

As Pesach approaches, Jewish inmates at HMP Coldingley are looking forward to their seder

A taste of freedom in prison

Jews in prison have rather more time and reason to contemplate freedom than most of the Jewish community. This Pesach, Rabbi Danny Rich and Elana Sondel intend to lead a small seder at Coldingley jail for its five Jewish inmates.

Rabbi Rich has served as a prison chaplain – including at Latchmere House and Coldingley, both in Surrey – for nearly 20 years, and knows the Jewish inmates at Coldingley well. On their first joint visit there, at Chanukkah, he and Elana, a student rabbi and education consultant to Liberal Judaism, enjoyed a camaraderie with the men. Sitting together in a room next to the prison chapel, they were joined by the lead Anglican chaplain, the Rev Jo Honour, as they talked about the meaning of Chanukkah, played dreidl and ate latkes.

Most of the prisoners at the medium-secure institution in Bisley, near Woking,



Cell windows at Coldingley, in Bisley, Surrey

have little Jewish knowledge, and the visit gave them a chance to reflect on their heritage. 'As we left, one of the men asked for a Jewish diary so he knew when the festivals were,' says Elana. 'Another asked for a Hebrew learning book.'

At Tu B'Shvat, Rabbi Rich and Elana again visited the inmates at Coldingley. On what was a very wet February morning, the beginning of spring in Israel was evoked with the ceremonial planting of a blossoming cherry tree. The whole group took part in the planting, outside the jail's E wing; and a number of windows were opened as prisoners whose cells overlook the spot took the opportunity to watch. Rabbi Rich then led the group back inside the prison for a seder and discussion.

The new tree will be particularly welcome at the jail, where inmate numbers have doubled in recent years; the prison lost its garden when a new block had to be built last year.

Coldingley's Jews are serving time mostly for burglary and drugs offences, but each has a different story. Some want their time in the prison to be a changing experience for them. Most have an interest in Judaism, which Rabbi Rich and Elana hope to continue to foster.

The Blessing of the Sun, page 5

Tributes for Sidney Brichto

Liberal Judaism has lost one of its best-loved voices with the death of Rabbi Dr Sidney Brichto, senior vice-president of the movement and its first executive-director.

Appointed in 1964, American-born Rabbi Brichto led the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, as the movement was then known, for 25 years. During this time it made huge leaps forward, in congregational development, in financial stability, in democracy and organisation and in its attitude to Israel.

During prayers at The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, a letter from the Israeli ambassador, Ron Prozor, to Rabbi Brichto's widow, Cathryn, was read out. Mr Prozor said the rabbi's passing would be grieved 'in Britain, in Israel and throughout the Jewish world... [He] was a man of courage, insight and integrity. His love and support of the State of Israel was deeply principled and unswerving.'



Rabbi Brichto died unexpectedly in January, aged 72



The group, including the Rev Honour, front left, plant a tree on Tu B'Shvat (one inmate declined to be pictured) as governor Dave Turner looks on

Working with Christian Aid to fight climate chaos

In December this year, the United Nations summit in Copenhagen will set the agenda for the next stage of the fight against climate change. Liberal Judaism is joining Christian Aid's Countdown to Copenhagen campaign, aimed at ensuring that world leaders deliver a fair and effective deal for the world's poor. The movement is also joining with Christian Aid for a campaign launch on 11 March (see box). Speakers will include Paul Brannen, head of campaigns for Christian Aid, Rabbi Danny Rich, student rabbi Janet Darley and Nick Hurd MP. Liberal Judaism hopes you will get involved: by sending the campaign card

enclosed with this magazine to the Prime Minister, and by signing and keeping your pledge. To get more cards, telephone the Montagu Centre on 020 7580 1663.

Campaign launch

Liberal Judaism kicks off its Countdown to Copenhagen support at 8pm on Wednesday 11 March 2009 at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, Oaklands Gate, Northwood, HA6 3AA. All are invited to attend.



'Never Mind the Bullocks!'

Pete Tobias, chairman of Liberal Judaism's Rabbinic Conference and rabbi at Elstree, has written a thought-provoking new guide for bar/batmitzvah students. Entitled *Never Mind the Bullocks!* – a reference to a verse in Isaiah – it takes the form of a conversation between a rabbi and the prophet. The book will be launched at The Liberal Synagogue Elstree on Sunday 8 March, 10.45am-12.30pm. Rabbi Tobias will introduce the book and signed copies will be available to buy. Refreshments will be served. The event is part of the synagogue's Purim Funday, and all are welcome. **Review, page 8**

Mazal Tov gives way to internet

Since its inception in 1995, Mazal Tov, the Progressive Jewish marriage bureau, has been responsible for many successful partnerships both within Liberal Judaism and beyond. Working out of office space provided by The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, its introduction service for those seeking a Jewish life partner was run entirely by volunteers and was, for most of its existence, a unique venture. However, the internet, in particular, and other media offer new choices for single people and the personal approach is no longer as popular as it was. Therefore, with reluctance and sadness, the bureau has now closed.

True sound of the Hebrew lyre

At Friday night services, Liberal Jews in Manchester have had a chance to listen to the rarest of Jewish instruments: the ancient Hebrew temple lyre, or kinnor. Michael Levy, a member of the Manchester community, taught himself to play his replica 10-stringed instrument, whose design is based on pictures on coins from the time of Simon Bar Kochba in 134CE. 'There's no instruction manual,' he points out. 'The last known people to play it were all murdered in around 70CE.' A support worker at a residential home, Michael, 40, describes the instrument's sound as having 'an other-wordly feel'. Listen for yourself by sampling the audio clips on his webpage. Michael's new MP3



Michael Levy, from Salford, with his replica kinnor

album, *Lyre of the Levites*, can be downloaded from <http://cdbaby.com/cd/mlevy2> and his first album, *King David's Lyre: Echoes of Ancient Israel*, can be ordered from <http://cdbaby.com/cd/mlevy>.

Shh... listen

I want to talk about the Bible – written two and a half thousand years ago by my ancestors, who walked the land that is now being torn apart with bombs and rockets. One of my favourite sections of the Bible tells of the prophet Elijah fleeing from violence, seeking refuge in a cave in the desert not far away from where the latest violence is raging.

Elijah experienced a revelation of God at the entrance to that cave. First there was a mighty wind, then an earthquake, then a fire – none of which contained God. Then came a still, small voice with which God spoke to Elijah.

Almost three thousand years later, in the same place where Elijah walked and tried to hear God's voice, mighty winds are blowing, carrying words of accusation and counter-accusation as each side seeks to blame the other. And voices from around the world add to this mighty wind of human noise: protest and condemnation adding to words of grievance and self-justification. But God is not to be heard in these words, in this mighty wind.

And there is fire and earthquake, man-made, by rockets and bombs that fall, destroying buildings, hopes and lives. But God is not in the fires that burn from the tails of these missiles. And nor is God in the earthquake, as the ground shakes from the explosions these warring peoples inflict upon each other in this ancient, troubled land.

This is the land in which the still small voice was once heard by Elijah, after the godless wind, fire and earthquake had passed. This is the voice with which God still speaks to us. It demands that we humans treat one another with dignity and respect, no matter what our differences, and seek peaceful solutions to our conflicts.

But the still small voice is lost in the mighty wind of claim and protest, drowned out by the falling debris of the earthquake and the flames of destruction. Helplessly we watch and we wait, praying for the still small voice to speak to us after the wind, the earthquake and the fire as once it spoke to Elijah. But it will not be heard until the wind, the earthquake and the fire have passed and we, like the ancient prophets, make the effort to listen to it.

Adapted from the 'Pause for Thought' broadcast on BBC Radio 2 on 30 December 2008 by Pete Tobias, rabbi at The Liberal Synagogue Elstree

Liberal Jews in Israel deserve the same rights we have here

Aaron Goldstein is leading initiatives to help the Progressive movement

When was the last time you stopped to think about how fortunate you are to be a Liberal Jew in the UK? The last time I had a true appreciation was during my days with Liberal Judaism's youth movement ULPSNYC, when I campaigned for Soviet Jewry. Thanks to IRAC (the Israel Religious Action Centre), the hub of Progressive Jewish social justice and legislative activity in Israel, I now have cause to celebrate my religious freedoms once more and to campaign for the rights of other Jews; not least in Israel.

Although Judaism is the state religion of Israel, Liberal Judaism is not. Whilst Orthodox Judaism is paid for by the taxpayer, Liberal Judaism is not. But the sands are shifting.

In 2006, IRAC won a Supreme Court ruling against the Ministry of Housing, which built synagogues only for Orthodox congregations. This landmark decision forced the ministry to supply four temporary buildings (of about 150 square metres) to Progressive congregations. One of these was destined for Kehillat Sulam Ya'akov, which had campaigned for a decade for its own synagogue in Zichron Ya'akov, 45 minutes north of Tel Aviv. However, after hard fundraising, the congregation was still £3,000 short of the



Avital Mazar-Tzeiri, activities co-ordinator, at Sulam Ya'akov's new building, and Rabbi Gold (inset)

fees it had to pay before the local authority would allow it to occupy the building. At a time when for many the phrase 'Jews in Israel' conjured up Hebron settlers, I felt a compulsion to switch on the lights of this Liberal synagogue in Zichron Ya'akov.

The fundraising that followed, in the weeks leading to Chanukkah, was a true re-dedication of the Jewish principles that are vital to Israel's future. A hundred members of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue donated £30 each and the mezuzah has been affixed to a Liberal, state-sponsored, pre-fabricated synagogue building in Israel.

This campaign brought to my attention the next chapter of the story: another Supreme Court case brought by IRAC.

Rabbi Miri Gold is recognised by her community – Kibbutz Gezer, just off the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway – by her congregation – Kehillat Birkat Shalom, near Ben Gurion airport – and, importantly for the case, the regional council – Gezer, which has 16 Orthodox, state-salaried rabbis. But she is still not recognised by the State because she is a woman and a Liberal rabbi. In addition to raising awareness about this injustice, IRAC needs action from Liberal Jews. Your signature on its petition will demonstrate to President Shimon Peres and to the whole Israeli government that the majority of the world's Jewish population cannot be ignored.

At a time when our members might not be so inclined to act through tzedakah (charity), it is imperative that we highlight the opportunities for tikkun olam (repairing the world) that still exist. I am urging all my synagogue members to take one minute to sign the IRAC petition (www.irac.org), and hope that all members of Liberal Judaism will do the same. Our friends or relatives who make Aliyah should have the same rights we have, in Israel of all places.

Aaron Goldstein is senior rabbi at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue




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Letters to the editor.....

Praise where it's due

I was disappointed at your reviewer David Goldberg's comments about Rabbi Jakobovits, ('Point-scoring and compositeness', *LJ Today* January 2009) in view of my own experience.

Around 40 years ago, I was chairman of the Jewish Society at a university with few Jewish students. I received a letter from the Office of the Chief Rabbi, saying he would be passing close to the university on a particular date and he would very much like to meet Jewish students.

I and a couple of fellow students met with him at the university. He must have spent well over an hour with us. He was not pompous nor did he talk down to us. As a result of that meeting, the Chief Rabbi's office subsidised the rent on a flat to be lived in by a couple of the female students. The condition of the subsidy was that these students provide a venue for Jewish Society meetings on Friday nights, including a kosher meal for those

who wanted it. The cost of the meal was subsidised. This was great boost to the Jewish Society and Friday nights offered food and discussion with larger numbers attending than previous meetings on campus.

Rabbi Jakobovits extended this scheme to other universities with small Jewish societies. He was aware that there were no orthodox students, but made no religious stipulations other than that the food served on Friday nights was kosher.

Unlike Rabbi Goldberg, I found Rabbi Jakobovits to be able to communicate effectively, and to be concerned for all Jewish students, regardless of observance. And he actually did something positive to enable a number of students to have a Jewish input into their lives that they would otherwise not have had.

Ian Kay
Harrow and Wembley

Liberal pride

We were delighted to welcome Rabbi Danny Rich and Laura Lassman to Shabbat services in Nottingham in January. Prompted by a question from the congregation, Danny spoke about his statement on the conflict in Gaza and his decision to speak at a Muslim meeting in Batley, West Yorkshire.

While he was careful to acknowledge the breadth of opinion even within the movement, his personal stance made me proud to be a Liberal Jew, and that our chief executive recognises the tragedy engulfing the Palestinian people as well as the fear experienced by Israelis forced to take cover from the Hamas rockets.

Now is the time to open up avenues of dialogue, especially between Muslims and Jews, to prevent events in the Middle East causing a rift between the communities.

Jeff Cohen
Nottingham

'tent' invites you to Purim and Shavuot

As *LJ Today* was going to press, Liberal Judaism's young adults community, 'tent', and its counterpart at West

London Synagogue,  **COLLECTIVE**, West London Collective, were finalising plans for their joint Purim party, on Monday 9 March. This event takes place at West London Synagogue, from 6pm 'til late, and will feature cabaret drag act The Schmooze Brothers followed by a fancy dress party.

We are also getting excited about:

- **Connections** 17-24 March. The biennial meeting of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv
- **One Night Stand** tent's Tikkun Leyl Shavuot on Thursday 28 May in conjunction with West London Collective, starting with a service at 6pm
- **Our summer weekend Getaway** in July
- **'tent' trip to Argentina** 30 September-12 October

For information on any of these events, please contact Avivit: a.katzil@liberaljudaism.org or 07866 501787

New ways to follow the example of Purim

'The month was reversed from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to holy celebration. These days should be observed as days of feasting and rejoicing, the sending of portions of food to a friend, and gifts to poor people.'

Esther (9:22)

Purim is generally known for noise-makers and dressing up. Or, digging a little deeper, for the uncomfortable images of the Jews hacking down their neighbours and sending Haman and his 10 sons to the gallows.

But Purim does have positive messages. It instructs us that we can remain Jews, strongly committed to our people, and yet integrate within society and work within the framework of the country we live in. At the end of the story, the Jews end up not as victims but victors. And how do they react to this new position? By celebrating, of course, and by giving gifts to friends and to the poor.

As British Jews, we are fortunately only rarely victims and often successful. How

do we react to this position, following the example of Purim? By celebrating who we are and the society we live in, by interacting positively with our friends, neighbours and co-workers and by acting with compassion at all times.

This year Purim overlaps with the end of Fairtrade fortnight (23 February-8 March), so we might want to carry out the mitzvah of *mishloach manot* (giving of gifts) by sending a Fairtrade gift basket to a friend or family member; try www.fairlygoods.co.uk.

Or do as the book of Esther suggests and give to the poor. This autumn, Liberal Judaism's young adults group, 'tent', is organising a trip to Argentina and hopes to build links to the local Jewish community. An Argentinian charity, called *Tzedaká*, provides services for the needy in the Jewish community and in the wider society. Find out more and donate by visiting www.tzedaka.org.ar/en. *Chag sameach!*

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LJ SOCIAL ACTION
mitzvah goreret mitzvah - one mitzvah leads to another

An anniversary like no other

The Blessing of the Sun, a celebration of creation which occurs every 28 years, falls this year on Erev Pesach. With global warming a reality, and drawing on an unlikely source, **Alexandra Wright** grasps this chance for redemption and renewal

As long as the world exists,/planting and harvesting,/cold and heat,/summer and winter,/day and night will never end (Genesis 8:22)

But the chief cause of our natural unwillingness to admit that one species has given birth to other and distinct species, is that we are always slow in admitting any great change of which we do not see the intermediate steps. The mind cannot possibly grasp the full meaning of the term of a hundred million years; it cannot add up and perceive the full effects of many slight variations, accumulated during an almost infinite number of generations. (Charles Darwin, The Origin of the Species)

Two extraordinary events come together this year. One is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin together with the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of the Species*, the other is a singular and rare event in Jewish life, known as *Birkat Ha-Hammah*, the Blessing of the Sun.

We are familiar with the monthly ritual of blessing the New Moon, because our calendar is fundamentally a lunar calendar. But the Blessing of the Sun is a solar occasion. It occurs every 28 years, and this year will fall on Erev Pesach, Wednesday 8 April/14 Nisan, 5769.

For the Rabbis of the Talmud, *Birkat Ha-Hammah* marked the date on which they believed that the sun returned to the exact position where it was created. The date of the blessing is tied to the vernal equinox, which falls on 20 March, when the sun is directly above the equator and there is an equal number of night and day hours in the northern and southern hemisphere. In rabbinic tradition, it was also connected with the belief that Creation began on Rosh Chodesh Nisan and the sun created on the fourth day. This would mean that *Birkat Ha-Hammah* would occur on 4 Nisan when that date coincided with the vernal equinox. Given that *Birkat Ha-Hammah* falls nearly three weeks after the vernal equinox in 2009, how do we account for the discrepancy between the vernal equinox, 4 Nisan, and the date of the Blessing of the Sun? In his magnificent contemporary

tractate, *Massechet Ha-Hammah*, Abe Friedman explains that slight inaccuracies – a matter of minutes – in ancient astronomical calculations add up, over the centuries, to days. 'These slight inaccuracies, combined with medieval recalibrations in the solar calendar, move the date of *Birkat Ha-Hammah* progressively later.'

The prescribed celebration of *Birkat Ha-Hammah* is recorded in the Talmud in *B'rakhot* 59b: 'Our Rabbis taught: One who sees the sun at its turning point [i.e. at the vernal equinox]... should say, Blessed be the One who has wrought the work of creation. And when [does this happen]? Abaye said: Every 28 years when the cycle begins again and the Nisan [spring] equinox falls in Saturn on the evening of Tuesday, going into Wednesday.'

For the scholars of the Middle Ages, this ritual connected them to a particular moment in the process of creation by a Creator God. It was a moment of renewal. Humanity could sweep away the debris of sin and pollution that had occurred since creation, and not only appreciate the sun, or the moon, in all its purity, but even more importantly, praise the Creator who had created their incandescence.

The ritual occurred in the first hours of the day when groups would converge to recite the blessing praising the One who had made the work of creation. If the sky was clear, then the blessing would be recited until the third hour of the day; but if it was cloudy, then one could wait until midday to recite it. Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Hatam Sofer (1762-1839) argued that if the sun was not visible, then it was not appropriate to recite the blessing at all. Here was a dilemma: to recite or not to recite a blessing in honour of an occasion that only happened every 28 years.

How might we think about celebrating *Birkat Ha-Hammah* in 2009? I would suggest we grasp this opportunity of renewal to voice our own defiance and protest against the consumption of fossil fuels and the negative effects of pollution.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun/which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,/like a champion rejoicing to run his course./It rises at one end of the heavens/And makes its

circuit to the other;/Nothing is hidden from its heat. (Psalm 19:5-7)

The prescient midrash comments: 'On the day of the summer solstice there is no shade for any creature, as it is written, "Nothing is hidden from its heat." The orb of the sun has a sheath, as it says, "In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun" and a pool of water sits in front of it. At the moment when it comes out the Holy Blessed One weakens its power in water so that it will not come out and burn the world; but in the future the Holy One will circumcise its sheath and incinerate the wicked with it, as it says, "And the day that comes shall set them ablaze." ' (Malachi 3:19) [Genesis Rabbah 6:6].

This message of global warming and climate change is encapsulated in the poetic imagery of this midrash. Here lie the dire predictions of shrinking ice sheets in polar regions, the absorption of warmth in the seas and increase in their temperature, global warming that will lead to the shrinkage of food in the world.

In this bicentenary year of Charles Darwin's birth, perhaps we would do well to apply the optimism of his prophetic stance to our own circumstances: that certain living species, able to adapt to their environment 'will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species'. He adds: 'We may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.'

If his prophecies are slightly too optimistic for the 21st century, they create, at least, a balance for our own sense of helplessness and disempowerment in the face of the enormity of climate change and global warming. Somewhere between Darwin's ideal of perfection and the hopelessness of vast numbers of species on land, in water and in the air, we can plough a furrow towards renewal and redemption.

Alexandra Wright is senior rabbi at The Liberal Jewish Synagogue



A mitzvah, yes, but one

As Liberal Judaism publishes a leaflet on circumcision,

Author of the new leaflet **Margaret Jacobi** explains the thinking behind it

One of the most fraught issues which parents discuss with me is whether to have their son circumcised. Although Liberal Judaism recommends circumcision, circumstances differ and the arguments are finely balanced. For this reason, the Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism has decided to publish a leaflet about this issue. We are in a unique position as a movement to respond to the challenge posed by changing attitudes, because whilst we value Jewish tradition, we are also willing to adapt to changing times and we emphasise the importance of ethics over ritual.

It is important to point out that circumcision does not confer Jewish status, either within Orthodox or Progressive Judaism. Within Progressive Judaism, if the boy has two Jewish parents, or has one Jewish parent and is brought up as a Jew (see our Liberal Jewish Values leaflet 'Liberal Judaism and Jewish Identity'), then he is accepted

as Jewish. Whether or not a boy is circumcised has no bearing on this.

Most questioning about circumcision hinges on the carrying out of a medically unnecessary procedure with possible harmful side-effects. There are risks from a surgical procedure, but if carried out by an expert practitioner they are very small. On the other hand, there is evidence of benefit to health, including a protective effect against HIV. So, from a medical point of view, there is no conclusive argument either way.

However, there are other benefits to a Jewish boy, in terms of his acceptance within the Jewish community and his sense of identity. Liberal Judaism recommends circumcision on the basis that it remains an important mark of Jewish identity and a sign of the covenant. It is kinder to bestow that mark on a boy when he is a child than to let him make a decision for himself in later life, when the operation would be more painful and involve a general anaesthetic, with the associated risks.

As we are an egalitarian movement, the question arises of inequality when the ritual cannot apply to girls. We would encourage parents to treat baby girls in

an equal but different way, so that where they might celebrate a *brit* for a son at eight days, they would hold a ceremony to celebrate the birth of a daughter at eight days (see 'Initiating a Girl into the Covenant', *Siddur Lev Chadash*, page 585).

If parents feel that they do not wish to circumcise their son, we would encourage them to speak to a member of the Association of Reform and Liberal Mohalim before making the decision, so that they are fully informed about the procedure. If there is disagreement between the parents, then it is more important to preserve *sh'lom bayit*, family harmony, than to circumcise the boy. Should parents decide against, we would respect their wishes, and would not treat the child any differently. Indeed, we emphasise that the upbringing and education parents give the child is far more important than any procedure carried out at birth and that Jewish identity is developed through experiencing Jewish life at home and in the synagogue and being part of a Jewish family and community.

Dr Margaret Jacobi is rabbi at Birmingham Progressive Synagogue

that some call into question

we offer a modern examination of this ancient Jewish practice

'To us, it's mutilation'

Some non-Jews, and a few Progressive Jews, argue that circumcision is at best unnecessary and at worst highly damaging, *writes Beatrice Sayers*.

The charity Norm-UK, founded in 1994 by men who see their circumcision surgery as having violated their rights, argues that the most sensitive parts of the penis are removed during circumcision.

In 2002, Steve Jones, professor of genetics at University College London, devoted a chapter of his book *Y: The Descent of Men* to the subject. 'All mammals possess a prepuce,' he says, 'but *Homo sapiens* alone has the urge to destroy it.' To support his argument that sexual function is damaged, Jones quotes Maimonides, who described the operation 'as a means to perfect man's moral shortcomings'. The scientist even claims that women prefer 'the untouched' (mentioning in brackets that the sample of women used was recruited through an anti-circumcision newsletter). Perhaps a more rigorous study needs to be done.

The biggest foreskin battleground is, of

course, the internet. Among campaigning American sites, www.foreskin.org tells us, 'One can never be too rich or too thin or have too much foreskin,' and www.noharm.org promotes 'genital integrity'. Norm-UK, of which art critic Brian Sewell is a patron, devotes a page to quotes by men about their love for their foreskins.

As for Jews, many early members of the Liberal movement were opposed to circumcision. In 1956, the Rev Vivian Simmons, one-time rabbi of Harrow and Wembley, wrote in *The Path of Life* that, 'The idea of initiation into a religious group by means of a physical operation is entirely primitive and alien to our modern outlook.' But by 1992, the movement was affirming the 'importance' of circumcision.

Monty Alfred, of Kingston synagogue, is one who puts his head above the parapet. 'Many, maybe the majority, will continue the practice for emotional, traditional, family, social or perceived medical reasons,' he says. 'But we should make it clear that for Liberal Jews there is no religious significance to circumcision.'

A covenant with God

In Genesis 17, Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself (at the age of 99) and his son Ishmael (aged 13). Isaac, and all males in future generations, are to be circumcised at eight days as a sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. For males, it became a mark of membership of the Jewish people: uncircumcised men were seen as excluded from the community and forbidden from joining in the Passover meal (Ex.12:44, 48).

Various reasons have been given for the practice. R. Oshaya (third century CE) suggests that God allows men to perfect themselves by performing a mitzvah. Maimonides suggests that its purpose is to diminish a man's lust.

At the time of the Maccabees, and again during the Hadrianic persecutions of the second century CE, circumcision was forbidden by the non-Jewish rulers. This strengthened the determination of Jews to carry out the practice in defiance of their persecutors.

They did: 'The first brit was the most difficult'

Sam Davis, from Birmingham, admits that before the birth of her first child, a girl, she was 'panicking in case I had a boy because of the circumcision'. Her following four children, now aged 12, eight, six and 14 months, were all boys and have been circumcised.

The first *brit* was the most difficult: 'It was done at our home. There was no anaesthetic and he lay on my brother-in-law's lap,' recalls Sam, who is converting to Judaism. 'I was there, of course, but I couldn't have watched it. [Rabbi] Margaret [Jacobi] recited the blessings.'



Sam Davis, holding Jacob, with husband Charles and, from left, Ilana, Joshua, Joseph and Ben

Her three younger boys were all circumcised in a doctor's surgery; the youngest slept through the whole procedure.

'Your emotions are so up in the air the first few days after having a baby,' says Sam. 'I wouldn't say it's an easy time. The more I've had done the more relaxed I've felt about the whole thing.'

They didn't: 'This ritual wasn't what we wanted'

Laura and Rob Hendy, also from Birmingham, discussed the idea of a *brit* for their son before he was born. Rob is not Jewish and not circumcised. 'He didn't have a problem *per se*,' Laura says. But when she found they would have to travel with their newborn to London or Manchester for a mohel, they had to think harder about whether to circumcise. 'We came to the conclusion it wasn't what we wanted,' Laura says.

One reason was the idea of their son not looking like his father. Another was a feeling that circumcision was 'a bit old-fashioned', as Laura puts it. 'To us religion isn't about



The Hendys: George, six, and Zara, three, both had baby blessings at Birmingham Progressive

this sort of ritual, in the mixed marriage we have. We're saying it doesn't matter what you look like, it's about what you believe and how you're brought up. That's my personal Judaism.'

Though she felt a pressure to circumcise, in accord with her family tradition, she is glad to have had the chance to think it through. 'We're very happy with our decision,' she says.

GP with a mission My 17 years as a mohel

By Howard Cohen

As a full-time GP and a father of four, including three boys, I know that the safe arrival of a new baby is a time of wonder and joy, high emotions and often complete exhaustion. Adding the *b'rit milah* to the equation is a challenge to any family. Parents, very naturally, seek reassurance that the circumcision is safe and painless.

As a mohel to the London and South East UK Progressive Jewish community for 17 years, I can say that by the standards of most medical procedures, such reassurance can be given. The vast majority of circumcisions pass off without incident, heal rapidly and, with appropriate anaesthetics and analgesia, distress the baby no more than a prolonged nappy change.

I began training as a mohel soon after the birth of my second son, when I was surprised to find that the only mohelim close to home were orthodox, out of step with the Liberal Jewish life we led.

The Reform and Liberal Association of Mohelim, to which I belong, requires that all its members are medically qualified. Its eight mohelim meet regularly to discuss issues and experiences, peer-review performance and set standards in line with best medical practice. We also offer training to potential new mohelim.

Since 1998, members have been required to submit annual figures of the outcomes of the circumcisions they have performed. As a result, the association now has a significant database, which allows us to answer with confidence questions about safety. Of 4,140 circumcisions on babies in the first four weeks, 87 (2 per cent) bled enough to need further

attention from the mohel (such as stitches or a new dressing) and 55 (1 per cent) caused initial concern, of which about half needed redoing as they failed to improve over time. There has been one reported infection (in 1996).

I enjoy the combination of the religious with the medical, looking after anxious families and taking them through the process in a professional and considerate way. The *b'rit milah* can and should be a joyful and inspiring event for a family. I feel honoured to be part of so many.

Dr Howard Cohen, pictured, is a member of Kingston Liberal Synagogue



Imagine a rabbi talking to a tree...

NEVER MIND THE BULLOCKS! A Twenty-first Century Exploration of the Torah for Bar/Batmitzvah Students. By Pete Tobias

Authorhouse, 164pp, pbk £7.99 Review by CLIFF COHEN

Never Mind the Bullocks! is an intriguing title to an intriguing book. The title is a paraphrase of Isaiah 1:11:

The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me? says God. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

The book itself describes how a series of conversations with Isaiah helped a young rabbi to put meaningful messages across to a class of bar/batmitzvah students.

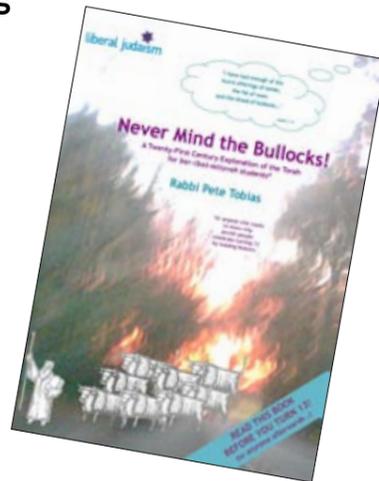
The content is organised into 11 class sessions, most of which are designed following a conversation with the prophet, who speaks from within a tree. At the end is a lesson plan for each session, complete with references, resources and quotations. However, if you think this gives an easy term's teaching to a lazy bar/batmitzvah teacher you are mistaken. The content is thought-provoking and controversial, and you would not be able simply to 'lift' the lessons from the book without personal preparation of your own.

The intention of the content seems to be to put the authorship of the Torah into a historical context in order to explain how Judaism survived the exile. The claim, made by the author and apparently endorsed by Isaiah himself, is that the

writing of the Torah was a project initiated deliberately by the Biblical prophets. Its purpose was to convince Jewish exiles that the exile was a punishment for their breaches of the moral covenant rather than any weakness or desertion on God's part. This strategy would enable the exiles to dream of and plan for a return once the sentence was served, and thus preserve Judaism and save it from extinction.

To be honest, I am really not sure about this thesis. For one thing, it credits the Biblical prophets with a sophisticated grasp of sociology. For another, it ascribes a calculated process of reasoning to a set of texts that appear on reading them to be rather spontaneous and passionate.

Having said that, I also find it hard to imagine a Liberal rabbi conversing with a tree! And really that's the crux of whether or not you like this book. For me the idea is intriguing. It made me read with anticipation and interest and it convinced me that a group of 12-year-olds would be equally interested in viewing the Torah this way. It made me think about questions that would be valuable as part of bar/batmitzvah preparation, regardless of whether or not I agree with the answers provided. And by providing



lesson plans, it made me more likely to use the ideas in the book as part of my own teaching.

I would recommend that you do the same. Let's have more about the prophetic tradition, more about the ethical covenant, and less about *Torah miSinai*. And never mind the bullocks!

Cliff Cohen, rabbi at Thanet & District Reform Synagogue, served the North London Progressive community during Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu's maternity leave

To order copies of *Never Mind the Bullocks!* at £7.99 + £1.50 p&p email Rabbi Pete Tobias at rabbipete.co.uk. Full ordering details can be found at www.rabbipete.co.uk/8.html

Sidney Brichto, 1936-2009

Radical and inspirational first executive-director of Liberal Judaism, life-long scholar, prolific writer, fundraiser and passionate advocate for Israel

Sidney Brichto came to work as a part-time rabbi at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in the autumn of 1962, an appointment arranged by the synagogue's senior rabbi, Leslie Edgar. It was an inspired arrangement, for immediately the dynamism and intellect of this young American became clear, as did his potential to contribute on a broader stage.

In March 1964, Sidney was appointed first executive-director of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues and, over the next 25 years, he put the movement on the map of British Jewry. A charismatic and energetic leader of what was then a small team, he encouraged the development of several new congregations – now established synagogues – including Northwood and Pinner, Nottingham, Kingston, Reading and Barkingside. He was responsible for the ULPS's move from St John's Wood to the Montagu Centre, set up the acclaimed Evening Institute and initiated a series of day conferences for synagogue leaders.

Sidney did not let things happen; he made them happen. Rosita Rosenberg, his eventual successor, who worked with him for 25 years when he was executive director, says she and Greta Hyman, ULPS's financial secretary, simply put into practice his brilliant ideas.

Another area of influence was the movement's attitude to Israel. Sidney oversaw the creation of a ULPS Israel Committee, the appointment of the first ULPS shlichah in 1978 and many other Israel-oriented projects.

An effective fundraiser for many causes, he initiated Liberal Judaism's successful Council of Patrons. His books include *Funny, You Don't Look Jewish: Guide to Jews and Jewish Life* and *Ritual Slaughter*, an account of his early years in America.

Rabbi Frank Hellner writes:

As an 11-year-old pupil at the newly formed Akiba Hebrew Academy in Philadelphia, Sidney displayed those extraordinary talents that developed and matured in adulthood. I believed then, in 1947, that he would become a renowned lawyer or politician. He did become a staunch and passionate advocate: for Israel, for Judaism and for the Jewish people.

He was always spirited and energetic, animated by people and ideas. He loved to explore new theories, discover new insights and tackle new philosophies. He was a



Rabbi Dr Sidney Brichto put the Liberal movement on the map of British Jewry

prolific writer and a voracious reader. His love of reading he acquired from his brother, Chanan, and sister-in-law, Milly. Chanan and Henry Slonimsky, dean of the Jewish Institute of Religion-Hebrew Union College, were to be his mentors and role models. From them he learned to love the Russian, French and English classics with a passion. During his late teens, he devoured Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Maupassant and Anatole France. Years later, he remembered everything he had read, as if he had read it yesterday. It was his love for the theology, history and literature of the Bible that motivated him, in more recent times, to create *The People's Bible*, a series of translations of the Old and New Testaments.

Sidney studied simultaneously, at New York University in the afternoon and the JIR-HUC in the morning, where he received ordination at the age of 25. From NYU, where he read philosophy with Professor Sidney Hooke, he was invited into membership of Phi Beta Kappa, the most prestigious academic fraternity in the United States, and awarded the coveted Phi Beta Kappa key. Instead of giving it to his best girl, as was the custom, he dutifully gave it to his mother.

Sidney's home was strictly Orthodox. His father, the Rev Solomon Brichto, was a gentle and pious man. I recall the day of Sidney's first act of apostasy. He had been reading, and he came across a line from Euripides that he wished to return to at another time. Normally, he would have underlined such verses in pencil, but it was Shabbat. Writing on Shabbat was anathema. Sidney loved and respected his

family and heritage. It would be a painful if not rebellious break with his past to violate the Sabbath. He picked up the pencil and underlined the sentence. No bolt of lightning came; instead he felt exhilarated, like Prometheus stealing fire from Zeus to give to mankind. This was the beginning of his defection from orthodoxy. Sidney was a complex individual: ambitious, persuasive and inspiring. His public image could be assertive and opinionated, but he was always impeccably honest and direct. Even his ideological opponents respected him for his integrity and his impassioned argument. But there was also the private man: the loving and devoted husband to Cathryn, proud father to Anne, Daniel, Adam and Jonathan and their partners, adoring grandfather to Thorne, Franca and Solly, loyal brother to Chanan, Ruth, Tzvi and their families, dedicated son and faithful friend.

He skilfully chaired numerous committee meetings whether at the ULPS, the Israel Diaspora Trust, which he founded more than 25 years ago, Liberal Judaism's Rabbinic Conference, the Joint Israel Appeal, the Joseph Levy Foundation or the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish studies. Behind the scenes, he would occasionally champion the cause of a fellow rabbi in dispute with a synagogue council or quietly help a fellow Jew in trouble. Once, when the ULPS posted on its noticeboard a front page from the *Jewish Chronicle*, which happened to contain a photo of an Orthodox Jew who was convicted as a sex offender, Sidney blackened in the man's face beyond recognition so as not to bring further shame on him or his family.

Sidney's life was beset by times of great sorrow, not least the death of Frances, his first wife, following a car crash in 1969. But like Jacob at the Jabbok, he wrestled with adversity and he prevailed. He married Cathryn in 1971. She transformed his image, turning him into a fashionable dresser for the prestigious position he held in the community.

Sidney touched a lot of lives. I, personally, shall be forever grateful to him for bringing me over from New York to serve the then Finchley Liberal Synagogue 44 years ago. His ideas and his influence will continue to pervade our world, and his memory will serve us all for a blessing. *Shalom, chaver.*

Photo: Phil Stone

LJ DAY OF CELEBRATION
17 MAY 2009

Number of adult tickets:

Number of under 18 tickets:

Number of lunches:

Creche places:

Total enclosed:

Please return this form together with payment to:
Liberal Judaism Day of Celebration
c/o Birmingham Progressive Synagogue,
Bishopsgate Street/Roseland Way,
Birmingham B15 1HD

Cheques should be made payable to Liberal Judaism. Please enclose an SAE for return of tickets.

liberal judaism

Travel subsidies are available for congregational group travel. Please contact sophie@liberaljudaism.org for more details.

Creche facilities for children of four and under are available at no charge, but should be booked in advance.

Please send names and ages of children when making a creche booking.

BOOKING FORM

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

email:

Spotlight on South London



A synagogue, in south London?

Walk to the top of Prentis Road in Streatham and you will discover – possibly to your amazement – an imposing former school building with a Star of David above the front door. The Jews who founded this synagogue in 1929 were perhaps the first immigrant group to alight in what is an increasingly cosmopolitan area.

Come through the doors on a Friday night or Saturday morning and you will discover a vibrant community.

Who is the rabbi?

Student Rabbi Janet Darley is the congregation's spiritual leader. During the years, South London has been served by some distinguished rabbis, including John Rayner, z"l, David Goldstein, z"l, and Julia (now Baroness) Neuberger, who is now president of Liberal Judaism. All made their mark and helped to shape what the community is today.

It is satisfying to note that the south London Jewish communities of all shades co-operate well together on many important issues, including security and Israel.

When are services held?

Shabbat services are held every Friday evening and Saturday morning. An evening round-the-table service and *chavurah* (shared meal) is held on the third Friday of each month. There are also regular High Holy Day and festival services, with a communal *chavurah* at the conclusion of Yom Kippur services.

A full range of religious facilities is on offer, ranging from bar/batmitzvah, Kabbalat Torah, conversions, weddings and more.



The South London Liberal Synagogue building, left, and student rabbi Janet Darley leading the community during an evening service for Simchat Torah enjoyed by young and old alike

How many members are there?

About 250, mainly living in south London and Surrey.

What special activities or events are there?

The annual John Rich Memorial Event, in honour of the synagogue's past president, is a highlight of the calendar. The many notable speakers have included, most recently, Rabbi Professor Marc Saperstein, principal of Leo Baeck College.

The synagogue organises various social functions, walks and talks during the year. It has a well-stocked library, which has recently been refurbished and the catalogue of which is on the SLLS website.

The Due South discussion group meets regularly; primarily for those living south of the synagogue, in Surrey and beyond, it is open to all members.

How does the synagogue keep in touch with members?

It has a superb monthly magazine, *South Circular*, and a frequently updated website.

The community also keeps in touch with household and less well members with a 'Chat and Check' telephone scheme. Pastoral care, visiting and other types of support are provided.

What's on offer for youngsters?

A thriving religion school, for children aged four to 15, with about 60 children on the roll. It also organises regular Saturday morning learning Shabbatot for families and adults.

For the very youngest and their parents, there is a Sunday morning Parents' and Toddlers' Group.

The synagogue offers free membership for students and younger members.

What about disabled access?

The synagogue is fully accessible, with a street-level lift to the sanctuary, which is on the first floor.

A message from the chairman

Philip Walker writes: 'We are all living through difficult times, but in this turbulent world organisations such as ours offer hope and comfort, and I am very proud to be chairman of South London Liberal Synagogue. We guarantee you a warm welcome next time you are in south London, so do call in and say hello.'

How do I find out more?

Take a look at the synagogue website, www.southlondon.org, or telephone the office on 020 8769 4787.



The sanctuary at South London. The community was established in Streatham in 1929



LJY-Netzer is Liberal Judaism's Zionist youth movement. It gives young people the opportunity to develop a strong Progressive Jewish identity whilst enjoying friendships and having fun. Visit www.ljynetzer.org

Don't miss Spring Camp!

Hello, I'm Saffyre and I'm 11. I've been going on LJY-Netzer events for five years. Two of the many camps they run every year are Kadimah in the summer and Machaneh Aviv in the spring. They are both really fun.

The reason I always go back on LJY-Netzer camps and weekends are because they're a chance to get away from your parents and spend time with your

friends. You make loads of friends on LJY-Netzer events. The friends you make on camp are the friends who will be your friends forever.

On the events you don't sit around all day. You do loads of activities that include being loud. The event that's coming up soon is Machaneh Aviv.

I'm going to be there, and you should be too!



Saffyre Coutts, 11, right, is looking forward to Machaneh Aviv at Cottesmore School, West Sussex



Our time in Israel is too short

An update from Matt Schmidt, one of the four Shnat Netzer (gap year) participants

Hello from Israel! I don't mean to make you envious (I hear the weather's not been too good in Britain) but here it's warm and sunny.

We're in our second phase of the Shnat-Netzer programme, a period of volunteering or additional study, which lasts until April. We're all doing

different things: in Jerusalem, in Kibbutzim Lotan and Yahel, and with the IDF's Sar-El programme. Our four months in Jerusalem we spent studying on the Etgar (challenge) programme, learning about Zionism, *hadracha* (leadership) and activism.

Once back in England we're looking forward to using the skills we've learnt to lead on Kadimah camp. The only problem is that none of us wants to leave...

See you in the summer!

Five-a-side fun

Come to our five-a-side football tournament in London on Sunday 24 May 2009.

We'll have three tournaments, for ages 8-12, 13-15 and 16+. Contact Victor: victor@liberaljudaism.org



Upcoming unmissables

6-8 March
Nechalim and Yamim weekend in Dublin

1-4 May
Songleading Sensation

12 May Lag B'Omer bonfire

15 July-10 August
Israel Tour
26 July-9 August
Machaneh Kadimah
16-28 August
Kayitz Netzer
1 September
Shnat Netzer

LJY-Netzer Contact Benjy Aarons-Richardson or Ben Baginsky: 020 7631 0584 or office@ljynetzer.org



What's new

We're going veggie

Veidah is LJY-Netzer's democratic annual conference for members over 15 to decide what LJY-Netzer does. In December, Veidah made the youth movement vegetarian. LJY-Netzer's vegetarianism is an example of our youth movement doing what it does best: transforming values into actions. *Tikkun olam* (repair of the world) is one of LJY-Netzer's central values. We aspire to act with consideration for the world around us. Putting aside the ethics of killing animals for food, the meat industry is no good for the planet. Did you know that it takes a whopping 13,000 litres of water to make one kilo of beef? Slowing global warming is not just the job of drivers and flyers. It's the job of eaters too.

As well as being a good bit of *tikkun*, vegetarianism also expresses a Liberal understanding of *kashrut* (meaning 'proper'). By making us think before we eat, *kashrut* has always encouraged Jews to respect their bodies and their environment. Vegetarianism isn't a traditional aspect of *kashrut* but Liberal Jews adapt tradition to meet present conditions.

A little health notice to end: LJY-Netzer may be meat-free but there'll still be protein aplenty on all our events. Remember, we only used to have meat on camp once a week anyway!

Also at Veidah, LJY-Netzer was proud to present a cheque for £450 to JCore, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality, as a result of its many, varied and often fun fundraising projects throughout the year. A JCore spokesman expressed gratitude, saying the money would make a real difference.

Wear a net to fight malaria

Thursday 5 March is Wear a Net Day, LJY-Netzer's ambitious attempt to raise £1,000 for mosquito nets to fight malaria.

Wear a Net to Work Day is part of Net Gains, a project of the Zionist Youth Council, inspired by the Tony Blair Foundation. The aim is to help the UN achieve its goal of eradicating malaria by 2015.

Liberal Judaism congregations

Bedfordshire Progressive Synagogue (Rodef Shalom), 01234 218387, bedsps@liberaljudaism.org, www.bedfordshire-ps.org.uk

Beit Klal Yisrael, PO Box 1828, London W10 5RT, 07505 477459, bky@liberaljudaism.org, www.bkylondon.org.uk

Bet Tikvah Synagogue, 129 Perrymans Farm Road, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG2 7LX, 020 8554 9682, bttkv@liberaljudaism.org, www.bettikvah.org.uk

Birmingham Progressive Synagogue Bishopsgate St, Roseland Way, Birmingham B15 1HD, 0121 634 3888, bps@liberaljudaism.org, www.bpsjudaism.com
Branch: Leamington Spa, 01926 421300

Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue
6 Lansdowne Road, Hove BN3 1FF
01273 737223, bhps@liberaljudaism.org
www.brightonandhoveprosynagogue.org.uk

Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation
43-45 Bannerman Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 0RR
bwjpc@liberaljudaism.org, www.bwpc.org

Crawley Jewish Community, 01293 534294

Dublin Jewish Progressive Synagogue, PO Box 3059, Dublin 6, 00 3531 2856241, djpc@liberaljudaism.org

Ealing Liberal Synagogue, Lynton Avenue, Drayton Green, W13 0EB, 020 8997 0528, els@liberaljudaism.org, www.ealingliberalsynagogue.org.uk

Eastbourne Progressive Jewish Congregation
01323 725650, fax: 01323 417645
epjc@liberaljudaism.org, www.epjcong.org.uk

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community
0131 777 8024, eljc@liberaljudaism.org, www.eljc.org

Finchley Progressive Synagogue Hutton Grove, N12 8DR, 020 8446 4063, fps@liberaljudaism.org, www.fps.org

Harrow and Wembley Progressive Synagogue
326 Preston Road, Harrow HA3 0QH, 020 8904 8581, hwps@liberaljudaism.org, www.hwps.org

Herefordshire Jewish Community, Enquiries: 01594 530721, <http://members.lycos.co.uk/herefordjc/>

Kent Liberal Jewish Community
07952 242432, bulletin.kljc@liberaljudaism.org, www.jewishkent.org.uk/communities/KLJC/kljc.html

Kingston Liberal Synagogue, Rushett Road, Long Ditton, Surbiton, Surrey KT7 0UX, 020 8398 7400, kls@liberaljudaism.org, www.klsonline.org

Leicester Progressive Jewish Congregation
The Synagogue, 24 Avenue Road, LE2 3EA, 07875 123744, lpjc@liberaljudaism.org

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, 28 St John's Wood Road, London NW8 7HA, 020 7286 5181, ljs@liberaljudaism.org, www.ljs.org

The Eltree Synagogue Elstree, Elstree High Street, Elstree, Herts WD6 3BY, 020 8953 8889, tlse@liberaljudaism.org, www.tlse.org.uk

Lincolnshire Jewish Community
01427 628958, ljc@liberaljudaism.org

Manchester Liberal Jewish Community, 08709 917327, mljc@liberaljudaism.org, www.mljc.org.uk

North London Progressive Jewish Community, 020 7403 3779, nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org, www.nlpjc.org.uk

Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, Oaklands Gate, Northwood, Middx HA6 3AA, 01923 822592, npls@liberaljudaism.org, www.npls.org.uk

Nottingham Progressive Jewish Congregation
Lloyd Street, Sherwood NG5 4BP 0115 9624761, npjc@liberaljudaism.org, www.npjc.org.uk

Or Chadash Liberal Jewish Community of Luxembourg, 00 352 31 65 94 ljc@liberaljudaism.org

Peterborough Liberal Jewish Community
Enquiries: 020 7631 9826

The Progressive Jewish Community of East Anglia (based in Norwich), 01508 538666
pjcea@liberaljudaism.org, www.pjcea.org.uk

Reading Liberal Jewish Community www.rljc.org
0118 375 3422, rljc@liberaljudaism.org

South Bucks Jewish Community 0845 644 2370
sbjc@liberaljudaism.org, www.sbjc.org.uk

South London Liberal Synagogue
PO Box 14475, London SW16 1ZW, 020 8769 4787
slls@liberaljudaism.org, www.southlondon.org

Southgate Progressive Synagogue
75 Chase Road, London N14 4QY, 020 8886 0977
sps@liberaljudaism.org, www.sps.uk.com

West Central Liberal Synagogue
21 Maple Street, London W1T 4BE, 020 7636 7627
wcls@liberaljudaism.org, www.wcls.org.uk

Woodford Liberal Synagogue
Marlborough Road, George Lane, London E18 1AR
020 8989 7619, wps@liberaljudaism.org, www.woodfordliberal.org.uk

Associated congregations

Beit Ha'Chidush, Postbus 14613, 1001 LC Amsterdam, Netherlands, 00 31 23 524 7204
info@beithachidush.nl, www.beithachidush.nl

Gloucestershire Liberal Jewish Community
Enquiries: 01242 521468 or 01242 234232

Oxford Liberal Jewish Services: 01865 515584 or 01865 765197, www.ojc-online.org

Developing communities

The Suffolk Jewish Community
01473 250797, sjc@liberaljudaism.org

'tent: the meeting place' for young adults Avivit Katzil 07866 501787

Schoolchildren hear survivor's message

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein, senior rabbi at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, is pictured with Ziggy Shipper, speaker on the first day of the eighth annual Holocaust Memorial Day event for schoolchildren, organised jointly with Northwood United Synagogue.



Ziggy, 79, a survivor of Auschwitz, said he told his story for those who did not survive. He was not bitter because he did not hate; he urged the children not to hate, because hatred is self-destructive.

The four-day event in January was the largest of its type in Britain. This year, for the first time, Borehamwood and Elstree United hosted a satellite session, and Bushey United again hosted sessions.

Biennial: 'Every step of the way'

Liberal Judaism has the power to touch us throughout our lives, but is often felt most strongly at lifecycle events. Do we make the most of these obvious opportunities for bringing meaning and beauty into our lives?

At the next Biennial Weekend, from 16 to 18 April 2010, participants will explore the wisdom Liberal Judaism has to offer all of us, at all stages and in all circumstances.

Join this unique gathering at the wonderful Tortworth Court hotel, near Bristol. Further details will be published in May's *LJ Today*.

Boy for Charley

Mazal tov to Rabbi Charley Baginsky, of Kingston, and partner Steve Rogers on the safe arrival of Joshua Shachar, born on 22 January and weighing 6lb 2oz.

PR's new name

Mazal tov also to Liberal Judaism's PR executive, Alexandra Mankowitz, who is to celebrate a civil partnership ceremony with Einav Ben-Yehuda this month. Alexandra is changing her name to Alexandra Ben-Yehuda.



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21 Maple Street
London, W1T 4BE
Tel: 020 7580 1663
Fax: 020 7631 9838
www.liberaljudaism.org

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Community Youth Projects Manager Victor Kaufman
Midlands Development Worker Sophie Stern

LJ Today is edited by **Beatrice Sayers** Articles and letters are welcome. The deadline for the May 2009 issue is 2 April. Please email: ljtodayeditor@liberaljudaism.org

Liberal Judaism is the dynamic, cutting edge of modern Judaism. It reverences Jewish tradition, seeking to preserve the values of the Judaism of the past while giving them contemporary force. Registered charity number 256390.

MAKE A DATE

17-23 March WUPJ International Convention in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Visit: www.wupj.org

20-22 March (Friday-Sunday) Hebrew Crash Course at Northwood Telephone 01923 822592

14-19 April LJY-Netzer's Machaneh Aviv (Spring Camp) Telephone 020 7580 1663

3 May LJS Israel Tour Seven-day trip, led by Rabbi Mark Solomon and open to all. Email carol.a.roberts@gmail.com

17 May (Sunday) Day of Celebration for Liberal Judaism in Birmingham. Speaker: Baroness Neuberger. w.glassman@liberaljudaism.org

24 May (Sunday) Liberal Judaism's Five-a-Side football tournament in London

21 June (Sunday) FPJ (Friends of Progressive Judaism) AGM at the Sternberg Centre

26 July-9 August LJY-Netzer's Machaneh Kadimah summer camp, for ages 8-15

15 July-10 August Israel Tour, for 16-year-olds

2010

16-18 April Liberal Judaism's Biennial Weekend at the Tortworth Court hotel, Glos