



ORDINATION ADDRESS

Rabbi Gabriel Kanter-Webber, Sunday 3 July 2022
The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

- 1 Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, who spent the 16th century leading communities from Egypt to Italy to Poland, said:¹ “When we fail to explore the mysteries of our Torah, when we say, ‘Lions of learning have already dealt with this,’ we are doing wrong.” And he added: “If you really want to benefit those who come after you, have some opinions and write them down in ink.”
- 2 But, of course, in order to be able to have some opinions, one first needs some education. And during my time at Leo Baeck, I have encountered some true lions of learning. From the very start of semester 1, when Chani taught me leyning – which revolutionised my connection with holy texts – and Colin passed on his nerdy fascination with binyanim, to the combined efforts of Laliv, Neil, Tali and Mark on the Rabbinic Literature team, my teachers have been filling me with a yearning to leave Leo Baeck... in the best possible



way, that is, a yearning to get out of the Sternberg Centre and do Judaism in the world beyond.

- 3 It is only thanks to these lions that I have been able to navigate and access vast treasuries of biblical and rabbinic literature previously inaccessible. And consequently, as everyone connected to Leo Baeck well knows, I've been only too happy to have some opinions of my own, and to write them down.
- 4 I've also been privileged to be able to offer pastoral and practical support to members of our community who have come under attack, sometimes criminal attack, from the wrong sort of lions, the fierce sort; friends and colleagues and congregants who have been assailed for daring to express themselves.
- 5 Everybody who engages their God-given mind and uses it to formulate an opinion should feel Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi standing, approvingly, behind them as they do so. It is my fervent hope that, by the end of my rabbinate, we will be closer to an Anglo-Jewry which values all viewpoints, respects the Divine spark in each of us,



and eschews the all-too-common silencing, bullying behaviour which is designed to intimidate British Jews – especially women, converts, young people and those who are LGBTQ – from participating in communal discourse. A time when Jewish institutions stand up for their members against the intolerant and the fanatical.

- 6 Closer to home, I will truly miss studying with my four classmates, but I know that we will continue to be a close gang for years to come.

- 7 My wonderful wife Manuella, of course, has been a huge support in accepting the bizarre lifestyle of a rabbinic student, and has perfected the skill of picking up and using random Talmudic phrases. **הבו לי בסרא**?² My parents have always supported me as well: I've taxed my mum's skills in Yiddish translation and even tempted my dad into shul on occasion! Admittedly my beautiful son Omri's only real contribution so far has been nibbling on various



sacred texts – but as God said to Ezekiel: “Feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll.”³

- 8 Thanks are also due to Rabbi Danny Rich for his three-plus decades of service as the Webber Family Chaplain.
- 9 Final gratitude has to go to Leo Baeck’s senior management team, who, whether present or absent today, have kept me on my toes throughout my time at the College, and I hope, and fully expect, that I’ve done the same for them.

¹ Ma’asei Adonai: Ma’asei Torah 31 (Parashat Balak)

² b.Kiddushin 70a

³ Ezekiel 3:2 (with thanks to Rabbi Mark Solomon for pointing out the relevance of this passage)