

May /
June 2008
Number 31

NLPJC Newsletter

North London Progressive Jewish Community



NLPJC events....

- **Special Shabbat Service – 17th May**

This will be a very special service, thanksgiving and celebration of the incredible vision and hard work of Jackie Richards, our first Co-ordinator, and Michael Ellman, our first Hon. Secretary, who both recently stepped down from their posts. We will also welcome Marc Turner as a member of the Jewish Community. *Venue: The Community Rooms – see Calendar on back page for details*

- **Adult Education**

Term 3 of our 'Jewish Skills: Liberal Insights' adult education programme has just begun – it's not too late to join. The last 3 weeks of the term (24th June- 8th July), comprise a mini 3 session cantillation (*leyning*) course : chanting the Torah according to one of the traditional western melodies, with Dr Annette Boeckler. See flyer insert for details.

Thinking of joining us ?

If you've been thinking of joining us for a while...why not do it now? We offer a pro-rata system for anyone joining throughout the year. You can contact our administrator, Julia Chalfen, nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org for a membership pack or phone Rabbi Shulamit on 020 7403 3779 to discuss membership options.

See our website at www.nlpjc.org.uk

Transitional Times



Claire Helman,
NLPJC Coordinator

As a relative newcomer to NLPJC, the fact that I have recently been elected as the co-ordinator of the community is testament to its ability to welcome and engage new people, and new ideas. I have found myself drawn into, and inspired by many aspects of the community, but in particular the spirituality and ritual of our services, the opportunity to improve my very rusty Hebrew, and to experience the delights of learning Talmud, Torah, Jewish philosophy and much more with our adult education programme.

Two years ago I would never have imagined becoming fascinated and excited by the study of Hebrew texts, struck by the poetic nature of the Torah, and enlightened by the arguments and stories of the Talmud.

The months ahead will be very interesting ones for our community, and a time of transition. With Rabbi Shulamit on maternity leave from June to December, we have the opportunity, with the appointment of Rabbi Cliff Cohen as her maternity cover, to deepen our 'lay leadership' skills and to experience working with a different Rabbi. Rabbi Cliff has over 30 years experience of all aspects of rabbinic work, and is currently part time Rabbi to Thanet and District Reform Synagogue. He has also previously taken on maternity cover roles for Woodford, and for Wimbledon Reform. In the past, he has been Rabbi for Southgate Progressive, and was also a voluntary assistant Rabbi at Kingston

Liberal, working with Rabbi Danny Rich. He is the Jewish Chaplain to Hospitals, Rehab Centres, Immigration and Asylum Centres and other similar institutions all over East Kent, and is also Jewish Chaplain to Canterbury Prison.

I am sure that I will find my new role at NLPJC both inspiring and enjoyable. As well as continuing to develop our spiritual and ritual practices, and our learning for adults and for children, I am particularly interested in helping to build the involvement of everyone in the community, and into making our community even more accessible to those who are usually socially excluded from many types of community activity. I also hope that in the coming years we will develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of 'Tikkun Olam', or 'social action' for NLPJC, and develop collectively a stronger contribution to improving and healing the world around us.

Claire Helman

Shavuot at NLPJC ~ Sunday 8th June

7pm Erev Shavuot Service

8pm Supper; please bring vegetarian and especially dairy dishes to share

8.30pm Tikkun Leyl Shavuot starts: a special night time study session in celebrating our interpretations of Torah. With Rabbi Sheila Shulman and Maurice Glasman (amongst other unconfirmed speakers) on the theme of '**Prophetic Judaism Now**'

Rabbi Sheila Shulman is well known and well loved as the founder of Beit Klal Yisrael and a teacher of rabbinical students at Leo Baeck College. She is also known for her longstanding commitment to Lesbian Feminist thought and action.

Dr Maurice Glasman teaches Political Science and is deeply involved in the development of Textual Reasoning as a civic practice amongst Jews, Christians and Muslims. This will be his third year of teaching at Shavuot at NLPJC.

Venue: the Community Rooms (see Calendar on back page)


liberal judaism

NLPJC is a constituent congregation of Liberal Judaism

My Jewish Journey?

*Birth is a beginning
And death is a destination.
And life is a journey.....¹*

Do I have a Jewish journey? I don't think soit is the wrong metaphor for me! Being Jewish is the essence of who I am. It is like a fountain, a strong core, forever gushing sometimes turned up or down, having various forms – but always there, shaping, influencing, giving meaning, purpose and guiding my behaviour. There are various aspects that are important:

First is my family. I am the oldest grandchild of two big families, almost all living in London and originating from Poland and Russia. My maternal grandma spoke mainly Yiddish and my other grandma was an eccentric business woman. All my older relatives had strong personalities. I grew up amongst a lot of love and arguments. I am the oldest of twelve cousins, and we are still close. There used to be many weddings, barmitzvahs and engagements although they do not happen much now. My father's family celebrated G-Day every year (Gumbiner was the family name) where the whole "tribe" met together. It was great fun.

Being Jewish is being an "outsider" and different. This is a very special life orientation. It has given me insights and experiences, many pleasurable and some painful. It has enabled me to be a questioner, an observer and to stand up for others as well as to receive a lot of kindness and respect from people different from myself. I had problems during my adolescence finding a place in Jewish community activities; at times this was really painful but eventually I joined the Square Peg Committee who raised funds for the Jewish Blind Society and gave me a circle of Jewish friends. After college in 1969, I spent an eventful summer as a counsellor at UAHC¹ summer camp in Indianapolis, visited New York and the Woodstock pop festival - all very life enhancing!

I have a sense of being part of something greater than myself, a connectedness to nature and humanity. I know many people do not feel this in the same way as I do. I suppose you either do or you don't! For me this is what "God" is about, finding joy, love, meaning and purpose



Jackie Richards

in life for others as well as oneself. How can "I- We-Us" make the world a better place? My Jewishness is secured by

- ❖ "Hear O Israel, the Eternal is One" (we are all part of a wholeness)
- ❖ "We are all made in God's image" (we are all human beings with needs, aspirations and feelings)
- ❖ "Every person will sit under their own tree" (equality and sharing resources in a healed world).

This is about coherence, sharing and treating others with respect and dignity, standing up for justice, with the expectation that the world can be improved. We each have only a short time on this earth to do something purposeful. Actions and results are more important than just theorising. There is such a rich tapestry of knowledge and heritage in Judaism if only we open ourselves to explore and find out what it is and act upon it.

At different times I have been involved in successful local social action. I have attempted to pass on values and traditions to my sons. I have read, listened and absorbed a lot of ideas as well as danced. Eric Fromm, Issac Batshevis Singer, the Bal Shem Tov,



1950: That's me with the handbag, sitting on Zeida George's knee. I was the first of the next generation.

Laban movement, sociology theorists including Marx and several phenomenologists and various rabbis have influenced me to name but a few. At 40, I started going to Shabbat services regularly and celebrating festivals and this has greatly enhanced my life.

I have a strong sense of time past, present and future. We have a long tradition and history. I am strongly progressive in the sense that experiences and meaning needs to be relevant and make sense. I could not belong to anything that did not totally include women as equals. I am no bystander! Our ancestors had different experiences from us. Judaism is strong enough to adapt and survive as long as it has purpose and meaning built on or adapted from our past traditions.

I have contributed to the creation and development of NLPJC. I have enjoyed working with so many of you and thank everyone sincerely as I have now stood down as co-ordinator. I feel confident that NLPJC will thrive and grow and I know the steering group are very capable. NLPJC is offering something very important for Judaism in the 21st century.

I am now about to become an OAP! I am retiring from fulltime work. The sea and forests are beginning to call. I welcome the time and space to learn, live and experience life in new ways and enjoy being with family, friends and travel. I will carry on working. I have a scale: voluntary work at one end - professional work at the other with choice and interests in between. The more I put into life the more I get out. We all have energy flowing within and through us enabling us to create sound loving relationships and healthy lives. Being positive attracts the positive. For me, being Jewish is a way of experiencing a positive life.

Please come along to the service on May 17th to celebrate the completion of the 1st phase of NLPJC's development and my 60th birthday! (See the Calendar)

Jackie Richards

¹ Rabbi Alvin A. Fine 1978 see P200 Siddur Lev Chadash

² Union of American Hebrew Congregations – similar to the progressive movement here

Israel: Finding a Language and a Voice

Israel has always been part of my life. Most of my family live there, and trips to stay with our grandparents were a regular part of my childhood. My relationship with the country dwindled as I grew into angry adolescence. Which is not to say I only then learned to be critical of Israel and Israelis, this was something that seemed to be part of my relationship with that place ever since I can remember. By the time I reached my mid thirties Israel was a place for a distant sort of longing, with infrequent visits helping me stay partly in touch.

I always knew that my rabbinical studies would take me there for a year, and my partner and I were very excited about a year in Jerusalem. I chose to study at an academic institution known for its rigour, in Hebrew, and we lived in a not very fashionable area a bit apart from the English speaking American dominated community. I hoped I would not lose my British perspective, but I very quickly learned how the political and social environment has a profound effect on one's outlook. We were there in 2002, the height of the Second Intifada, with *piguim* or, attacks, happening almost daily. We learned the profoundly irrational but somehow comforting way of thinking that people adopt in these sorts of situations. The belief that, for example, the bus station is safe, but the market most certainly isn't. Or, today, the market is safe again, because such and such a political agreement has been made, or undone. I learned to fear the other, to look out for strangers, to examine every public space with caution.

And I also learned something else. I met many many people of profound bravery and hope. Women who put themselves, literally, on the

line each week, by standing at Checkpoints to defend the rights of Palestinians (Machsom Watch). Rabbis (for Human Rights) standing shoulder to shoulder with East Jerusalem residents, and with Bedouin both in Jerusalem and the south. Rabbis engaged in defending the rights of foreign workers. My teachers were, for the most part individuals of great heart. I felt as warmed by their teaching as by the heat pouring out of the golden Jerusalem stone at the end of each day. I saw from, if not the inside, then at least a closer place, how the escalation of violence wipes out the possibility of rational thinking. I saw that on a national level it seemed to be impossible for the leaderships (of both Israel and the Palestinians) to get to grips with the stark political realities. And how the main tools, on both sides, were aggression and threat. I never saw any sense of planning or foresight in many of the political moves made then, which are such a problem today. I understood these to be a result of two societies living in a state of terror, of perpetual threat.

NLPJC seeks to be open to the widest possible debate about Israel and her future, but we do not hold a political stance, and we do not see ourselves as a place for campaigning, although we have invited campaigners to speak to us. I am sure that we have the most open and enquiring attitude of any of the progressive synagogues. Yet, how easy it is to become divided, as anyone who read the discussion on our recent email Thread will know. And this is not in the least surprising. Israel divided us, the Jewish people, long before she ever came into existence. The earliest Zionists were a minority, and possibly many of our ancestors wanted a future in

the lands of their birth and not in Israel. As it turned out, most of them did not have that choice. Still others, the Sephardi or so called Oriental Jews, (my family among them) made Aliyah as soon as they could.

My own feelings remain mixed. And I think that is right, because I think they reflect the complexity of the situation. But I will say this. I may live here, but in some part of me Israel is my home. I have a home in the language, the light, but most profoundly of all, in the sense of shared destiny I feel with every Israeli. And it is in this place I hope that we can begin to meet. Not, perhaps, in the sense of home, which for many of us is complicated and various. But in the fact of shared destiny. This means I must profoundly care about everything that happens there.

And this is a destiny I share with every one of us here in the Diaspora. Perhaps, one day, this sense of shared destiny will enable us to argue with passion and a sense of continuing connection, to each other, and to that place which seems so far away, and at times so distant.

We will not be holding our own Israel Independence Day celebrations this year at NLPJC, but I hope you were able to join me last Sunday at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue for the special service which was sponsored by a wide range of progressive Jewish communities.

We will continue to provide a forum for education, debate and activism, encompassing the broadest possible range of views. Where each one of us has a place.

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu

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

1 Cheder session = £ 75

Special Kiddush £30 - £80

Insuring the Torah scrolls £700p.a.

Buying & equipping a building = £2 million!

Hosting a festival = £ 150

Creche materials = £30

1 Newsletter print run = £150

Showcase community event = £1, 400

1 Adult Education evening = £200

Pot luck supper with speaker = £ 80

Chollah £2; Kiddush wine £6

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.

Annual General Meeting ~ April 2008

What do the election of NLPJC officers and fine Indian dining have in common???? Well, knowing that Annual General Meetings are rarely the most exciting of events, the 2008 AGM was held at Rasa's in Stoke Newington Church St, a very effective way of encouraging people to come, and ensuring that a fine time was had by all.

As the Annual Report (published on our website) for 2007 shows, last year was a very successful and inspiring year for NLPJC.

"We have continued to do far more than might ever be expected from such a small community, with a full programme of Shabbat and festival services, educational activities, and support for both members and prospective members who are facing difficult Jewish questions in their lives."
Rabbi Shulamit

Some of the highlights included:

- ❖ Nearly 8 % increase in our membership
- ❖ Growth of our Adult Education programme and our Cheder and crèche.
- ❖ Rabbi Shulamit and the wardens have developed and given more order and meaningful spirituality to our services and our High Holydays were truly beautiful and thought-provoking.
- ❖ Our first major social event and fundraiser: a quiz with professional entertainers and a meal.
- ❖ The involvement of more people with the leadership and management of the community, including new people in officer roles
- ❖ Sound management of our finances, ending the year with a surplus of approximately £13,000

NLPJC Community Seder 2008 / 5768



"The Advanced Hebrew Class has spent the year grappling with verb forms and the magical 'reversing vav'. We are amazed to find we can now translate tiny pieces of Torah!
The classes are stimulating and thought provoking as our excellent text book and Rabbi Shulamit's depth of knowledge allow us to combine grammar rules with Torah study.
This adult learner looks forward to them as an oasis in a hectic week, and is always sorry she can't stay for the Faces of God course that follows."
Kitty Stewart

As well as presenting the annual report, and agreeing some minor amendments to our constitution, the following officers were newly or re-elected:

- ❖ Coordinator: Claire Helman
- ❖ Hon. Secretary: Liz Reiner
- ❖ Treasurer: Hannah Forbes
- ❖ Education Officer : Sue Lukes
- ❖ Religious Affairs Officer: Alison Behr

Claire Helman
Co-ordinator

NLPJC Members News

A warm welcome to our new members & friends:

- ❖ Peter Bergamin
- ❖ Eve Largin
- ❖ Daniel Ozarow
- ❖ Megan Royle-Jacob and Torejan Havnen

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.



CHEDER CORNER

Does anyone have a use for a recycling tree? For Tu B'Shvat the children decorated a large branch (put into a stand by a friend of mine) with the various objects we can recycle. We showed it off at the next Shabbat, but now it is sitting in the cupboard. I'm pretty sure no one will want to give it a home, and I know we need to recycle it, but the question is, how?

We have also been discussing Israel's 60th anniversary, with the help of some wonderful posters and books from Leo Baeck. I have been amazed at how many of the students have travelled widely – more widely than me! We are trying to use the knowledge that the students have to make our studies more immediate.

That being said, Yom Chinuch is being celebrated on 15th June at LJS at St. John's Wood, and I would like parents to think about having a cheder trip there. It is organised as a "trip" to Israel. Each city will be in a different room, and travel guides (madrichim) will take them from place to place. Each city will show off its best features – including song, dance, archaeology etc. Adults will be able to go to adult discussion/lecture groups. It looks like a wonderful experience.

One session when I really wished we had access to the internet was during Pesach. I discovered a group of young people who have been writing rap lyrics

for Jewish holidays. The one for Pesach was quite exciting – all about the plagues. After consulting every computer geek I could find to try to get the rap onto my IPOD (who says I'm a fuddy-duddy?), I gave up and brought in the lyrics instead. One of the students had a "go" at it, and then the students each wrote their own poem or rap. For next year, Rabbi Shulamit and I are discussing a slightly different organisation of the Cheder studies. We are planning a three year rolling curriculum, to allow the different age groups to work at their own pace. We are in the planning stages of this at the moment, so I will be explaining in more detail later.

In the meantime, as usual, if anyone has any ideas they would like to share, I'd always be grateful for them.

Laura Miller
Head Teacher

We hear from one of our recent 100 club winners.....

Michael Ellman reporting from the Moon after his £24 win....

Got here at last - thanks to winning the NLPJC 100 Club draw. Looking around to see where to build my villa, swimming pool and all mod cons... It's a bit cold here, so central heating will be a must - but that shouldn't be a problem with my winnings. Will also need to build a synagogue.... Magnificent views of the earth from here: I can just about pick out London with a telescope - the gherkin, Canary Wharf - and that must be Hackney over there.

What a great thing to be able to retire here and spend the rest of our lives in peace: thanks to NLPJC 100 Club !

Our Winners this year: Michael Ellman (March), Laura Miller (April) and Sue Lukes (May). Remember...you've got to be in it....
For more details contact Julia at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org

Advert: Do you need an editor, tutor, baby sitter.....?

I grew up in a Reconstructionist congregation in Philadelphia, and I am coming to London for the summer and possibly the year. I am looking for interim work starting May 19. I have been working with human rights organizations since graduating from university, and plan to continue in that field. In the meantime I am looking for babysitting, tutoring, writing, editing or other types of employment in London. I currently have a very flexible schedule, and would be happy to talk further or provide references or a resume. Please contact me at Frances.Kreimer@gmail.com.

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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 : Claire Helman
Hon. Secretary : Liz Reiner
Treasurer : Hannah Forbes
Prayers & Spirituality Chair : Alison Behr
Education Chair : Sue Lukes
Head & Cheder Teacher : Laura Miller
Children's & Adult's Hebrew Teacher : Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu
Volunteer Creche Worker : Anna Sklar
Administrator : Julia Chalfen
Fund-raising Coordinator: Sue Lukes
Social Action Co-ordinator : Daniel Casson
Marketing & Promotion: Claire Helman
Befriending Group: May Friedler & Sheila Melzak
Vacant Posts:
Membership Secretary; Youth; Intergenerational

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 July/August issue is 22nd June. Please send articles for publication to: nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org

Advertisements contained in the NLPJC Newsletter are the sole responsibility of the persons that post the advertisement. NLPJC does not make any guarantee as to the accuracy, completeness, truthfulness or reliability of such advertisements.

NLPJC events calendar

May - July 2008

Most events are held at *the Community Rooms adjacent to St. Mary's Church, Spensley Walk, Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16*, unless otherwise stated

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Venue</u>
Thursday 1 st May	7.30pm	Yom Hashoah Service	
Saturday 3 rd May	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder & creche Shabbat Service	
Tuesdays 6 th , 13 th , 20 th May	7pm/8pm/9pm	Adult Education Programme (<i>see enclosed flyer</i>)	
Saturday 17 th May	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder (no crèche but toys Special Celebratory Shabbat Service (<i>see front page</i>) available)	
Friday 23 rd May	7.15pm / 8pm	Erev Shabbat Service / Supper & Speaker (to be announced)	
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Tuesdays 3 rd , 10 th , 17 th , 24 th June	7pm/8pm/9pm	Adult Education Programme (<i>see enclosed flyer</i>)	
Saturday 7 th June	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder & creche Shabbat Service	
Sunday 8 th June	7pm	Shavuot Service & Study evening (<i>see front page</i>)	
Saturday 21 st June	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder (no creche Shabbat Service but toys available)	
Friday 27 th June	7.15pm / 8pm	Erev Shabbat Service / Supper & Speaker (to be announced)	
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Tuesdays 1 st , 8 th , 15 th July	7pm/8pm/9pm	Adult Education Programme (<i>see enclosed flyer</i>)	
Saturday 5 th July	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder & creche Shabbat Service	
Saturday 19 th July	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / cheder (no creche Shabbat Service but toys available)	
Friday 25 th July	7.15pm / 8pm	Erev Shabbat Service / Supper & Speaker (to be announced)	

**Contact us at: North London Progressive Jewish Community, PO Box 42702, London N19 5WR.
Call Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu on 020 7403 3779
email nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org or visit our website www.nlpjc.org.uk**