

# Jewish Students VOLUNTEER WITH Ukrainian Refugees



*Shortly after the Russian invasion, a group of Jewish students, led by the Student Chaplain, Rabbi Aharon Lemberger, travelled to Warsaw to volunteer with children fleeing Ukraine.*

*Tara Silberg, a graduate student at the University of Glasgow, reflects on her experience:*

A day working with the children showed me things that no reporter or politician could truly experience.

Each day, I worked in Warsaw Expo, where multiple hangars housed thousands of refugees waiting to travel to a place of safety. We used funds raised by other students to buy things they needed from local stores. From 10am to 7pm we played with children aged from a few months to 16 or 17, kicking and throwing footballs, painting faces, and playing multilingual versions of "duck duck goose" and musical chairs.

Basic hand gestures quickly broke language barriers, but the most effective communication, particularly with the little ones, was smiling and silly faces. One child simply wanted to be swung around the room and thrown high in the air. Some wanted to be alone, like a young boy taking time to work through his emotions in a corner. I realised how far a hug could go.

No matter where they're from, children are children – playing with toys, wanting their face painted,

and, most importantly, taking all the love you can give. If it's hard for adults to fathom what's happening in Ukraine, imagine understanding this as a child. I asked one girl where she was going, and she said home to Ukraine. I was confused – each day coaches left for various countries and I expected her to name one of these, but I quickly understood she meant her home was still her home. That changed my perspective.

This trip was eye-opening; immersing oneself in experiences like these is more effective than any textbook, and I'm extremely grateful to Chaplaincy for organising this trip and enabling me to participate in *tikkun olam*. Whenever I can get involved, I absolutely will.



ISSUE 73 • SUMMER 2022 • TAMMUZ 5782



Scottish Council  
of Jewish  
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# Face TO Face AGAIN



## Challah Bake

Giffnock Newton Mearns Synagogue marked Shabbat UK with a number of events including special Friday night services, challah bakes (below), Shabbat cholent lunch, and musical Havdalah to end the day.



## Yom haZikaron & Yom haAtzma'ut

People of all ages came together in Glasgow to mark Yom haZikaron (Israel's national memorial day – above and below) and Yom HaAtzma'ut (Independence Day – right).

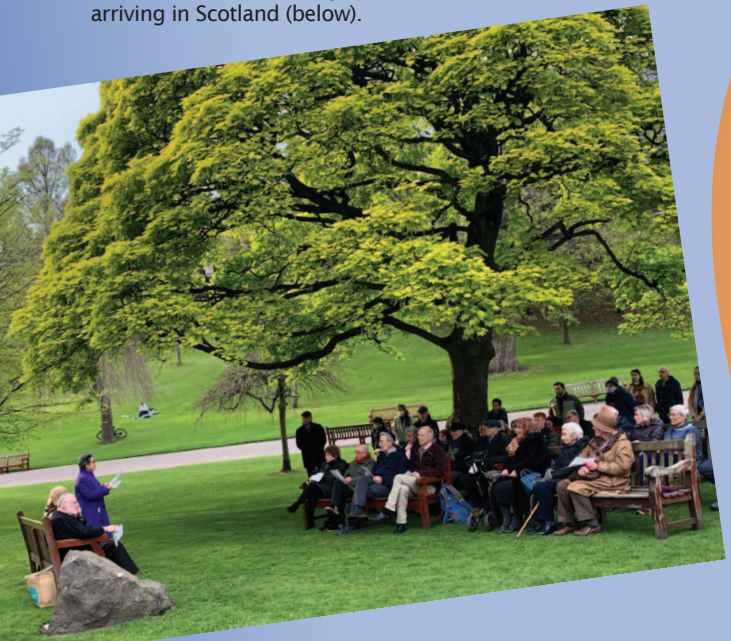


## Pesach

Glasgow Reform Synagogue was delighted to be able to hold an in-person Seder for the first time in three years, led by Fiona and Howard Brodie (above). After the pandemic and lockdown, there was added poignancy in being together, retelling a story of captivity, and the ensuing joy of freedom.

## Yom haShoah

The Association of Jewish Refugees planted an oak tree below Edinburgh Castle Esplanade to mark the 80th anniversary of refugees from the Nazis arriving in Scotland (below).



## Interfaith Iftar

SCoJeC Treasurer Philip Mendelsohn (below, white shirt), and Sue Siegel (below left), who represents the Jewish Community at Interfaith Scotland, attended an Interfaith Iftar (Ramadan fast-breaking) hosted by the Muslim Council of Scotland at Minhaj ul Quran International mosque in Rutherglen. The Muslim hosts spoke about their close collaboration with the Jewish community on issues such as circumcision and appropriate food provision. Ironically, however, as it was during Pesach, the Jewish participants had to decline all food except for dates!





# Living in Public?

DITZA HOPPENSTEIN

Here we are again, approaching the Three Weeks, a period of increasing mourning bounded by two fast days.

There is a Mishnah that lists five tragic events that happened on each of these fast days. It appears that these are the reasons for the fast days, yet some of the events happened after the days were set. Rav Moshe Shapira explains that the Mishnah is helping us understand more deeply what has been damaged and lost.

One of the events that happened on the 17th of Tammuz was the breaching of the wall of Jerusalem. According to Halachah, Jewish law, Jerusalem was a private domain since she was surrounded by a wall and her gates were locked each night. The breach created a permanent opening into Jerusalem changing her status from private to public.

Rav Shapira tells us that this also represented a breach in humanity – no longer were we living primarily in the private domain but rather the public domain. We can look around and see how this rings so true, as we currently live so much through social media.

There are many studies showing how social media affects our moods and behaviours but what about our essence? The Rambam tells us that a person acquires most of his wisdom at night. At night? Surely, most of our learning seemingly happens during the day and with others. How can we acquire most of our wisdom when there is no outside input? To acquire really means to internalise and connect it to ourself which requires solitude. However if we live too much in the public arena we prevent ourselves from doing just that.

I was in South Africa recently with my family, and I chose not to buy an international package for my phone – shocking I know! I did, however, take my phone with me to use as a camera – gotta document the children being only metres away from wild animals and all that!

On one trip though I forgot my phone, but after feeling regretful I settled into being present. For the other trips I have photographic evidence, but it was the trip without photos that actually affected me the most, because I can recall and feel it.

Perhaps, in these three weeks, we can look at how we ourselves are affected by how much we live in a public domain as opposed to a more private one. We can ask ourself before we photograph, post, or share: *what is our goal here?* If we share now, are we diminishing our ability to acquire and deepen ourselves?

How does our life answer a modern version of that old philosophical question: *if it isn't documented or shared, did it really happen?*!

## Summer Calendar

**Fast of Tammuz**  
Dawn till nightfall  
Sun 17 July

**The 'Three Weeks'**  
*between the Fasts of Tammuz and Av are a time of mourning for the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586BCE and by the Romans in 70CE.*

**Fast of Av (Tisha b'Av)**  
Dusk on Shabbat 6 Aug  
till nightfall Sun 7 Aug

**Festival of Av**  
*the 'Jewish Valentine's Day'!*  
Fri 12 Aug

**Rosh HaShanah**  
Dusk on Sun 25 Sept  
till nightfall Tues 27 Sept

**Yom Kippur**  
Dusk on Tue 4 Oct  
till nightfall Wed 5 Oct



Glasgow Reform Synagogue has formed a Chodesh Group to look at ways of contributing to Tikkun Olam ('repairing the world').

The group is meeting regularly and a community garden is being developed, crafting projects are underway, and discussion groups are planned. The group was delighted to be awarded funding by the World Wildlife Fund's Mobilising Community Climate Action project.

## Filming 'Jewish in Scotland'

SARAH HOWITT, PRODUCER / DIRECTOR

When I was approached last year by Red Sky Productions and asked to direct a documentary for the BBC about the Jewish population in Scotland, I had no hesitation. I said I'd love to, but I did however have one reservation – I'm not Jewish, so did I have the right? There's a whole essay to be written on that subject, but in general, people seemed to be comfortable with me taking the reins. The privilege was to be mine. I leapt straight into learning and planning, but there wasn't much time.

Ordinarily I would spend weeks just reading and talking to people – but Chanukah was upon us, and it was clear that we should at least attempt to include the festival in some way. The works of Kenneth Collins would have to wait, there were latkes frying and menorah to be lit. Chanukah was a blur, we managed to reach people all over the country, with promises to return and do 'proper' interviews later. I had to make some very quick decisions about some of the people I wanted to film, which can be tricky when you know there's a finite number of voices you can fit into a documentary.

However, going headlong into filming turned out to be a very good way to learn at high speed. I heard many words, ideas, and jokes during this period for the first time that I knew it would be important to hold onto:

*Shabbat, Mikvah, Mitzvah; Torah, Talmud, Aliyah;*

*Cholent, Matzah, Kippah-Kippot; Orthodox, Liberal, Reform;*

*'Two Jews, three opinions'...* It was time to take stock, taste the challah, and listen!

I immersed myself in the novels of J David Simons, researched film archive, read David Baddiel, the work of Fiona Frank, and of course Kenneth Collins. We talked to many, many people up and down the country, expertly guided by Fiona Frank and others. It was decided the film would focus mostly on the contemporary experience of being Jewish in Scotland, and merely touch on the historic. There simply wasn't time to do both well. I was fascinated by the diversity of the Jewish experience that I was learning about, and determined try to represent as much of that as I could. The resulting film is essentially a series of portraits of Jewish people around the country telling us what it's like to live here in this

country we share today – be they Liberal, Reform, or Orthodox; 'religious' or not; 'Scottish' or not.

I have no doubt that there will be more than one opinion about the end result, but one thing is certain, every single person I met makes the best chicken soup. (I'm actually vegetarian and may have stolen this joke from a certain deli owner!)







## First Minister's **HYBRID** QUESTIONS

*“A very welcome opportunity for me to hear directly from the community about the issues that matter to them the most.”*

SCoJeC's first live event after the easing of Covid restrictions was a multi-venue public meeting with First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, with live audiences in both Giffnock and Edinburgh, as well as 130 homes signed in on Zoom. Impressed by the technical wizardry of our Jewish Scotland Connected team, the First Minister commented, “This is the first time I’ve been in a meeting in Glasgow where people in Edinburgh were actually invited to ask questions live”.

Rabbi Rubin, Scotland's senior rabbi, began with a prayer for peace in Ukraine, and thanked the First Minister for her leadership during the pandemic, and for promoting good relations between Scotland's faith communities.

The First Minister acknowledged the resonance of Ukraine for Jewish people, many of whose families had been refugees, and the work of Jewish charities such as Magen David Adom, to bring Ukrainian orphans to Scotland. “Scotland wouldn't be the country we are without the contribution of our Jewish community” she said, adding “I want to make this point very forcibly: so long as anyone feels discriminated against, we as a government have more work to do”.

Answering questions from both live and virtual audiences, the First Minister discussed the rights of faith communities, Ukrainian refugees, Iranian antisemitism, independence, and her taste in reading, but mainly antisemitism and the Middle East. She emphasised that society should have zero tolerance of antisemitism, and while her own party has had problems, it and her Government have adopted the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism, and “all ministers have to be clear that they accept that, and that includes the two Green ministers.”

Supporting Holocaust Education, she said, “as generations pass, it is vital that future generations understand what happened”, while noting “that is not the same as understanding what it's like for Jewish communities today”.

The First Minister acknowledged that her widely criticised comments during last year's conflict in Gaza had not got the balance right, and should have been more nuanced. She had a long conversation with the Israeli Prime Minister in Glasgow last year, and while she supports the rights of Palestinians, she is a strong proponent of a two-state solution. She said “the situation is not binary – it's not 100% right or wrong on one side or the other”.

SCoJeC Chair, Nicola Livingston, commented: “It was really important for the First Minister to hear the concerns of our community first hand. She was unambiguous in her commitment to tackle antisemitism and prejudice, and in her aspiration to make Scotland a safe and welcoming place for the Jewish Community.”

# SCoJeC



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### ◆ SCoJeC is grateful to:

- ◆ Scottish Government Connected Communities Fund
- ◆ Netherlee and Clarkston Charitable Trust
- ◆ Jewish Scotland Connected Funders
- ◆ Eloise Bishop (photographs, p4)

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Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438

