

# The Edinburgh Star

Journal of the Edinburgh Jewish Community

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# The Edinburgh Star

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# Editorial

Issue number 20 of "The Edinburgh Star" is surely an achievement for our small Community. Lest we be tempted to be complacent, we engaged the services of Edgar Prais, a man not frightened to speak his mind, to review the last 19 issues and whilst we don't agree with all his conclusions, we appreciate the accuracy of his analysis. Put simply, when the late Ruth Adler took over from Eitan Abraham there was as our reviewer so neatly says, a shift in emphasis "from the third to the second word of the title". This emphasis on Community was quite deliberate and what we feel the Community wants. We have found that obtaining articles of communal interest is not easy and we appeal to all our readers to submit articles to us for publication. In the first editorial in March 1989, Eitan wrote "Perhaps with a touch of Semitic dream about this venture, we would like to think we are witnessing the birth of a baby that will grow stronger and healthier as years go by: only the full support and interest of the community can form the basis for such an optimistic outlook". The baby is now grown up, but as every parent knows, the child needs continual support.

Over the years, at least two American journalists have written about us. Writing about Edinburgh, in the Long Island "Jewish Week" (August 1990) in an article which was syndicated and appeared in California and Florida, Gabe Levenson wrote that "the Star ... ventures to take positions on Jewish issues from which more establishment orientated Jewish newspapers in the United States often shy away". And more recently, Curt Leviant in "Jewish Frontier" wrote "it is not a synagogue bulletin, but a full-fledged journal that reflects the range of thoughts, activities and accomplishments of the Edinburgh Jewish Community. With book reviews, memoirs, news about Israel and the local area, features about famous Jewish sons and daughters of the City ... plus historic and current photos ... the Star is a mirror of present and past life of Edinburgh Jewry. Levenson was reviewing Eitan's Star and Leviant summed up a typical Ruth Star. There has to be a balance between intellectual excellence and sheer readability - tell us what you want!

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# HAPPY TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY

Edgar Prais, QC, reviews the last 19 issues of "The Edinburgh Star"

Why me? Not even at my smuggest can I delude myself into believing that I am qualified on literary, historical, religious or journalistic grounds. I have just turned fifty-two and I have yet to be accused of insight or objectivity. Far less than half my years have been lived in Edinburgh and, horror of horrors, I belong to the genus (or is it the species?) Glaswegian. I seem to remember a visit to the Synagogue some years ago; only recently did I learn that "Lit" was not some unfathomable acronym but simply an abbreviation adopted by men and women whose attachment to matters cultural is genuine rather than formal. And as for what my own pen usually does to paper – well, this effort speaks for itself.

I return, therefore, to the question with which I began. Edinburgh – and its "Star" is incontrovertible evidence of the truth of what follows – boasts a megaminyan of talent and experience whose scope and range only serve to illustrate that C P Snow's neurosis qualified him for honorary Jewish status. Sons and daughters of the Edinburgh Jewish community grace every aspect of city life – from the halls of academe, through the chambers of commerce, the galleries of the arts, the schools of philosophy and the courts of so-called justice, all the way to the laboratories of science. There is not a need for which your community cannot cater (a plumber's telephone number would be most welcome). All of which explains my astonishment at being invited to cast a reviewer's eye over the previous editions of "The Edinburgh Star". I feel like the spectator plucked from the terracing to captain the team (maybe not such a bad idea for the Hearts).

Whatever else I may or may not be, I am most certainly Jewish which means, of course, that I am the person best suited to answer my

own question. There are, in fact, two obvious reasons for my being asked to review the back numbers: first, the other people invited to do so refused and, secondly, I am sufficiently "semi-detached" to tread on toes without fear or favour. "He didn't know any better" is not a bad plea in mitigation when all else fails. I promise neither perspicacity nor profundity; I am by instinct impetuous and insensitive. Actually, I think the time has come for me to seek some improving advice from a friend – if only I had one.

To the business at hand. I do not plead for sympathy when I say that reviewing nineteen issues of a magazine born as long ago as March 1989 is something of a daunting task. Just translate the problem (and I don't suppose anybody will object to the analogy) into Burns poems or Shakespeare plays. Realistically, can the reviewer be expected to arrive at a conclusion other than one which falls into the category of the curate's – or chazan's – egg? You must forgive me, therefore, for adopting an impressionistic approach to my task; you would not in any case expect me to read all nineteen issues from cover to cover. I have already told you how old I am and I am not sure that I have that long left. What is more, I cannot see myself opening envelopes at a glittering awards ceremony, singling out particular contributions worthy of a statuette called an "Eitan". I am wearing my Gestalt spectacles.

There can be no greater tribute to the inspiration behind the launching of "The Edinburgh Star" than the fact that it continues to twinkle and to shine. Credit for the light it sheds is due to its indomitable editorial crew (I note that Messrs Cosgrove, Sischy and Shapira are permanent members of the chain gang) and to the contributions they have elicited. It in no sense detracts from the appreciation of the growth and

development of the magazine to say that, if any one name associated with "The Edinburgh Star" should be inscribed in the Book of Local Heroes, it is that of its creator and first editor Eitan Abraham. There is surely an element of the majestically ironic in the community's having to wait for somebody from Argentina, whose first language isn't even English, to prod it into regular print. Nor does the debt to Eitan end with his initiating drive.

The first seven issues, from March 1989 to September 1990, were edited by him and created a very distinctive mould. When one examines Nos. 1 to 7, the overriding impression is one of balance between horizons wide and parochial, between an article on Tay-Sachs and one on the Goodwins, between a contribution on the Intifada and one on Paul Gilbert's Bar Mitzvah, between a personal recollection of the Kindertransport and one of post-war Edinburgh. Politics, science, the arts, literature, communal affairs, religious issues, personal reminiscence, all were tackled.

By the time the third issue came along it was clear that the tentative had become the established. The bulletin format had been converted (forgive the word) into the glossy journal. The twenty-eight pages of the pilot number had grown to forty-eight and their contents were as impressive for their range as for their depth. It contained no fewer than sixteen separate sections, several of them comprising more than one contribution, covering the complete gamut from religion to sport, all contained within a cover specially drawn by Robin Spark. At least two articles in the section on the Holocaust and one under the Research heading on Medieval Spain were worthy of inclusion in just about any serious journal dealing with such subjects. The third issue also contained three



elegantly written pieces about various facets of the diamond which is Edinburgh – one on a Jewish ghost, one on the Fringe and one on Robin Spark. All in all, No.3 featured twenty-nine articles plus a double editorial and four pages entitled “Yom Teruah” – Chagmanay messages of goodwill.

I write at such length about No.3 because it strikes me as the most outstanding of all nineteen produced. I do not go so far as to suggest that it towers head and shoulders above all its brothers and sisters; what it does is epitomise all that is most ambitious and worthwhile in the venture which is “The Edinburgh Star”. Quality writing on a wide variety of interesting topics must be the aim of any magazine publication and No.3 proved that the Abraham team could certainly achieve that end. So now at least you know which one I’m taking with me to the desert island where those who invited this contribution will undoubtedly be banishing me.

With the appearance of the seventh issue, however, there were discernible signs of a change in direction. The scales were coming down rather more heavily than previously on the parochial-community side, a trend which appears to have continued to the present day. Whether or not that is a welcome development is

ultimately a question of personal delectation. Is that what the readers want and, if so, should they have it? Ask Rupert Murdoch. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not for one moment suggest that from No.7 “The Edinburgh Star” became “The Edinburgh Sun”. What started to happen was that the emphasis shifted from the third to the second word of the title. It is clear that editorial objectives narrowed at about that time and it comes as no surprise that No.8 features a new editor, the desperately missed Ruth Adler. Hers, too, was a marvellous series of “Stars” but not quite in the Abraham mould; she cast her own.

No.3 came out for New Year; let me take another New Year issue to illustrate my point. No.13 (September 1992) has shrunk to thirty-two pages, half of which are devoted to communal affairs of one kind or another, while much of the remainder is given over to family albums and family holidays. There are, of course, one or two articles with broader perspectives but the overall impression is one which is preponderantly local. If that is what the readership wishes, it has it. For my part, I regret the change of flavour. Where once the “Star” would have had real appeal for readers from both home and away, it has very definitely become a strictly Scottish, particularly Edinburgh-orientated publication.

Yes, it continues to print those fascinating articles on all manner of topics wide and abstruse; just take a look at No.15 – Spinoza, Primo Levi and Avrom-Nokhem Stencl (I don’t believe any of them was from Edinburgh). No, what I have in mind is a trend, a tendency, away from the distant horizon to the narrower prospect; the telescope has been turned around.

What worries me above all else about “The Edinburgh Star”, from first to latest number, is that it is far too goody-goody. It wouldn’t raise a blush from infant to maiden aunt, and as for laughs ... I do not, of course, expect to have an issue drop through my letterbox whose contents would warrant the cry of “Eat your heart out James Kelman”. What I do miss, however, is that touch of pepper and spice. The bland and the deferential anaesthetise. There are worse crimes than mildly to offend. I have always been led to believe that it is one of the other religions which cherishes its sacred cows. Go to sea on “The Edinburgh Star” and you’ll never know you’ve left dry land – this is an earnest plea to rock the boat from time to time. Maybe I am missing something, but I can detect nothing in any of the nineteen issues which could properly be termed controversial. Where are the irate letters to the editor? Is the “Star” not ashamed of itself that it never has to

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apologise for anything? Editorials almost, if not entirely, without fail shy away from what is surely their proper purpose – the expression of opinion.

Imagine, if you will, a stranger descending upon the city, eager to discover the character of its Jewish community by the shortest possible route. Is there any better way than by reading its very own journal? This, I suspect, is the image the stranger would derive from the pages of "The Edinburgh Star" – a community "at peace with itself" (where have I heard those words before?), interested in a variety of topics rather than issues, particularly when they are local and Jewish, terribly pleased with its own high-fliers and obsessively nostalgic. There is a distinct whiff of the hygienic from the "Star". What rankles a little with me is that I cannot really believe that the community is that slightly precious, bourgeois, self-satisfied collection of parochials which its journal appears to portray. Am I misguided? I don't think I am and, what's more, I believe I can identify the root of the problem. It is because this is an entirely personal perspective that I am calling it a problem; I acknowledge that there will be some whose assessment of the situation will differ radically (if I may use that word) from mine.

The problem, as I see it, is that behind "The Edinburgh Star" lies a philosophy which equates community with congregation. In a significant sense, the magazine has developed a distinctly religious flavour, with its concomitant conservatism. Perhaps it was not always thus but who could argue otherwise today? With very few exceptions indeed, for instance, issue covers have had religious themes. The front page of No.1 carried a message from the Rabbi; No.9's cover blows the shofar; No.10 is inside the Synagogue; No.11 is at the seder table; No.12 dips the apple in honey; No.15 holds the Sefer Torah aloft; and No.19 (is there some hidden significance here?) casts its sins upon the waters. Leaf

through back numbers – Synagogues, Rabbis, even their wives, and all manner of contributions on religious questions will flit past your eyes. Of course the Edinburgh Jewish community has its religious face; but I don't really want to live in Stamford Hill and I don't believe that I do.

My concern is that the "Star's" deference to religion is in microcosm its attitude to the world as a whole as it affects the Edinburgh community. Is it mere coincidence that of the three stalwarts on the editorial board two are closely associated with the Synagogue in their roles as communal figures? Just as I do not want "The Edinburgh Sun", I am scarcely over the moon about "The Edinburgh Tablet".

I am less than confident that "The Edinburgh Star" truly represents and reflects the powerful diversity of its community. Let it break free of its self-imposed constraints and it will be marvellous once again. I know I have been critical (I have to justify my huge fee) but the fact remains that I am steeped in admiration for a magazine which has frequently shown itself capable of scaling the heights of quality.

May it live to 120 – first issues, then years.

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## THE LOWRIE REPORT

### Yehoshua Ben Avraham— This is your Siddur

On Shabbat, 19 November 1994, at a special Kiddush for that very special man Joe Lurie, our President, Dr Nathan Oppenheim, opened his remarks by saying that this occasion was high on his list of the more pleasant duties that is his portion. He went on to say that the Kiddush was to make public the Congregation's thanks for all that Joe had done over these many years, including reciting Haftarah today.

Unlikely, thought our President, that too many could remember the Community without Joe in whichever of the many capacities and guises he has appeared and the many services and duties he has performed. Dr Oppenheim then went on to tell us how Joe had returned from flying with the RAF in the Far East at the end of World War II, bringing with him his bride, the lovely Sheva who he was happy to see at the Kiddush along with their children Michael and Ann. Joe had then joined his father, the late Abraham Lurie in supplying the Community with his excellent

merchandise (sadly missed now) and in dispensing his unique blend of advice, folk-lore and gossip.

Hospitality was the Lurie hallmark, for the open door was always Joe and Sheva's way; many the graduate who can look back with gratitude to the Lurie home for no stranger was ever turned away. Within the Community Joe is still, after a lifetime of service, taking a very full part in community life; not least as President of the Chevra Kaddisha, carrying out this most important Mitzvah with solicitude and kindly efficiency, easing the burden of the bereaved at this most difficult time. Reading the Council Minutes soon discloses Joe's quiet voice urging consideration and moderation in all issues as befits its longest serving member until his retirement.

Many have been Joe's activities – Mason, President of B'nai B'rith, Member of the Board of Guardians Committee, JIA Convenor and of course as Sick Visiting Convenor he was welcomed as a friend by all those whom he visited in hospital or at home.

"In conclusion", said the President, "those who have seen the voting results at the AGMs always found Joe's name at the top of the list and that says it all! Joe is ever top of the list, a gentleman in every sense of the word; and now on behalf of the Congregation it gives me much pleasure to present to you Joe this inscribed Lectern Cashdan Siddur commemorating your many years of service on the Synagogue Council as a token of our appreciation and thanks for all you have done are doing and (allevei) will continue to do for many years to come in the happy company of all your family and friends. And now we say Joe Lurie, this is your Siddur!"

In his reply, Joe, modest as ever, replied that he had difficulty initially in recognising himself but conceded that it all did seem to fit.

Joe said that he had found his 27

years of serving the Community through the Council to be both gratifying and fulfilling in that the Council could say that there had been progress in our Communal Affairs. He observed that the rapid changes of our times were mirrored in our Community, but that together we had made certain that our Jewish heritage and traditions were maintained.

The young, he declared, are the inheritors of our management and are our future. I am, he said, confident that the Community would agree that they will continue to uphold our values and traditions. Joe reiterated that this continuity made his 27 years Council service truly worthwhile, gratifying and fulfilling. And thank you for the Siddur.

### Just a Yiddisher Minute (or 65 seconds)

On Sunday, 9 October, after an excellent meal produced by the Ladies' Community Centre Committee, the diners sat back to listen to a Panel, consisting of Sheva Lurie, Elaine Samuel, Morris Kaplan and Julian Goodman, attempt to speak for 1 minute and 5 seconds on Jewish themes selected by John and Lesley Danzig who chaired and timed respectively. The well-known radio game requires that the speakers can be challenged by any of the others on the Panel on the grounds of repetition, deviation or hesitation. The themes included: Chicken Soup, Barmitzvah Boy, Yiddish Expressions, Flying El Al, The Ideal Son or Daughter, Family Ferribles, Machers in the Community.

Now it might be thought that a Jewish Panel talking on typically Jewish themes would hardly produce other than flowing monologues free of RD & H, but not on this occasion, for all were playing this game to win! Indeed it was almost GBH! With prepositions and conjunctions the challenge was



Joe Lurie



repetition; draw breath and that was hesitation; your own son or daughter was (or was not) the ideal – deviation!

Sheva, our most accomplished Polyglot, decided at an appropriate moment to hijack the game with Yiddish but Morris challenged – the Judges looked knowing and allowed the challenge. Elaine unequivocally did not deviate on the subject of the Ideal Son or Daughter and Julian, as an old (or even young) trouser, made his entrances judiciously and his exits with dignity. But then Julian could afford to, for with a masterly command of the situation, he won the game.

### Chanukah Luncheon

The Luncheon Club's Chanukah Luncheon was held on the 29 November (the second day) and attended by the Lady Provost, Mrs Norman Irons.

Rabbi Shapira lit the candles on the large Chanukiah which had been brought into the hall.

The President, Dr Nathan Oppenheim, thanked the indefatigable ladies who had prepared the fine meal and pointed out the importance to the Club members of regular meetings such as this.

In thanking the Lady Provost for once again joining the Club at Chanukah, he hoped that those duties which had prevented the Lord Provost's attendance this year, might allow him to join us next year. He went on to praise the Lady Provost for "the keen personal interest and knowledgeable enthusiasm which she brings to her civic position, always being ready to come and meet all sections of the Edinburgh citizenry – mingling freely with all and never showing any signs of slacking despite a most arduous and daunting programme. An example we should all be happy to emulate".

In conclusion he said that the city was enhanced by the stance she and the Lord Provost had taken, that it had been a great pleasure to have had her company and hoped that she would again be our most welcome guest at future events.

### WIZO Theatre Party

Mention a theatre outing and the loyal supporters of WIZO will turn out in strength; tell them that it's 'Fiddler on the Roof', coupled with the possibility of meeting Topol at the usual sumptuous supper at Katie and Ron Goodwin's home and they turn up en masse – this they did on 17 September at the Playhouse.

After the theatre had been cleared the group met Topol who spoke to them about playing the part over the past 25 years and said that time had not diminished his enjoyment of playing the part. He said that he was very pleased that his daughter had joined the cast playing the part of one of Tevye's daughters, Chava.

Topol said that 25 years of playing two shows a day was extremely tiring and with great regret had to decline Katie and Ron's kind invitation to supper, however two of the cast did join the company for an excellent Fish Buffet Supper. There was a Lucky Draw in which, rather like the race in Alice in Wonderland, everybody seemed to have a prize! Unanimously voted a most enjoyable evening.

### Michael Adler's Gift to the Synagogue

Michael Adler, Jonathan and Benjamin, in memory of their dear wife and mother Ruth, have donated two very fine bookcases together with ten sets of Machzorim (30 volumes) for use on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana.

The Council is delighted that these books have been placed in the Ladies' gallery for there is a shortage of spare Machzorim for the High Holy Day services.

This gift will be well used, perpetuating the memory of that very special and caring lady, Ruth Adler.

### WIZO Annual Luncheon

While not being in Private Eye's and Ian Hislop's class, this Column approaches the Bench and without reservation and in all humility apologises for the gross negligence of omitting the WIZO Treasurer (and who is more important than the Treasurer on any Fundraising Committee!) – and most excellent cook of mouth-watering goodies for Foodies – Mrs Irene Mason, from the article in the last issue.

But we are not prepared to admit damages!!!



*The Lady Provost (right) with, left to right, Rabbi Shapira, Rose Orgel, Eve Oppenheim and Dr Nathan Oppenheim.*



## Willie and Betty Caplan – the Caravan, the Bedouin and the Camel

Buying a raffle ticket from Rachel Shapira for that most worthy of all causes, Operation Wheelchair, to supply modern rehabilitation equipment for disabled Israeli soldiers, proved to be one of Willie and Betty's better buys for it won them a seven-day trip with B & B in Tel Aviv.

They extended the trip with an additional seven days in Netanya, where they took the bus to Jerusalem and hired a taxi for the day, visiting the Western Wall, Mount Moriah and the Dead Sea. One of the Kibbutzim they visited, made soaps from Dead Sea materials; they also visited a Diamond Factory between Tel Aviv

and Netanya, but regretfully they did not get any free samples! Other visits included Haifa (Mount Carmel) and Jaffa.

Ellis Brem, a cousin of Betty from Australia, arranged to spend 14 days in Israel when he discovered the Caplan's had won the trip and they all enjoyed Shabbat dinner with daughter-in-law Marsha and Uncle Johnny in Netanya.

This was Betty's first trip to Israel – Willie of course had been there, all expenses paid, 52 years ago – and her first flight, but probably not her last as the El Al staff completely won her over; she said they were absolutely wonderful.

The Caravan, the Bedouin and



*Willie and Betty Caplan in Jerusalem.*

the Camel? You had better ask Willie and Betty about that one!

## Chanukah Dinner

On Saturday, 3 December after the Reception, the Rabbi lit the Chanukah Candles and the company sat down to an excellent four-course Dinner prepared by the Ladies' Committee.

Afterwards, nearing the 'Pumpkin' hour, MC Ian Shein introduced the evening's Artistes and is to be congratulated on his exhaustive research, relaying the myriad musical qualifications and



*Chanukah Dinner Entertainers, left to right: Andrew Nicol, Margaret Aronson and Fiona Mitchell.*

hugely varied experience of Margaret Aronson, Fiona Mitchell and Andrew Nicol.

This multi-talented trio entertained us to a concert of a standard not to be matched on too many of the world's stages. The programme opened with Hinei Huba, an old hymn set to music by Handel for his Judas Maccabeus, then there was a Chanukah Folk Song followed by Hanerot Hallalu. The secular side of the programme surely satisfied all tastes – the Duet from Ivor Novello's *Perchance to Dream*, then from Cole Porter, George Gershwin and Irving Berlin Musicals a selection of songs; Andrew Nicol, a remarkably fine Accompanist, showed us his wonderful solo skill with a piano piece by Satie. Songs from French Cabaret followed with marvellous solos – Poulenc from Margaret Aronson and Satie from Fiona Mitchell; a selection of Scottish songs drew the evening to its conclusion with *The Rowan Tree* as an encore.

Anita Mendelssohn and Leila Goldberg (Co-Chairladies) of the Ladies' Committee can certainly think of this evening as being most memorable for all of the 96 who attended.

## Christine Burns

Mainspring, linchpin, coping stone – all sorts of complimentary phrases can be used to describe Mrs Christine Burns, caretaker. Amazing, but Christine has been feeling anything but amazing for some weeks. A week of debilitating illness and several more of feeling very much less than her usual sparkling self had left her trying to get fit again.

Taking over from her husband, Dave's father, who was Caretaker for 12 years, Christine has been our indefatigable caretaker for more than 14 years, and those weeks of illness have made us all think 'how do we manage when Chrissie is not here?' and the answer is of course 'with very great difficulty'. We hope that by the time you read this Chrissie has long been again her usual self.

*With Compliments*

*from*

*Mark and Judith Sischy*





*Topol and family in our Succah.*

### Topol with us at Kol Nidre

Topol, together with others involved in the production of 'Fiddler on the Roof' attended our Kol Nidre service. Seated as close to the 'eastern wall' as our architecture will permit, he joined in the Congregational singing and his hearty basso profundo was enjoyed by those sitting near him.

Subsequently at a Thursday matinee the following week, the Rabbi and Rachel went backstage

and met Topol and his wife and Topol said that he would like to come to the Succah to make the blessing on the Lulav. The following day Topol, his wife, daughter and son-in-law duly arrived at the Synagogue when the Rabbi conducted them around. They were particularly interested in looking at the books in the Cosgrove Memorial Library in the Succah, after which they all made the blessing on the Lulav and Etrog.

### Edinburgh and Israel Youth Exchange

Led by Uri Nave, Director of Tel Aviv/Jaffa Teaching Services, a delegation representing Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, the Israel Society for Youth Centres and the Druze village of Daliat el Carmel, visited Edinburgh to sign an agreement for Youth Exchange in 1995.

Delegation visits in 1995 will be:

1. Tel Aviv Drama Group to perform a musical
2. Tel Aviv Youth Orchestra
3. Jerusalem Youth Leader Group
4. Secondary School Pupils from the Druze village of Dalyat el Carmel
5. Youth Leaders from Youth Centres throughout Israel.

The visit hosted by the Scottish

Council for Communal Education, was led by Jim Bartholomew, the local Convener, whose responsibilities include that of Foreign Affairs.

Having been welcomed at the Shabbat Service by our President, Dr Nathan Oppenheim, Mr Nave, himself President of a small community in Israel, Sha'arey Tikva, later exchanged views with our members and explained that it was his hope that the Edinburgh Jewish Community would become involved in his youth exchange plans for Edinburgh and Israel. Mr Bartholomew of the Scottish Council for Communal Education can be reached on 0131 660 5690.

Mr Nave was the Shabbat guest of Rabbi and Mrs Shapira.

### Ian Shein weds Pearl Levinson



*Photo by Harold Corney, Photography*

On 28th December 1994, the Edinburgh Star's Editorial Assistant, Ian Shein was married to Pearl Levinson of Manchester. The ceremony took place at the Prestwich Synagogue in Manchester and Rabbi Shalom Shapira assisted in the ceremony which was conducted by Rabbi Mordecai Ginsbury and the Chazan, Rev B. Sandler. A former reporter to the Children's Panel, Ian has been active in every facet of communal affairs in the Community. He is a former Treasurer of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and is currently its Hon Secretary and Keeper of the Communal Diary. He is a key member of the Community Centre Committee, Board of Guardians and Lodge Solomon and also acts as the Librarian. We extend a warm welcome to Pearl and wish them both many years of happiness together.



# WHO WAS CHASERASIE?

by Philip Goldberg

She belonged to an era of local immigrants from 'Der Heim' (village of origin in eastern Europe) of about 100 years ago. We all know of their late Victorian arrival in Edinburgh, with ankle-length clothing and their struggle to establish themselves in a strange, if not alien environment. They were our parents or grandparents.

This remarkable woman was a mere 18-20 year old girl when she left Lithuania and accompanied her brother to Edinburgh at the bidding of an older brother who kept writing letters telling them how good life was in Scotland. There were no pogroms, there was freedom to worship as you pleased and you could make a living and better yourself. Sadly this last element wasn't always true and she was an unlucky one. Being a young girl, not well-to-do nor even pretty, a 'shidduch' (match) soon paired her off with a similar young man – who wasn't a great earner (who was in those days?)

Invariably life began in those days staying in 'digs'. This was at the home of some relative with a spare bed – let alone room and you graduated to your own house when you found a kind landlord willing to accept 2/6d or 5/- rent per week – quite a huge sum in those Edwardian years.

She was joined by further sisters from the home village who settled, married and established families in Edinburgh, Glasgow and even in America. In Edinburgh, one brother became a beloved, saintly congregant and communal leader and one of the sisters brought up a renowned family over which she was queen until a ripe old age.

One day -shortly after the First World War – she was at home (a third floor flat in the West End side of Edinburgh too small for the previous occupant (a cousin) frying fish (Kotleten in Yiddish) for her husband – out working inevitably as

a traveller/pedlar in Fife or in a mining village in the Lothians – and for her two young children.

'Ring, ring' went the brass bell in the lobby (not a hall in those days) activated down at street level to see if somebody was at home and so save trekking up three flights of stairs. 'Hoos Der?' was the inevitable cry over the balustrade in reply. 'Dein teire coozeen' (your dear cousin) answered Sheime Moishe as he started to climb the stairs. Greetings and vos macht min over with Chaserasie, wiping her fartuch (you didn't have an apron or pinnie if you were Jewish in those times – it was a fartuch which had multi-purpose use, e.g. as a handkerchief or dishcloth etc.).

What are you doing? asked Sheime, as if he didn't know. The entire house stunk from frying fish – it acted as a deodorant to overpower the normal household smells since Chaserasie wasn't over-renowned for cleanliness or being too house proud.

*'I'm frying fish for the evening meal'.*

*'Himm smells very appetising'.*

*'Would you like a piece?'*

*'Thank you very much'.*

*'Himm it is tasty – you make good kotleten'.*

*'Have another one'.*

They sat down for a cup of tea and chat – interspersed with 'Have another one' and 'Thank you's'.

Later the children came in from school and they too wanted a 'nash' and nothing beats the smell of fresh fried fish straight from the frying pan.

And the Kinder enjoyed a nash (delicacy or titbit) and Sheime had another and Chaserasie had to also furzooch (try out or test) her product and had another one Biz Vanent (until) the plate, once full of fish, was empty.

Just then who should walk in the door from a very laborious day when money was scarce and few miners' households could afford

their weekly 6d or 1/- payments, but Chaserasie's husband – a modest man (orntlucher mench).

He greeted Sheime and the Kinder and gave a sniff saying

*'Aha, you've made fish for the evening meal. I'll enjoy that'.*

She interrupted,

*'Yes, I made fried fish – but it was so tasty and I enjoyed it so much when I sampled one that I ate another and another and now there's none left. I'm sorry ...'*

*'Vos!! your poor husband goes out all day to try and make a living and comes home and you've oof gefreser the meal you were preparing and you've nothing to feed me? This is no good'.*

At this point the husband left home without packing or anything and emigrated to America. He settled in Florida and lived until the 1970s and the son and daughter went to Chicago and New York respectively.

Meanwhile Chaserasi – labelled Nit Ken Mench – lived in relative poverty, arguing with and complaining about her brother and sister who both helped her financially and otherwise. She finally went off to America and died there in the 1960s.

She was a typical product of those times in Edinburgh and although she could have passed as a double of Golda Meir, she suffered a lonely life because she had one quality – she made good and tasty fried fish!

Postscript:- This was a real person and many readers should be able to identify her.

## BBC Radio Scotland "THOUGHT FOR THE DAY"

by John Cosgrove

Appox. 7.40 a.m.

Wednesdays

8th, 15th, 22nd February  
& 1st March, 1995



## COMING EVENTS

### February 1995

5 Sunday	Lodge Solomon 75th Anniversary Service and Reception	3.00 p.m.
	Literary Society	
	Duncan Thomson on Avigdor Arikka	8.00 p.m.
12 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
19 Sunday	Community Centre Quiz/Social	7.30 p.m.
20 Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
23 Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews	
	Dianna Wolfson on Jewish Education	7.30 p.m.
26 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
	Literary Society David Capitanchik on Current Israeli Politics	8.00 p.m.

### March 1995

12 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
	Hillel Dinner with Guest Speakers Malcolm Rifkind Brenda Katten and David Kaplan	7.30 p.m.
19 Sunday	Literary Society Timothy Lim on the Dead Sea Scrolls	8.00 p.m.
20 Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
26 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
30 Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews James Walker & John Cosgrove on "Covenant"	7.30 p.m.

### April 1995

2 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
	Literary Society AGM	8.00 p.m.
15 Saturday	First Day of Pesach	
16 Sunday	Second Day of Pesach	
23 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
24 Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.

### May 1995

4 Thursday	Israel's Independence Day (Social)	7.30 p.m.
7 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
11 Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews Margaret Shepherd on "Current Issues"	7.30 p.m.
15 Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
21 Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
28 Sunday	Lodge Solomon 75th Anniversary Ball	7.00 p.m.

Maccabi meets every alternate Sunday from 1.00 - 3.00 p.m. For further information, contact Cassie (452 9112)

Senior Maccabi meets on Sunday evenings in members' homes

The Jewish Philosophical Society meets every alternate Saturday afternoon in the Cosgrove Library

The Luncheon Club meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 12 noon

The Mother and Baby Group meets on alternate Sunday mornings at 10 a.m.

Meetings are subject to alteration

The above events, unless otherwise stated, take place in the Community Centre, Salisbury Road.

## Nick to succeed David



At the Annual Conference of the Union of Jewish Students in December, Nick Cosgrove was elected Chairman of the national body that looks after the interests of Jewish students in the United Kingdom and Ireland. He will succeed David Kaplan in what amounts to an unprecedented coup for Edinburgh. Nick, 22 takes over from David in July when he hopes to graduate from Hull University where he is reading Politics and Legislative Studies. Previously active in Maccabi, JYSG and AJ6 in Edinburgh, Nick went on to hold office for UJS at local, regional, national and whilst in Brussels last year, European level. Close friends from an early age both Nick and David attended the Edinburgh Academy, although Nick later moved to George Watson's College. Whether the coup was hatched in Henderson Row or Salisbury Road will puzzle followers of national student politics for years to come!

## MAZEL TOV

Congratulations to David and Anita Mendelssohn, whose grandson Daniel, son of David and Elaine Littman of Nottingham, celebrated his Barmitzvah on September 17th 1994, when he read the Maftir and the Haftarah.

Good wishes are extended to Ian and Joan Leifer who recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary and to their daughter Dina, who announced her engagement to Robin Blass in December 1994.

## JEWISH CHRONICLE

Reports of functions and meetings for publication in the Jewish Chronicle should be sent to Philip Goldberg, 20 Carnethy Avenue, Edinburgh EH13 0DL (0131 441 5955).



## Edinburgh Mother and Toddler Group



*Andrea Goldstein writes:*

The Mother and Toddler Group was set up before the summer by myself and at present we have between 10 and 12 Mums who come regularly with their children to the Community Centre on certain Sunday mornings between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. The Council allocated some funds to the group and with that money we have a good selection of toys and books for the children to play with. Juice and biscuits are provided for the children and much needed coffee for the Mums!

I think this is the first Mother and Toddler group at the shul in the last 30 years.

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## Inter-Faith 'One World Week'

*Rose Orgel writes:*

The Edinburgh Jewish Community was well represented in Inter-Faith 'One World Week', with the theme, this year, being 'Peace between Religions'. The Week opened on the 22 October with a Conference and Dinner held in the Assembly Rooms. Being Saturday, there could be no Jewish presence, but a Greeting and Prayer prepared by John Cosgrove on behalf of the Community was sent and read out by Dr James Russell, Secretary of the Inter-Faith Group.

On Sunday, 23 October, a pilgrimage of Churches took place starting at St Giles Cathedral, after the United Nations Associations Day Service, with a send off by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh. The group of 60-70 people then continued to either walk or ride to

the Hindu Mandir, the Sikh Gurdwara, the Mosque, the Baha'i Centre then the Synagogue where Dr Nathan Oppenheim, President of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, welcomed the Group and showed them round. The day ended at the Salisbury Centre with a meeting with the Serene Meditation Group and the Brahma Kumaris followed by refreshments. The Community's representative on the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Committee, Rose Orgel, went on the pilgrimage together with Leila Goldberg, Sylvia Donne and Vicky Lowrie.

On Sunday, 30 October, an Inter-Faith Service was held in St Mark's Unitarian Church at which the Jewish element was contributed by John Cosgrove. Rose Orgel also attended.



*Rose Orgel became the Shapira's 2000th visitor.*

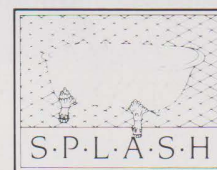
## BATHTIME TALES NO 1



### *Nigel stags a bull*

It had been a long day. The money market was up but Nigel's mood was anything but. He closed the bathroom door and turned the tap, noticing the satisfying touch of antique gold plated fittings. He lay back, the water gently lapping round the beautiful porcelain bath. It felt like a very expensive haven, designed with utmost style and taste. Life looked better already. And to think Nirvana could be gained just by visiting Scotland's premier bathroom specialist. Upwardly mobile? Right now Nigel felt wonderfully horizontal – and with his complete suite costing a mere trifle who could question his watertight business position?

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# ARMY SERVICE IN ISRAEL

by Ian Ben Yehuda

I emigrated to Israel in 1980 from Edinburgh (via London). Like most immigrants, I did a 'shortened' army service, four months, which at the age of 33 seemed like four years. After this period of time I was treated like any Israeli and was called up every year for an average of 45 days (one call-up of 15 days and the other of 30 days).

One year I did part of my service near Tiberias along the border between Jordan, Syria and Israel. For 24 hours per day we were responsible for this part of the border. It was very cold (November) and very boring. The only thing that broke the boredom was the hunting of wild pigs. Every so often, these animals would break through our defences and somehow escape from being blown up. If we were lucky

we would spot one of them and hunting we would go!!! On our successful missions the non-observant Jews and the Druses would have a glorious BBQ.

At the same time that I was doing my military service, Philip Vinestock, with whom I grew up in Edinburgh, was doing his service nearby. He emigrated to Israel in 1972 after Heriot Watt University. One Friday evening I went to visit him in his army camp. We had our Friday evening meal together and afterwards went to Tiberias to paint the town red. In Tiberias there is a Church of Scotland and so we could not resist having our photograph taken of two Scottish soldiers on a Friday night outside the Church of Scotland!!!

After this delightful interlude the

boredom continued until the very last day. Suddenly we received a message that there were people filming in the vicinity. This was it. Enemy spies!!! We loaded our weapons, jumped on to the jeeps and roared off towards the enemy. We arrived at the scene and immediately saw a television film crew. They spoke English and so, lacking any 'English' speaker, they chose me to be the interpreter/-interrogator. I quickly ascertained that they were from BBC2, yes, from

way back home, and so thinking that this was my moment of fame I told my 'men' to drop their weapons as they were 'friendly'. The film crew said that they were doing a documentary about peace and as this area bordered on three countries they wanted to film it. I quickly told them my brief and colourful (and exaggerated) existence here hoping that the cameras would start rolling. The producer said he was from, wait for it, Morningside and asked me if he could photograph me. Hollywood (the American one, not the Edinburgh one) here I come. But (there's always a but) he took out his Brownie 125 (or something similar) and said he wanted the picture for his family album. My dream shattered, I nearly shot him. However, after gaining control of myself I wanted to tell him that I would never watch BBC2 again in my life. But due to my Scots politeness, I just smiled through the tears streaming down my face.

I finished my military service broken-hearted and went back to civvy street to look for another career.

## FOOTNOTE

For those who do not remember/know me, my father was Judah Lichtenstein/Leighton born and bred in Edinburgh. My mother, Julia Cohen, was born in Manchester. Her two sisters married the two Rifkind brothers, David and Elky, who were also incidentally first cousins of my father.



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and Lorna Nicholasby  
and family*



# Jewish Artists and the Russian Avant-Garde

by Christina Lodder

*This essay, which was originally given as a lecture to the Lit on 20 February 1994, is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Adler, who taught me a great deal about Jewish history and culture.*

Jewish artists like Marc Chagall, Natan Altman, El Lissitzky, and David Shterenberg played a very important role in Russian avant-garde art of the 1910s and 1920s creating new languages of artistic expression. At the same time, in the years just before and immediately after the 1917 Revolution, they were also very closely associated with the attempt to create an "avant-garde Jewish art", which fused modern artistic languages with Jewish folk sources. Following the events of 1917, the complex legal restrictions under which Jews in Russia had lived since the 18th century were lifted. For a year or two, until the government began to bring all cultural developments under central control, there was a period of hope and blossoming which has been called the "Jewish cultural renaissance". Theatres, journals, and publishing ventures proliferated. Naturally, the creation of a Jewish art by painters like Chagall, Lissitzky and Altman was an important component of this renaissance. In this paper I wish to concentrate on the complex inter-connections between avant-garde aspirations, the formulation of a Jewish aesthetic, and a commitment to the universal values of socialism which ultimately underpin the problems of defining a Jewish national identity in art at this time.

There had, of course, been Jewish artists before who had worked within the structure of artistic life in Russia. Artists like the sculptor Mark Antokolsky, and the painters Isaak Levitan, Leonid Pasternak, and Leon Bakst (born Rosenburg). Although these artists occasionally produced drawings and paintings based on themes taken from Jewish life, on the whole they worked within the Russian artistic establishment, using styles which were rooted in Western

European models. The call to create a Jewish art really came from the critic Vladimir Stasov. Better known for his close association with the Wanderers' and their desire to create a realistic art rooted in Russian life of the nineteenth century, Stasov also encouraged Jewish artists to produce a nationalist art. To assist such developments he helped to compile a compendium of Jewish decorative motifs, which was published under the title *Hebrew Ornament*. It appeared in Russian in 1887 and was reissued in French translation in 1905.

Some Jews eventually responded to Stasov's encouragement. In 1912 Marek Schwarz, Joseph Tchaikov, Yitzhak Lichtenstein, and others set up a group called the *Makhmadim* or Precious Ones. In the journal of the same name, they argued that there was a Jewish artistic tradition which could be found in mediaeval manuscript illumination, metalwork decoration and motifs on tombstones. Moreover, they asserted that this foundation could be used to create an art which was both Jewish in content and style. Although these artists were living and working alongside Chagall in Paris, he was not associated with them. He rejected the possibility and desirability of producing a specifically Jewish art, later recalling: "I happily snickered away at the idle thoughts of my neighbours concerning the fate of Jewish art: all right talk away and I will work."

Nevertheless, Chagall accepted and sometimes celebrated his Jewish identity in his work, drawing on his own past for source material in his paintings. *The Fiddler* (1911-12, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) epitomises the way in which Chagall used motifs derived from Jewish folk culture and from

his own humble background as an Hasidic Jew born in 1887 in Vitebsk, within the Pale of Settlement. The subject of the painting is possibly based on the legendary heroic violin player of the 1905 Revolution, celebrated in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The painting also seems to capture some of the particular cultural significance of the music of the violin as described by Sholom Stempeni: "In this sad song one hears the groan or lamentation of the soul. In these marvellous and enchanted sounds flow the nostalgia of past youth, dead love, lost liberty." While this roots the painting in Jewish culture, the way the fiddler is depicted epitomises current artistic concerns. The use of non-naturalistic colour, particularly evident in the Fiddler's green face is characteristic of French Fauvism and the paintings of Matisse. Moreover, like the Fauves, Chagall abandoned single point perspective and placed his fiddler with one foot on the roof and the other on a hillock, surrounded by houses



*The Fiddler – Marc Chagall  
(1911-12, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)*



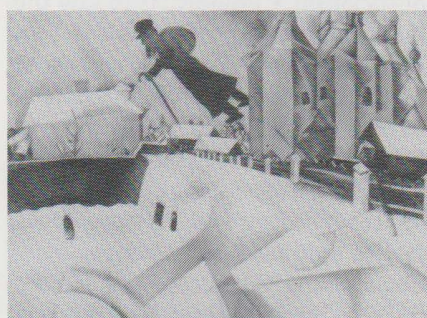
depicted completely irrespective of the positions which they occupy in everyday reality.

A similar combination of folk motifs and the latest French pictorial inventions could be seen in the Neo-primitivism developed by Russian artists of this period who were seeking to create an art which would be quintessentially Russian. Chagall's art also emerged from this milieu and was very much a part of this broader Russian context. Typical of works by Russian Neoprimitivists is Natalya Goncharova's *Rabbi and Cat*, (c.1912, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh). While the expressive style of the hatched brushwork is indebted to Cézanne, the bold simplicity is derived from indigenous sources. From icon painting, she incorporated devices like the hand entering the space at the top left, the expressive emphasis on the hands and face, the frontality of the figure and the way the white arch acts as a halo. The figures in the background, on the other hand, refer far more clearly to the *lubok* popular prints, as does the stylised depiction of the cat and the anti-naturalistic space of the composition as a whole. Interestingly the painting seems to refer explicitly to the plight of the Jews. The figures carrying sacks in the background seem to refer to the pogroms against the Jews, of which there were many in the wake of the violent suppression of the 1905 revolution. The explicit use of icon motifs, especially the hand of God pointing to the Rabbi, asserts spiritual values and implies criticism of official policy, while endowing the work with a feeling of compassion.

While responding to the artistic innovations of his Russian colleagues, Chagall also explored the latest artistic approaches which he encountered in Paris, particularly Cubism. This is particularly evident in works like *Hommage to Apollinaire* (1911-12, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven), in which subject matter and style are rooted in

contemporary French culture. But this orientation is also clear in works which depict subjects taken from his native land. In *I and the Village* of 1911 (Museum of Modern Art, New York), Chagall exploits the general principles of Cubism; opening up the figure, abandoning single point perspective, and inverting solid and void. But he directs these devices to explicitly expressive and poetic ends. A Russian peasant, with a green face and wearing a cross, presents a flower to a white cow. This emphasises perhaps the close relationship between the peasant and the animals which he tended. The cow's head is transparent showing a milking scene, and the two dominant figures are set within a space which obeys none of the rules of perspective; some of the houses in the background and the female peasant returning from work are turned upside down and the woman's face in the church is almost as large as the building. This is an irrational space, evoking the sensation of a memory or a dream. The transparent circles linking the two main figures create a sense of circular motion or rotation. These features of Chagall's style are, of course, derived from Cubism and particularly the kind of Cubism developed by Robert Delaunay in his series of works *Round Forms: Sun No. 1* 1912 (Museum of Modern Art, New York) in which he used colours independent of subject-matter to create sensations of dynamism.

Marooned in Russia by the outbreak of the First World War in



*Over Vitebsk* – Marc Chagall  
(1915-20, Museum of Modern Art,  
New York)

1914 Chagall became more involved with Jewish subject matter, producing works like *Over Vitebsk* (1915-20, Museum of Modern Art, New York) in which a figure flies above a naturalistic urban scene. This figure may refer to the Yiddish expression for a beggar, "he walks over the city". Alternatively, it may symbolise the lot of the persecuted Jew in Eastern Europe, the eternally Wandering Jew or the prophet Elijah who was reputed to bring help to the Jews. Certainly, Chagall referred to Elijah in the guise of a beggar in his biography *My Life*, which may indicate that this is the true explanation.

From 1916 onwards, Chagall became closely associated with the self-conscious Jewish art movement which gained momentum during the First World War, leading to the establishment of the Society for the Encouragement of Jewish Art in 1916. Chagall's subsequent treatment of an explicitly Jewish subject-matter is epitomised by *Cemetery Gates* (1917, Private Collection). Above the looming grey gates, intersected by rays of blue light, Chagall deliberately placed an inscription from Ezekiel (which was not usually a feature of Jewish cemeteries in Russia):

"O my people I will open your graves and bring you up from them,



*Cemetery Gates* – Marc Chagall  
(1917, Private Collection)



and restore you to the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from them. O My people. Then I will put my spirit into you and you shall live, and I will settle you on your own soil, and you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and will act. This is the very word of the Lord."

In this way, Chagall created a memorial to all the Jews who had been massacred in the pogroms during the past century, those who had died fighting for Russia in the First World War and those who had fallen in the struggle for the Revolution.

In February 1917 the Tsarist autocracy fell. All legal restrictions on Hebrew publications were lifted, resulting in an avalanche of books and brochures. Chagall participated actively in this movement, illustrating numerous children's books in a style which was based on his pictorial experiments. After the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, Chagall became involved with the Revolution, becoming the Commissar for art in Vitebsk and director of the local art school. Among the staff he appointed to teach at the school was the young artist Lissitzky, who, undoubtedly encouraged by Chagall's example, emulated his style in producing illustrations for children's books.

Born Lazar Lizitskii, Lissitzky eventually Westernised his first name to El. He came from a slightly more middle class background than Chagall, and had studied engineering at Darmstadt in Germany before returning to Russia at the onset of the First World War. In the wake of 1917, Lissitzky also became involved with the attempt to create a Jewish style of book illustration. For instance, he based his design for Broderson's *The Prague Legend* (1917) on the traditional format for the scroll of Esther, placing the scroll in a wooden decorated box and basing his illustrations on decorative motifs from Jewish tombstones. Lissitzky had personal experience of such motifs, having made rubbings of

tombstones for the Jewish Ethnographic Museum. He continued working along these lines until the latter half of 1919 when such work became less central to his activity.

In Autumn 1919 Lissitzky began to respond to the artistic language of Suprematism, to which he was introduced by Kazimir Malevich who arrived in Vitebsk as a teacher in the autumn of 1919 at the invitation of Chagall. Malevich had launched his completely abstract art, Suprematism, in Petrograd in 1915 when he had exhibited a series of canvases including *The Black Square* (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) and *Eight Red Rectangles* (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) which consisted of flat abstract shapes in saturated colours on white grounds. Lissitzky started working in a very similar style.

In this respect, Lissitzky was not unique. At this time, many Jewish artists began to experiment with abstraction at the expense of the exploration of a more identifiably "Jewish style". In part, this new trend may have been a response to government policy which had started to operate against the autonomy of independent cultural organisations, like the Society for the Encouragement of Jewish Art. At the same time, Jewish artists became committed to the socialist message of the Bolsheviks, regarding socialism as a means to secure the amelioration of society in general. Consequently, they began to embrace the more universal language of abstraction as an artistic equivalent to the internationalism of socialism. Certainly, 1918 saw the last exhibition of Jewish art in Russia. Appropriately, it consisted of paintings by Chagall, Natan Altman and David Shterenberg. From this time onwards, Altman and Shterenberg embraced a more abstract language, eschewing a Jewish emphasis. In Altman's, *Petro-Communa* (1920, Russian Museum, St Petersburg) the initials of the new state and letters referring to the Petrograd Commune are painted against two large abstract planes of

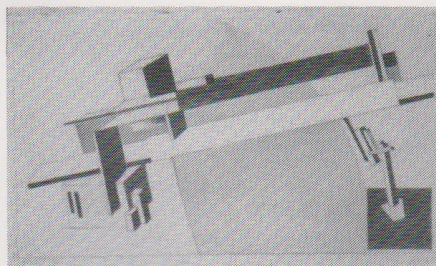
brown and red on a grey ground, thus wedding progressive politics to progressive art. The move into abstraction, moreover, was supported by avant-garde theorists like Abram Efros who emphasised the internationalist essence of the Jewish artist and defined the characteristics of Jewish art as "a certain abstraction, a generalising tendency, an elegaic contemplativeness."

Both Altman and Shterenberg became closely allied to the government and continued this involvement into the 1920s. Both worked for the Department of Fine Arts set up in early 1918 by the Commissariat for Enlightenment. Shterenberg was appointed head of the Department, and was responsible for running artistic affairs throughout the new Soviet state. Such figures form an artistic parallel to the prominence of Jewish figures such as Trotsky in political life, during the early years of the Bolshevik regime.

The political commitment of the avant-garde artists inspired them to go beyond the autonomous artistic media such as painting and sculpture to extend the language of abstraction into the everyday environment. Altman, for instance, designed the decorations for the first anniversary of the Revolution in November 1918 which involved clothing the Winter Palace and Palace Square, including the surrounding buildings and the Alexander Column, in large abstract planes of red and orange. Indeed, the bold cuboid and curvilinear forms grouped at the base of the Alexander Column produced the effect of flames leaping up and consuming the old order. Such decorations temporarily obliterated the Tsarist environments with a new, potentially socialist style. Lissitzky also produced works which have a strong ideological message, like his poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* of 1920 in which the pictorial language of Suprematism is used for agitational ends.

An attachment to socialist ideals





*Proun: The Bridge – El Lissitzky  
(1919, Estorick Collection, London)*

also informed Lissitzky's painting of 1919 and the early 1920s. In works like *Proun: Bridge 1* (1919, Estorick Collection, London), Lissitzky explored the volumetric and spatial possibilities of Suprematism. He called such explorations Prouns, which he defined as "interchange stations between painting and architecture." These paintings were not designs for buildings, but visionary blueprints for cities of the future, exploring the ways in which simple two-dimensional forms could be developed towards a more architectural conception, and experimenting with ideas of cantilevering, rotation, equilibrium and potential movement.

Lissitzky left Russia in 1921, settling in Berlin where he promoted the new constructive aesthetic which had been developed in Russia. He emphasised that this art was not subjective, but rational and precise like science and engineering, in tune with the achievements of contemporary technology, and embracing socialist ideas and "an attitude of universality – clarity – reality".

Alongside him in Germany was another Jewish artist from Russia, Naum Gabo, who shared this ideal for a precise and rational, "constructive" art which would inspire men to live in peace and harmony. Unlike Lissitzky, Gabo had not been brought up as a Jew, but came from a *nouveau riche*, assimilationist background. His early constructions like *Head No.2* (c.1916, Family Collection), built up from discrete planes of metal, were influenced by Cubism's language of faceted planes and its emphasis on opening up the figure and fusing the object with its environment.

The contemplative mood of the figure in *Head No. 2* also recalls the tradition of the Russian icon. These devotional images were clearly a source of inspiration and Gabo actually placed one constructed head in a corner, emulating the position of icons in Russian orthodox homes.

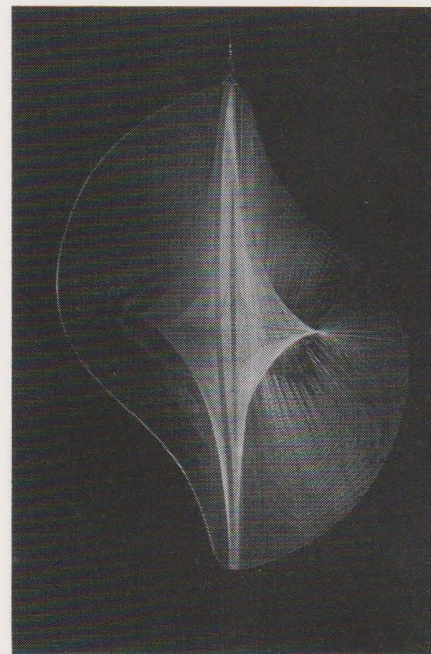
In Russia, and in Germany after 1922, Gabo produced images which expressed the clarity of geometrical construction. His *Column* of c. 1923 (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) essentially consisted of two large intersecting transparent planes of glass. Although Gabo produced it as a sculpture, he also envisaged it as a model which might eventually be used as a prototype for a public monument, possibly with the text of the Soviet constitution engraved on its surfaces. Like Lissitzky's work it also aspired towards architecture.

Lissitzky returned to Russia in 1925 and remained committed to the regime until his death in 1941. He designed exhibitions, devised posters, and created layouts for Soviet propaganda journals such as *USSR in Construction*, which promoted Soviet values at home and abroad. In contrast, Gabo and Chagall remained in the West and they represent the twin polarities of Jewish artistic endeavour during the twentieth century. On the one hand, Chagall (except for a brief period in America) lived in France and continued to develop his expressive figurative style. On the other hand, Gabo remained committed to abstraction, and lived in Berlin until the 1930s when he moved to France, settling in Britain in 1936, and finally emigrating to America in 1946. Towards the end of the 1930s he had begun to explore more organic forms and *Linear Construction in Space No.2* (1950, Tate Gallery, London) eloquently fuses qualities of transparency with a sense of an evolving organic form. The nylon filament wound around the basic structure of inverted transparent curved planes creates a structure which is permeable by space but which also reflects the light,

evoking a sensation of depth and movement within the construction.

Is there anything Jewish about these works? When in America, Gabo always resisted being included in exhibitions of Jewish artists and indeed in any show which had a nationalist bias. His works seem to embody Efros' definition of Jewish art as internationalist and characterised by "a certain abstraction, a generalising tendency, an elegaic contemplativeness." But Gabo himself had a distinctly utopian concept of art, a concept which had been developed in Russia during the revolutionary period and which is implicit in this statement from 1944:

*"I have chosen the absoluteness and exactitude of my lines, shapes and forms, in the conviction that they are the most immediate medium for my communication to others of the rhythms and the state of mind that I would wish the world to be in. This is not only in the material world surrounding us, but also in the mental and spiritual world which we carry within us. I think that the image they evoke is the image of good, not of evil, the image of order, not of chaos, the image of life not of death."*



*Linear Construction in Space No. 2 –  
Naum Gabo  
(1942-50, Tate Gallery, London)*



# ADAM AND EVE

by Sheriff Gerald H Gordon QC

*The following is based upon a talk given to the Literary Society on 13th November 1994*

Thank you for your invitation. I have to confess that it took me some time to decide to accept it. In the end I was unable to resist either the blandishments of your Secretary, or the strong pull of nostalgia. The Lit was, after all, a central pillar of my life for twenty years.

The story of Adam and Eve is unlike most other biblical episodes in a number of ways. Firstly, of course, it is not ethnocentric – the God of Adam and Eve is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he's not even the God of Israel, he is the universal creator god. Not even the Jewish Chronicle would claim that Adam and Eve were Jewish. And what happened in the Garden of Eden is not really of any great importance in the Jewish religion – certainly of nothing like the importance it is in Christianity.

There are two parts to the story of Adam and Eve: the story of their creation, and the story of the Garden of Eden. The most striking feature about the creation part of the story is that there are two creation stories. The standard, elementary class, approach to this is that the second one is simply a summary of, or in parts an elaboration of, the first. But there are significant differences between the two. In Chapter 1 man is created last, while in Chapter 2 he is created first, and then the garden is planted and he is put in it to look after it. In Chapter 1 he is given dominion over the animal kingdom, while in Chapter 2 it can be argued that he has to win that dominion by discovering the names of the animals, or rather by conferring their names on them. Indeed, dominion over the animal kingdom is almost treated as the *raison d'être* of his creation in Chapter 1: 'Let us make man ... and he will rule over the fish etc.' The difficult verses in Chapter 1 are, of course, 1.26 and 27:

*'And God said, "Let us make an Adam in our image according to our likeness" ... And God created the Adam in his image, in the image of God He made him, male and female He created them'.*

There are two problems here, one important and one, I venture to suggest, not. The important one is, just what do we mean by **בצלם** "in the image of"? What do we mean by saying that man was created in the image or shape of the likeness or form of God, an idea that is stressed even more in the marriage ceremony, where we add to the words **בצלם דמות תבניתו** both meaning shape or form or image, the word **תבניתו** which has much the same meaning. Maimonides complained that a misreading of these verses had led to the view that to reject the idea of God as corporeal was to reject the truth of the Bible, and it may well be responsible for the persistence in Christian iconography of the figure of God as grandfather which we see everywhere from the ceiling of the Sistine chapel downwards, so to speak: and things won't be improved if we add a few divine grandmothers to the illustrations.

Philo, of course, says that it refers to the Platonic Form. For him the creation in Chapter 2 is the creation of physical man, whereas the creation in Chapter 1 is of the non-corporeal, archetypal Man. Maimonides, too, says that it refers to man's essence, that which makes him a man – the Aristotelian version of the Platonic form – and that man's essence is his intellectual perception. Others say, a little more plausibly, that it is intended to single out the concept of man as a personality, and so as different from animals and I have a strong suspicion that what it meant is what it says, or that at the very least that it meant that man was godlike, in the celebratory 'O brave new world that has such creatures in it' sense.

The other problem with this verse is its use of the plural. Personally, I am happy to treat this simply as a matter of style, the Royal plural, if you will. But two things have flowed from it. One is homiletic – God does not do anything without consulting His cabinet, and other rulers should act in the same way. The other result is that it gave rise to the whole panoply of angelology, with which

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I have never had much patience, even if the angels are incorporeal intelligences, and not giants, or babies, with wings. It did, however, give literary space, so to speak, for a discussion of the paradox of man. There was, we are told, a debate among the angels as to whether man should be created or not, in which they tossed back and forth his good and bad qualities.

Then there is the other story of how the angels were ordered to serve or worship man, and one of them in particular, rebelled, and was thrown out of Heaven, and indeed decided to wreak his revenge on man.

Let's come to the creation of woman. There are two radically different accounts of this, as I'm sure you all know. In the first we are told simply that God created Adam in His image, 'in the image of God He created him', or perhaps better, 'it', and then, somewhat inconsistently, 'male and female He created them': that is to say, both at once without distinction. Indeed, there are those who say, like Plato in the Symposium, that the original human creature was androgynous – male on one side and female on the other, and later the two sides were split, so that, as again you all know, we all now go through life in a desperate search for our other half.

The second account of the creation of woman is quite different, and has provided a storehouse of material for misogynists. Robert Alter sees the two accounts as an endeavour to reconcile the accepted position of women in society with the empirical fact that some women, at least, are as strong and as clever as men, and appear to be their equals. Again, you all know the second account. Adam was alone, and therefore lonely, and God saw that this was not good – that's the only piece of Divine self-assessment we get in the second account, and it contrasts strongly with the repeated assertions in Chapter 1 that God saw what He had done and it was good. So God decided to make a help for him עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ literally, a

help 'against' or 'opposite' him. Why these terms? One rabbi suggested that the juxtaposition of the two ideas, help and hindrance if you like, summed up things as they were. If you got a good wife she was a help; if you got a bad one, Heaven help you!

Now, when we say that Adam was alone, we mean he was alone, totally. And it is only because God realised that it was not good for Adam to be alone that the animals were created, and were paraded before Adam so that he can name them. And the verse goes on, after telling us that he did name them, to tell us that he didn't find a help/hindrance among them.

What happens next is that Adam is placed under an anaesthetic. Eve is created out of his spare rib, which those less favourably disposed to women say wasn't a rib at all, but his tail; which is why people don't have tails. Others say that it was from his rib because the word for rib, צֵלַע, also means lame, and women are pretty lame creatures. Well, I warned you that this was a great source for misogynists. And there's worse to come. For example, it is said that woman was not created from Adam's head lest she become arrogant, or from his eye lest she be wanton, or from his ear lest she be an eavesdropper, or from his neck lest she be insolent, or from his mouth, lest she be a tattler, or from his heart lest she be envious, or from his hand lest she be a meddler, or from his foot lest she be a gadabout, but from his rib which is a modest part of him, and that as he formed each of her limbs God said, 'Let it be modest'. Women were taught, in a passage which is quoted in the Tzena Urena, that there is significance in the fact that they were created from bone and not from dust, for bones make a noise and earth doesn't, that they need more perfume than men because bones stink while earth doesn't, that just as you can't melt a bone, so you can't pacify a woman. And did you know that the reason that women have shrill voices is that if you put a bone into a pot of

meat it sizzles.

The Tzena Urena, to which I have just referred, is very important from our point of view. It is a Yiddish translation of the Chumash with interspersed commentaries and midrashim. In fact, these midrashim take up much more space than the biblical text, and the book is published in such a way that it is not always easy to distinguish text from commentary. Its importance is that it was probably the only religious book, if not the only book, your greatgrandmothers and their greatgrandmothers ever read. That is to say, it contains the tradition as it was handed down to women themselves.

But let's pass on to the Garden of Eden. Before we get to Chapter 3, however, we have to look at two more parts of Chapter 2. The first I just mention here, because it really belongs with Chapter 3. That is that when Adam is first put into Eden he is told that he can eat himself sick from all the trees in the garden, except for the tree of knowledge, because in the day he eats of that tree he will die. (Note that he is not forbidden to eat from the tree of life, indeed he is impliedly given permission to do so. All we know of it is that it was planted in the middle of the garden.) The second thing we have to look at is the last four verses of the chapter, the verses which follow on the creation of Eve. We are told that when Eve was brought to him Adam said,

*'This time (i.e. unlike the animals) this is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, and the name of this one will be woman, אִשָּׁה because she was taken from man'.*

She doesn't at this stage have a name of her own, any more than Adam does. She is the archetypal woman, just as he is the archetypal man. But his personal name, so to speak, is also Adam, and the first use of the word אִשָּׁה is Adam's use of it at this point. His pun works in Hebrew and it works in English, but it doesn't work in all languages, and it is, of course, said to prove that Adam and Eve spoke



Hebrew – that they might have spoken English was literally unthinkable. Note, however, that Adam gives Eve her name, just as he gave the animals theirs, and consider if this in itself does not give him domination over her. Anyway, the text goes on to say,

*'Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they will be one flesh'.*

And then the text goes on,  
*'And they were both naked, the man and his woman, and they were not ashamed'.*

There are clearly overtones of sexuality there. Which leads to the 64,000 dollar question: did Adam and Eve do it before the Fall, and if they did, a question which interests only Christians, did they do it without sin? The text does not say that they had sexual intercourse, although some midrashim do. Nor does it say that they didn't, except that it does specifically say that they did after the events in the garden. If, as some midrashim say, the whole thing, from the creation of Adam to the expulsion from Eden, happened in one day, they wouldn't have had all that much time.

There is, however, another pun lurking in the text. The word for naked in the last verse of Chapter 2, עֶרְוָה is the same as the word for cunning, and we are about to be told in the first verse of Chapter 3 – and remember there were no chapter divisions in the original Bible – that the serpent was more cunning than all the beasts of the field whom God had made. So I think it has to be conceded that when the serpent appears on the scene, sex raises its ugly head.

The first question is, why the serpent? To which the answer probably is that this is also the story of why the serpent goes on its belly. Or, perhaps, it is because serpents had a sinister, or magical, connotation: someone will insist that the serpent was really Lucifer the fallen angel, or at least the devil Samael – which some have suggested means 'God's poison' – אֱסֵם אֱלֹהִים, and others have suggested

more prosaically was the name of a Syriac god. If we want to be more sophisticated, we can say that the serpent is Satan, that Satan is a metaphor for our evil inclination, and therefore when Satan is talking to Eve it is really Eve who is talking to herself, and that she thought matters through for herself and decided that the thing to do was to defy God and eat the fruit – and depending on your viewpoint you can treat that version as to her credit or to her discredit. More literally, the serpent, for one reason of another, was out to create mischief. And he did it by approaching Eve, and not Adam, because, according to Philo, woman is more accustomed to be deceived than man, her judgment is softer, she gives way easily and is taken in by plausible falsehoods which resemble the truth. This particular snake in the grass, however, has a PhD in deceit. He says to Eve, 'I hear you are not allowed to eat from any of the trees'. And she says, 'No, you're wrong, we can eat from any of the trees, except the tree in the middle of the garden, we're not even to touch it, or we'll die'. (I know it can be argued that the tree in the middle of the garden is the tree of life, but it is clear that the tree we are talking about here is the tree of knowledge. When did Adam tell Eve about this tree? What exactly did he tell her? The original

command is just to refrain from eating, it says nothing about touching. But Eve's expansion of the prohibition backfired, according to the rabbis. Because what happened was that the serpent pushed Eve against the tree, so that she touched it, and nothing happened. And that, of course, encouraged her to go on to eat the fruit.

Now, what the serpent told Eve, in the text itself, was that they wouldn't die if they ate from the tree. So the next question is, was he right? To which the answer probably is, yes. The serpent also says that the reason for the prohibition is that God knows that when they do eat of this tree they will be like gods, knowing good and evil. And again, as we shall see, he was right, although just what knowing good and evil involves is a more difficult question, to which we shall return. Nor is it clear whether or not Eve knew anything about the nature of the tree before the serpent told her. Anyway, the next verse tells us that the woman saw that the tree was good as food and pleasant to the eyes, and – and this is the important bit – that the tree was desirable to make one wise. Eve was tempted by promise of wisdom, and she ate the fruit to become wise, and gave it to Adam to make him wise. She is the heroine of the story – the Jewish Prometheus (even if

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she wasn't Jewish herself, she represents the Jewish version of the Prometheus story), but whereas Prometheus defied the gods to give man physical comfort, the comfort of fire, Eve defied God to give humanity the gift of wisdom. And then, having taken and eaten the fruit, she gave it to the man with her and he ate. That is to say, she did not keep this gift to herself, but shared it with Adam. And then there comes a bit of an anticlimax, in that all that happened as a result of taking this intelligence-potion, so to speak, was that their eyes were opened and they realised that they were naked and they sewed themselves figleaves. From this brief account there have been constructed many complicated legends, including of course Paradise Lost in which Milton took considerably longer to tell the tale. But we are left with many unanswered questions. The most naive one is, what fruit was it? To which the answer is that we don't know and don't care. Some say it was the fig. Some say it was the ethrog, whence apparently there grew up a custom for women to bite the end of the ethrog on Hoshana Rabbah, confess their guilt and pray for an easy labour. The next question is whether it all happened just that quickly, or whether something, and if so what, happened between Eve's eating the

fruit and her giving it to Adam. Well, one story is that having eaten the fruit she saw death, or at least was convinced that she was going to die, and she went to Adam and gave him to eat. Milton's Eve (and I make no apology for quoting Milton, if only because he knew the relevant kabbalah and midrash better than most of us) debates with herself for a little as to whether or not to give the fruit to Adam, or keep 'the odds of knowledge in my power'. But then she fears that she may die and be no more,

*'And Adam, wedded to another Eve,  
Shall live with her enjoying, I  
extinct!*

*A death to think! Confirmed, then I  
resolve*

*Adam shall share with me in bliss or  
woe.*

*So dear I love him that with him all  
deaths*

*I could endure, without him live no  
life'.*

But why did Adam eat the fruit? Well, according to Milton, he did not want to go on living without Eve. Here is a little of Milton's Adam, addressing Eve as she offers him the fruit:

*Some cursed fraud  
Of enemy hath beguiled thee, yet  
unknown,*

*and me with thee hath ruined: for  
with thee*

*Certain my resolution is to die.*

*How can I live without thee; how  
forgo*

*Thy sweet converse, and love so  
dearly joined,*

*To live again in these wild woods  
forlorn?*

*Should God create another Eve, and I  
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee*

*Would never from my heart. No, no!  
I feel*

*The link of nature draw me: flesh of  
flesh,*

*Bone of my bone thou art, and from  
thy state*

*Mine never shall be parted, bliss or  
woe'.*

Let's move on now to the next part of the story. Adam and Eve have experienced shame, and are skulking in the garden when they hear the sound of God taking a

walk to Himself – and He says, 'Where are you?' And Adam says, 'I heard you and I saw I was naked, so I hid'. [Which is a pretty lame excuse and would give the game away even if his questioner was not omniscient. But it is a nice piece of detective story writing, as the audience gasp and realise how incriminating an answer it is. Adam we realise is a total wimp and wet. A stupider, duller lump of a hero you won't find till Wagner's Siegfried! —lehavdil.]

God gives the expected response, 'Who told you you were naked, did you eat from the tree I told you not to?' And Adam replies, 'The woman you gave me to be with gave me of the tree and I ate'. Note the two typical male reactions. Either it's your fault, i.e. God's fault, because if you hadn't given me this woman none of this would have happened, or else, more simply, it's the woman's fault. Eve then makes her plea in mitigation, and just says it was the serpent who beguiled her. The serpent doesn't get asked for his excuses, which is a little odd, especially as the fact that Adam and Eve do get a chance to explain themselves is used as Biblical authority for the basic natural justice maxim: audi alteram partem – never come to a decision without hearing both sides. But what happens is that as soon as Eve has blamed the serpent, God turns to it and tells it is cursed, will go on its belly and eat dust, and be a perpetual enemy with, in an odd phrase, the woman's seed. Eve is told that she will bear children in pain and, most importantly for the social effects or explanatory power of the story, that her desire will be to her husband and that he will rule over her, presumably as a compensation to man for having been led astray by her, as well as by way of punishment for her. Adam is told that he'll have to work for a living, and also that from dust he was taken and to dust he will return. Two odd things now happen. First, Adam gives his woman a name and calls her Eve, because she is the mother of all

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living things. And secondly, God made leather coats for Adam and Eve and clothed them, although they'd already sewn figleaves for themselves.

The only remaining piece of text is the decision to expel Adam and Eve from Eden, in order to prevent man from acquiring eternal life by eating of the tree of life, which it is not suggested he had been prohibited from doing. This is not presented as part of their sentence, so to speak. It happens because it is apparently the only way of stopping them from eating of the tree of life, or at least because God is not prepared to take the chance of their eating it – and apparently does not think that a prohibition will be effective. It appears that man cannot be allowed to eat that tree because mortality is all that distinguishes him from God, since it is said that he is now 'like one of us knowing good and evil', and man must not be allowed to become too godly, must not be allowed to compete with God.

Now let's ask what this is all about. There are those who will say that it is about and only about disobedience, and that the nature of the disobedience is unimportant. There are those, like Milton, who are concerned that it brought sin and death into the world. My feeling, as you will have gathered, is that the author of the story was not particularly interested in the question of mortality. I think that started to loom large later, when, for example, we are told that Eve gave of the fruit to all the animals except the phoenix, as if we were talking about the tree of life and not the tree of knowledge. I don't think that Jews, or at least biblical Jews, were unduly concerned with death. Milton would say, along with his fellow-Christians, that what it is all about is original sin, and in particular original sin as a condition requiring redemption. But that, of course, is Christian and no Jew would think in anything like that way – or would he? Well, perhaps not precisely, but how about this? A rabbi, R Joseph, I think, asks why Gentiles (or idol worshippers) are

tainted (or polluted or filthy), and answers that it is because the taint which fell upon mankind when the serpent tempted Eve remains with everyone except Israel who stood at Sinai.

As I have indicated, and as is crystal clear, a lot of what the story is all about is the subjection of women – as we have seen, such subjection is explicitly stated to have been the direct result of Eve's disobedience, and Chapter 3 of Genesis can be read as a misogynist's charter – so much so that the Tzena Urena reminds its female readers that women must cover their heads for shame at having made men sin, and that they must light Shabbat candles to make up for having extinguished Adam's light.

I prefer to think of the story as a just-so story, but as one which is centred on human knowledge. What it is all about is man's acquisition of knowledge, which is why I said that Eve was its heroine. Just what knowledge we are concerned with is a matter of dispute. Was it empirical or scientific knowledge, or was it knowledge of the distinction between good and evil, moral awareness? The text talks of knowing good and evil and not of knowing the difference between good and evil, and there are other biblical passages which support the view that the phrase 'knowing good and evil' is just a way of saying 'knowing everything', and has no moral connotations at all.

Maimonides gets very involved in this problem, and I don't claim to understand him – he seems to say both that prelapsarian knowledge was what we would call empirical or scientific knowledge, and also that such knowledge was necessary for the concept of obedience to make sense. He then goes on to suggest that the knowledge which was acquired from the fruit was knowledge of propriety and impropriety. I am inclined to think, given the sexual connotations of the story, that we are talking, at least in part, about the acquisition of a moral sense, symbolised if you like

by a sense of modesty, in which case Eve's audacity is perhaps even more deserving of our gratitude than if it was just scientific knowledge, since she provided us with what makes us essentially human, our moral sense. When we take into account the punishments imposed for eating the fruit, we can see the story as being about the tension between knowledge and happiness, the price we pay for being human and not animal, what T H Gaster calls man's constant sacrifice of innocence to intellect. We are all, he says, expelled from Eden and sacrifice our happiness to the ambition of our intellects. Or, as the Preacher put it, 'In much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow'.

Finally, a postscript. What are we to make of the punishments of Adam and Eve now that we can more or less achieve painless childbirth, and can get machines to do the sweat-producing work for us – and should the passing of these curses carry with it the passing of the remaining curse, the subjection of women? And on a more pessimistic note, it is worth remembering that although Genesis tells us that Eve gave us godlike knowledge, Job tells us that we are still not capable of having even a clue about what goes on in God's mind, כְּבִיכּוֹל so to speak.

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# LAUGHTER AND LATKES

*Micheline Brannan describes the Lit's Chanukah entertainment*

On Sunday 27 November, the Lit enjoyed a gastronomic treat with a difference.

We chose the first night of Chanukah to hold one of our popular evenings of readings, poems and songs on the theme of Jews and their relationship to food. Elaine Samuel selected the material with the assistance of various members who offered material and agreed to read or indeed launch into song.

Elaine introduced the items and kept the whole show together in an expert manner, and with a bit of fun sociology thrown in. The readings included writers in English and in Yiddish, past and present. Elaine also shared with us, from time to time during the evening, the results of her research into what the kosher caterers are offering today, from the traditional five course banquet, milchik or fleishik to choice, to the nouvelle cuisine, Japanese-style offerings, garnished with flowers, of Schaverien's.

We talk disparagingly about bagel and lox Jews – meaning that their only connection with their Jewishness is through the food they eat. But just as food may be the last vestige of Jewish identification, so food has the capacity to bring Jews back. This was illustrated by the reading of a poem of Heinrich Heine entitled "Prinzessin Sabbath" in both English and German, by Heather Valencia.

Our Jewish engagement with food is not restricted to cholent and kreplach and blintzes – it is as much within the Sephardi tradition as the Ashkenazi. It appears to have as much to do with a lost past, a lost childhood. Perhaps this kind of relationship with food is the prerogative of men (Jewish women have other problems – and our identification as Jews is perhaps not so tightly bound up with mother and food). To illustrate some memories of the food served in a Sephardi family, we had a reading



*Tony Gilbert – Big Bang Kneidel*

specially written for the evening by Rene Levy and read by Stephen Gellaitry.

Returning to cholent, in the next piece "At Grandfather's Table", an intriguing and altogether credible theory of the role of the cholent in Jewish life was put forward by Jonathan Bard. The cholent is the method which Jews have devised to keep out of trouble. It is why there are no Jewish football hooligans. What mischief can you get up to on Shabbos afternoon after 3 helpings of cholent? It's a "SIYAG" (a fence around the law) – the bulwark of our sanctity. It's amazing Michael Howard hasn't already thought of it. Extracting one ingredient from the cholent, the potatoes, led us to the first community singing of the evening, celebrating "Bulbes" – potatoes – as the staple diet of the Pale of Settlement.

Summarising the investigation so far, Elaine said that first we had looked at the Oedipus/Shmedipus theory – it's all to do with mother. Then we went on to propose functionalism – food keeps Jews out of trouble – so that's why we elevate its significance. What about a theory of gratification? Oral gratification, so it has been theorised, is the first stage on the

path to normal sexual development. Under certain circumstances, of course, children may get stuck at this stage, stuck forever. Not for nothing was Freud a Jew. This is one of the themes played around with by Howard Jacobson in his journeys among Jews in his travelogue "Roots Schmoots". We followed him, in a reading by Adrian Harris, to the Catskills, those hills in Up-State New York alive with the sound of oral gratification and populated, for the Rosh Hashana festival, with Jews who, apparently never left the breast.

Ian Leifer and daughter Dina then repeated their performance of a song which was the hit of the Lit Yiddish evening 4 years previously, entitled "Tate – s'iz gevesn a mechaye". "A mechaye" is how a Jew articulates delight, pleasure, gratification. The song consists of an imaginary discussion between a traditional father and his Cholutzic daughter recent immigrants to Israel but still speaking in Yiddish to each other. It is one of the many satirical songs written in Yiddish during the British Mandate. The daughter has been on a Kibbutz and her responses to her father's questions are not exactly reassuring. They start with food – "So what did you eat there?", "Kasha cooked by Masha." They end up with a question that a wise parent would not ask, and the answer will not be printed here.

Up to this point, we had looked at the Jewish relationship to food in a Freudian sense – it's obsessional, it's compensatory, it's regressive, it's mother-related. All of these themes are present, of course, in the works of Philip Roth. At the same time he asks some very serious questions about how Jews have coped in the goldene medinah, namely the need for Jews in the United States to cope with some existential problems which face them qua Jews, such as "How do you manage to ensure that there is so much food in the



house at all times that the family will forget what a hunger pain feels like – and at the very same time make sure that not one scrap goes to waste?" The answer, of course, was the refrigerator, and subsequently, the freezer. These appliances, or white goods, as the Americans call them, have become to Jews in the secular/domestic sphere what the ark is to the religious sphere. Stanley Raffel illustrated this by readings from "Goodbye Columbus" and Roth's later works.

Roth, the archetype of the self hating Jew, can make us feel that perhaps we put ourselves down and berate ourselves too much. To counteract this effect, we had a reading from Tony Gilbert to illustrate the contribution which Jewish food has made to the advancement of science. The Big Bang – as Tony was to explain, all began with a Kneidel.

The mysterious presence of roasted smoked almonds among the evening's refreshments was then explained by a reading by Charles and Gillian Raab from the correspondence between Sir Isaiah Berlin and Lord Sieff about the availability of that commodity from Marks and Spencer. Sir Isaiah, as an addict, was horrified when M & S ran out. However Lord Sieff speedily ensured a complimentary supply of the delicacy to his desperate correspondent.

From "Der Heim" we had a reading from a Yiddish novel by Zalman Shneur describing the annual dinner of the Chevra Kadisha, where the wealthier burghers of the Shtetl vied with each other in philanthropic hospitality. On this occasion the host outdid himself with an enormous feast of carp, duck and kugel. We marvelled at the appetites of these stalwarts of the burial society until we discovered that it was tacitly understood they would take home the "leftovers" to feed their hungry families for a month. Our own Rabbi assures us that each year, on the 7th of Adar, the anniversary of Moses' death, it is still customary in Jerusalem for

each burial society to have a seudah or feast.

Returning to the footsteps of Howard Jacobson, we followed him on his last night in the States, to the Nagila Pizza House in Los Angeles, where the modern American orthodox celebrate the end of Shabbat by devouring round after round of pizza among hordes of screaming children, frustrated queues of customers not yet served, or served and waiting endlessly for their orders, and staff who apparently couldn't care less. Micheline Brannan read this piece.

The Rabbi and David Goldberg then led us in singing 2 more Yiddish classics "Lomir Alle Zingen", which differentiates between the rich and the poor by what they eat, and the song "Ven der Mechiach vet kumen". This song describes how it will all end, when the Mashiach comes, at the end of days, when there will be no strife, when the lion will lie down with the lamb. What is the Jewish version of the good age which will be ushered in at that time? The priorities are clear. The first thing of course is to make a feast. What will we eat? The wild ox and the Leviathan, in other words absolutely enormous amounts. And what shall we drink? Vintage wine? And who will teach us? Moshe Rabenu. And who will play music for us? Dovid Hamelech. And who will speak words of wisdom for us?

Shlomo Hamelech. And who will dance for us? Miriam Haneviya.

To round off, there were both a Yiddish poem, "Der Cheyshek is groys" (read by Elaine) and a saying from the Talmud, which sum up the Jewish relationship to food, which can be generalised to all fields of human appetite and endeavour. In the words of the Talmud:

"No man departs this world with even half of his desire in his hand – with having accomplished even half of what he wanted to do." Food is like many other things in Jewish life – our appetite – our aspirations and our standards are often greater than is humanly possible. And this is so whether our appetite revolves around a desire to understand the human conditions or to consume what is put on the table before us. We are a ... driven, not a chosen people."

Following the entertainment, we were able at last to satisfy our appetites whetted by so much talk of food and drink. As is traditional for the Chanukah meeting, Jonathan and Ellen Bard had made a plentiful supply of latkes served with sour cream to go with our more usual tea and cake, and the aforementioned almonds.

Thanks to Elaine for the spiritual and the Bards and the Raabs for the earthly food, and for a highly enjoyable evening all round.



## 75th ANNIVERSARY DIVINE SERVICE

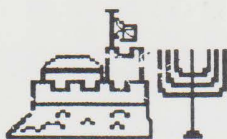
*Lodge Solomon No. 1209 (1920-1995)*

*The Master and Office-Bearers of Lodge Solomon No. 1209  
cordially invite all members of the community  
to a Divine and Memorial Service*

*at Edinburgh Synagogue, 4 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh  
on Sunday 5th February, 1995 at 2.30 p.m. for 3.00 p.m.*

*Hats and Regalia to be worn  
Light Refreshments after Service*





# **Edinburgh Hillel**

## **DINNER TO CELEBRATE THE OPENING OF EDINBURGH HILLEL**

**Sunday 12th March 1995  
at the Community Centre, 4 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh**

### *Guests of Honour:*

**Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind QC, MP, Secretary of State for Defence  
Brenda Katten, Chairman of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation  
David Kaplan, Chairperson of Union of Jewish Students**

**Dinner 7.30 p.m. • £15.00 per person  
Lounge Suit • No Appeal**

### *Ticket Enquiries:*

**MYRNA KAPLAN  
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EDINBURGH EH4 8BA  
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