue of Kol HaKehilah, we’ve welcomed Laurence, Hazel and Douglas Cohen, Adam Hayek and Danielle Berlin, Benji Rosen and Miri Cabib, and Chazan Jalda Rebling (the new director of EAJL). We are delighted to count them among the members of Kol Nefesh.

We’ve celebrated the arrivals of Ariella Hettie Fenster-Simons, Jonathan Francis Kofi Butt Philip and Charlotte Pepper-Grant and we look forward to watching them grow and flourish. We’re also looking forward to congratulating Isla and the whole Silk family on Isla’s upcoming Bat Mitzvah in late May. Benji Rosen and Miri Cabib have announced their engagement, and we look forward to a joyous aufruf (pre-wedding Shabbat) at Kol Nefesh next spring.

While we’re on the subject of growth, following the merger of Edgware Masorti (EMS) with the Borehamwood community to form Shema (South Herts and Edgware Masorti), and the EMS move out of the area, we look forward to going from strength to strength as the only Masorti shul in Edgware.

Our shul attendance has been growing steadily over the past few weeks, and it feels so good to experience being able to see each other and daven and sing together again on Shabbat morning. We’re incredibly blessed to have so many members who are able to lead our davening, to leyn, and to give thought-provoking drashot. And we’re looking forward to our next “first-timers” Shabbat on May 14th when many people will contribute to the service in ways that they’ve never done before. Amazingly, almost all of the many slots are already filled even as we write this two months ahead of time!

On May 29th we’re looking forward to our Pelach Fair and brunch, with prizes to be won and musical accompaniment (kindly provided by Isaac Scheer). We hope that seeing all of our Pelachim (committees) together, and having the opportunity to chat with the Pelach chairs, will remind our members of our



egalitarian, can-do ethos and encourage new participation, energy, involvement and ideas from members which will help our shul to continue to provide a very diverse range of activities and learning in addition to our services.

Speaking of learning, during the Omer between Pesach and Shavuot, we’re looking forward to a brief online counting and thought for the day together, similar to the very successful Elul programme which we’ve enjoyed for the past couple of years. There will also be a programme of learning with Rabbi Joel on Zoom in preparation for Shavuot, organised by our Talmud Torah (education) Pelach. And we’re very much looking forward to being able to hold our traditional in-person Tikun Leyl on Shavuot, on the topic of Makhloket (“constructive conflict”) and Standing Together at Sinai, followed by our even more traditional picnic and football in the park.

We’re also looking forward to seeing the direction taken by some new member initiatives, including the exploration by the Green Team of additional ways in which we can make our shul’s activities more sustainable and eco-friendly, ongoing support for refugees from all over the world and in particular from Ukraine, as well as the Giving Circles charitable donations programme of the Tikun Olam Pelach.

And while we of course hope that these services are never required, we’re looking forward to the peace of mind that comes from knowing that the Yad b’Yad Pelach, together with the Member Engagement Pelach, have streamlined procedures in place for helping members at times of bereavement, illness or other needs.

Not least, we are delighted that the Families Pelach as well as Noam continue to provide fun and interesting activities for parents and kids – most recently, the Mishloach Manot project, which was a wonderful and well-received initiative!

Most of all, we would like to thank all those who give of their time, effort and enthusiasm to make us a community that continually punches above its weight. We look forward to all that we can continue doing together.

And finally, we’re looking forward to the publication of this edition of our magazine – it means that we’re off the hook for writing articles for the next six months. 😊

Chag sameach!

*Philippa Gamse & Gabi Peretz*

## CST wishes our whole community a safe and enjoyable Pesach

For two years, we have been unable to celebrate Pesach as we all wanted to. We have been unable to sit around the seder table with family and friends, every household carrying out its own version of this very special festival. We have had to be innovative in overcoming the challenges that COVID-19 has posed to the notion and practice of community.

This year, with life gradually returning to something more familiar to what we knew before the virus’ outbreak, CST also has to get back on track: but throughout the pandemic and for all of the changes in our lives, CST has kept working for the good of our community, ensuring that British Jews can live Jewish lives with the confidence that security brings. As long as there are people who hate Jews – as long as antisemitism, terrorism and extremism remain unfortunate parts of our reality – this work cannot stop.

Events over the past year have shown how crucial it is that CST sticks to its mission, supported by the partnership of our Jewish communities. Reactions to the war between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 had a far-reaching and profound impact on the Jewish community, driving a record annual total of antisemitic incidents reported to CST. In January of 2022, a British terrorist, motivated by his hatred of Jews, travelled across the Atlantic to a shul in a small town in Texas, where he took

congregants and a rabbi hostage. It provided a stark reminder of an uncomfortable truth: if it can happen there, it can happen anywhere.

We strive every day to make sure that it does not happen here. Protecting the wide and wonderful spectrum of Jewish life in the UK, encouraging it to flourish, is at the core of our mission. We rely on your support and cooperation in this endeavour. There are different ways that you can help us.

**You can contribute by becoming a volunteer** and training in technical and physical aspects of modern-day security, ensuring that your synagogue and fellow congregants are as well-protected as possible.

**You can report antisemitism to us when you see it.** Every report helps us to better do our jobs, to better understand the landscape of anti-Jewish hate, and to better represent our community to police and government.

**You can donate to us.** We are a charity and depend upon the generosity of our community. Every penny goes towards building a better Jewish – and British – future together.

**CST wishes you all a Chag Pesach Sameach.**



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