



SCoJeC's Government Funding Increased

SCoJeC's funding from the Scottish Government Equality Fund has been increased by more than 25% for 2015-16, in clear recognition that we have more than delivered on our undertaking to contribute to "real and positive outcomes for people and communities in terms of promoting equality and addressing discrimination, prejudice, and inequality".

It also signals their understanding of the evidence in our original *Being Jewish in Scotland* project and the current follow-up on *What's changed about Being Jewish in Scotland?* which were funded by the Scottish Government's Community Safety Unit, and have shown the need to address the increasing isolation and alienation of many Jewish people in Scotland, and the ignorance and even animosity of many in public life.

SCoJeC Director Ephraim Borowski said: "We are delighted that the Scottish Government has again recognised the value of our work both within and on behalf of the Jewish Community, and has so significantly increased its support, particularly in the current economic climate. SCoJeC has earned the trust of our funders by consistently delivering on our commitments, and we welcome their commitment to developing safer and stronger communities, and to combatting hatred and discrimination, and look forward to working with them to continue to support vulnerable members of our community."



'Third Seder' in Inverness

The Jewish Network of the Highlands hosted a well-attended explanatory 'Third Seder' that provided an opportunity for Jewish people from Inverness and further afield, to get together to mark the festival of Pesach.

Linda Martin from Lochaber, SCoJeC's Voluntary Ambassador to the Highlands and Islands, organised and cooked for the event, while also making emergency arrangements for tourists unexpectedly stranded in Oban without any matzah. Other participants brought seder essentials such as chrain (horseradish and other bitter herbs), charoset (a "mortar" paste of grated apples, nuts, and wine), and hard-boiled eggs, and helped to set out the tables, serve, and clear away after the festive meal.

Vintage seder plates and bowls provided the focus for the annual retelling of the familiar story of the exodus from Egypt, as everyone crunched matzah, drank wine or grape juice, dipped the karpas vegetable into salt water, and listened to the children sing the *Mah Nishtanah*, the four questions that trigger the annual recital of the Haggadah.

Rounding off the event, Kathryn Kusa, from Findhorn, gave a beautiful rendition of *Let my people go*, and Kathleen Hagler, a Holocaust survivor living in Inverness, led a stunning and heartfelt *Echad mi yode'ah?* (Who knows one?) that concluded a great celebration.

"It was a truly memorable occasion to see so many people with varied Jewish attachments, identity, and interests, gathered together for this traditional event in the Jewish calendar," said one participant.

Another echoed these sentiments: "It was a lovely event. I really enjoyed being there. The dinner was delicious, and the atmosphere friendly and welcoming."

Biblical Women

SCoJeC teamed up with Scotland's ethnic minority umbrella organisation, Bemis, to facilitate a pre-Purim interfaith Bible study at which Daniel Taub, the Israeli Ambassador to the UK, spoke about the similarities and differences between the biblical heroines Esther and Ruth: both narratives take place primarily outside the land of Israel; neither explicitly refers to divine intervention; but Esther lives in the royal court while Ruth has to beg. As a lawyer, he was particularly interested that it is the ancient Jewish laws that farmers must leave gleanings for the poor that save Ruth from starvation and lead to her marriage, while Esther has to find a way to bypass the unalterable "laws of the Medes and Persians" in order to prevent Haman's planned antisemitic genocide.

Thanking SCoJeC and Bemis on behalf of the guests from the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, the Free Presbyterian Church, and the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Rev Stuart MacQuarrie, Glasgow University Chaplain, said, "*Esther and Ruth are remarkable women who speak to our shared humanity. They tell us of how together we can create conditions in which humans are able to flourish. Esther's and Ruth's purpose in life was for each to be herself, the person God called her to be – not to be someone else, but for each to be herself.*"

Bemis Chief Executive Rami Ousta referred to the long-standing and close links between Bemis and SCoJeC, adding "Bemis was pleased to assist in facilitating this important event aimed at promoting peace and positive community relations."

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The
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of Jewish
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THE UMBRELLA REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATION
OF ALL THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND





SCoJeC INTERFAITH REPRESENTATIVE, ALAN KAY, WHO IS ALSO THE HON SECRETARY OF INTERFAITH SCOTLAND, AT THE LAUNCH OF ISLAM AWARENESS WEEK 2015

Celebrating Diversity; Condemning Racism

SCoJeC sent a message of support to the launch of Islam Awareness Week 2015:

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes the opportunity to extend its support to Islam Awareness Week 2015, and particularly to its theme of "Give a little of yourself", which is common to both our faiths. We support all efforts to promote better understanding between faiths and communities, and utterly repudiate the mindless stereotyping and xenophobia that ultimately affects all of us. We are pleased to join you to celebrate the diversity of the threads in the Scottish tartan, and firmly believe that unity in difference is what holds society together.

We also sent a message to the STUC annual march against racism, islamophobia, and antisemitism, emphasising how hate crime affects everyone who shares the group identity that made the victim a target.

Freedom & Commitment

TALYA SILVER

"Let my people go!" became a rallying cry of the civil rights movement and was even set to catchy music by Paul Robeson. But somehow no-one ever seems to quote the second half of the verse, "that they may serve Me."

You might think that counting the seven weeks of the Omer is a reflection of our eagerness to move from matzah to cheesecake, but the commentators see Shavuot as the culmination of Pesach, even going so far as to call Shavuot the 'last day' of the Passover festival. Pesach is known as "the time of our freedom" but the Sages describe the Exodus as the transition from Egyptian slavery to serving G-d, a concept that is at odds with the Western conception of freedom as lack of constraints.

Yet this definition of freedom lacks something vital. In his book, *Fear No Evil*, Natan Sharansky describes how he and other refuseniks defied the KGB's attempts at mind control. He tells of tortures, both physical and psychological, in conditions where prisoners were denied the most basic of human rights – yet it is clear to anyone reading his book that he remained proudly free throughout his incarceration.

An artist engaged in the liberating act of creation does not feel unconstrained and unobligated. There is a compulsion to express, to dig deep and create. Freedom is not mere absence of coercion, but the removal of barriers to expression of, and connection to, the truth. Expression of the deepest ideals of the self, commitment to the truth; this is the Torah's idea of freedom.

The Sages liken freedom to the engraving on the Tablets we were given at Sinai. Non-erasable, not existing merely on the surface, but carved into the substrate itself, engraving can be seen as the supremely committed form of writing. On Shavuot we received not only a system of Law, but an understanding of what it means to be free.

SUMMER CALENDAR

Shavuot

Sat night 23 May (after Shabbat) till nightfall Mon 25 May

Fast of Tammuz

Sun 5 July (dawn till nightfall)

The "Three Weeks" between the Fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av are a time of mourning for the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 586 BCE, and the second by the Romans in 70 CE.

Fast of Av (Tisha b'Av)

Sat night 25 (dusk before end of Shabbat) till nightfall Sun 26 July

"Welcome to our Shul!"



SCoJeC's range of educational resources will soon include a series of short films in which young people from each of Scotland's Jewish communities give guided tours of their synagogue, and explain what it means to them. The resource is being produced in response to requests from teachers who told SCoJeC's new Education and Community Development Worker, Zoe Jacobs, about the lack of materials to support learning about Judaism, particularly where distance makes it impractical for their schools to visit a synagogue, and it now has the support of Education Scotland.

The new films will shortly be available in the **Resources** section of our website. For further information, contact zoe@scojec.org.

ABOVE: FILMING IN ABERDEEN SYNAGOGUE



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