

December 2009 /
January/February 2010

Number 38

NLPJC Newsletter

North London Progressive Jewish Community



NLPJC events....

• Hackney Mini Limmud

Let Limmud take you one step further on your Jewish Journey. Following on from the fantastic success of Hackney Limmud in 2008...the Hackney Limmud team bring you **Hackney mini Limmud on Sunday 6th December**. 1.45pm - 6pm See pg 4 for details

• Special Shabbat Family & Community Service

Come and join us for this special Shabbat morning on Saturday 16th January :

10am - 11.30am Children's Hebrew / Cheder & crèche

10am -11.30am Adult study session : "How do we talk to our children about the Holocaust?"

11.30am - 12.30pm Special Children and Family Service.

Everyone welcome, both the young and the young at heart for this special participatory morning of learning, drama, discussion and prayer.

• Tu b'shvat Seder

We will be celebrating Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of Trees, with a **seder meal on Friday 29th January at 7pm**.

This is a day on which we traditionally enjoy eating fruits, when we plant and celebrate trees, and generally raise our environmental awareness. Come along to learn about the traditional ritual fruits, the symbolism of the seder and to come together as a community. Please bring a vegetarian dish to share.

Venue: The Community Rooms

• PURIM Party

Join us for some fun & celebrations on **Sunday 28th Feb at 3.30pm** at our fantastic Purim Party!

- ❖ Creative Activities
- ❖ Purim Spiel
- ❖ Megillah Reading
- ❖ Fancy dress
- ❖ Food

Everyone is welcome. Please bring veggie snacks to share. Non-members: £5 per family / £3 concs. *NB: Venue still TBC – either our usual Community Rooms, or the Defoe Rd Community Centre.*

See our website at www.nlpjc.org.uk

Shabbat Together on 21st November



Walking inside the animal enclosures in Clissold Park in the autumn sunshine... poking in the pond for frogs...learning the names of all the trees at the entrance to Clissold Park...seeing the magnificent London Plane trees that are years older than any of us....a giant chocolate cake with Shabbat stencilled on in sugar strands (in Hebrew)... kids making up 'potions in the toilets'....games of pass the balloon, hunt the slipper, pass the smile giggles...havdalah....it was a lovely day.

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu



CHANUKAH PARTY

Sunday 13th December 3.30pm – 6pm ~ At the Community Rooms

Party games, creative activities, Chanukah play, doughnuts and latkes – everyone welcome, adults and children.

Please bring vegetarian snacks to share.

Non-members: £5 per family / £3 concs

liberal judaism

NLPJC is a constituent congregation of Liberal Judaism

Happy Chanukkah! (Merry Christmas)

At this time a year ago I was invited to give a talk at a local primary school about Chanukkah.

"Why Chanukkah"? I thought. "Surely this is the most minor of our festivals. Wouldn't it be better for the children to learn about Pesach, the truly defining Jewish 'moment', or what about Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah?" The answer of course, is that Chanukkah is so close to Christmas, and it is this close juxtaposition that, rightly, forces our secular, but basically Christian state school system to think about the experiences of people of other faiths. I taught the children about Chanukkah in a way that, I hope, made sense to them, by asking them how they might feel if they were prevented from following their religion? How might it feel if animal or even pig sacrifices were forced to take place in a Church or in a mosque? What would they do if they had to keep on practicing their faiths in secret?

I hoped that they could identify with the courage of the Maccabees, and with our feelings of celebration and warmth at this time of year. At any rate, the *dreidels* helped, although school healthy eating policies mean chocolate money is now definitely out!

Chanukkah and its intersection with Christmas is, for us, a time for grappling with the practical questions of integration. Integrating with the wider community, yes. But also, to a greater or less extent, for working out how we integrate these two festivals within our family lives and within ourselves. Liberal rabbis are never really comfortable giving advice... we are after all so often liberal with a small 'l' as well as the capital L. The danger is then that our words slide into a bland and fuzzy muddle. But here are my thoughts. Jewish identity and Jewish ways of life are not so straightforward today. It is usual to feel as though our selves are made up of several different parts. Our task, through the process of growing up, and continuing maturity in adult life, is to bring these parts together, to feel ourselves integrate, to become *shalem*, whole or complete.

So how do we work out a positive lively Jewish identity and way of life that also incorporates our non-Jewish loved ones, be they partner, parents, grandparent, friends, and children? How does someone who

converts to Judaism, or who grows up in a mainly non-Jewish family, hold on to this identity? I think that many of you readers will answer this question in the most insightful and creative ways. But here's my thought. I think that the best chance of *sheleimut*, or integrity, the integrating of various and multiple identities, comes from making a stand, or a very clear choice, for what will take hold of at or near the centre of the self.

I think that we must make the choice, for Jewish identity, or Jewish action, to be the firmest axis, around which we arrange the various parts of our other personal identities. If we make a stand for Chanukkah, then there is no reason to exclude the reality of Christmas. I celebrate Chanukkah; I cannot celebrate the birth of Jesus. But I am happy to visit people who do, and to enjoy being with them. This doesn't confuse me. My belief about identity is that if one makes a stand, then integrating these different parts becomes all the more possible.

Integrity and integration are two themes that also seem to be emerging from some recent work we have been doing on membership and our community. The new membership structure, which you will see in the coming New Year 2010, will ask you to rejoin as households, rather than as one or two adult members, if that category is relevant to you. This will help us to build a stronger community.

We are also finalizing details of one of the most significant breakthroughs for members of Liberal Judaism communities. As you will have seen in a previous announcement in our newsletter, we are now able to arrange for couples consisting of a Jewish and a non-Jewish member of our synagogue to be buried together at Edgwarebury cemetery. Some of our Jewish members may have previously opted *out* of our funeral scheme because you would like to be buried together with a partner. You may now choose for both of you to opt *in*.

Edgwarebury is easily the most beautiful of our cemeteries (not that that should matter, I suppose) and the most accessible from London. I understand that moves towards green burial are also taking place. It is strange to be thinking about death in the middle of life, but these very

practical concerns are also very Jewish.

Finally, I write these words after our very first Shabbat Together. Thank you to everyone who baked cakes, shared our fantastic outing in Clissold Park, joined in with the games and helped to clear up. It was good just to be together.

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu

NLPJC Members News

A warm welcome to our new members:

- ❖ Professor Norma Raynes
- ❖ Paul Collins
- ❖ Leila Baker and her children, Miriam and Saul Ashon

...and welcome to Michael Lomotey and his family as full members of the community.

A belated Mazel Tov to Rachel Crasnow and her family on the birth of Nina Crasnow-Dodd, born 21st April this year.

❖ Congratulations to the 100 club winners this year, who all won £42 each:

- Davina Good (Sept)
- Laura Miller (Oct)
- Michael Lomotey (Nov)

We hope more of you will join in next year, which will make the winnings even bigger !!

In the event of the death of an NLPJC member, please contact the Funeral Directors M.M. Broad & Son (NB: Change of number) 020 8445 2797 and Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu on 020 7403 3779.

HHD CHARITY APPEAL

This year we have collected a fantastic £1,337 to divide between our 2 chosen charities: Windows for Peace and NLPJC. On top of this we are also able to collect an additional £332 in gift aid – so many thanks to all of you who have, once again, donated so generously to this year's appeal.

My Jewish Journey by Michael Lomotey

ARAMI OVEID AVI (A wandering Aramean was my father)

Ki Tavo/ Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8



Michael with his daughter Kesia

The metaphor is my father, who had many strengths, of which possibly the foremost were his conviction and selfless endeavours. He left his home, a royal palace in the Western Region of Ghana, which was quite a

comfortable life, and wandered until he founded a family in Hull. A singular tenacity drove him and he kept his faith in silence. His head was always covered, and Shabbat was oppressively kept; silence reigned in our house and we were always immaculately dressed.

Where did his wandering take my Avi? We never knew his family until my brother and myself sought them out when we were grown. Once we finally visited Ghana we found a few small references to his Judaism but nothing solid. It was all mainly anecdotal, but there was one cousin of my father's living an orthodox Jewish life.

As a young child, I was taught the Hebrew alphabet, nothing about Torah that I can remember, but we did have *Kashrut* drummed into us. But was it really *Kashrut* if the source and reason were never explained? We just had to do it, which meant never eating takeaways or going to restaurants and also no school meals, even though we were entitled to free ones.

Our difference was never explained but was a source of comfort I recall. Pride in our difference is the best way I can explain how I felt about it. I expect I am not alone in revelling in feeling special which is how my difference made me feel. Throughout our upbringing – 7 kids, 4 boys and 3 girls - our parents never explained why we couldn't watch TV on Friday night or Saturday. I don't know about my siblings but I took it for granted that it was because of our dual heritage; my father is from Ghana and mother British. At school I was the only black pupil. Our parents explained a lot about Africa, we played Ghanaian ring games, knew the geography, foods – like Ahule Tolo my favourite Ghanaian stew..., we served it with Latkas – it was all very different from my friend's lifestyles. They could answer their parents back, call them by their first names and swear in the house, eat bacon etc, all anathema to us – just not allowed in an African household. It reinforced the differences but not in a judgemental way, just, well just, different. I thought the Ghanaian cultural stuff and religious observances (e.g. Shabbat) were one and the same.

The biggest fault that I can lay on my parents is the error of omission. Why did

we not have a community upbringing? And why were we never taught the name and story of our Jewish identity? One thing that can't be faulted though is that my parents, my mum's brother and my grandmother all had impeccable moral values and were a great influence upon us all in terms of what was right and wrong.

Hull was a pretty grim place when I was growing up during the late 70's and early 80's, no real future prospects, work etc, hence on the streets my friends and I led ourselves astray. It was at this time, just after I'd turned 18 that my father asked me to go to London in order to keep me out of trouble (ha, out of the frying pan, into the fire?).

To travel with he gave me a book.

He informed me in a matter of fact way, that I should read it. The book was a *Hertz Pentateuch*, a Chumash with commentary that I still have.

What a find. I knew of the bible and was aware of the Old Testament but to read this was fantastic. Synapses began to fire and reveal all of what it seemed I already knew. I remembered the Hebrew letters I had been taught as a child. I felt home and wonderful and belonging. I became an avid reader and devoured for three of four years this book and any others that I could lay my hands upon. They included the *RamBam's Guide* (phew, heavy going), Luzzatto's *Derech Hashem* (which explains Tikkun Olam in terms of Mitzvoth) and some books by Kaplan and Scholem.

As I read on I began to understand more about what our peculiar lifestyle as a child had been about. This was exciting, it had a name, we weren't, I wasn't, just the different one. I had something to shore up my identity and an understanding of how my sisters, brothers and I had been brought up. It was all so interesting I neglected to question why it had never been fully explained before by our parents. I spent a few years learning and exploring myself. I went to certain synagogues a few times, although the closest to me was over an hours walk away in Stamford Hill but the Lubavitch there were welcoming. I became close to my Uncle, the cousin of my father who



Michael (back row, second from left) with his brothers and sisters

was now in the UK and a member of a congregation in South London. He often talked about wanting to become a Rabbi, we learned together a little but he was quite introverted and not open to talk or answer searching questions about family. Unfortunately I've lost touch with him after he went to Israel.

I plodded on as my father had done in solitude and it took another 20 years before I found the courage to join a community. The community I chose needed to have an acceptable perspective on the ethics of life as opposed to blind faith – in other words to be progressive. My choice, NLPJC, had real practical values for current society and for me (thanks).

My Grandma was married in a church (I've seen the picture) but the rumour goes that my great Grandma Neqvist came to the UK during the war as a Jewish refugee fleeing the Nazis. We've tried to trace her journey but nothing. All I can confirm is that my parents took us to Shul as a child. About 10 years ago I contacted the old Rabbi, Dr Chaim Cooper, who remembered us attending services in the late 1960's but who couldn't tell me much about who we were or our ancestry.



Michael's father in Grand Hull Synagogue

So there's my story. I've lived my whole life as a Jew, I still can't bring myself to eat *trefa* meat for instance and like to have a restful Saturday, it is part of who I am and can't be washed away. The Beth Din we saw recently agreed and affirmed my Jewish status and I didn't have to formally convert.

NLPJC and its inclusive diverse community brings a fantastic opportunity to teach our children many positive lessons of life, including a modern take on culture, heritage, acceptance of the diversity of society and I suppose also a respect for religious tradition.

Arami Oveid Avi, is often said to relate to Abraham, but my own father's wanderings have set my family and myself on our own tale of exploration, love and spirituality. The values of the past will merge with the present and I firmly believe we'll make a good path wherever our own wanderings take us.

Shalom.

Jewish Identity and Jewish Social Action

Our Exciting Adult Learning programme continues

Tuesday evenings

7 – 8pm Hebrew for Intermediate / Advanced

8 – 9pm Hebrew for beginners

8 – 9.30pm *From Here to There*; Jewish Identity and Jewish Social Action:



1st December **The Jewish Alinsky**

Saul Alinsky's work had an important impact on a young community organiser working in Chicago. When this man developed a campaign to win the presidency of the United States some thinkers could see he also modelled it closely on Alinsky's strategy for political victory. Who was the Jewish Alinsky?

Teacher: **Dr Maurice Glasman** teaches political science at London Metropolitan University and is a popular speaker at NLPJC. We are delighted to welcome him back.

8th December **The New Jews of Ethiopia**

Teacher: **Rabbi Sybil Sheridan**, rabbi at the Wimbledon and District Synagogue, spent her Sabbatical with the Beta Yisrael Community in Gondar, Ethiopia last Spring and has many stories of her experiences.

15th December **Whitechapel, mayn Vaytshepl:**

Yiddish songs of London - stories, words, history and politics. An illustrated talk.

Teacher: **Vivi Lachs** has been a teacher in Hackney for over 20 years. She has been singing with the band Klezmer Klub for over 10 years (in her free time). Her research into the Yiddish songs of London has culminated in a CD. The title refers to one of the Yiddish songs of London, full of places, people, politics, history and a good dose of humour. The CD will be available at the talk at the pre-launch price of £10, and can be previewed at www.klezmerklub.co.uk

For more details, visit our website www.nlpjc.org, email Julia at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org or telephone Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu on 020 7403 3779. **Venue:** The Community Rooms at St. Mary's.

Cost per single hourly session: Members £5 (unwaged £2.50); Non-Members £7.50 (Unwaged £3.75)

After the fantastic
success of Hackney
Limmud, we bring you


Limmud

Hackney Mini Limmud

Sunday 6 December 2009
13:45-18:00

(Refreshments plus registration from 13:45)

Simon Marks School
75 Cazenove Road, London N16

Just a small taste of the riches of Limmud:

- Vivi Lachs on London Yiddish songs
- Clive Lawton and Shulamit Ambalu on Chanukah
- Short films by Leah Thorn and the Knish Collective
- Debate the JFS admissions legal ruling and what it means for Jewish schools
- Talks by representatives of minority Jewish communities of Hackney
- Dance Midrash with Jacqueline Waltz on the theme of Chanukah

Plus: refreshments, shmooze

Please note: there will be no creche at this event, but young people aged 12 and over are welcome.

Tickets £5* on the door

Book a place in advance by emailing hackney@limmud.org

* Limmud policy is that no-one should be prevented from attending for financial reasons. Please contact us about this if necessary.



LJY NETZER

LJY-Netzer is the youth movement of Liberal Judaism and a branch of Netzer Olami. They run a huge number of events for different age groups, ranging from 3 to 23-year-olds...

Spring camp, Summer camp, Countryside treks, 'Social Action Chain Reaction', 'Party in the Park' Israel Tour month, Gap year in Israel, Group travel around Europe and more.

For more information contact offica@ljynetzer.org or phone 020 7631 0584

Thinking of joining NLPJC ?

If you've been thinking of joining us for a while...why not do it now? The membership year begins in January and we offer a pro-rata system for anyone joining throughout the year.

You can contact our administrator, Julia Chalfen, at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org for a membership pack or phone Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu on 020 7403 3779 to discuss membership options.

Newsflash – online booking is now open!



*“Liberal Judaism:
With You Every Step of the Way”*

If you are a Liberal Jew, then Liberal Judaism’s next Biennial Weekend (Friday 16th - Sunday 18th April 2010) is for you!

This year’s exciting theme moves us to think outside the box. Ours is not the world our grandparents knew—Jewish and Jew-ish families look different than they did generations ago, with families differently constituted and with us all living longer. To remain at the cutting edge of Jewish life, Liberal Judaism needs to address these realities.

Come and help develop our theme – a new shape of Jewish life; innovative rituals to more fully include non-Jewish family members; marking previously ignored milestones in our lives; ways to include those rendered “invisible” by age or health problems; and using of the wisdom of the elderly while recognising the needs of the young. We will take up the age-old quest for God and how we can find spiritual space in our often frenetic world. Whether you prefer a hands-on approach or more intensive study, this Biennial has something for you.

Our distinguished keynote speakers include Baroness Neuberger and Lord Dholakia. Rabbi Julia Neuberger, the president of Liberal Judaism, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our Biennial, including insights based on her most recent book ‘Not Dead Yet – a manifesto for old age’. Navnit Dholakia is a Vice President of the Mental Health Foundation and Vice Chairman of the Policy Research Institute on Aging and Ethnicity and will give us an interesting perspective to our weekend.

New this year is the addition of our Scholar in Residence. The first woman to be ordained in Israel, Rabbi Na’amah Kelman is currently Dean of Hebrew Union College’s Jerusalem School. Her commitment to pluralistic Jewish education, interfaith dialogue, and supporting the plurality of Jewish experience makes her a wonderful addition to our Biennial programme.

Don’t miss this chance to engage with and explore real-life issues from a Jewish perspective. Sign up today. Visit the Biennial website where you can now book online or download a registration form. www.liberaljudaism.org/biennial.htm

Are you reading this? This space could be working for you....

If you would like to advertise in our quarterly newsletter, please contact Julia by email at nlpjc@liberaljudaism.org or by post to PO Box 42702 London N19 5WR

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Number of editions	Cost per month		
	1	3	6
Size of advert			
¼ page	£16.00	£14.50	£13.00
⅓ page	£21.00	£19.00	£17.00
½ page	£32.00	£28.00	£25.00
Full page	£52.00	£47.00	£42.00



Westlon Housing Association

Sheltered Accommodation

**Westlon is a Jewish Housing Association
founded by members of the
West London Synagogue.**

**We have vacancies in our friendly, comfortable
warden-assisted sheltered housing for
Jewish people aged 55 and over,
in East Finchley and Hendon.**

**We provide 24-hour warden support, 7 days a
week, a residents’ lounge and kitchen, laundry,
a sunny patio and garden.**

**For further details and application forms, please
contact Westlon Housing Association on
0208 201 8484 or email
johnsilverman@btconnect.com**

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
- Chair : Claire Helman
- Hon. Secretary : Liz Reiner
- Treasurer : Hannah Forbes
- Prayers & Spirituality Chair : Alison Turner
- Senior Warden: Joanna Ryam
- Education Chair : Sue Lukes
- Head & Cheder Teacher : Dr Laura Miller
- Hebrew Teacher : Yasmin max Sason
- Volunteer Creche Worker : Anna Sklair
- Administrator : Julia Chalfen
- Fund-raising Coordinator: Joanna Ryam
- Membership Secretary : Jackie Richards
- Marketing & Promotion: Claire Helman
- Befriending Co-ordinator: Sheila Melzak
- Vacant Posts:**
- Social Action Co-ordinator; Youth;
- Parent Liaison; 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 Mar/Apr/May issue is Monday 15th February. 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

December 09 – February 2010

Most events are held at *the Community Rooms adjacent to St. Mary's Church, Spensley Walk, Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 9ES*, unless otherwise stated

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Venue</u>
Tuesdays in Dec 1 st , 8 th , 15 th	7pm / 8pm (6.45pm start on 1 st Dec for ma'ariv – short evening service)	Adult Learning Programme (see pg 4)	
Saturday 5 th Dec	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / Cheder & Crèche Shabbat Service	
Sunday 6 th Dec	1.45pm	Hackney Limmud (see pg 4 for details and venue)	
Sunday 13 th Dec	3.30pm	Chanukah Party (see front page)	
Saturday 19 th Dec	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / Cheder (no crèche but toys available) Shabbat Service	

NB: Tuesdays in Jan for adult learning programme: all TBC

Saturday 16 th Jan	10am – 11.30am	Torah Breakfast – study session on “How do we talk to our children about the Holocaust?”
	10am – 11.30am 11.30am – 12.30pm	Children's Hebrew / Cheder / Crèche Family & Community Service (see front page)
Friday 29 th Jan	7pm	TU B'SHVAT SEDER (see front page)

NB: Tuesdays in Feb for adult learning programme: all TBC

Saturday 6 th Feb	10am / 10am 10.40am / 10.50am 11am	Torah Breakfast / Children's Hebrew Kol b'yachad service for children / Cheder & Crèche Shabbat Service
Saturday 20 th Feb	10am 10.40am 11am	Torah Breakfast Kol b'yachad service for children Shabbat Service <i>NB: No Cheder or Children's Hebrew this week as it is half-term</i>
Friday 26 th Feb	7.15pm / 8pm	Erev Shabbat Service / Supper & Event tba
Sunday 28 th Feb	3.30pm	PURIM PARTY – children & adults : NB VENUE TBC (either the Community Rooms (our usual venue) or the Community Centre, 3-5 Defoe Rd, N16

Dates for your diary.....

- 1) SPECIAL PESACH CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES (mock seder, songs etc) on Sunday 28th March at 3pm
- 2) PESACH ~ 2ND NIGHT SEDER at 7pm on Tuesday 30th March at the DEFOE ROAD COMMUNITY CENTRE

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