



# Kehillah קהילה

Community magazine

THE WIMBLEDON SYNAGOGUE

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## From the Student Rabbi

In March, it was my wife's birthday. Knowing that we were going to be spending a lot of time together under lockdown in a small flat, I bought her a two-player card game called Jaipur. Set in an exotic marketplace, we are each a trader trying to stockpile precious metals, spices and silk. The spindles of silk, though, with protruding wooden handles, look just like Torah scrolls, and we will normally say, "I'm going to sell three Torah scrolls."

I miss using a physical Torah. On the one hand, being able to 'read Torah' without going to all the trouble of learning the vowels and cantillation by heart makes life a lot easier. On the other hand, it makes me lazy - I do one, maybe two, run-throughs on Thursday and Friday and then I'm all set - and I miss the physical sensation of rolling the parchment around, finding the right place, knowing that generations of previous rabbis and lay-leaders have done exactly the same thing to exactly the same object.

Torah scrolls are great works of art. The *Keset ha-Sofer*, a book of Jewish law about the rules for producing a Torah, says, "Even if, after the work is done it makes no difference to the writing, we consider it necessary to write using a fine quill." You might think you write just as well (or just as badly) with a biro as with a Parker Pen, that the one is a completely adequate substitute for the other, but the *Keset ha-Sofer* suggests that there may be differences we haven't noticed.

Life as a student rabbi under lockdown has shown me what a difference is made by many things I'd never really

considered before. "Me, leading a service over Zoom, isn't so different to me leading a service from a bimah," I thought. But then I realised that many things are missing. The one-on-one kiddush chats, hearing about people's children and grandchildren and holidays - remember when people used to have holidays? The travel - I miss my spare Friday afternoons in Manchester or Cardiff, having an explore, going to a food market, visiting a museum.

And the Torah scroll itself. At the end of the Torah service, we sing Hashiveinu: "Chadeish yameinu k'kedem, renew our days to how they were in earlier times."

In normal times, we never mean that line literally. Our lives always change week-on-week, year-on-year, and that's a good thing. But when the change happens far too fast - when our lives have changed immeasurably from how they were just weeks ago - we remember how things used to be. And we can be forgiven, at the end of our virtual Torah service with no Torah

scroll, for meaning it literally. A full return will never be possible, but we must hold fast to a belief that we will all meet again, we will use our physical scrolls again, we will have our kiddush chats again.

And in the meantime, as a rabbinic student privileged to be working with Wimbledon Synagogue, it's my job to use the nicest pen I can under the circumstances to craft the best Jewish life we can have for ourselves right now.

*Gabriel Kanter-Webber*

