

HaGesher הגשר

The Bridge

East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue September 2020 | 5781



In this issue:

We look back on a packed summer of events!

ELELS Zoom Mitzvahs - the inside stories!

High Holy Days - how we're planning the Autumn festivals

And so much more...

Editorial



The ELELS community have been extremely busy with their continued support over the last few months - with the phone tree, Elevenses, discussions and lunchtime learning, online Cheder classes and lots more!

New members have joined which is a testament to the strength of our community and young families have grown - which is why I'm stepping in, whilst our previous editor Clare Crego-Molloy and Adam take time with their newborn son Jacob - I'm sure you'll all join me in wishing the family well as they enjoy their new chapter in life.

I'm looking forward to working closely with the communications team here at ELELS and hope you enjoy this bumper issue and, as a result of the activity around the community - the most substantial issue of HaGeshet to date!

Best wishes
Claire Bone

Life cycle, events and new members



Mazal Tov

Wishing Clare and Adam Crego-Molloy Mazal Tov on the arrival of Jacob Joseph Maxwell Crego, Jacob was born on 17/6/2020 weighing a healthy 7lbs 7oz!

Mazal Tov to Shirley and David Forbes on the engagement of Zachary to Verity, daughter of Suzanne and Nigel Rosehill.

Welcome to our new ELELS members

Jacob and Paul Anne Forman (Friend of ELELS)
Claire Bone, with Nathan and Jessica
Peter Kalve (Friend of ELELS)
Alex Lippa and Thomas Lawson (Friend of ELELS)
Bess Solomon

Forthcoming events

Sukhi and Talya Singh and Oren Noy B'nei Mitzvah on 21st November
Izzy Duck Bar Mitzvah on 12th December

We commiserate with

Since our last edition of HaGeshet, we offer our condolences to family and friends of husband and wife, Douglas and Sara Green. Douglas Green died on 18 May 2020 & Sara Green died on 07 August 2020

We also offer our condolences to Judy Berkowicz on the untimely death of her son Andrew.



Chair's Word, by Stewart Spivack

This High Holy Day season will be very different from any we have experienced. There will not be the normal gathering of generations of families and friends visiting each other in their homes through those very special days. There will not be the reunion of so many of us when we join together to pray for a sweet new year.

The lack of physical contact with each other, the missing of a handshake or a hug, is something that many of us find difficult to be without. This has been one of the major difficulties throughout this period of the pandemic.

But here, at ELELS, many volunteered to come together to increase contact with all our members, through our 'Phone Tree' where we were all contacted to see how we were getting on before, during and since the lockdown period. Those who were shielding were helped with deliveries of supplies, those who needed any technological help were advised by our band of experts, and our range of events were increased to allow for us to get together several times a week. For instance, our daily 'Elevensies' chats have proved invaluable, not only to Ruth and myself, but to many others who were not seeing other people.

On screen contact became our new normal!! We have met, by Zoom (a very new meaning of the word for so many of us), in so many ways – in services, talks, quizzes, joining with other communities in prayer and discussion. Sadly, we have also all joined together with our friends and mourners at funerals and shivas. On these sad occasions, many have spoken to me of the special sense of warmth and community that has been felt by many attending. I hope that the mourners have been comforted at the time and since.

Slowly, and very carefully, with 'baby steps', we are starting to emerge from our homes. Beginning with a walk through a park or open space, then a visit to a shop, hopefully meeting after a long time with family and friends. For the more adventurous amongst us, even a visit to a socially distanced restaurant, or a holiday. Of course, we should always behave with care for others and for ourselves.

Life, no doubt, and in time, hopefully with the help of a vaccine, will get back to some sort of normality, or as some say, the 'new normal.' And I hope, that at that point, we shall remember those who really helped us through the pandemic – the NHS, the care workers, the postmen, the shop workers, the road sweepers and dustmen and many, many others, who we have taken for granted in the past. We will understand their true worth to society and that our sense of values in society will improve. I hope we will have a kinder society, where those who have fallen victim to hard times, illness, racist behaviour and discrimination will be treated with respect by us all. Maybe we will not walk by when we witness homelessness and still see the cruel necessity for food banks. Then it will truly be a good New Year.

Meanwhile, on behalf of Officers and Council, and from Ruth and myself, wishing you all a very Happy and Healthy New Year, SHANA TOVA.

Looking forward to seeing you, on screen, and in time, in person at our services and all other events

Stewart Spivack
Chair

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Too much heat, too little light

By Rabbi Richard Jacobi

As I write, the 'tropical' nights continue and we struggle to stay cool and comfortable in our homes not designed for such a climate. I feel that 2020 has been a year so far dominated by "heat" not "light". Heat comes in the form of language that is ill-tempered, such as that being used to vilify vulnerable people fleeing life-threatening persecution and conflict in other parts of the world.

Instead of care and compassion, we have seen aggressive and de-humanising language applied to vulnerable, desperate, often young people. We Jews know the heart and soul of the refugee and we do ourselves harm if and when we remain silent while others are made objects of hatred.

Light comes when we act morally and compassionately to look after the vulnerable.

Heat comes in the form of arrogant and deceptive language used to disguise, deflect, distract us, the citizens of this country from the failures of its government to care for our own vulnerable relatives and friends. The coronavirus pandemic was going to be massively disruptive. Our congregation has seen its share of tragic premature deaths in this ongoing crisis. Too many lives have been sacrificed at the altar of vanity and unapologetic mis-management that places ego above sound collaborative decision-making, sound bites above saving lives

"Light comes when we act morally and compassionately to look after the vulnerable".

Heat comes in the form of allowing our conscious and unconscious biases to turn prejudice into harmful discrimination, intolerance and racism. It is easier to get angry at others than to confront our own bias or the systems that embed disadvantage and exclusion. Our ELELS community is not exempt, I am not exempt, as I've learned about my own unconscious biases in recent weeks. This kind of heat kills: Stephen Lawrence, Anthony Walker, the residents of Grenfell Tower, the Windrush Generation.

We, the decent people of the UK shouldn't have needed the killing of George Floyd to shake us out of our complacency. If we are not actively anti-racist, then we are bystanders condoning it and allowing it to take deeper root. Light comes when we act morally and compassionately to look after the vulnerable.

These are three of the all too many examples of where heat – factless, brash, prejudicial arguing and abuse of people with different views – replaces light, with its calm, open, self-aware and empathetic clear consideration of what is best and brave to do in the interests of all, in line with moral and ethical principles.

"I am enormously grateful to the many members of this community who stepped up to do what is both right and good as the Coronavirus lockdown took effect".

I feel we lived out our values as a synagogue community in so many acts of care and kindness that we have never been more Jewish! Further, with your help and the support of more members than ever volunteering to do their bit, we – the Council and staff of ELELS – are acting to place the emergency response, where appropriate, onto a sustainable long-term footing. We are establishing a Care Committee, accountable to Council, that will ensure we continue to connect with and support our more vulnerable members, and I'm very grateful that Sonia Muscovitch has agreed to lead this.

The light that comes when we act morally and compassionately to look after the vulnerable is not only visual clarity, it is a lightness of spirit and conscience when we know and feel that we are doing what is both right and good. Each year, the High Holy Days offer us the time and space to reflect and consider how we have thought, spoken and acted in the past Jewish year. If we use the time and space well, then we will not just voice the many words of the liturgy, but we will truly reflect and repent of mistakes and errors.

This year, uniquely, we will each be doing this in our own homes. Rightly, to save lives and preserve health, government regulations and our own willing Council decisions mean that we will be together in spirit but not in person.

If you have not already begun, please consider now how you will transform a part, however small, of your home into a mikdash m'at – a small sanctuary – as Judaism has always described the home. Create a space with lightness that is supportive of prayer, reflection, repentance and positivity.

"This year, our services and other study, reflection and learning sessions will be available to all over the internet or by telephone. It has to be this way. So, let's transform necessity into virtue and create together a unique and special period of time that inspires all of us".

May we turn away from the heat of acrimony, division, discrimination and blame and instead create light and lightness by our shared commitment and action to bring more morality and compassion into the world. One moment of light, one kind word, one good deed can save the world.

Lyn and all my family join me in wishing you all a Shanah tovah umetukah – a good and sweet Jewish year of 5781!

Rabbi Richard Jacobi

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

Comments about the life of our Synagogue would be particularly appreciated.

We also welcome any comments and feedback about this issue of HaGeshet and our other communications.

Please send via email to Claire Bone at: editor@elels.org.uk

High Holy Days - Where will we be?



When lockdown started in March there was some very quick work by Rabbi Richard and Nick Young to move our Shabbat services online. As anyone will appreciate who can remember that far back (was it really only five months ago?) there was very little time to plan and they did a fantastic job in, not just offering virtual services, but adapting them to the new medium.

How did we give people a chance to socialise? How would we organise a Kiddush? Was there anything online we could bring into the service we wouldn't be able to do ordinarily. All of these were considered and addressed, with great success, in just a few days. But no sooner was that immediate challenge tackled than the High Holy Days started looming large.

At the time it wasn't clear how long lockdown would go on for but it wasn't like we could just wait until August and see. In a normal year activity for the High Holy Days start from April – and this year there was a lot more to think about:

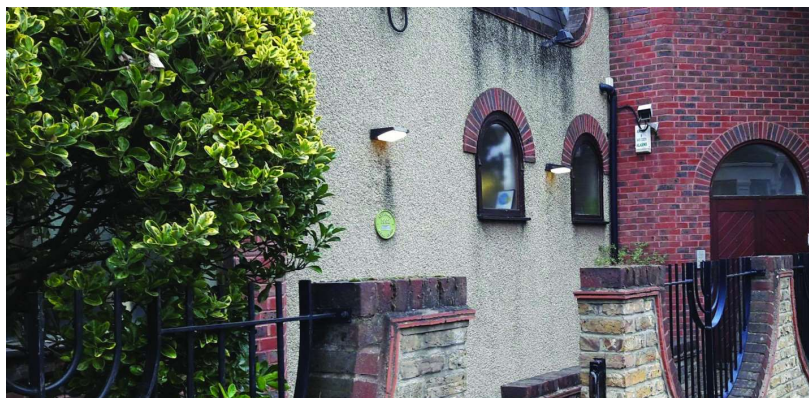
- How do we have the choir singing when you can't hear more than one screen at once?
- How do we avoid members staring at a screen for 12 hours straight on Yom Kippur?
- How do we pick just two people to honour for Simchat Torah in a year when so many have done so much?
- Were there any benefits we could bring from being online (without losing the familiarity of the service)
- Some of the solutions will be surprises for the day and a few bits of detail are still being finalised at the time of writing, but there are some key pieces of information we can share now:
- Any service or activity we normally hold is available this year – although the format may be a bit different from usual. In particular some of the longer services (like Yom Kippur morning) have been made shorter to make it easier for people to view online.
- Service times are similar to usual as well, although a few have moved to prevent households having to use too many devices at the same time
- We will be joining with other progressive Synagogues for some of the services – from Ealing, Reading, Bristol and the local ECAMPS communities – that means a variety of rabbis will be leading the services as well as our own and lay leaders from our community
- This increase in leadership means there will be a choice of services and activities at times: more study sessions, more Havdallah ceremonies, the introduction of some podcasts, and – for the first time – a cooking lesson: how to bake the perfect honey cake!

A full break down of times and other details will be coming out at around 1st September – although this year's services will undoubtedly be different we hope you find they still provide an appropriate time of reflection for you – and may we be the first to wish you a sweet and happy new year.

Ben Glassman and Elliott Porte

Co-chairs of ELELS Rites and Practices Committee

ELELS' Covid-19 'Mini Cobra' Group - COBRA committees and responding to crises



As we all know, these are extraordinary times and our lives whether at home, at work or at synagogue have all been changed by the current pandemic.

Since the early 1970's, when the miners strike disrupted power supplies, successive UK governments have responded to various crises by establishing a COBRA committee. Usually chaired by the Prime Minister, although sometimes by the Secretary of State of the relevant lead department, the COBRA committee assesses the immediate situation and reviews the response to crisis. As the situation evolves, COBRA will determine how to divert resources to help (e.g. deploying troops to help with flood defences) and the best way to manage the ongoing situation.

The exact derivation of COBRA is not known, although it is acknowledged to be an acronym for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A. The acronym was originally COBR - because the crisis committee would meet in a Cabinet Office Briefing Room. During the miners dispute, these meetings took place in Cabinet Office Meeting Room F - because that was the room that was available when the first emergency meeting took place and it was then commandeered to manage the response to the energy crisis. It is thought that COBRA was adopted partly because Her Majesty's Treasury had a Briefing Room A and partly because COBRA works better than COMR or COBR!

Since its inception, COBRA committees have managed a number of crises and one-off international events (such as G20 or other summits held in the UK) including the Iranian embassy siege, outbreaks of foot & mouth disease, flooding, terrorist attacks (in the UK or abroad), and the current pandemic. Who sits on a COBRA committee is determined by the nature of the crisis - along with government ministers there is often representation from local authorities (usually via the Local Government Association), blue light services, the military and members of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

The latter being a subgroup of COBRA whose membership includes various senior scientific, medical and technical advisers; which can also call on experts from academia or industry to provide the best available advice to COBRA.

As explained, in a recent blog post (<http://bit.ly/EL2cobra>), the ELELS Council established its own version of a COBRA group to manage our response to the evolving pandemic, and that group continues to manage our planning for reopening the synagogue. When we can reopen will be determined on the latest advice from the government and how we can best apply that advice to constraints of our building.

For more information about COBRA please see: Institute for Government: <http://bit.ly/IfGCobra>

Wikipedia: <http://bit.ly/WikiCobra> (where you will also find a link to SAGE and the only photo of the COBRA room ever released by Cabinet Office).

By Bob Kamall

EL² FOR THE NEW GENERATION



EL2, our cheder is revving up for the start of a new year with lots of fun learning and activities in the pipeline, whether they be online or in person. As it stands, we will certainly begin in September online, with the hope that in the not too distant future we can be together in person.

Since we successfully moved and established the Cheder online via a week after lockdown, we have a tried and tested formula with classes starting at 9.30am and finishing at 10.45am every Saturday during term time.



Although it clearly isn't the same as being in the building together with the community, we can be proud that from the youngest (age 4), to our oldest children (age 14), our cheder came together, week

in and week out, to continue their studies of Judaism and of Hebrew. We can also be especially proud of our teachers; Sasha, Isabelle, Ezra, Zach and Isaac and our Help Teachers, who successfully adapted to preparing and teaching lessons online. The fact that these young people all grew up in our community and are now becoming leaders for ELELS is even more positive.

Over the past term there were many highlights. We held an online Quiz in the Spring break for families, that was such a success that we held another hotly contested quiz on the penultimate session of the year in July for teams formed across our classes. Among the activities were treasure hunts, art and craft activities, drama and the challenge of creating acrostic poems .

We also inaugurated Shishi Shituf- Sharing Friday. These were Friday night services during which our children and families joined the main community. Our first Shituf (Sharing) service was in June when Shemot class (age 7-10) participated and shared their Shabbat pictures with the community.



The second event saw our youngest children from Bereshit Class join Mich Sampson's wonderful Tots Shabbat service (pictured here). Mich's online Tots services have also been a real treat for little ones of all ages, and their parents too. These have continued during the summer and we owe Mich a huge thanks.



For the final cheder session of the year on July 18th, we held a Family Service when our children, along with Rabbi Richard, led the Shabbat morning service.

The children showcased the projects that they had been working on, and Jonathan and the Teachers presented certificates to the children for their efforts during the course of the year.

As is traditional at this time, the Synagogue awarded Jack Petchey certificates to our young people who have contributed to the community and shown leadership over the past year. A huge Mazal Tov to Zach Krisman, Joshua Rosenthal and Aelfred Williams who were this year's winners (pictured in order below).



Our new term begins on Shabbat, Saturday 12th September a week before Rosh Hashanah. We look forward to seeing everybody. Shanah tova!

Jonathan Young

Head Teacher

Zoom B'nei Mitzvah: As told by the families

ELELS first ever online/ B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies took place across three weeks in May/June. Here, the three families involved provide the inside story on what turned out to be poignant, unforgettable as well as historic events!

Korinna Lorinc-Young (mother of Dominik and Maja Lorinc-Young, BM on 30th May 2020):

We liked the idea of being able to invite people that actually would never otherwise have been able to attend. We had guests from Hungary (my country), the USA, Israel, Croatia and this was something we were all so grateful for.

"It was a very special day, from the moment that we woke up, and put on our special clothes for the event. We had prepared our living room specially so that we could swap places and be in front of the camera at the right time. Rabbi Richard conducted the service beautifully. It was also great fun to spot all of the people on the different screens including the ELELS community with our family and friends and wonderful to read their messages on the chat".



"I was pleased that the hard work paid off, and it felt like a great accomplishment to read from the Torah and share my d'var Torah with so many people". Maja Lorinc-Young (age 13)

"Because we did this in lockdown it was very different from the b'nei mitzvahs we'd been to, but it still lived up to my expectations, and I felt very proud". Dominik Lorinc-Young (age 14)



Jason Levy (father of Jake and Joe Levy, BM on 6th June 2020):

When lockdown became a reality, we discussed together that keeping our arranged date in shul wasn't going to be possible. Our boys decided that instead of waiting for when/if we would be allowed to return to normal services, that they'd like to proceed and have a Zoom Bar Mitzvah. Rabbi Richard held a group meeting between the three families with upcoming b'nei mitzvahs and we all discussed the fact that it would be fantastic to have three joyous occasions to share with our shul members during a time that has been very trying. With that in mind, it was agreed!

As a parent I've been left with a feeling of immense pride that our boys have continued our Jewish tradition and that they understand what that means and that they will continue those traditions and pass them on for future generations!

"The day itself was fantastic, enabled everyone to tune in... The experience was brilliant and we felt the elation just as we would have done, had we been in shul. To share the service with members, family and friends, with our boys being the B'nei Mitzvah and being the centre of the service, was amazing" Jason Levy

"It was great to still be able to connect and share our special day with friends and family on Zoom, regardless of the pandemic". Joseph Levy (age 13)

"I'm delighted to have been able to become Bar Mitzvah as I did, to respect and continue my Jewish tradition". Jake Levy (age 13)

B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies *continued*



Gemma Segal (mother of Samuel Segal, Barmitzvah on 13th June 2020):

We decided to do it because we wanted the community, family and friends to have something to enjoy during lockdown. Samuel had worked hard to learn his portion and was keen to share it while fresh in his mind. If we hadn't done it on Zoom there would still be uncertainty as to when it would take place, Gemma continued:

"We got far more out of it than we initially thought we would. Although it would have been nicer to be physically together, by doing it through Zoom we were able to involve more people on the day to share our celebration. Given the situation, it felt very special to see so many people wanting to support Samuel on his special day. The family were surprised by how special it was and some people said it was the best they'd ever been to"



"To sum up the experience in three words: exciting, overwhelming (in a good way) and enjoyable. It felt very special to be with everyone and it was a once in a lifetime opportunity." Samuel Segal (age 13).

(in the order that their B'nei Mitzvah took place)

Mazal Tov to: Dominik, Maja, Jake, Joe and Samuel.

All of these young people are looking forward to marking their coming of age with the community in Synagogue when it becomes safe to do so.



"Liam's call to the Torah was planned for March 28th. During the week of the service the country was brought in to lockdown and with the closing of the ELELS building, the decision to cancel was taken out of our hands.

Not only was Liam gutted that the service could not take place as he had hoped for, but we as a family were heartbroken to see him so upset after all his hard work. We considered the possibility of a "Zoom Mitzvah", but Liam did not want to do this as he had his heart set on reading directly from the scroll and having a service with family and community physically present no matter how small.

After conversations with Rabbi Richard, and the easing of some of the lockdown restrictions, we have been able to grant Liam his wish to read from the Torah Scroll and have a small service at Clore Tikva School on 29th August. This will be a different type of service and has taken a lot of planning to keep everyone safe.

We are excited that Liam has his wish on the type of service he wants and we are truly grateful for the help and support of Rabbi Richard, Rabbi David and Fiona Hulbert on making this possible for Liam".

Emma and Gavin Bell (parents of Liam Bell- BM on 29th August 2020)

Liam says,
"I am really excited that the day is here after such a long wait. I hope to do my parents proud and hope the whole of the ELELS community enjoy my special day as well".

Forthcoming B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies

Three cousins, Sukhi, Talya and Oren are having a joint ceremony on 21st November - this will certainly be an exciting occasion for the whole family!

"Hi my name is Sukhi Singh. I like to draw and to run. I am doing my Bat Mitzvah because it helps me learn more about my religion and culture. It is useful later on because I will know a lot more prayers and how to read Hebrew. I can gain new knowledge. Also I can do something I haven't done anything like before. I think this will be a fun thing to do and look forward to doing it". Sukhi Singh



"The Trio when younger"

"Hi, my name is Talya and I'm 13. I'm really excited to be doing my Bat Mitzvah with my sister and my cousin. I want to do my Bat Mitzvah because I think it's great for me to learn more about my religion and culture and feel part of the community. Learning Hebrew has been so fun and it's lovely that I get to share this experience with my family. I love music, reading, playing with my dog, and I also love astronomy. I think that learning to read Hebrew is so useful and I hope that everything goes well"
Talya Singh.

"This occasion is not just about being part of a community, it involves knowing where you come from and where you are going. My first name is taken from both my Jewish and Celtic heritage, and though I have refused to wear a kilt to the service, I'm sure this will still be an event that our family will never forget.

This year has been crazy, but I am happy that is ending with a Bar / Bat Mitzvah with my cousins Sukhi and Talya. Its already fun sharing the challenges and the rewards of this experience with them". Oren Noy

Community development and continuity



For all of the well-documented challenges, the last few months have been rich and varied as we've moved our full programme online holding services, social events, educational classes and even our AGM on Zoom!

Among the benefits of being online is that it has enabled us to explore some possibilities that would not previously been possible, such as: holding joint services with seven other Liberal communities for over 1000 participants (Green Shabbat); holding B'nei Mitzvah on Zoom with people checking in from all over the world; and a succession of very popular pub-quiz style evenings on a Sunday night hosted by our members and attracting up to 60 people at a time!

The fact that these events, whether services, quizzes or educational courses have often been led by our members or friends of our community, is something for ELELS to be very proud of. The next few pages offer a flavour of our community events since May and through the summer. We've tried to include as much as possible, but it's impossible to include everything!

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who have led, hosted or been involved in the organisation of the events and the authors for submitting their articles. Thank you for your contributions and support.

If you would like to know more about our programme or if you have suggestions for future events please do contact me, **Nick Young** at: community.development@elels.org.uk

Lunch and learn with Rabbi David

In July began the first of a series of online Lunch and Learn sessions led by our Emeritus Rabbi, David Hulbert.

Rabbi David gave talks about two fasts. The first one was the fast of Tammuz and the second, the well known fast of Tisha B'Av. We learnt that between the two fasts is a period of three weeks of mourning ending with the fast Tisha b'Av during which we read the book of Eichah/ Lamentations.



And now the seven weeks between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashanah is known as the time of comfort or consolation.

Rabbi David provided us with a selection of excerpts from scripture, Rabbinic texts and more modern sources. He made them accessible, enabling us to share our own ideas and highlighting the irony! The sessions were always interesting and we learned a lot- it was an excellent way to spend lunchtime, and in very good, friendly company.

I recommend that you join us for future sessions in September and October when we will learn about Teshuvah (returning to God) over the High Holy Days, Sukkot and Simchat Torah!

By Judy Berkowicz

A Toastmaster's tails

Howard Robbins, one of the most highly respected Toastmasters on the circuit, gave a talk entitled 'From Top to Tails' on July 15th.

It was very interesting to tune into Howards presentation, in which, wearing his red coat-tails for the first time in months, he gave a very entertaining view of what happens behind the scenes. Howard explained that he followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by becoming a Toastmaster.

According to Howard, a host expects everything to be just perfect, but has no idea of the amount of hard work and diplomacy involved on the part of the "Toastmaster" to ensure the reception, dinner, dancing and speeches flow like clockwork in an orderly and smooth manner. Despite sharing some very entertaining stories Howard told us that in his experience everything always turns out well and members of our community who have had Howard look after their simchas testified to that!

Among the tales that Howard shared of managing the unexpected, was the occasion that a boy, now a well-known cantor, cracked his head on the toilet lid being sick from nerves moments before delivering his speech flawlessly!

Another story was of a Toastmaster colleague who banged his gavel extra hard thereby smashing the top table which was made of glass!

Howard's explanation of both history and regalia, together with anecdotes as to the variety of people, he had met and functions presided over made the evening very enjoyable and worth repeating for those unable to tune in.

By John Morrison



How to become Lord Mayor of London



One silver lining to the Coronavirus is the amount of talks there are and Rabbi Richard even said a blessing for Zoom. I was a magistrate in the City of London and sat in Court with the Lord Mayor at the time so was really looking forward to Elliott Porte's talk on July 7th on how to become the Lord Mayor of London.

Elliott told us of the many stages that one must pass through in order to become Lord Mayor.

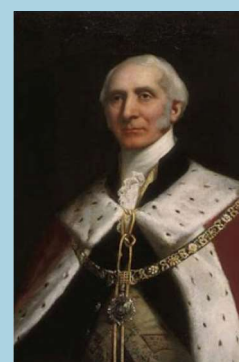
The Freedom of the City of London must first be granted, and Elliott showed us his certificate. This gives him the right to certain mythical privileges, e.g. a silken rope if hanged; the right to carry a naked sword in public; the right to be sent home by the City of London police if drunk rather than arrested and the right to drive sheep and cattle over London Bridge – a right which has been exercised several times as publicity – but not by Elliott as far as we know. After this, a freeman needs to join a Livery Company (in Elliott's case, the Worshipful Company of Wheelwrights!). The next stage is the incredibly competitive process of becoming an Alderman, after which one may rise to become Lord Mayor, paying handsomely for the privilege!

The Lord Mayor is elected for a year and lives in the Mansion House with his or her own staff including a chef. He or she has the primary role of acting as an international ambassador for the financial expertise and services offered by the City of London.

S/he is also the head of the City of London Corporation. Elliott told us about a famous Lord Mayor of London – Dick Whittington. He really was Lord Mayor four times but did not come from a poor family. We also learned about Jewish Lord Mayors, the first of whom was Sir David Salomons in 1855.

Elliott's talk was fascinating and highly informative, supported by a Powerpoint presentation that enabled him to show photographs of his career as a Liveryman and some of the pomp and ceremony. And of course we were all encouraged to attend the spectacular annual Lord Mayor's Show which takes place in November and will even happen in some shape or form in 2020!

By Stephanie Kerstein



Images:

Top left image: Dick Whittington.

Right hand image: Sir David Salomons the first Jewish Lord Mayor

#EveryMitzvahMatters

With Maureen Lipman and Hugh Dennis



On 12th May EELS member Samuel Segal (then aged 12) took great delight in participating in the Facebook Live event "Every Mitzvah Matters" interfaith volunteering scheme created by the Mitzvah Day Charity.

Actress and TV personality Maureen Lipman along with two Rabbis' an Imam and a MP joined in the fun. They all made some soup and as an act of kindness gave it away. Samuel said:

"The cook-along was so much fun and it was nice to meet a celebrity in a virtual way. It also felt good to make something for my Grandma, who recently returned from hospital, as she likes my creations!"

This was also a good opportunity for Samuel to get used to starring on screen as he was to be Bar Mitzvah on Zoom the following month!



On 16th June it was the turn of 'Mock the Week' and 'Outnumbered' star Hugh Dennis, who did his best to make homemade masks using just an old T-shirt and a pair of scissors. Possibly the youngest participant was EELS' own Sam Lőrinc-Young (age 7) who made a mask for his grandparents.



"I made a mask for my grandparents because they are going to make a barbecue for my birthday and I will see them for the first time since the lockdown so I wanted to show my love for them"

Sam Lőrinc-Young (Age 7)

Who are we?

Elliott Porte became the first ELELS member to take the plunge and share one of his passions online with the members of our community through a well-attended course that took place over three evening sessions during the month of May.

Elliott is a member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain and an experienced presenter on the topic. His 'Introduction to Genealogy' course, was very well presented and informative, including excellent illustrations.

Elliott discussed in detail the various tools now available online and what might be to hand amongst family records e.g. letters, diaries, photographs etc. He also covered the real and sometimes 'fake' history of immigration including clues in family records and how to interpret information. He showed us how to arrange a family tree and gave vital tips to us participants in how to show the results of our research.



The websites he suggested we visit for information to expand our research into our family trees were a great help to me in particular. Having hit many roadblocks in researching my own family tree, and stopped a good few years ago, I returned with new enthusiasm, and have since further developed the process thanks to these sessions.

The Q&A at the end of each session was fascinating, in as much as we heard from other people, as to how much they had achieved in their research.

By Gary Freedman.

Celebrating our Volunteers

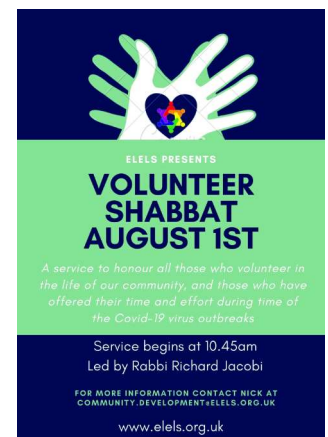
On Saturday 1st August Rabbi Richard Jacobi led a meaningful Shabbat Service to honour all our wonderful Volunteers

As all are aware, we do have a Keep in Touch group that keeps regularly in contact with some of our members. To deal with the Covid-19 Pandemic we asked for more volunteers to form a Phone Tree to reach out to the whole community. As a Synagogue we wanted to call every member of our community and give extra help where required. Shopping, delivery, prescriptions etc. We were truly overwhelmed by the response! There were 60 volunteers reaching out and making telephone calls to members and another 30 volunteers making extra daily support calls, shopping and delivering, along with medical supplies or whatever was needed. We also had volunteers running on-line quizzes, talks and we must not forget the volunteers who make the screenings possible!

There were 44 live screens on show for the service, this means about 70 members joining in. Many volunteers read special passages and prayers that they had written for this dedicated service.

Synagogue Chair Stewart Spivack said ***"Volunteers have always taken a large role in the running of our Synagogue, and this week-end we held a special service of thanks to them and the extra hundred members who had stepped forward to volunteer during the pandemic. Members had volunteered in all different areas - phoning and supporting our congregation, delivering food and medication to members who were shielding, helping with technology and getting people on to our services, discussions, quizzes and other events. All these people made true the message of ELELS - Our building may be closed, but our community is very much open! We can all feel very proud and thankful for all the efforts of all those members."***

As the service drew to a close Rabbi Richard Jacobi asked everyone to take wine and share kiddish in their own homes.



Green Shabbat

ECO SYNAGOGUE



Green Shabbat is a multi-denominational initiative that is led by the Eco Synagogues project set up by the Board of Deputies. On Friday July 3rd ELELS participated in a pioneering Green Erev Shabbat event held jointly by seven Liberal Jewish communities. Nottingham Liberal Synagogue's Rabbi Tanya Sakhnovich who instigated the event and sits on the steering group for Eco Synagogues said:

"The subject of the environment and healthy living is so huge that it requires the attention of all of us, not just a few of us. So I am delighted to introduce Green Shabbat into our annual cycle."

Rabbi Richard Jacobi of ELELS was also instrumental in facilitating the evening, beginning with a Kabbalat Shabbat Service in which more than 1,000 people participated across the country, watching via Zoom or social media platforms.



Following the Service, Brighton's Benita Matofska, (pictured left), international speaker and author of 'Generation Share' gave a talk and answered questions about sustainability before we heard from LJ President Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein, who provided a rabbinic response on eco concerns of our times. Finally, we were treated to a presentation from Nottingham member Louise Lipman, who lives in the UK's only eco village – Hockerton Housing Project.

Some of the many highlights of the Friday night service were readings provided by members of each of the participating communities. ELELS' Fiona Hulbert (pictured right), provided one of those readings, and we are delighted to present Fiona's evocative and inspiring words on the opposite page:

The natural world: Finding solace in strange times



Throughout history there have been times when the lives of individuals, communities and nations have been thrown off course by famine, disease, war or economic collapse. But through all time there has been a constant potential source of solace and even of joy for those able to focus on it. It is the natural world.

"From childhood I have always been fascinated and inspired by nature. Whatever has gone on in my personal life, whatever has gone on politically, there was Nature quietly going about its business. If we haven't noticed it, if we haven't tried to understand it, then it may feel unimportant to our own lives: and what we don't value, we don't protect".

Maybe this Covid time, when being outside has become one of the best ways to be safe, we have an opportunity to notice and enjoy the plants growing in our gardens, including the wild ones we didn't invite, the green spaces in parks and forests and the wildlife that lives there. Every green leaf on trees, on plants, every blade of grass has been sweetening the air, absorbing pollutants and carbon dioxide, producing pure oxygen and, through transpiration, putting filtered clean water into the air. We all noticed at the beginning of lockdown how much clearer and sweeter it was to breathe, as air and road traffic dwindled.

In my work in environmental education I would take groups of children into our local forest on mini-beast hunts. Their initial reaction to collecting worms and other invertebrates was often disgust and fear. By the end of the day they had realised that these tiny creatures are capable of keeping the world running in ways far, far beyond human capabilities. Worms are the supreme example of recyclers as they turn dead leaves into fresh new soil, releasing nutrients to nourish a new generation of plants. That winged insects amongst others will be busy transferring pollen that ensures trees and other plants reproduce. Thank moths for your chocolate. That ants and wasps, amongst others are the ones who collect and recycle plant and animal matter, so we aren't knee deep in dead organic matter. By the end of their day in the

forest the children would be eagerly looking under logs and stones, running with nets through the long grass and carefully sifting leaf litter to find amazingly adapted mini-beasts. Each with its place in the foodchain, each perfectly adapted to the natural world. Maybe not to our world though, of insecticides and herbicides that kill them and their habitats.

We have all heard the health benefits of green spaces and what I heard this week are called blue spaces, those with bodies of water. During the last few strange months I have talked to many people who have been treasuring their time in the garden and out walking, cycling, jogging, dog-walking. How fortunate that this all kicked off just as Spring was in the air. Those of us fortunate enough to be walking outdoors or with views out to a garden or even to pots on their balconies must, like I have, been grateful to watch the season change. The bare soil, the naked trees, the seemingly empty plant pots gradually came to life as the first tiny shoots appeared and grew and opened. And this year we were around with the time to watch.

My weekly walk in Epping Forest became a daily walk. I truly feel blessed to have had what I can't help but feel is a heaven-sent opportunity to see the views through bare trees gradually disappear, as the forest turned greener and was soon full of returning life. How could I not feel connected and invigorated myself as the sun warmed the earth and the grass and the ferns and the tree blossoms and the wild flowers grew taller and denser and more colourful day by day? The resident song birds and the waterfowl, the squirrels and the incoming migrant birds were busily pairing up and having young. The air is full of insect life, butterflies, bees, flies... all going about their important business, heedless of us and our concerns.

They say you are closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth. God's world is a source of awe and wonder. Certainly I find spiritual balm in being outdoors, and this year the shecheyanu has extra meaning for me. Every brachah is a moment of mindfulness, giving us the chance to savour and appreciate. As I say it I am heartfelt in thanking the Eternal One for sustaining me and enabling me to reach this season, surrounded by the strong lifegiving forces of God's natural world.

By Fiona Hulbert (pictured above)

Quiz nights at ELELS!



On 5th April, in the first couple of weeks of lockdown, ELELS member Emma James offered to host an online quiz for our members. This began a run of 14 online team quizzes over the following weeks, enjoyed by up to 60 members and guests at a time, which have become a staple of our Sunday nights. Aside from thanking Emma, we send our thanks to David and Tina Gold who have also prepared and hosted quizzes, John Spero whose quizzes have been presented by Darren Green and Jason Levy, and Robert Young who hosted a music quiz. Emma tells us here what it's been like to be ELELS 'Quiz Mistress'!

Ever since I can remember I've loved taking part in quizzes. My dad used to ask me and my brother general knowledge questions on long car journeys when we were kids and this sparked off my love of quizzing. I now do the same to my three boys. This is why I have been delighted to be the only ELELS lockdown quiz 'mistress' over the last four months.

The week before my turn at hosting the quiz, I start to brainstorm with my husband and children new ideas for rounds.

Trying to make the quiz not too easy and not too hard is a fine art and I haven't always been successful at it. My particular passions are films and politics and whilst always managing to sneak a few questions on these subjects in I do try to not to let them always dominate the quizzes



I love seeing participants faces as they listen to me asking the questions - from expressions of delight when they know the answer to furrowed brows as they try and discuss possibilities with teammates. I am delighted that all age ranges and genders enjoy the quizzes and I try and cater for that in the questions.

I also love seeing the regular teams returning because that means they have clearly enjoyed my past quizzes. I also received much appreciated positive feedback from people after the quiz.

"My hope is that my quizzes provide a couple of hours of enjoyable company for those who have been isolating all week and that it brings friends and family, young and old together in some friendly competition and banter. It is only a small contribution but I am delighted to be able to offer it to our wonderful community."

Although we will take a break from quizzes over the High Holy Days, look out for announcements about future events in our emails and also at: <http://eastlondonandessexliberalsynagogue.org/events/>

By Emma James



On Thursday June 25th, just ahead of Pride Week, ELELS welcomed Dalia Fleming, Executive Director of Keshet UK, who

spoke to a group of our members and guests online on Zoom.

We heard about the work of the Keshet organisation as an LGBTQ+ advocacy group as well as the education programming that has been provided over the years in synagogues, community groups and schools including King Solomon High School locally. Dalia also took us through a timeline setting out the history of Jewish LGBTQ+ in the UK.

A novel feature of this session was a series of multiple-choice questions that Dalia set participants throughout via the Zoom chat function; these questions were excellent ways to include participants and to prompt our thinking, on questions such as the first openly gay students to be admitted to Leo Baeck College Rabbinic Programme (1984) and the first same-sex marriage to take place in a synagogue (2014 at Finchley Reform Synagogue). The event concluded with a Q&A.



Those who attended included a number of members of the ELELS Council. Alice Wilcock said,

"It was great to hear from Dalia, whose interesting and informative session gave us a lot to think about. We need to ensure ELELS is a synagogue and a community where all are included and welcomed. It is crucial that we are aware of the history of LGBTQ+ Jews in the UK and take active steps to educate our young people".

Dalia also returned in July to run an education session for the oldest group in our cheder and we will continue to work alongside and support Keshet in the future.

To find out more about the work of Keshet, head to: <https://www.keshetuk.org/>.

ELELS 'Learn Together, Grow Together' - London Jewry; from the Normans to the 19th Century

We're delighted to announce that the course on London Jewry will run again for four weeks in November, every Tuesday from 3rd to 24th. The following is a synopsis of the last session:

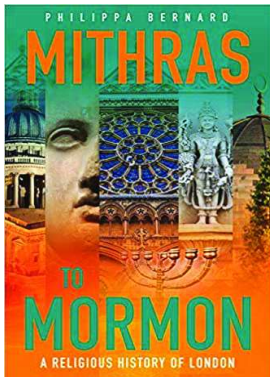
"Were there Jews in London after the expulsion on 1290? Our course on London Jewry learnt about why Henry VIII encouraged some to attend his court as well as the Jews who were here in Shakespeare's time. From Jews coming with William the Conqueror bringing their financial acumen and concluding with the passing of the Alien Registration Act in the final session, the Jewish East End descriptions reminded many of us of our own families and the journeys they made. Online and over three sessions we looked at maps and quotes and images of Jewish life in London from the Norman Conquest to the Nineteenth Century."

This course has been so popular there have even been participants from New York as well as many of our ELELS community and friends in Redbridge and beyond. Thirty students switched on to enjoy weekly powerpoints illustrating the talks and many references and reading lists to support their exploration.

This series is presented by Caryle Webb-Ingall, a qualified adult education lecturer, as part of ELELS 'Learn Together/, Grow Together' programme. If you missed it first time round you can put your name on the waiting list by contacting Sam at administrator@elels.org.uk.

Adult Education: Some Autumn highlights

Learn Together/Grow Together are short midweek educational courses or stand-alone sessions run by educators from our community or guest speakers. These are highlights from our planned Autumn online sessions, but click on <http://bit.ly/ELELSevents> to see more of our upcoming events.



'Mithras to Mormon - A Religious History of London', Tuesday 13th October, 7.30-8.30pm led by Philippa Bernard

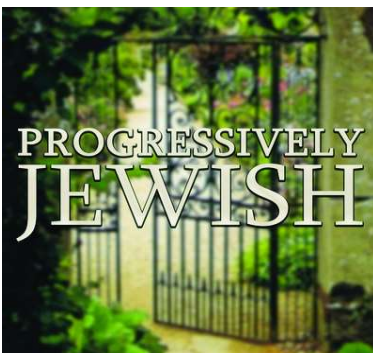
Join renowned writer and lecturer Philippa Bernard as she talks about her book, 'From Mithras to Mormon - A Religious History of London' including time for Q&A. The talk takes us through 2000 years of religious history in London, exploring the way in which religion has shaped the city's architecture, music, literature, skyline and character.



'London Jewry from the Norman Conquest to the 19th Century', November 3rd-24th 2020 led by Caryle Webb-Ingall

We are delighted that EELS member Caryle will return in November re-running this extremely popular course, but this time extending the course to four Tuesday evening sessions. The course takes in the first settlement of Jews in the City, their treatment under different monarchs, Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries, famous personalities and more. Each week there will be time for questions and comments in addition to study resources provided.

Progressively Jewish: Rabbi Richard presents a new podcast



We are delighted to announce the launching of a new podcast series called 'Progressively Jewish'.

The series was the idea of our own Rabbi Richard Jacobi, and features Rabbi Richard, progressive Rabbinical colleagues and other progressive Jewish voices representing the richness and diversity within our community who will guide us through different opportunities to reflect and to learn. The first podcasts are available now on Spotify and the series will run initially for 60 days, taking us right through Ellul, the High Holy Days and beyond.

As Rabbi Richard says:

"I am thrilled to be launching a new podcast that we think will be helpful, interesting, and uplifting to all who listen".

Access the podcast at <http://bit.ly/progjewish>, and click on "follow" to be notified as each new episode is released.

Safeguarding

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 feel 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 names 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

Remember that it is never wrong to feel concerned an 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: <http://eastlondonandessexliberalsynagogue.org/home/safeguarding/>



Josh Newham



Jonathan Young



Di Kamall



Sonia Muscovitch



Sharon Pinhas

Designated Safeguarding Lead



Volunteer drivers needed for Meals on Wheels

Jewish Care at Sinclair House are very short of drivers for Meals on Wheels. They have lost their regular over 70s volunteers. At the beginning of the lockdown they had a surge of volunteers but now many volunteers are back at work or are starting university and college. It is not onerous, is an hour or two per fortnight at the most and fits around volunteers availability.

It is very well organised, much appreciated by the recipients and very much needed to support our local Jewish community.

Rabbi David and Fiona Hulbert, Tina and David Gold have volunteered for a few years, amongst many others (pictured on left)



Ring Melanie or Rachel at Meals On Wheels, Sinclair House on 0208 551 0017 or email Rachel Esterman at resterman@jcare.org for information or to register interest.

“From where I am standing”; musings from the ELELS diaspora

By the time you read this, the High Holy days will be upon us. I wonder how it will work with lockdown. Will we be able to celebrate together? Lockdown has been difficult we would all agree, but in some ways, it has been a blessing.

I am lucky that I still have a full time job. It keeps me active in body and mind, but working full time has always meant that I run around like a mad thing at weekends catching up, getting together with friends, attending to tasks, shopping, cleaning etc.

This lockdown has made me stop. I am still in touch with friends and family, but I have had to take time to just be. It's been a mixed blessing, time to rest and enjoy our home, but missing those whom we cannot entertain in our home and hug and kiss.

Just before the new year will be my mother's stone setting. I don't know if my friends will be able to join me or not or if the ceremony will be via Zoom, Whatever will be, will be for me. I had the luxury of support and comfort at mum's levoyah, but the crisis rules have been particularly difficult for those bereaved during the pandemic. Habits no longer applied, our well-oiled cogs had to stop turning. There was no automatic grabbing of hats and making our way to the cemetery to support the living and honour the dead; there was no shiva to attend. We watched the services on Zoom and went about our lives, but those in mourning struggled even harder than they would have done if our little cogs had moved the ages old wheel.

My friend found it so hard that there was no-one with her when she buried her father, no table to return to, no prayers or kaddish at home that night. So for everyone who lost someone during the lockdown and in that, lost the comfort of their community as we know it, my heart and prayers go out to you all.

However, I don't think we will ever return to Pre-Covid normal, whatever 'normal' means. We will be the *before* and *after* Covid generation and we will bore our grandchildren with stories of what happened during the 'Great Pandemic of 2020'.

Apropos the above, I sat reading my book, it was restful and I so enjoyed my couple of hours with my cat on my lap and my book on the cat. When I got back to work the following day, I found myself embarrassed to admit that all I had done with my afternoon off was sit and read a book. Had I wasted an entire afternoon? However, authors write for their living, it is a privilege to buy their books and enjoy their work so that they can carry on writing for our entertainment. If we walk round an art gallery, are we not reading someone's work? We admire their talent for painting and wonder at their imagination for colours, textures and perspectives. Isn't it just like reading a book – how did the author take us on a journey while we stayed in the same place? Not wasted time at all.

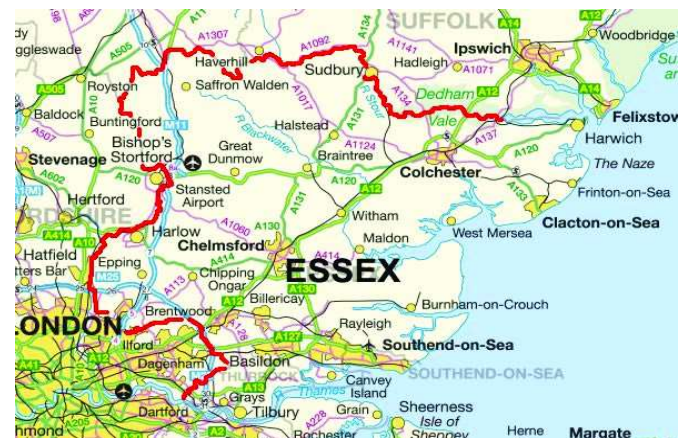
Antisemitism is on the rise, again! We are all aware of it, I don't know why it is quite so rampant, but it is. What does upset me more than 'outside antisemitism' is inside antisemitism. Jews should not be apart. We are part of a greatly respected historical religion, and we as Liberal Jews, are so lucky to be able to celebrate the religion in the 21st Century, in the knowledge that we are moving with the times and are all inclusive.

I respect the orthodoxy for their beliefs, I don't necessarily agree with them, but I strongly resent the implication that we are not 'properly Jewish' because of our progressive way of life. In this time of antisemitism, should we not all be as one, respectful of each other's way of life and united in our joint love of Judaism and its teachings? We should be on one side, we are all of the same root and should embrace it as such.

I swear: I will never again take cuddles from my daughter and granddaughter for granted, nor coffee with friends, nor the joy of chance meetings in the supermarket aisle. What's more, I will never look at toilet paper in the same way again!

I wish you all a very happy, sweet and healthy new year.

Shalom, Laurie Benton (in Dunmow, Essex)



ELELS in interfaith virtual tour of Waltham Forest

On 1st of August- a Saturday afternoon - ELELS hosted a visit on by Forest Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) and their guests, including men and children. Every year Forest WIN organise a day's summer walk, visiting a variety of faith venues in Waltham Forest. It's taking place virtually this year over three months. People going on the tour can be of any faith or no faith. The faith communities hosting this year are Hindus, Baha'is, Roman Catholics, the Jews of ELELS, Nichiren Buddhists, Anglicans and Muslims in that order, one roughly every weekend.

The theme for this year's summer tour is "gratitude" because of the lull in Covid and easing of lockdown. You can see the edited recording of our WIN visit on the ELELS facebook page. We showed lots of film clips from lockdown, introduced the synagogue, Torah, shabbat, spoke about the Kaddish prayer, (and highlighted others), our family services, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Shelanu services and the Rosh Chodesh group. Mich sang thankful and inclusive hymns. We took feedback and questions from our visitors. ELELS people involved were myself, June Bradbury, Rabbi Richard, Elliott and Amanda Herbert, Mich Sampson, Nick Young and many others in the clips.



The guests asked various questions and gave a lot of positive feedback about their visit to ELELS. Maybe my favourite comment was from Bhavane Manogaraan, who said she: **"felt blessed and energised by the love that was shared."** I think this mirrored the way we felt!

Jasvinder is a Sikh and she was interested that we, like Sikhs, have a holy book as the focus of the prayer room, was very impressed with the prayers that the children wrote for our family service prayer book and what she heard of our Cheder and wondered if we could create an interfaith event between our children and the Sikh children's group of her temple? (She is very involved with young people.)

Tara Khare is Hindu. She founded my local WIN group, "Forest WIN" in 2009, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ForestWIN>, but there are many different local WIN groups. WIN, itself, is a London group, founded by Lady Gilda Levy and an Asian friend in 2003 in reaction to the Twin Towers event of 2001. Tara also became involved in 2003. She built Forest WIN by bringing different local interfaith organisations together.

The interfaith walks started in 2012, inspired by those organised by Westminster Cathedral. Waltham Forest is a very multicultural borough. It is not that difficult to plan a day's walk seeing many different faiths.

This is from Central WIN's website at <https://womensinterfaithnetwork.org/> (also <https://wominet.org.uk/>)

'The Women's Interfaith Network invites women of all ages, abilities, beliefs, cultures, faiths and races to learn about and value our similarities and differences. We work to eradicate stereotypes and prejudice beginning in our own communities in order to promote our common humanity and build a peaceful world.'

'WHO ARE THE WOMEN OF WIN? The Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) is a group of over 100 women representing a variety of religious orientations, including Judaism, several forms of Christianity, Islam, Baha'i, Wiccan, Humanism, and Metaphysical Spirituality as well as indigenous and spiritual traditions.'

WHAT WIN MEMBERS ARE SAYING

"I made friends with people that I would never have met and am richer for it."

"It was comforting to hear other women expressing doubts about their own religious teachings."

"I gained a whole new perspective on Muslims and how their customs vary in different countries."

"I loved the diversity in our group and am surprised at how much I learned."

Forest WIN would love to come to our actual synagogue to visit us when we eventually reopen. June Bradbury, I and other members would also be very interested in other interfaith collaborations. If you would like to join us or have ideas to share for interfaith projects, contact Nick Young at: community.development@elels.org.uk

By Bess Solomon (with June Bradbury)

AGM report

This year, our AGM was delayed by a month and was held on 26th July. I am very pleased to say that almost fifty screens joined in, (meaning about eighty people). Voting was done by email and by post offering everyone the chance to take part in our democratic process.

Although on Zoom, our AGM followed its normal agenda, with reports from our Rabbi, Chair and Treasurer, Tina Gold carefully explaining how our funds are used

Of course, there was also discussion of the wide variety of activities that go on within our community here at ELELS. Sadly some, such as the Friendship Club have had to cancel meetings due to the pandemic and lockdown. However, all members have been kept in contact, either by phone, email, post, or a combination of all three.

A particular feature of our AGM was a report from our Community Development Officer, Nick Young, who explained how our 'Phone Tree' was set up, to keep in contact with our community, and how extra events and talks and quizzes etc had been organised.

Of course, even though we cannot yet enter our own physical building in Marlborough Road, the subject of property was discussed in a very lively discussion with many contributions. This is an on-going discussion which has been rather put on hold due to the pandemic. But our Property Advisory Group (PAG), which has worked so diligently, will carry on their work, and I was delighted to see their Chair, Darren Green elected to Council.

As we look forward to the New Year, this will be my last as Chairman, and several Council members will also come to the end of their elected terms of office. We all have greatly admired the fantastic amount of volunteering that has gone on during the pandemic, and I would ask if anyone would like to consider joining Council, or getting involved generally in the work of the synagogue, please contact me for a chat.

By Stewart Spivack, Chair

Thank you to Merle and Alice

At this year's AGM, we saw two of our Council members stand down after many years of dedicated service on this committee.



Merle Muswell was first on Woodford Liberal, and then on ELELS Council for many years! Since we came together, Merle has been our Membership Secretary. This has meant contacting all potential members and dealing with enquiries from those who may wish to join. Merle has made many potential members very welcome into our community, and helped them join and get involved in the life of ELELS.

Merle has also been our Publicity Officer, and has great contacts with all the local and the Jewish press. Rarely does an event occur within our synagogue that does not lead to an article and picture in our local press and in the Jewish News, and of course LJ magazine.

Merle has been responsible for Mitzvah Day arrangements, and amongst other things, always arranges the annual collections for Jason Lee House.

Merle has kindly offered to carry on, for the while, with these various duties. Council does hope, with your help, to find others to continue with all the wonderful work that for which we thank Merle.



Alice Wilcock was also on Woodford Liberal Council, and was one of the first Directors and Officers of ELELS. Her very wise words of advice, and also great knowledge of local government and employment and administrative law have been greatly valued by our Council.

Alice is also a very learned lay reader, and one of the wonderful voices of our beautiful choir. Alice will, thankfully, remain on our Rites and Practices Committee. Her opinions and contributions to these meetings are always of quality and wisdom. As a Lay Reader, she has always brought insight to discussions on the particular Torah reading of the week, and has led many an informative, sometimes controversial, entertaining and fun Torah study sessions.

Alice has balanced her extremely onerous duties working with the Greater London Authority, raising a lovely family, and devoting her time to us all at ELELS. Alice is very compassionate in her opinions, and is always ready to listen to different points of view.

Liberal Judaism: Outgoing and incoming Chairs of our national movement are both ELELS members

As is reported elsewhere, in July our member Ruth Seager became the first woman to be appointed as Chair of Liberal Judaism. While Ruth is to be congratulated on her election, it is a source of further pride for our community that she is taking over as Chair of Liberal Judaism from fellow ELELS member Simon Benscher.



Anyone who knows Simon will know of his passion for Liberal Judaism. In his time as the Chair, he has visited nearly every member community, presided over Biennial Conferences, presented at award

ceremonies, taken part in rabbinic ordinations, attended LJV-Netzer events, and various meetings with other bodies - including the World Union of Progressive Judaism on his visit to Jerusalem.

As is typical of Simon, he does so with enthusiasm and good humour and we are very grateful to Simon for all that he has done in his years as Chair and during his 20 years of involvement with our national movement.

Recent ill health has meant that Simon has had to stand down a bit earlier than expected. This may have prevented him from achieving his stated ambition of visiting every Liberal Jewish member community, if indeed he has not done so. Hopefully, Simon will have a speedy recovery and, while enjoying his well-earned 'retirement', will continue to play an active role in our community and that of the wider Liberal Jewish family.

By Bob Kamall

Photo above is Simon Benscher, with Rabbi Danny Rich, who himself has just recently retired as Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism.



Our incoming Liberal Chair

In July, ELELS member Ruth Seager was elected as the Chair of Liberal Judaism. She is not the first member of ELELS to hold this role, but she is the first woman to do so.

I first met Ruth over thirty years ago and we bonded while chasing various small children around – nothing sinister in this, they were ours!

Contact has waxed and waned over the years with work and family commitments getting in the way, but the core friendship remained, supported by our shared commitment to our communities and to Liberal Judaism.

Our shared love of travel has always given us plenty to talk about (not so much this year), especially the Seager stories of adventures with the tandem. Travelling in this way Ruth has learnt a lot about synchronicity, working in partnership and leading from behind, as well as providing her with a good view of her husband, Andrew's backside.

The formation of ELELS has helped to bring us closer again, although coronavirus and our move to Hertfordshire has made it difficult to sit together in shul. We have enjoyably Quizzed together for some time now, as those who join the Sunday night shul Quiz will know – a combination of Ruth's inability to take 'no' for an answer or her ability to pick the right team!

Ruth is both thoughtful and clear thinking – qualities which will serve her well as Chair and benefit the whole LJ community. Her teaching experience will have also taught her how to deal with 'unruly' elements!

ELELS is fortunate to have Ruth and Andrew within our community and, whilst she will now be dealing with bigger affairs of state, I hope that we won't lose the benefit of her expertise, advice and guidance.

Good luck, Ruth.

By Shirley Forbes

Message from the President



This has been a year like no other. The global pandemic has affected life more in a short space of time than any other even at in peace time.

Of course, the effects have been experienced worldwide with hundreds of thousands dead and millions more badly affected by this virulent virus. We are a small community but we have been hit heavily. Sadly, our death rate has been more than double that of the general community and we have lost some wonderful people since March, taken from us way before their time.

It has been a time to mourn but also a time to act. The Board of Deputies lobbied hard to ensure that local councils could not cremate bodies without first consulting with the families of the deceased. This was a fine example of collaboration between Jews and Muslims who shared the same concerns.

We collaborated closely with other community organisations to ensure that UK Jews are received all the help and information possible in the emergency, using all of our resources for the benefit of those affected. We collated a document bringing together all of the special guidelines for Passover this year and devised a card for members of the community to print off, fill out and post through the letter box to neighbours, letting members of the local community know that people are available do a food shop or even just to speak to someone on the phone who is self-isolating. No less importantly, our team has had the sad but necessary duty of collating the deaths we have endured so that we have an accurate record.

Last year, we were in the midst of Labour's antisemitism crisis. Twelve months on and Labour are, in the words of new leader Sir Keir Starmer, "under new management". We set out our Ten Pledges on anti-Jewish racism in January and they were enthusiastically adopted by the new leadership team. The progress we have seen is very encouraging. The scourge of antisemitism has not disappeared from the Labour Party but the determination to address it and take action where it is needed, as in the case of the sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey, gives all of us reason to be optimistic after a dark few years

Even Coronavirus could not completely overshadow the worldwide movement which developed rapidly in response to the racist murder of George Floyd. We in the Jewish community felt we needed to formulate our own initiative. The result is the Board of Deputies' Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community which is being chaired by distinguished journalist Stephen Bush.

We need to make sure that we are accepting of people of all backgrounds and I look forward to making progress on this most important of issues.

Those who know the Board of Deputies will understand we work on a diverse set of issues – indeed so much that it is impossible to list everything in a short message.

We exist to ensure that the UK's Jewish community can live freely, happily and continue to practise our traditions.

We are passionate about protecting our religious freedoms, whether the right to circumcise our baby boys in accordance with our tradition or to ensure that employees are able to take time off for Jewish festivals and follow their Jewish traditions within the law.

Our interfaith activities have certainly made the news – for example our support for the Chinese Uyghur Muslims currently suffering oppression in China, has raised awareness of the problems.

Through Pikuach, we supervise religious education in Jewish schools, and pandemic permitting, we travel the country with the Jewish Living Experience exhibition, educating non-Jewish children and adults about our way of life.

We engage with Government ministers, MPs, local councillors, diplomats, faith leaders and with a huge variety of public bodies on behalf of the community we represent.

We can only do this work with the help of communities across the UK, so I thank you for all the support that you all give. Let's hope the New Year truly does bring health and happiness to all of us.

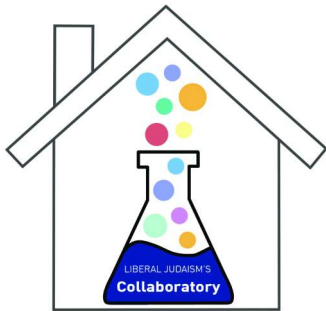
Shana Tovah

Marie van der Zyl

Marie Van Der Ryl
President Board of Deputies of British Jews

Liberal Judaism Biennial Conference

BIENNIAL WEEKEND AT HOME



Liberal Judaism has a big conference every two years where all the different communities come together. It offers everything you might hope for from a dynamic synagogue: innovative religious services, social events to make new friends and catch up with old ones, education on a host of subjects (religious and otherwise), calls for social action and a swimming pool.

Normally the Movement takes over a four star hotel in Gloucestershire. It creates a great sense of atmosphere for the weekend but has its drawbacks: it's a long journey for many communities and, naturally, three days full board isn't cheap.

As a physical conference wouldn't have been possible this year, the decision was made to keep the Conference and move it online and make attendance free – a very successful move! Conference took place on 22-24th May 2020 and normally attracts 200-250 people. This year well over a thousand people got to participate in Liberal Judaism's flagship event – many going for the first time.

The normal activities had all been kept (minus the swimming pool) and cleverly rethought. Interviews with members across the movement were beamed between events, photographs of every synagogue formed the backdrop to footage, pre-recording and live footage were interwoven to mix a sense of spontaneity with careful organisation.

The theme for the weekend was 'Liberal Judaism's Collaboratory' as sessions were themed around the topic of collaboration within, across and beyond our communities. Highlights included a keynote conversation between Matthew Gould, former Ambassador to Israel, and Lord Daniel Finkelstein, associate editor of The Times who addressed the ways in which collaboration can work in many areas, from government, to business to rock bands. Cabaret on Saturday night was memorably provided by Dame Dave Lynn, one of the few British Jewish drag queens.

A host of musicians from different Shuls, including our own Mich Sampson, took part in the services, creating harmonies between singers who never met in person, through very diligent and professional editing.

And there were big roles for two other ELELS members. Simon Benscher had recently stood down as Chair of the Movement and received a very public display of thanks (typically he was left looking incredibly embarrassed as he always does whenever anyone acknowledges the huge amount of work he does) – and Ruth Seager opened the whole Conference in her first public appearance as his successor – the new Chair of Liberal Judaism.



Altogether the level of thought that had gone into the weekend was very impressive and did exactly what the Conference is designed for – providing ideas and inspiration to take back to ELELS to make our own online offerings even better.

By Ben Glassman

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