

September /
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NLPJC Newsletter

North London Progressive Jewish Community



See our website at www.nlpjc.org.uk

NLPJC events....

• Sukkot Celebrations

Join us on **Sunday 23rd September at 3pm** for a Sukkah decorating party in the Community Rooms garden – suitable for all ages. Please bring decorations, fruit and vegetarian snacks to share.

We will then be celebrating **Erev Shabbat in the Sukkah on Friday 28th September:**

4.30 pm Children's Sukkah party, songs, service and food.
7pm Friday night service in the Sukkah followed by supper.
Please bring vegetarian food to share.

• Simchat Torah

Our Erev Simchat Torah Service will be at 7.30pm on **Wednesday 3rd October** at the Community Rooms - one of the biggest celebrations of our year. With reading of the Torah, live music with the wonderful rock 'n' rollmops klezmer band, partying and food. Please bring alcohol and vegetarian food to share.

• Salaam Shalom

Dr Richard Stone will be leading a talk & discussion at our next **Friday Night supper on October 26th**. Richard will be talking about his inspiring work with **Salaam Shalom and Alph-Aleph** – a grass roots organisation involved in promoting positive contact between Muslims & Jews. Service at 7.30pm; supper 8.15pm followed by talk.

At the Community Rooms (see back page calendar for address)

www.salaamshalom.org.uk

• Friday Nights

The Fourth Friday will now be our only monthly Friday night gathering. The evening will begin with a short Erev Shabbat service at 7.30, followed by supper at 8.15, and then a speaker.

Venue: The Community Rooms

A Sapling: Reflections on 5767

Yesterday afternoon I visited a friend who has a small but very beautiful garden. I turned the corner next to her house and was astonished to find a vigorous grape vine crawling up her walls and knotted overhead into a dense canopy of green leaves and purple berries. How long had she had this plant, I wondered? She told me that she had taken it as a cutting from her mother some time in the 1980's but at the time she had no garden, so she kept it in a pot till she moved to this house. This tiny little plant, which she subsequently planted here a few years ago, now looked truly ancient.

I wanted to know about her fig tree. Was it true I asked, that the smaller the tree the bigger the fruit? Yes, but not quite; you must plant them in pots, and restrict their roots. This makes the fig tree, also, easy to move. She showed me her tomatoes, marvellous orange furry sweeties picked up in a local garden store at the beginning of the summer. And I went home with apples

from the knotted English apple tree.

As I look back over the past year at NLPJC I ask myself, what kind of plant are we? The image comes to mind of a tiny sapling, or even a cutting. This seems a humble image, since we aren't the venerable tree yet, loaded with fruit. But I learned from my friend that the cutting, or sapling, contains everything within it. Planted in the right conditions, it might, in just a few short years, grow with surprising vigour. There is something very ancient looking about a vine; even one just five years old looks as though it has always been there, but it needs careful tending.

I wish I was a gardener, because it seems to me that gardeners have the gift of discovering this incredible potential for life. And they understand also, the importance of time.

A tiny sapling with everything within it.


Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu

The Music of the High Holy Days

We are delighted to announce that this year the music of the High Holy Days will be led by two very special singers. Many of us already know Rebekka Wedell, who will lead the music on both Erev Rosh Hashanah and Kol Nidre. We are also joined by Dr Annette Boeckler for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur during the days. Annette has studied *chazanut* in Heidelberg and has published widely on Jewish Liturgy. She has recently joined the staff of the Leo Baeck College as Librarian. Rebekka and Annette share an interest in traditional *nusach*, the seasonal melodies of the Jewish Year, and will be introducing us to these chants as well as reminding us of the congregational melodies that we have sung in previous years. CD and sheet music available.

High Holy Day Singing Workshop ~ 4th September

Rebekka will lead a workshop to familiarise us with the special music of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur on Tuesday 4th September at 7pm-9pm. We have a choice of venue which is dependant on numbers - either the Community Rooms at St. Mary's or a local member's home - so please email Julia at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org or phone 020 7403 3779 by **Sunday 2nd September at the latest** to let us know if you would like to attend.


liberal judaism

NLPJC is a constituent congregation of Liberal Judaism

High Holiday Ticket Applications

Not a Member or a Friend and Need Tickets for the High Holidays?
Already a Member or a Friend and want to buy extra tickets?

Most of us feel that we would like to avoid the crush of people buying tickets at the door during the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Services. **Once again, we will only be selling tickets in advance, either**

- Through ordering them directly by post (to arrive no later than Monday 3rd September) using the application form sent to you in August
- By buying them in person on **Sunday 9th September between 6 – 8pm** at the Community Rooms, St. Mary's Church, Stoke Newington Church St N16 on (where you can also browse at our book stall - see right). Please bring your completed application form with you.

Please email Julia at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org to let us know of you intend coming on the 9th to buy tickets, or if you need another ticket application form

Books for Reflection

Some of the most stimulating and relevant books ever written on the subject of the *Yamim Noraim*, the High Holy Days, will be available for purchase at our special bookstall, at the Community Rooms, St. Mary's on **Sunday 9th September 6pm – 8pm**

Copies of *Machzor Ruach Chadashah* will also be available for purchase. All welcome to browse and buy.

We can accept cash or cheques only.

A letter from America

As I look back on the past year from my vantage point 5,000 miles away from London and a mile up on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, I am struck by how much has happened in my life, and NLPJC has been no small part of that.

Last year, Viv and I were in San Francisco for Rosh Hashanah, taking a break from our responsibilities and trying to plan our civil partnership celebration. We were looking for a progressive rabbi who would be willing to do a blessing for us, an American convert and an old-school Sephardi Jew who hadn't been to services since her teenage years.

Viv had heard about Shulamit and the congregation and I sent her off to explore our possibilities. The first time she came back from services I knew that she had found more than just a friendly rabbi but a group that would be our Jewish home.

In January I came over to London to spend three months with Viv, during which we registered our civil partnership and received a blessing under the chuppah in front of our family and friends. My mother walked me to the chuppah and it

was the happiest day of my life. It was made even more precious by the help and support we received from members of the community, many of whom we had just met.

While in London, I was able to become part of the community and go to services more than I ever have in the three years I have lived in Colorado. I moved here from Minnesota to take care of my Mom, and I live in a small town with an even smaller Jewish population; we have a Shabbat service once a month, but it isn't the same as being part of a congregation with a rabbi. With the responsibilities of being a caregiver it was too hard for me to try and find something more.

I knew that the time I spent in London would be an opportunity for me to recharge my batteries and get some time for myself; it became a time for me to come back to services and a deeper level of Jewish practice. I truly missed NLPJC and the friends I made when I left in March.

Mom passed away a short month after I returned to her.

Her friends are convinced she was waiting for me to get home, even though she was adamant that I not return early.

She was so proud to walk me to the chuppah and showed the photos and video to all of her friends. When she died, I hadn't found a congregation or a rabbi, but through Shulamit and the hospice team here I was able to connect with the Jewish community in nearby Boulder. A local rabbi generously hosted a shiva service at her house with my Minnesota havurah joining us by speakerphone.

Grieving is a difficult process, and it's the memories of the happy times that sustain me. I have found a congregation here that is very welcoming and supportive, but I miss NLPJC.

I am coming home for the High Holy Days. I wish I could say it's for good, and that will happen in the next year. In the meantime, I can't wait to say *l'shanah tovah* to you all in person.

Beth Kent

Selichot Service

This year some of us will be visiting the New London Synagogue for their beautiful Choral Selichot Service with Chazan Stephen Cotsen & The New London Synagogue Choir.

Saturday 8th September at 10.45pm
New London Synagogue 33 Abbey Road London NW8
Everyone is welcome

Liberal Judaism Annual Memorial Services

Sunday 9th September at 2pm

Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery
Edgware, Middx, HA8 8LW
Conducted by Rabbi Thomas Salamon

Learning About Jewish Thought

In my work as a child and adolescent psychotherapist with young exiles from violent conflicts, one of the most helpful ways of thinking is about the different resilient and vulnerable aspects of the self. When I think about young refugees I think about their internal and their external sources of strength, and about how fragmented or integrated the different aspects of themselves are at different times during development.

Working with young people, some of whom are deeply religious, Christians and Moslems mainly, and some of whom are more traditional in following the faith of their families of origin, it is clear that the interplay of their traditions and their beliefs usually provides a huge resource of internal support and strength and often a clear antidote to their sense of pain and hopelessness. This includes offering a sense of redemption after overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt about personal survival, and about disasters involving losses and disappearances, abusing and being abused.

During this work I found myself examining my own emotional sense of being Jewish alongside the huge lacunae in my knowledge about Jewish belief, Jewish philosophy, and the essence of Judaism. I found myself searching in Jewish texts for stories and portions that might help with the emotional and moral dilemmas of young people raised within the other two Abrahamic faiths.

As many questions emerged for me in my work I was reminded of how as a child, raised in a traditional East European Jewish refugee family in an area without a Jewish community, how much I had

wished to go to classes and learn about Judaism.

As the only Jewish girl in my school, I was looking for ideas and structures, better questions and explanations about what was Jewishness and why the Holocaust had happened.

Last Rosh Hashanah, I asked a friend if she knew a synagogue on my side of London. She told me about the partner of an old friend of hers who was a rabbi in a community that met in a church hall at the back of my home. Like everyone else, I was impressed by Rabbi Shulamit's leadership of the community and her gifts as a teacher and as a thinker. I also met others there who I knew in different work and social contexts.

A Treasure Chest of Study was advertised, taking place five minutes walk from where I lived and hence, accessible. Owing to my many sceptical questions about organised religion and about community, I was both nervous and excited. From the first session I loved the course. This included Rabbi Shulamit's rigour as a seminar leader keeping focused, managing time and being open to a variety of questions; and the other students, sometimes a group of middle aged women like myself, and sometimes a more diverse group in relation to age and gender.

During the first two terms, we covered the history of Jewish community life and this term have moved on to study texts from the Talmud and the Mishnah. We find ourselves at different times being critical of hair-splitting discussions about sentences and phrases. In general though I love the structure and exploration of texts in a group

and the different interpretations of accounts of details of Jewish life from the written and the oral traditions and commentaries.

The idea that especially moves and interests me, in a world where many governments are repressive and autocratic and many organisations are dominated by managerial jargon that both obscures and devalues human relating, is the presence in many of the texts we have studied, of both the majority and the minority view of the issues under consideration. I hope we will explore this in greater depth.

I continue to have many questions, in particular about prayer and community and the ways that different themes were and are interpreted at different times, themes such as disaster, pluralism, cooperation, friendship and family relationships. I am looking forward to the classes continuing over the next year.

Alongside the many unfamiliar ideas about Jewish discourse that I have learned about in our studies over this year and taken back into my work and my personal reflections, I also have a set of warm feelings, when I think about the small group of tired individuals sitting after a day's work round a table thinking about old Jewish texts in a way that fits with our times, and provides a context in which it is possible to move beyond the individual self in the search for solutions..

This gives me a sense of *bayit nachon* (a proper home). I would like to give "thank yous" and appreciation to everyone involved, and especially to Shulamit Ambalu.

Sheila Melzak

Donations

We see it as our duty to raise our income so that we are more fully able to fulfil our obligations towards each other and create a vibrant and inclusive community.

Some examples of the community's expenses:

Shabbat morning service = £120	Hosting a festival = £ 150	1 Adult Education evening = £200
1 cheder session = £ 75	Creche materials = £30	Pot luck supper with speaker = £ 80
Special Kiddush £30 - £80	1 Newsletter print run = £150	Chollah £2; Kiddush wine £6
Insuring the Torah scrolls £700 p.a.	Showcase community event = £1, 400	Buying & equipping a building = £2 million!

Donations can be made at any time by cheque to NLPJC and sent to PO Box 42702, London N19 5WR. If you wish, you can earmark a donation for a particular purpose. Many thanks for your continuing support.

Jewish Skills: Liberal Insights

Adult Education 2007-2008

Our Adult Education programme commences this coming October with three courses, taking place on Tuesday evenings.

Hebrew Level I is for complete beginners and rusty readers. Term one will be devoted to bringing all students to a point where they can comfortably read texts with vowels from the *Siddur* (prayerbook) and Torah. In Term 2, students will learn the rudiments of classical Hebrew grammar, and enjoy in-depth study of some well known prayers. **This class starts at 7pm sharp!**

Hebrew Level II continues with some advanced features of Hebrew grammar in Term 1, including verb forms. Students will translate and discuss texts from the Torah. Term 2 will offer the much anticipated *leyning* course. We will learn to chant the Torah by reading and singing the cantillation marks. **This class begins at 8pm.**

Beginners from Hebrew Term 1 may progress straight to *leyning* in Term 2 if they can read with reasonable fluency.

We follow an excellent published course for all levels of Hebrew (Edited by Linda Motzkin and published in 2000 by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations). Workbooks are available for purchase throughout the term and cost around £14-16.

A learner's pack, consisting of CD and sheet music created by Chani Smith will be available for purchase for the *leyning* course. No musical background is necessary.

Faces and Traces of God is our new Jewish Studies programme, which **starts at 9pm.**

Faces of God is a 1 term, eight week course exploring ideas of God, starting with the twentieth century and moving back through time to explore how the rabbis of the Talmud grappled with questions such as, 'Why is there Suffering?' 'Is God's Face Hidden?' 'Would it have been better were human beings never created?'

Traces of God is a 2 term course which combines text work with learning new skills. We will explore these traces within our Torah and the prayer book in Term 2. Term 3 will tackle some difficult questions about the meaning and place of ritual for Liberal Jews today, asking, 'Is the *mikvah* still relevant?' 'Must we circumcise our sons?' 'Is there any place for *kashrut*?' We will also begin to learn the special *nusach*, the seasonal melodies Shabbat, and the High Holidays.

Sue Lukes and Claire Helman have been working on a completely new approach to learning. We aim to create a process where students work together to create a learning resource, during the course itself, which will then be made available to other communities through a special website.

An outline for all three terms can be found in the course flyer (enclosed)

NLPJC Plans New Bnei Mitzvah Programme

A New Programme for children approaching Bar or Bat Mitzvah is currently in the planning stages. In the very near future, children in our community who have reached the age of 11 ½ can expect to take part in a fortnightly *Bnei Mitzvah* programme, which will run from 10-10:40 am before Shabbat morning services.

This group will investigate the journey to Jewish Adulthood through group work and project work done individually and with their families at home. The group will be facilitated by our Cheder Co-ordinator Laura Miller.

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu will shortly be contacting all our members who have children who are eligible to take part. Non-members are invited to contact her on 0207 403 3779.

Mazel Tov to Rabbi Aaron Goldstein

NLPJC is delighted to hear that Rabbi Aaron Goldstein, Liberal Judaism Outreach Director and current Assistant Rabbi of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, has been appointed Senior Rabbi of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue. Rabbi Goldstein will take up the post full-time in the summer of 2008, until which time he will divide his time equally between both roles.

Rabbi Goldstein was instrumental in setting up NLPJC and guided us in those early days. He has always been a really good friend to the Community. We wish him a sincere Mazel Tov!

CHEDER CORNER

Reflecting on the past is always hazardous – for me at least. Like many other people I'm sure, I am my own worst critic. So I want to thank the parents at the last meeting of the Education Committee for showing me that I actually had done some good, and cheering me up no end. I've learned a lot this year, both from parents and students, and especially from working with Rabbi Shulamit. So I am grateful to you all and thank you.

I have this habit of making a mental balance sheet (I was much affected in my youth by reading the story "Bonche Schweige" by IL Peretz) of what I've been able to accomplish during the academic year. All teachers know that the year starts on 1st September, so along with Yom Kippur comes the annual school reckoning.

So - we covered some about what it means to ourselves to be Jewish. We talked about how Jewish people relate to other religions. We began discussing the stories in the Bible, so that we can relate to what is being done "downstairs" in the Adult Service. We did a lot of drawing and discussing through art. And we (I think) have a much better picture of what the major holidays really mean. And, of course, we did a really FUN Purimschpiel.

For next year: by the beginning of September families will be receiving the first of a series of Cheder Newsletters, with articles about what we hope to accomplish this year. Highlights are: we are starting the year with a slightly more formalised curriculum, formalised in the sense of being written on a spread sheet no less, which Shulamit and I have worked on over the summer. We are planning for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Group, and we will be discussing the program at the meeting called in October. We are hoping to gradually add to the Children's Services, to make it a little more child-friendly. Hebrew we're still discussing.

The comments from the children who attended regularly I append below, and I want to thank Naomi Strauss for her insightful comments and suggestions for next year. I've put some of them in, just to show that I really welcome any suggestions about how Cheder can be made better. You – yes YOU! – might have some ideas and I would always want to hear them. At the same time, my hopes for this year are that more children will come to Cheder regularly. It's the only way we can have a really dynamic Cheder.

Here's to a really good – and sweet – and productive - New Year.

Laura Miller
Head Teacher

FROM ELLA AND HANNAH COLLINS

We enjoy Cheder, learning about the festivals and all the different things we do each time we meet. We enjoy meeting up with friends and we like the group being different ages and the way it doesn't feel like being at school. We particularly remember the discussion we had about whether we think Jews are better (more good) than other people. We both think that Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jews and all people are as good as each other. We really enjoyed celebrating Chanukah, Tu B'Shvat and Purim with the rest of our community. We like feeling part of the whole community and not just separate in the Cheder. We advise more children to join because it is fun and more than just going to extra school on Saturday.

FROM ESTHER HOBBS

"I liked the arty stuff - like colouring in - like making the mirrors. Laura confirmed and improved on what I knew. I learnt about the festivals in a lot more detail. Overall I think it's been good and fun. I think it would be good to make the drawings we coloured of Adam and Eve into books"
(Great idea, Esther. We're going to start our own books this year so that we can see what we have done and keep it together. Laura)

EXTRACT FROM ESTHER'S MUM, NAOMI

Cross-curricular ideas might be: Making your own board games linked to the Jewish Year, or a Jewish Life for example? Listening to a range of different Jewish music and seeing how different it is depending on where it has come from, and then triggering a discussion about the Diaspora. Looking at different theories/beliefs about how the world was made - the biblical versus the Big Bang? Looking at Jewish artists and their subject matter.

NLPJC Members News

A warm welcome to our new members:

- ❖ Wendy Sugarman & her son Zach
- ❖ Daniel Pollock & Grace Baynes

In the event of the death of an NLPJC member, please contact the Funeral Directors Martin Broad & Son 020 8441 6047 and Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu 020 7403 3779.

Sacred Texts at The British Library

The British Library is currently displaying an exhibition of sacred texts from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths, exploring commonalities and differences between these three faiths. Sefer Torahs from the Middle Ages, part of the Dead Sea Scrolls etc.

Admission is free by timed ticket. Book online at www.bl.uk/sacred or phone 020 7412 7332

The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB

NLPJC 'Who's Who'

All officers and chair can be contacted at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org or by post to PO Box 42702 London N19 5WR

Rabbi : Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu
Co-ordinator : Jackie Richards
Hon. Secretary : Claire Helman
Treasurer : Hannah Forbes
Prayers & Spirituality Chair : Joanna Ryam
Education Chair : Sue Lukes
Head & Cheder Teacher : Laura Miller
Children's & Adult's Hebrew Teacher : Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu
Volunteer Creche Worker : Anna Sklair
Membership Secretary : Daniel Casson
Administrator : Julia Chalfen
Social Action Co-ordinator : Daniel Casson
Marketing & Promotion : Claire Helman
Fundraising : Joanna Ryam

Vacant Posts:

Befriending Co-ordinator
Family Representative
Youth
Senior Warden
Intergenerational
Social Events Co-ordinator

If you are a member of NLPJC and are interested in joining one of the groups, or would like to fill one of the vacant roles, we would be delighted to hear from you.

NLPJC Newsletter is edited by Julia Chalfen. The deadline for the November/December issue is 18th Oct. Please send articles for publication to: nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org

