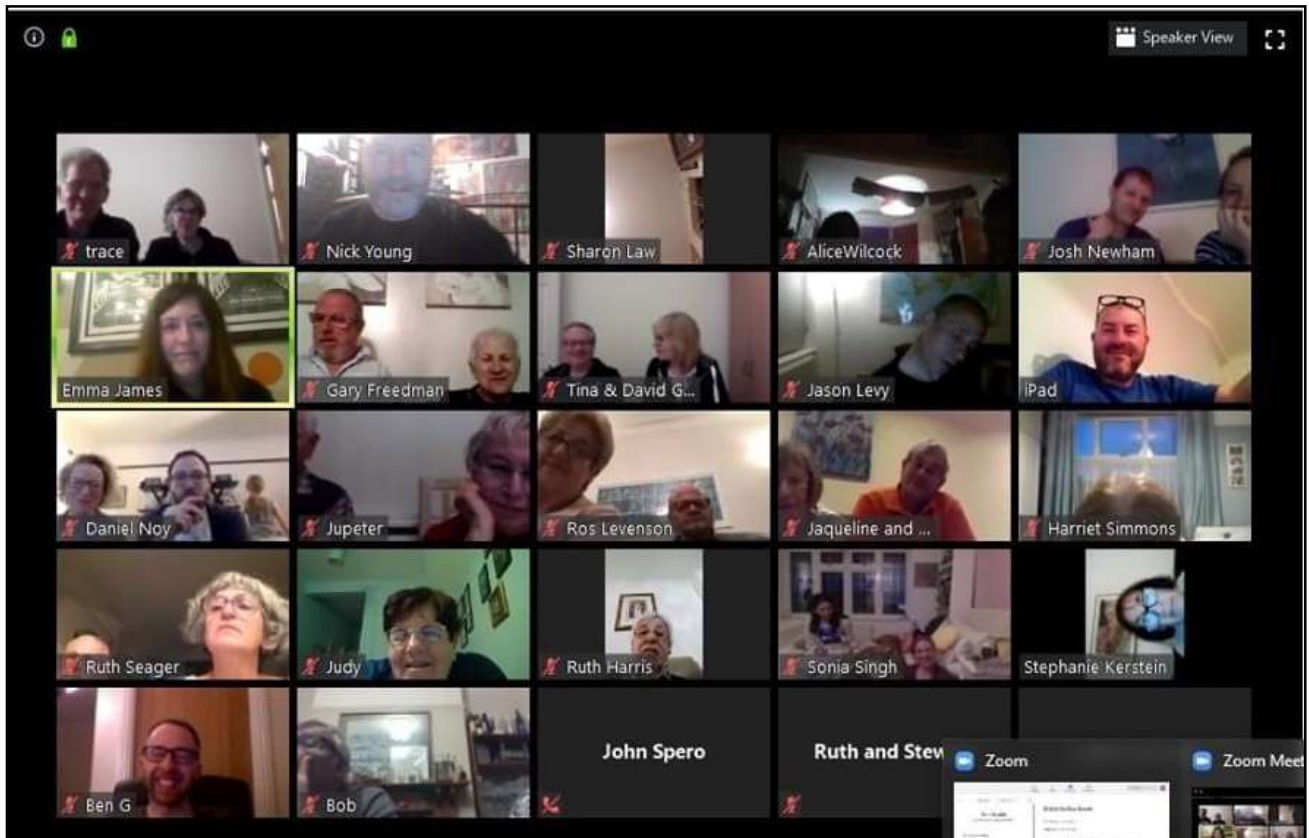


# HaGesher הגשר

*The Bridge*

East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue

May 2020 | Iyyar 5780



## In this issue:

We learn of the community response to the current crisis

Reflect on Chanukah and Purim celebrations

Find out about a Czech Torah Scroll connection

And more...

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## Editorial

A lot has changed in the last few months since the Chanukah issue of HaGesher. Normal life as we know it has been put on hold and we have had to find ways to adapt to our new 'normal' in lockdown. You can read about how the ELELS community has rallied and responded to this change in this issue.

On a personal note, this is my last issue as Editor of HaGesher, as I am stepping down to have a baby.

Claire Bone will be interim Editor and I look forward to reading future issues at leisure! It has been a privilege to be Editor for the last two and a half years and to get to know a lot of you through your article contributions. Thank you for your support and best wishes to you all.



**Clare Crego-Molloy**

### Chair's Word by Stewart Spivack

The last time I wrote to you all, we were looking forward to Purim and Pesach. Well Purim was a wonderful occasion! We had already been told not to shake hands, or hug or kiss, but we had a fantastic Spiel (masterminded by Jonathan Young – our new Cheder Headteacher), with superb acting from our youngsters. We had games and chat, along with music, and hamantaschen were distributed very hygienically by Ben Glassman. There was a huge attendance and it was a really fun event.

But then, some days later, our world changed. We were in LOCKDOWN. Bob Kamall chaired the ELELS 'Cobra committee' shadowing the government one. Our building could not be used, so our new administrator Sam began working from home; our rabbis had to work from home too and any meetings were to be held on Zoom. Those amongst us who are technologically naïve wondered: what was Zoom?? (For an explanation of Zoom, please call in!)

Within a few weeks we have all become 'Zoomers' (if that is a word?). Council meetings and all other group meetings were held on Zoom. Services were to be held on Zoom, as well as our Communal Seder. Next came coffee mornings, quizzes, chats and all other sorts of ideas for Zooming. Indeed, we have even held funerals on Zoom, as we attempted to give the mourners some comfort by seeing the community on screen, if not in person.

Of course, all this had to be set up; we had our resident technical brains. I'm not sure who they all are, but I know Bob Kamall and Nick Young were amongst them. We had to be allowed in to our Zoomed events, so Gary, Jason and others went on 'security'; not letting us in the door, but letting us on to the screens. We had our ELELS Community Group set up on Facebook, which has proved a great forum for expressions of opinion and thanks.

Then, we started contacting all our membership by phone; this took great planning and was masterminded

by Rabbi Richard and Nick. It was done by the many, many volunteers who got in contact with all our members to check if they were ok and if anyone needed any help. Others volunteered to bring parcels of food and medicines to those who are isolated because of health conditions or age, which means they cannot go out at all.

All of this work, this great effort to keep our ELELS community together, spiritually and practically, has been done in such a short space of time, and by so many offering their time and effort. It has been truly inspiring and awesome to see everyone involved and is a great source of pride to all of us in our synagogue. Thank you to all who have given such time and effort.

One day, hopefully fairly soon, we shall come out of our own isolation, be together and begin again discussing various topics of synagogue life, like buildings, AGMs and other topics. We may even start talking about Brexit again!!

I can only hope, not just for us, but for the wider community, that we remember that during this period of isolation, there were those that kept the country going – the staff in supermarkets and the drivers that delivered, the postmen and the dustmen, the pharmacies, the police, fire and ambulance staff, many others, and of course, the NHS workers who we rightly applaud on Thursday evenings at 8pm, out with our neighbours on our streets (albeit two metres away!!).

And, hopefully, we will all become a little kinder to each other; not walk by the homeless in our streets, but campaign for better housing. Not tolerate food banks, but ensure that adults and children are helped when they suffer misfortune. Perhaps we will all look at our values and become a fairer minded country with less extremes of great wealth alongside extreme poverty.

I look forward to one day, standing at the door in Marlborough Road, with a handshake, a hug, or even a kiss to welcome everyone back. Meanwhile, let's keep ZOOMING!

# IMAGINE – Freedom and Responsibility!

**By Rabbi Richard Jacobi**



I dislike the overuse of hyperbole. Not everything described as exceptional or unique or a crisis is that. However, the current experience we are having caused by Covid-19 is all these things. It is unique as a pandemic in the twenty-first century with global travel, global news coverage, and global anxiety. It is a shared traumatic event that we are all experiencing. Thus far, we as a community have experienced deaths and illness, and also kindness and active supportive care as our response.

Some people are already suggesting that this Coronavirus crisis could be a telling period in terms of homo sapiens and the planet Earth. The quiet of traffic-free roads, the sky unoccupied by frequent aeroplanes, the rivers rapidly re-gaining flora and fauna, all these are sources of enjoyment in amongst the worries caused by a deadly virus.

The virus exploded the economy and normal ways of being between Purim and Pesach. A wonderful Purim Spiel and Party would have been topped, just (!), by the expected attendance at our Communal Seder. Except that we, and so much of the world, were stopped in our tracks. Our Communal Seder over Zoom was memorable for different reasons, and Pesach 5780, 8th – 15th April 2020, will, we hope, prove to be a unique experience in the history of the 21st century (whenever that comes to be written).

It remains to be seen whether history will judge the Coronavirus pandemic as a plague or curse, on the one hand, or as a painful blessing in disguise on the

other. I, for one, hope that homo sapiens will have the courage to turn this global halt into an opportunity for a morally-inspired system re-boot.

Let's imagine a better world into being as we emerge from the panicky early weeks of this crisis. Let's start to dream about how we could bring closer the messianic age that we talk about at the end of our Pesach Seder. Let's carry on the caring and helping community we are being in these difficult times. Let's mingle more online and in person. Let's think very carefully about who are the really important people in the functioning new civil society we want to establish. Let's ensure we don't return to un-housed street homeless, when we have proven that they can be accommodated if we really want or need them to be. Let's give the climate a chance to breathe and reverse the damage.

Jewishly, we celebrate the marriage of freedom with responsibility at Shavuot, fifty-one days after the start of Pesach. As we approach Shavuot this year, let us hope and pray that we will be seeing an improvement in the health situation, so that the virus ceases to plague us with death and illness. Let us also seek the courage to not "return to normal", but to build such a better society that history will regard us as pioneers in improving the world!

HaGesher would like to invite readers  
to send in letters to be published in our magazine.

Comments on any subject are welcome, but of course, those on the life of our  
Synagogue would be particularly appreciated.

Please send them to our Office by email.

## ELELS Council News

### Stewart Spivack (Chairman ELELS)

As in all aspects of our life, the ELELS Council has had a transformation recently. We were quite happily meeting at least monthly at the start of the year. Then, suddenly in March, 'social distancing' came about.

Council had to learn how to 'Zoom'. Of course, many on Council were already familiar with this technology (excluding your Chairman, who still harks back to the days of the quill pen!).

But, Council adapted as it should, and we have now had a few Zoom meetings to discuss aspects of synagogue life.

Our Council set up a new sub-committee calling it our very own 'Cobra Group' to work out how we should work during lockdown. We are all very thankful for Bob Kamall for chairing this group.

Of course, many events to be held at Marlborough Road had to be postponed – several Bnei Mitzvot have had to be postponed until later in the year, as have other family and communal celebrations.

The decision had to be taken to cancel our Communal Seder at Clore Tikva. We were considering this, but as 'lockdown' was announced, this had to be confirmed.

Our own building had to be closed and Sam Ly, our Office Administrator, is now working from home, as of course, are our rabbis and Nick Young our Community Development Manager.

But through the brilliance of technology and the skills of many of our members, we have adapted to our new way of life. Council and all the committees of the synagogue are meeting regularly and are putting on many services and other activities. Please keep a lookout for emails sent out giving details of all that is going on, and also look at (and please join) our new ELELS Community Facebook page where events and services are also listed.

If you have any questions or suggestions please contact me on 07745 790869 or at: chair@elels.org.uk.

The virtual services via Zoom have been very welcome. After 'attending' the first one at the end of week one of lock-down, I can honestly say that it was the highlight of my week! It was great being able to see our community all in one place, and somehow comforting to be able to come together in this way. The Communal Seder was also a brilliant way of coming together to celebrate Pesach; it wouldn't have been the same without it, especially as it is just the two of us at home at the moment.

A big 'thank you' to everyone for making these services possible, and of course, meaningful. I feel that the leaders of the synagogue have been quick and proactive in finding new ways for us to continue to be a community. As it's been written (!) a community is not about the building.....

All good wishes

**Harriet and Russell Simmons**

Thank you so much for organising the Cheder classes via Zoom; it was fantastic to hear the children connect and they were so excited to see each other! The lesson went well and I like that the classes were able to be split into groups. Nathan and Jessica's teacher, Issey, did really well managing the children within the virtual environment, keeping them engaged and occupied - looking forward to the next virtual class.

**Claire Bone**

A huge thank you for arranging virtual Cheder classes. Both my children are in different classes, so it was great to see the technology at work for them to continue learning with their age groups. I think the length of the Zoom was good, especially for the young ones, as Daniel was getting a little fidgety by the end of his. Both boys loved being able to say hello to their friends. The simplicity of the tasks on this first one was good too. Would love to see the boys doing some of their Hebrew language learning in future lessons if possible. Thank you once again. I'm so pleased you were able to facilitate this.

**Vicki Delow**

A Zoom Communal Seder! A fun, moving occasion, and wonderful to see all our community gathered together. Thanks to Rabbis Richard & David and to Nick for organising the event. Very proud to be part of ELELS.

**Stewart Spivack,  
ELELS Chair**

**By Nick Young  
ELELS Community  
Development Manager**



The word for community in Hebrew is kehilla. As a synagogue, we aspire to be more than a community, but a kehilla kadosha - a holy or sacred community whose activities and programmes are reflections of Jewish principles and values. The question as to how we measure ourselves at ELELS as a kehilla kadosha is one to explore as we move into the future, but at this time I'm sure we can agree that being a holy community means to take care of one another as well as ourselves. As it says in the Talmud, "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la-zeh." All of us are responsible for one another.

The current pandemic has brought sadness, worry and in some cases tragedy that has touched all of us, which I would not seek to diminish in any way. On the other hand, it has also brought the best out of our synagogue community as we have pulled together. This has been especially exemplified through a magnificent response to our call for volunteers. Unlike the famous Lord Kitchener poster, we didn't need that finger pointing unsettlingly towards the viewer. All we did was ask, and the ELELS membership emphatically answered. We are a synagogue that cares!

More than 50 people have stepped up to make phone calls to each and every household in our community; a team of more than 20 shoppers/deliverers are now in place picking up groceries and medicines for people unable to do so. We also have members offering specialist support, whether a reassuring voice at the end of a phone for those benefiting from more regular contact, or support with technology. And all of this is handled by a team of four Request Handlers overseeing our care@elels.org.uk email address and a Deliveries Coordinator who liaises with our delivery team.

And, in addition to building up a new care network, volunteers have also created social events such as our daily Elevensies sessions and quizzes.

The feedback from our congregation has shown that, in these worrying, isolating and disempowering times, people have really appreciated both the connection and the care that has been forthcoming. This quote, from members living in Chadwell Heath who have received deliveries from us, reflects the value of our support efforts:

"I am never really short of words, but I just cannot say how thankful both I, and my husband are, for the kindness and help given. Know that whatever happens, you have all done an honourable thing helping your fellow human beings to survive in the most dreadful of times."

More than 1/6 of our membership are part of our volunteer corps, which speaks volumes as we know many of our members are also part of other care efforts, whether supporting organisations like Jewish Care, Mutual Aid groups in their localities or volunteering for the NHS. Events of the past few weeks show that our synagogue, ELELS, is not just a building, but a real community -- a kehilah kadosha -- made up of a diverse group of people who are committed to one another, the support, and the betterment of their community.

Rabbi Yirmiyah makes a statement in the Talmud that those occupied with the needs of the community are like those who are occupied with matters of Torah. Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz & Rabbi Margot Stein of the American Reconstructionist movement created a blessing derived from Rabbi Yirmiyah that is appropriate to share with you at this time.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לעסוק בצרכי צבור

Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok betzorkhei tzibur.

How full of blessing you are, ETERNAL ONE, our God, majesty of the Universe, who has consecrated us with Your commands, and commanded us to occupy ourselves with the needs of the community.

Although I am on the professional staff, I have never been prouder to also be a member of ELELS, or any synagogue (and I've belonged to a few in the UK and on my travels abroad!). I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks and acknowledgement to the ELELS membership.

If you would be interested in joining our team of volunteers, we can almost certainly find a role for

you, get in touch to let me know at [community.development@elels.org.uk](mailto:community.development@elels.org.uk). If you would like our support in some way, please email our Care Team at [care@elels.org.uk](mailto:care@elels.org.uk) or call Stewart Spivack, our Chairman, who is our phone contact person on 07745790869.

## East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue is committed to the safeguarding and well-being of all of our members

In our welcoming and inclusive ELELS community, we wish to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable, supported and safe.

However, if you are concerned about a member or if a child or adult discloses information to you that makes you feel concerned about their safety or welfare, or the safety or welfare of another, please inform one of the named Safeguarding Team below by phoning the office on **020 8989 7619** and leaving a message for them to call you or emailing [safeguarding@elels.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@elels.org.uk).

Remember that it is never wrong to feel concerned and it is better to inform one of the Safeguarding Team than do nothing at all. Please visit our website for our safeguarding policy and further information.



**Josh Newham**

**Designated Safeguarding Lead**



**Jonathan Young**



**Di Kamall**



**Sonia Muscovitch**



**Sharon Pinhas**

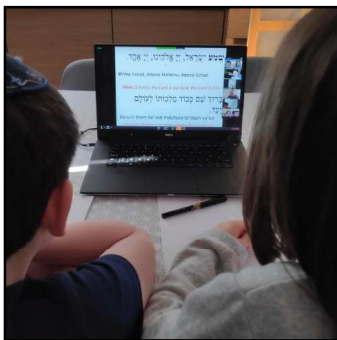


# FOR THE NEW GENERATION

Dear ELELS Council, Parents and Community,

I have been in the post of Head of Cheder (EL<sup>2</sup>) for nearly four months now and the time has flown by. For those of you who haven't met me yet, or indeed know anything about me, I have a background in Jewish education, having taught at Westminster Synagogue for the last seven years and I grew up in South Woodford, with my family belonging to South West Essex and Settlement Reform Synagogue. This means that leading the Cheder has been a return to my roots, which has been a pleasure.

As some of you will know, I am a performer and creative, and run a theatre company with my wife. Before lockdown we took an extract of our new show, based on the Iliad, to The British Museum and then completed two weeks of development in Scotland in collaboration with the St Andrews Classics department. We intend to bring this to London at some point in the future and hope that some of you may get to see it. I was able to put those artistic skills to good use for the ELELS Purim Spiel, which was great fun! In fact, it was a real highlight of the year so far, with a packed attendance and great performances from our teachers, who did a superb job. It has since dawned upon me that the Purim Spiel was probably one of the last times that the community was able to come together, so for that reason alone it was a special moment.



In the short time that I have led the Cheder, it has grown and matured nicely, with new families joining the younger classes and new friendships being made. The children have explored Jewish ethics and Halachah, looking at the values of Tikkun Olam, the concept of 'love thy neighbour as thyself', and examined what makes a hero, through the stories of Joseph and David. The classes all delved into why people pray, what makes a prayer, and wrote and decorated their own prayers which can be seen on "The Prayer Wall", on display in the Vayikra/Bemidbar classroom. Please do feel

free to check it out once we're back and utilising the synagogue space. They have also studied the festivals of Tu B'Shvat, Purim and Pesach including impromptu drama plays, artwork and discussion. During the break we held a Pesach Zoom Challenge which was a great success. Activities included a house scavenger hunt for Pesach related objects, writing an acrostic poem, Pictionary and a version of articulate and were enjoyed by all who took part.



Now, as term starts again after Passover, which marks the Jewish people's freedom from bondage, we look forward to the time when the present coronavirus situation is under control and we can once again resume the physical Cheder, but for now we have successfully moved it online. The format has been adjusted to accommodate the changing needs of families, with an earlier starting time, providing continuity for the children and an opportunity to continue their Jewish education and social experience. In fact, the new term with its overall themes of community and home would seem particularly apt in this moment. And though it is uncertain when religious centres will be able to open their doors once again, it is clear from all the events, quizzes and classes that are happening online, that the ELELS community and the Cheder will continue to grow and will emerge stronger for it.

**Jonathan Young**





On a bright and cold afternoon on Sunday 22nd December, ELELS hosted their Chanukah Party. More than 120 congregants, families and friends filled the synagogue on both floors! There were lots of activities on offer, including traditional doughnut eating games, face painting and dreidel spinning. After the fun and games (and eating of doughnuts!) finished, Rabbi Richard led a guitar and singing based Chanukah service. Many songs were sung and questions about the festival asked and answered!

We also said farewell to our Head of Cheder, Paul Bloomfield, who moved to Israel. Paul was presented with flowers and a leaving gift by Sharon Pinhas, Chair of the New Generation Committee.

ELELS Vice Chair, Elliott Porte, said: "It's been such a lovely party atmosphere this afternoon, a good start to the festive season."



More than 130 members, children and friends gathered at ELELS to enjoy the Purim Spiel written by new Head of Cheder, Jonathan Young, and performed by the Cheder teachers. As is customary at Purim, at the conclusion of the Spiel, all the children paraded in three different age groups in their fancy dress costumes. A winner was chosen from each group by a panel of judges; one judge being ELELS Chair, Stewart Spivack, who said: "All the children have worked so hard on their costumes and it is really hard to decide who the three winners will be. It has been a truly wonderful occasion."

After the Spiel, everyone was invited to stay and eat hamentashen, a traditional triangle shaped pastry, filled with fruit or chocolate.



## A Hero Tells His Story



Forty members of ELELS braved a wild and windy night in December to attend a meeting at Marlborough Road where they heard a fascinating story of courage of a completely different order.

Rami Sherman, in his youth a member of IDF's famed Sayeret Matkal unit, entranced the audience with

his account of his role in the daring raid on Entebbe in July 1976. At the time the world was captivated by the audacity and chutzpah of the raid, when the IDF flew four Hercules aircraft laden with 100 brave young men in Ugandan army uniform, medical personnel and supplies, and one special black Mercedes limousine, 4,000 kilometres through enemy skies in dead of night to launch the raid on the Ugandan international airport.

The aim was to free over 100 Israeli and Jewish hostages and the French pilot and aircrew who had volunteered to stay with their passengers, after their capture by Palestinian and German terrorists. The ill

fated Air France flight had been hijacked en route from Tel Aviv to Paris and while the world waited, holding its breath and listening to the terrorists' demands, the Israeli government led by Yitzhak Rabin, decided to act. They assembled the crack unit of volunteer soldiers to fly the clandestine mission to the Ugandan airport and bring back the hostages. In their planning, the Israeli government allowed for up to 40% casualties – in the event four hostages and one soldier were lost.

The success of the mission was a world changing event which enhanced Israel's standing on the international stage and led to Ugandan reprisals against other innocent parties. It still has repercussions today, both for the hostages who continue to live with their terrible experience and for Israeli politics because the soldier lost – Yoni Netanyahu – became a national hero and his family name continues to dominate Israeli politics. Rami Sherman told his incredible tale with warmth and humility but his actions as a 23 year old soldier could not be overestimated.

**Judith Konzon**

## Mental Health Awareness Shabbat

Rabbi Richard Jacobi, Emeritus Rabbi David Hulbert and the ELELS community, were delighted to welcome Michelle Kabia and Tallat Bhatti from Mind in Tower Hamlets to our Mental Health Shabbat morning on 1st February.

Rabbi Richard led a shortened guitar based service, which was followed by an insightful talk given by Michelle and Tallat regarding many issues about mental health, including how in today's society it remains a taboo subject. After the conclusion of the service, Michelle and Tallat mingled with the community sharing tea and cake, and encouraged members of the community to ask questions or share their experiences.

Rabbi Richard said: "My take-away from our speakers is this; when telling people about a mental health problem is as easy and normal as telling them you have a cold, then, and only then, will we NOT need a Mental Health Awareness Shabbat event like we had with Michelle and Tallat. As a step in this direction, we at ELELS will support the establishment of a new Mind association in Redbridge."



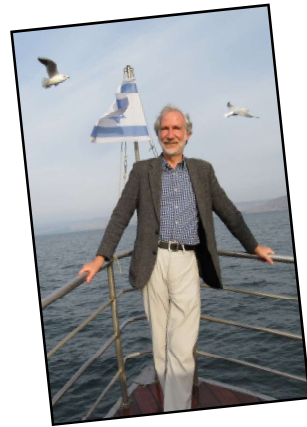
*Tallat and Michelle with Rabbi Richard and ELELS members*

# East London Three Faiths Tour to the Holy Land

In December 2019, 24 members of our local East London Three Faiths Forum returned from a week's tour, visiting many religiously-significant places in Israel and Palestine, including Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Jericho and Hebron. For the Muslim members of the group, the spiritual highlight was the opportunity to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, both the dawn and the noon prayers.

This was the eighth annual tour organised by the Three Faiths Forum. The group included ten Muslims, eight Christians and six Jews, inspiringly led by Revd. Ulrike Bell (United Reform Church), Imam Dr. Mohammed Fahim (South Woodford Mosque) and Rabbi David Hulbert (East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue).

The week-long tour was an immense success, packed with unforgettable experiences – as well as getting us all 2,500 miles away from Election Day! Many new and deep friendships were made amongst the participants.



*Left: Rabbi Hulbert on a boat on the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee)*

*Below: The group at the ancient port of Jaffa*



*The group on the steps of al-Jazzar Mosque in Acre*

## Tree of Life Ceremony

More than 85 members came together for Shabbat, Saturday 8th February, at ELELS for our annual Tree of Life Ceremony.

Rabbi Richard led a guitar based family service to welcome all our new members along, with their family and friends. Each new member was invited by Rabbi Jacobi to look at the Torah Scroll and help him read the blessings. Next, all the recent B'nei Mitzvot (Bar and Bat Mitzvah students) were also invited to look at the Torah Scroll and were asked to stick a celebratory leaf on the synagogue's Tree of Life.

ELELS Chair, Stewart Spivack, said: "I am so happy to chair such a wonderful growing and inclusive community and look forward to welcoming many more new members during the coming months. Of course, one never forgets the founding members of our community, who tirelessly work for betterment of everyone". The morning finished as usual with blessings over wine and chollah, and with lots of chat over tea and cake kindly donated by the community.



## The Industry of Lies - Myths and Facts about the Israeli-Arab Conflict

Ben Dror Yemini, an Israeli journalist, was guest speaker at ELELS on Friday 7th February, after a Chavurah supper and a brief service from Rabbi Richard. His speech was regarding the untruths that are continuously published regarding the Israeli- Arab conflict, which he wrote about in his 2014 book, *The Industry of Lies*. He gave insightful and illuminating examples of many of the untruths and quoted falsehoods about the Jewish state and after his talk congregants were invited to ask questions. At the close of the evening, Rabbi Richard presented Ben Dror with a book about the Czech Scrolls collection of Westminster Synagogue, one of which we host at ELELS.



## International Women's Day Service

Members of the Rosh Chodesh group led a Shabbat service and study session at ELELS on 7th March to celebrate International Women's Day. The theme running through this year's International Women's Day was 'Each for Equal'. All readings and songs were written or composed by Jewish females and they included: 'We All Stood Together' by Merle Feld, a Jewish author, activist and educator and 'Me Too' by Devon Spier, an American student rabbi.

Members of the group read out passages and prayers. After the service, there was a discussion of the Torah story about the female Tamar, who is embedded in the the narratives of Genesis and perhaps a stronger woman than one initially thinks.

Merle Muswell, part of the Rosh Chodesh group and one of our two Ask Me Ambassadors for Jewish Womens Aid, said:

"It was an interesting and inspiring service. ELELS are blessed with having such learned and inspirational female lay leaders."



## An Interesting Experience

On 18th April I excitedly joined the congregation of Ohev Shalom for Shabbat morning service (yes, it was 2.00p.m here in the UK). Ohev Shalom is a Conservative synagogue in Wallingford PA, just outside Philadelphia, to which I had been invited by my cousin Lyndall Miller and her daughter Rabbi Kelilah Miller. Kelilah was trained in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and has the roles of Cantor, assistant to Rabbi Gerber and Religion School teacher, since 2015. Both Kelilah and Rabbi Gerber, together with the 30 or so congregants, gave me a very warm welcome. Needless to say, I had not been 'beamed in', but transported by the amazing modern technology of Zoom.

At an early point in the service, Rabbi Gerber pointed out that rabbis in the past have named certain festivals of Pesach with an outstanding event of that particular year. He has the idea that Pesach of this year will remain in the memory as the 'Pesach year of Zoom' with people linking with family and friends by the technology for Seder nights as well as synagogue services.

Obviously, it was just lovely for me to be at the service with Lyndall and to hear Kelilah daaven and leyn, but the main point of this article is what followed. In his talk to the congregation towards the end of the morning, Rabbi Gerber explained that before Covid-19 changed the pattern of synagogue, and indeed all our lives, there had been a plan for this particular Shabbat. The plan had been to celebrate the completion and making Kosher the Czech Scroll which originated from Lostice. Apparently, it had taken some years for the restoration to be carried out. At the appropriate time I mentioned, and Rabbi Gerber and several others were interested to hear, that not only did ELELS have a Prague Scroll, but in addition, Nick Young, ELELS Community Development Officer had worked with the Memorial Scrolls Trust at Westminster Synagogue. Last year ELELS was privileged to host the travelling exhibition, which traces the history and subsequent journey of the Czech Torah Scrolls and illustrated the exhibits with a most interesting informative talk.

In conclusion I am hoping that this will be the beginning of a connection between Ohev Shalom and ELELS, as I am in the process of establishing email links between Rabbi Gerber, Rabbi Richard and Nick Young. Nick has already agreed to assist Rabbi Gerber to be in touch with the Chair of the MST.

**June Bradbury**

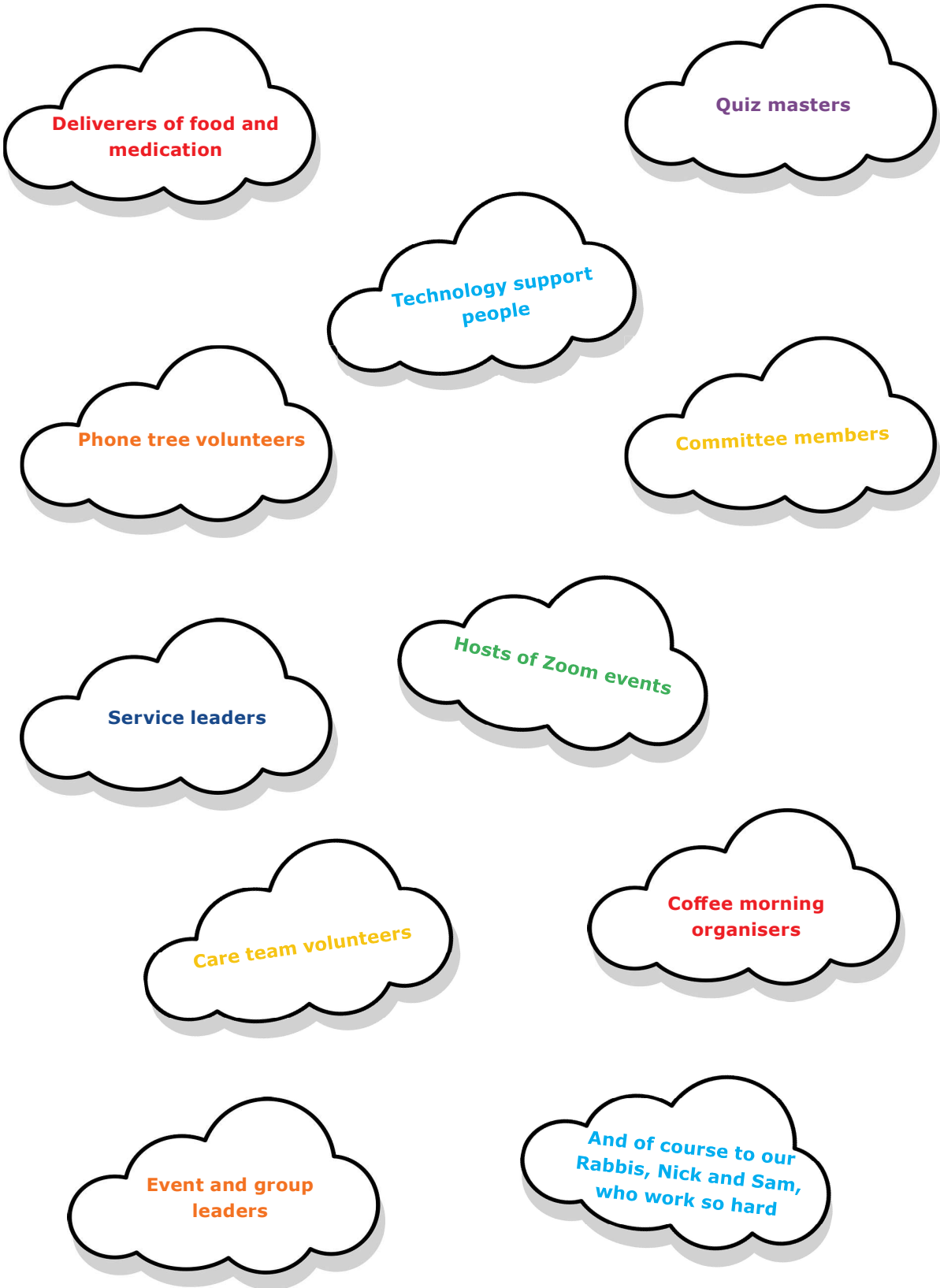


*Rabbi Kelilah  
Miller*



*Rabbi Gerber of  
Ohev Shalom*

# Thank you to all of our ELELS volunteers!



## Closing Our Doors - Keeping Our Community Open

We've all had to make changes in the last few weeks. For most of us "change" is usually at best uncomfortable and often something to avoid, especially so when it is a change being imposed upon us. In the last few weeks ELELS has had to make some difficult decisions, many in response to changes imposed from elsewhere, and many needing a quick or even an immediate response.

Anyone who has been involved with ELELS, or with its former constituent communities, will know we tend to be cautious about making big decisions. It took several years and countless meetings (I know because I was at most of them) to move from thinking "it might be a good idea" to actually making the decision to merge. We became ELELS three years ago - we are still looking for and thinking about our new home.

So how was it that we managed, within a few weeks, to stop being a synagogue based in a building to become a real community, albeit a digitally enabled one?

To start with there was a flurry of emails as members of Council, our rabbis and our administrator all exchanged information, much of it derived from the same Government advice, repackaged by different organisations like the Board of Deputies, Liberal Judaism, JVN, NCVO, CST, etc. Initially it focussed on washing hands, staying away if you felt unwell or recently travelled in affected areas, and the need to avoid shaking hands or kissing family and friends when entering shuls. There was a danger we would all

be overwhelmed by emails, so rather than bombard everyone with endless variations of the same advice, ELELS borrowed some ideas from the Government and established a COBRA group.

It was this small COBRA group who took on the task of filtering through all the emails, and all different versions of expert advice, to present to the Council recommended actions to take. In early March we sent all members advice about visiting the synagogue and began to think about planned communal events - theatre trips, forthcoming B'nei Mitzvot, the Communal Seder. We monitored the situation and exchanged emails everyday, aware of the developing situation, conscious that things could change quickly, alert to the potential need for urgent action.

When the unthinkable became the new reality we moved quickly. Yes, we had to cancel a few Shabbat services, but not many. Regretfully, planned events have had to be cancelled or postponed but we did have

our online Communal Seder.

Creating ELELS Zoom accounts and a more secure closed Facebook community group helped provide technical solutions to the enforced temporary closure of our synagogue building.

It is, however, people that have enabled our synagogue community to continue to thrive - members and friends of the community have responded to the call to volunteer. It is the volunteers who:

- Came forward to make telephone calls to our members to enable ELELS to stay in touch, not just with vulnerable members but (at the time of writing) nearly all members
- Have done shopping, collected medicines or done other good deeds for other members
- Have helped other members of the community to get online or taught them how to use Zoom
- Who have hosted Shabbat services, regular coffee mornings and run weekly quizzes

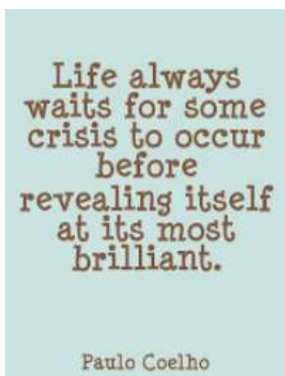
We have learnt a lot in the last few weeks; we continue to learn as we go and, in so doing, we have seen a new sense of togetherness emerge - the Facebook group discussing availability of Matzah, the use of Zoom rooms for social interaction during Shabbat services, online Cheder and Education sessions, etc.

We know there are still lessons to learn, more that can be done to ensure what we are doing remains sustainable, more to encourage and support volunteers, and (when allowed) more work is needed to ensure a smooth transition when we can reopen our synagogue.

**"Our building may be closed, but our community is very much open"**

You can read more about the community response to the current crisis in Rabbi Jacobi's recent article in the Jewish Chronicle (<https://bit.ly/3eWWUsk>). Information about all ELELS activities is on our (open) Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ELELSynagogue/>) and you can find details of Zoom activities by joining our (members only) Facebook Community Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/567678327182168/>).

**Bob Kamall**





# Around the Community

Not long after we had entered lockdown and services had moved onto Zoom, our member, Emma James, keen quiz-goer and quiz creator, kindly offered to host an online quiz for the community. This took place on Sunday April 5th, with twenty-five households competing against one another over four fun filled rounds including film, general knowledge and an interval round involving completing sequences. The results were tight, but as Emma put it, Josh and Philippa Newham were more than deserving winners of the ELELS Virtual Golden Toilet Roll. Following the success of that first evening, our quizzes have taken off, becoming regular weekly events, for teams of households, consistently drawing ten-thirteen teams including members and friends based locally and participants as far afield as Italy and Hungary. We have also witnessed the birth of a legend in the shape of our team of "Invincibles", the Newhams/Jacobis who between them, throughout April, have carried off the prize every time that they have participated in increasingly tight battles. As I write this, however, we have new champions in the Golds/Solomons who triumphed on the final Sunday of the month with the title holders otherwise engaged! It all sets things up perfectly for further fun and duelling in coming weeks over music, sport, dingbats, food and no doubt some more wonderfully, and fiendishly random rounds! We have quizzes scheduled on Sunday evenings throughout May - check our weekly emails to find out how to register and join. Huge thanks to Emma James, David Gold and John Spero for preparing quizzes, and to Emma, David and Darren Green for hosting as well as to our Zoom co-hosts.

**Nick Young**



**to our new ELELS members:**

**Natalie Alter & Menashy Cohen**

**Sharron Wood & Adam Taylor**

**David & Susie Barnett**

**June Press & Lawrence Phillips**

**Marina Burridge & Adam Russell, with Mimi**

**Leslie Graham**

**Victoria & Richard Delow, with Max & Daniel**

**Jeremy Levene & Hannah Tate (friend of ELELS)**

**Melissa Kaye, with Grace**

**Sara Camlett, with Marnie & Grayson**

**Rosalind & Michael Weltman**

## A Wedding Special Shabbat

ELELS Emeritus Rabbi David Hulbert and his wife Fiona celebrated their upcoming Ruby wedding anniversary with their family and the community at a special Shabbat service on Saturday 15th February. Fiona led much of the service, along with Rabbi Richard. Emeritus Rabbi David was called to the bimah to read from the Torah and to recite the blessings.



ELELS Chair, Stewart Spivack, said: "Many friends, family and members of the congregation gathered at ELELS to celebrate with Fiona and Emeritus Rabbi David to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. Their service to the congregation and to the people of Redbridge over 35 years was remembered and marked with thanks and joy. A lovely occasion followed by a splendid Kiddush!".



The second celebration was the Auf Ruf of Natalie and Menashy, who were also called to the bimah to recite blessings, witnessed by many of their family and friends. After the service, the whole community was invited to enjoy a tasty Kiddush provided by the two couples.

# Life cycle events and notices

## We offer our condolences to...

Since our last edition of Hagesher, we offer condolences to those who are grieving the loss of:

Ronald Islin ר"י, who died on 17th February 2020  
 Sadie Freeder ר"י, who died on 27th February 2020  
 Lester Rabin ר"י, who died on 29th February 2020  
 Eileen Wayne ר"י, who died on 2nd March 2020  
 Gerald Chess ר"י, who died on 8th March 2020  
 Rabbi Neil Kraft ר"י, who died on 27th March 2020  
 Ron Kennard ר"י, who died on 28th March 2020  
 Frances Meinchick ר"י, who died on 3rd April 2020  
 Gerry Wimbourne ר"י, who died on 7th April 2020  
 Warran Rolnis ר"י, who died on 9th April 2020  
 Gillian Vicary ר"י, who died on 11th April 2020  
 Stephanie Sack ר"י, who died on 15th April 2020  
 Lee Joseph ר"י, who died on 27th April 2020

We extend further condolences to those of our members who have lost loved ones during the recent months, whether because of the Covid-19 pandemic or any other cause.



Rabbi Neil Kraft was uniquely humorous, caring, giving and carried his learning lightly. He had a unique capacity to hug and to make the person he was in conversation with feel special. Neil arrived in the UK in 1984 to continue his rabbinical studies, begun in America, at Leo Baeck College in London. Very soon, he combined these studies with serving Woodford Progressive Synagogue, as it then was, as its student minister, continuing until after he was ordained and left to take over from Rabbi Julia Neuberger at the South London Liberal Synagogue.

During his time at Woodford, when the Jewish community in Redbridge was at its most numerous, Neil connected with people of all ages - joining a community coach trip in his vest and jeans, yet never failing to be a spiritual leader. Many of those who grew up in that time still remember Neil fondly, as do his peer group, including past-Chair and long-time friend, Simon Benscher. He adds: "Neil's untimely passing has made me reflect on a friendship that spanned four decades. His naughty sense of humour was legendary. For example, at a friend's simcha - unbeknown to me - he had told the MC that I was Rabbi Kraft, so I was presented with the microphone to make hamotzi. Later, Neil confessed and told me that he often recited "rub a dub dub thanks for the grub"! Some of his jokes were very unrabbinic and unrepeatable. The last time I saw him was at the inaugural service for the combined Edgware and Hendon communities. When he saw me, he ran and threw himself at me and it was the warmest and probably most inappropriate greeting I've ever received from a rabbi. But that was Neil: warm, loving, considerate, knowledgeable, real, and a true friend."

At South London, Neil met Susannah and their subsequent happy marriage was blessed with two sons Elie and Oscar. Having been a very liberal Liberal rabbi, Neil surprised many by taking up a new post at Edgware and District Reform Synagogue. Yet, the shidduch worked brilliantly. Neil survived a near-fatal heart attack a decade ago, and was due to retire at the end of March. Very sadly, and tragically for his family, he contracted Covid-19 and died four days before his retirement date.

Hearing that the live funeral service crashed several times due to the amount of people trying to watch, Susannah commented, "Neil was never really good with technology and it would amuse him that he crashed the internet."

Zecher tzadik livrachah - may the memory of this righteous man be for a blessing.

**Rabbi Richard Jacobi**

## **We commiserate with...**

We commiserate with Liam Bell, who decided with his family to postpone the celebration of his becoming Bar Mitzvah and look forward to sharing the family's joy when circumstances improve.

We also commiserate with couples who have already decided to postpone their planned weddings, as well as those who are still facing the uncertainty of whether they can proceed as planned later in the year.

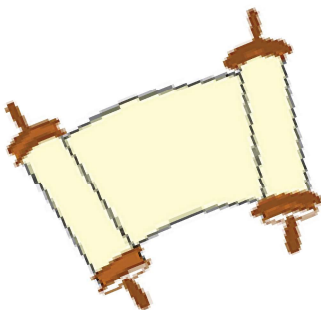
We send our good wishes to everyone who has been or is ill, whether with the Covid-19 virus, or any other cause. We pray you will each have a speedy refuah sheleimah (complete healing).

## **Mazal Tov to...**

We offer a hearty Mazal Tov to Natalie Alter and Menashy Cohen, who were married on 1st March 2020.

We wish Mazal Tov to Hannah-Marie Tate and Jeremy Levene on becoming engaged.

We wish Mazal Tov to Dominik and Maja Lorinc-Young (30/5), Joe and Jake Levy (06/06), and Samuel Segal (13/06) and their families. Each of these young people has chosen to mark their becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah during our Zoom services on the dates given. BUT, fear not! They wish to celebrate again with their families and friends when the congregation is once more allowed to pray together and the word "Kiddush" has been mentioned!!



## **SAVE THE DATE**

**Celebrate the giving of Torah in many  
languages with Dr. Lily Kahn,  
along with our fellow local communities and with  
Liberal Jewish communities around the country on  
Thursday evening 28th May  
and  
Friday morning 29th May**

# ELELS Contact List

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