



Welcome

Connection. Disconnection. Reconnection. These three states shape our lives: interchanging, crossing over and forever challenging us to think and be present.

There's an amazing feeling that arrives just before Rosh Hashana every single year. A feeling of a new chance: an opportunity to dig a little deeper, to try again and to get it right. As the Yamim Noraim roll in this year it feels even more important. The last eighteen months have been some of the toughest we have ever known and the question of what really matters has been on many minds.

Community is at the heart of what we do at Masorti Judaism. We seek to create opportunities to connect and across our community are a multitude of invitations. There are many routes in, whether it's enrolling in our Jewish Community Organising course, joining one of our rabbis' classes or joining a team cooking for homeless people. The only thing you have to do is accept the invitation.

Rachel Sklan

Deputy Chief Executive, Masorti Judaism



As our worlds got smaller, retracting behind the solid walls of our homes to protect ourselves and society, there are ways in which some worlds grew spiritually larger. I have witnessed this in two major ways since March 2020. The first is that the number of requests for conversations about conversion to Judaism grew. Our meetings moved online, along with our conversion learning, but I found the requests were never in short supply. The second shift I noticed is that my inbox seemed to fill with requests for conversations with Jews disentangling their lives from orthodoxy due to their sexualities and gender identities, or who removed themselves from Jewish life some time ago and are considering coming home. These individuals reached out because they wished to speak with a rabbi about how they understand themselves in a Jewish context. I have been honoured to hold that space.

At the time, I was as busy as anyone else with questions of what the worldwide situation meant for society, and what this meant for my working and home life. I was living alone (with the exception of one very enthusiastic cat), and I felt the shrinking of my social life very acutely. I can now apply the power of retrospect to the unfolding of those conversations. The compression of our lives down into a smaller space had real implications for many of us. And it seems that one of those repercussions, for some, was a re-engagement with questions of identity. But further than simply giving more time or space to thinking, it seems that many people felt more able to take the next step, to put something into action that might have been stirring for some time.



Questions of becoming Jewish, or of disengaging or reengaging with Jewish identity, might be more exceptional examples. Most of us probably haven't set up meetings with rabbis to discuss our relationships with Judaism. However, I feel that this model is something many of us have experienced in some way in the last eighteen months. I have witnessed communities coming together like never before, and being more aware of one another's needs. I have seen Jews over a hundred years old learning to use Zoom in order to connect. I have seen people filling online spaces in a way that would not have worked in person.

Our worlds may have gotten smaller, our circles tighter, our walls more firm - but people have shown me time and time again that it is possible for our spiritual and emotional worlds to ever expand.

Rabbi Natasha Mann

New London Synagogue,
Mosaic Masorti



Jonathan Tebble
is a member of Ohel Mo'ed and New North London Synagogue

Connection to... Ritual

Since the pandemic began my Jewish life has been turned on its head. While at the beginning I was filled with optimism about lockdown learning, feeling enriched by a multi-timezone Tikkun Leil Shavuot and even helping to run Ohel Mo'ed's Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services, the time has dragged and my connection has stretched thin.

Motivation in my personal, work and spiritual life has fizzled disappointingly. Whereas before I was keen to take part in activities such as Torah study and community organising, I struggled when I was approached to write this piece. How could I write about connection while feeling so disconnected?

Then I remembered something. I have been with my boyfriend for three years. Even though he's not Jewish he has always been supportive of my faith. One thing we have always done together is Shabbat. It is something I have done since I first began exploring Judaism and finally converted in 2017. Welcoming in Shabbat by lighting candles and making kiddush is non-negotiable.

I imagine Josh thought it was strange at first. But we did it every week without fail. Sometimes during the pandemic I didn't feel like it, especially if I was frazzled or anxious, and I just wanted to veg out on the sofa. Let me just forget about it, I would think to myself. Just this once.

But Josh is always keen for Shabbat. I would enter the living room and he would be fishing out the candle holders or grabbing the kippot from the shelf. He even has his favourite one now.

He's learned the word 'kiddush' and bobs his head along with the tune of the bracha.

The theme of comfort is echoed at Kol Nidre, when we open with the haunting refrain: *or zarua l'tzaddik ul'yishrei lev simcha*. Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart: gladness.

When all the lockdown days blend together, the simple ritual of lighting candles has been a constant light. Sharing it with him has been special and I am blessed that though he might not want to be part of Judaism any more than sipping wine at the Shabbat table he makes a point to help me maintain my connection. It's made me understand that our lights of connection to Judaism don't have to be big. They just have to happen.

Small lights of mitzvot can grow into bigger ones, and over time, I know I'll regain some of the normalcy I've felt to be lacking.

So here's to you, Josh, and the other interfaith and LGBT couples finding their feet during the pandemic. Let's do what we can, and not beat ourselves up or shame ourselves when we're tired or feeling run down. We are enough, and we are here. We are all lights this Yamim Noraim.

IT'S MADE ME UNDERSTAND THAT OUR LIGHTS OF CONNECTION TO JUDAISM DON'T HAVE TO BE BIG. THEY JUST HAVE TO HAPPEN.





Connection to... Community

Growing up with parents who are both Jewish and non-Jewish, I've always been drawn to communities that were religiously engaged yet inclusive. I was attracted to the Masorti movement as a teenager because of the way it blends modernity and a really deep connection with the tradition of Jewish learning, and several decades on, those are still the things I love about it today.

I adored being in Noam when I was younger, but my involvement in communal life petered out during my 20s while I concentrated on other things. More than a decade later, I decided to check out New Stoke Newington Shul when I moved into the area. I immediately felt inspired to reconnect with community life.

I love the informal atmosphere of services and the impressive level of lay leadership in the community. I also really appreciate the level of intergenerational mixing; every event seems to have people from a wide range of life stages and with lots of different experiences to contribute.

During the pandemic I've enjoyed taking part in Hebrew classes, online talks about feminism, Mildmay food bank collections and the tet-a-tet befriending scheme. Recently there was a shared Tikkun Leyl between New Stoke Newington Shul and the neighbouring community Kehilla North London – it was fantastic to get to learn with another community and to share the celebration of

Shavuot with them. It also made me appreciate the huge diversity of Jewish communities available in London, and the fact that there really is an option for everyone.

For me, being Jewish has always had a very personal, spiritual aspect, and that's something I can enjoy wherever I am and whoever I am with – I don't think that I need to be with other Jews in order to access that part of my identity. But feeling that you have a group of people with whom you do belong is really special; it's like finding an external home for the Jewishness inside you. That's something I'd wish for everyone that wants it.

Sarah Braybrooke

is a member of New Stoke Newington Shul

Connection to... Trust

Stepping into the busyness of my shul for the first time was akin to wading into the Thames against the current, or so I imagine. Quite honestly, it knocked me sideways. Where was I to fit in? Would I be able to find my path to prayer within the crowd? How could I connect with like-minded people in a meaningful way? I took a breath...and began to swim.

One of the most valuable lessons I continue to learn in life is that it's okay to start from the beginning again, even if it seems as though the work is never-ending. It is humbling, enriching and rewarding, with the moments of connection all the sweeter for the effort. And it's a 'choose your own adventure' kind of experience too: 'Shall I take this course?' 'Let's invite these people for lunch after shul.' 'How about a walk-and-talk with a new friend one lunchtime?' 'I'd love to come for seudah, thank you.'

Defining community has taken on a new dimension in the past eighteen months for everyone. Standing at this threshold in the Jewish calendar, I look to the new year with hope and a renewed sense of resilience, strong in the knowledge that, though a fledgling in the Masorti movement at the start of the pandemic, there has been space and opportunity for me to grow with energy, joy and purpose throughout these unsettling times.

For me, however, connecting with Judaism on my own terms has been an ongoing quest throughout my adulthood and, though I'm glad and grateful that I've landed on my feet in terms of this new-to-me community, both in person and online, I know this is a mere moment which is just one part of the whole journey. To return to my Thames analogy, I can't see the end of the river, but I don't need to. I trust that it knows where it's going in a beautiful, instinctive and natural way. So for now, I'll just keep swimming.

Joanna Kramer
is a member of New North
London Synagogue



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Connection to... Learning

Over lockdown I experienced a wonderful reconnection to my Judaism through the weekly 'Topical Talmud' sessions at New North London Synagogue. I grew up as a participant and leader with Noam, but after graduating I lost my connection with a meaningful community.

After activities went online last year, I found myself clicking a link that led me to a digital room of community members. We analysed fascinating perspectives, textual stories and references. I was suddenly immersed in exciting conversations and making friends from all walks of life.

I have been deeply moved by Talmud study. The process of learning has reminded me that there is always more than one answer to a question. In so much of life, be it education, work or elsewhere, there is immense pressure to give or find the right answer. This is impossible in Talmud study as there are so many lenses through which to consider the text and everyone's experience informs their reading differently.

Something dormant in me awoke during these sessions, sparked by interest, curiosity and community that had been so present during my time with Noam. Something I had been missing and craving for so long returned: spiritual questioning, search for meaning and connection with community. I did something spontaneous in joining the Talmud classes and with that step I have reconnected with values and a community that have given me a sense of belonging, feeling like a part of something larger than myself.

Nina Fine
is a member of New North
London Synagogue



Connect with our communities

THESE EVENTS ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE. WE'D LOVE TO HAVE YOU JOIN US!

Basic Judaism Classes

Whether you're new to Judaism or are looking for a greeting understanding of things you've done your whole life, these in-depth sessions taught by Rabbi Roni Tabick are for you.

*New Stoke Newington Shul, Mondays at 8pm,
rabbi@nsnshul.org.uk*

Cooking with FEAST

Volunteers cook together at New North London Synagogue with leftover produce and supply 80 meals to a homeless shelter.

*New North London Synagogue, Wednesdays,
volunteer@feastwithus.org.uk*

Masorti LGBT+ Network

The Masorti LGBT+ Network is a welcoming group that meets for social events, workshops and more, celebrating LGBT+ identities in a Masorti Jewish context.

lgbt@masorti.org.uk

Jewish Community Organising Course

Learn the skills to build and contribute to a strong Jewish community with leaders from across the Masorti community.

*hello@masorti.org.uk,
masorti.org.uk*

The Minor (Mighty) Prophets

Delve into the world of the Minor Prophets with Rabbi Natasha Mann. These short biblical books are packed with history, poetry, philosophy, and storytelling.

*New London Synagogue, Mondays at 6.30pm
newlondon.org.uk*



Zohar Study Group

Join Rabbi Adam Zagoria-Moffet for a close look at the Zohar, the masterpiece of medieval Jewish mysticism. No prior experience or knowledge needed.

*St Albans Masorti Synagogue, selected Mondays at 6.45pm,
info@e-sams.org*

New London Synagogue Salon: Intelligent Discussion For Our Time

A weekly space in which one of the New London clergy invites a guest of interest for a public conversation, followed by a chance to take questions.

*New London Synagogue, Wednesdays at 6.30pm
newlondon.org.uk*

Hebrew: Language Of Law

Learn Hebrew through the study of texts of Halakhah (religious law). A great opportunity to expand vocabulary and practise reading and translating for intermediate students.

*St Albans Masorti Synagogue, selected Sundays at 6.30pm,
info@e-sams.org*

The Ethical Life: Jewish Values in an Age of Choice

Learn how Jewish ethics can inform our discussions and decisions about the critical questions of the day. Taught by Student Rabbi Anthony Lazarus Magrill.

*New North London Synagogue,
mynnls.org.uk*



Visit our website to learn about our communities across the UK, register for social, educational and cultural events and explore articles and videos about all aspects of Jewish life.

Stories From The Masorti Judaism Community



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www.masorti.org.uk

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