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**COMPELLING COMMITMENTS**  
**A NEW APPROACH TO LIVING**  
**AS A LIBERAL JEW**

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liberal judaism 

RABBI ELIZABETH TIKVAH SARAH

LIBERAL JUDAISM

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Compelling Commitments* has been a work in progress since I wrote my first article on the subject in 2002 (subsequently published in *MANNA*, No. 78, Winter 2003 as the *MANNA* Essay with the title, 'Bridging Choice and Command').

My thanks are due to those who participated in the study sessions I gave at the *Limmud* national conference in Nottingham (December 2002), the annual gathering of Liberal Judaism's Rabbinic Conference (November 2003), and the one-day local *Limmud* in Brighton (October 2004). The thoughtful responses I received on these occasions led me both to revise the *Compelling Commitment* dealing with God, and to change its position from Number One to Number Three.

When preparing my presentation to the Rabbinic Conference *Kallah* in November 2003, I decided to orientate the idea of compelling commitments more specifically to Liberal Judaism. This is reflected in my article, 'Compelling Commitments: A Radical Re-think of Liberal Judaism', published in *Aspects of Liberal Judaism* edited by David Goldberg and Edward Kessler (Valentine Mitchell, 2004), the anthology of essays prepared to honour the contribution of Rabbi John D. Rayner to Liberal Judaism at the time of his 80th birthday. The loss of Rabbi Rayner, *z"l*, to Liberal Judaism is immense, and I treasure the letter he sent me expressing his support for my work after he had read the manuscript of *Aspects*.

After that publication, I began developing the practical outcomes of compelling commitments, with a view to offering guidance to Liberal Jews. Special thanks are due to Jess Wood Sarah, for helping me to do this and for generating so many good examples. I also revised the presentation in order to make the essay more accessible to a wider audience. Following discussion of the draft document at the Rabbinic Conference, Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi kindly took the time to read the text carefully, and I am grateful for her comments. Finally, particular thanks are due to John Eidinow, a member of the Liberal Judaism Publications Action Group, for his meticulous approach to copy-editing, his helpful suggestions in respect of the first and last paragraphs of the text, and for offering an accessible sub-title.

## PREAMBLE: BECOMING A COMMITTED LIBERAL JEW

Liberal Judaism in Britain emerged at the dawn of the twentieth century and has been on the move ever since. *Compelling Commitments* presents a new approach to Liberal Judaism as a way of life, with a view to galvanizing individuals — both those who are already involved in Liberal Judaism and those who are not — into choosing to become committed Liberal Jews in the twenty-first century.

*Compelling Commitments* identifies three key commitments that go to the heart of Liberal Judaism:

Compelling Commitment One:

**Embracing Jewish Teaching and engaging with knowledge in the wider world**

Compelling Commitment Two:

**Sustaining the Jewish Community and repairing the world**

Compelling Commitment Three:

**The Eternal is our God and the Eternal is One**

To demonstrate why these commitments are so compelling today and what they mean in practice, I want to begin by exploring the essential core of Liberal Judaism, and how and why it has evolved during the course of the twentieth century.

## LIBERAL JUDAISM IS LIVING JUDAISM

Liberal Judaism has entered a new century. The world we live in today is not the same world that the founders of Liberal Judaism in Britain inhabited. The world they knew has been transformed by the First and Second World Wars, the *Shoah* (Holocaust), the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the development of the technologies of mass destruction; by the collapse of old empires and the rise of new tyrannies; by the explosion of consumerism and the ensuing threat of ecological catastrophe. The first exponents of Liberal Judaism in Britain could not have anticipated these horrors at the dawn of the twentieth century. They could not have imagined the widening gulf on the global arena between east and west, north and south, rich and poor. Nor could they have foreseen that British society would become utterly transformed: that the rigid class system they knew would be challenged by the expansion of educational opportunities; that women would not only gain the vote alongside men, but also that men and women would no longer inhabit separate spheres of existence, and that heterosexual marriage would cease to be the sole model

of mature adult life. Of all the twentieth century's massive upheavals and changes, perhaps the establishment of the State of Israel would have been the development that the pioneers of Liberal Judaism, envisaging the emergence of a universalistic form of Judaism, would have least expected back in 1902.

The world has changed and Liberal Judaism has also changed in response. Indeed, it is Liberal Judaism's ability to adapt and respond to contemporary circumstances and challenges that has always been one of the hallmarks of the movement. As early as 1899, writing about 'Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today', Lily Montagu declared:

*Together we must sift, with all reverence, the pure from the impure in the laws which our ancestors formulated in order to satisfy the needs of the age...*<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in one of his early sermons at a Jewish Religious Union *Shabbat* service, Claude Montefiore argued:

*Where Jewish students, or rather Jewish teachers, so often fail is that they learn the answers of past ages to past problems, but hide their ears and envelop their minds from the questions and problems of today.*<sup>2</sup>

Four decades later, Israel Mattuck, who had become the rabbi of the newly-established Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1912, wrote:

*Judaism cannot for all time be confined in a form given it in the past. It must develop as life changes and human thought grows... Judaism... was always a developing religion. Rabbinic Judaism developed out of Biblical Judaism; the Bible itself records a development of Judaism. Liberal Judaism is its latest development.*<sup>3</sup>

Since its inception in 1902 in the form of the Jewish Religious Union, Liberal Judaism acknowledged that Judaism is dynamic and changing. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, which regards the *Torah* as God's word, pure and simple, *min-ha-shamayim* - 'from heaven', Liberal Judaism understands the *Torah* as the work of human beings. That is why the founders of Liberal Judaism felt able to teach about the necessity of adapting the Jewish inheritance to meet the needs of the age. What is more, while emphasising the biblical heritage (rather than later rabbinic elaborations of Jewish teaching), they taught their fellow Jews to look not only to Scripture for guidance, but also to the insights and wisdom of all the generations of the Jewish people from Sinai onwards. And so, from the perspective of Liberal Judaism, God is neither a dictator nor a commander. On the contrary: while the Creator of the world and the Liberator of our ancestors continues to address us in myriad ways, human beings continue the creative process of making sense of our existence and grappling with the challenges of the world in which we live.

## LIBERAL JUDAISM IS CONCERNED WITH BOTH JEWISH LIFE AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

From the outset, the founders of Liberal Judaism also felt it imperative that Judaism should make a contribution to the task of creating an ethical and just society. Concern for the world has always been a feature of Jewish teaching: the Hebrew Bible begins with the creation of the earth and centres on a code of ethical living and social justice. Similarly, in both the evening and morning order of prayer, acknowledgement of God as the Creator comes first, preceding the recognition of God as the Giver of *Torah* and the Redeemer of Israel, while the concluding prayers of all three daily services express the hope that the time will come when all the different peoples acknowledge the sovereignty of the One God. However, in practice, mainstream Orthodox Judaism has been more preoccupied with ritual than with universal issues, and the formation of Liberal Judaism was in large part driven by the determination to redress the balance and put ethics at the heart of Jewish life.

Consequently, in the early decades of the movement, Liberal Judaism was, predominantly, an ethical movement. However, after the *Shoah*, the staggering loss of Jewish life — not only the loss of six million individual Jewish lives, but also the loss of thousands of Jewish communities across Europe — made thoughtful Jews everywhere more conscious of the need to maintain, develop, and transmit distinctly Jewish ways. In this climate, contemporary Liberal Judaism has actively reclaimed some traditional practices, re-fashioning them within a Liberal context.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 has also had an impact on Liberal Judaism. Liberal Judaism today regards Israel and the diaspora as equal partners in the development of Jewish life. It supports all sincere efforts towards a peaceful and just solution to the on-going conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, including the creation of a viable State of Palestine alongside a secure State of Israel. The significance of Israel's existence is reflected in the prayer books of Liberal Judaism, and in the association of Liberal Jewish Youth in Britain with the international progressive Zionist youth movement, *Netzer*. Israel's foundation, involving the revival of the Hebrew language, has also precipitated an increasing use of Hebrew words and expressions in Liberal Jewish settings.

## LIBERAL JUDAISM IS THE JUDAISM OF THE HEAD AND THE HEART

The three principal founders and exponents of Liberal Judaism, Claude Montefiore, Lily Montagu, and Rabbi Israel Mattuck, put three core ideas at the centre of their radical new agenda: that Judaism should progress to meet the challenges of the modern world; that Jews should contribute to the task of creating a just and ethical society; and that reason and intellectual integrity should be the hallmarks of the new progressive form of religion. And so, Claude Montefiore declared that 'Religion needs the mind; it needs thought and study, as well as ardour and love...' <sup>4</sup>

In the spirit of the legacy of Lily Montagu, Claude Montefiore and Rabbi Israel Mattuck, each Liberal Jew is required to think, and to re-think, to develop his or her understanding. But thinking alone is not enough. When Claude Montefiore argued that 'Religion needs the mind; it needs thought and study, as well as ardour and love...', he was not suggesting that 'ardour and love' are unimportant. As Liberal Jews today face the complex, contradictory challenges of life in the twenty-first century, including the increasing diversification of life patterns and choices, it is becoming ever-more necessary for Liberal Judaism to articulate a holistic approach to living as a Jew that acknowledges and encompasses all the dimensions of our humanity — the intellectual, the spiritual, the ethical, the emotional and the physical.

To appreciate what this means, it is helpful to reflect on a key verse from the first paragraph of *Sh'ma*, the text from Deuteronomy chapter 6:4 - 6, which observant Jews recite in the evening and morning. Addressing the Jewish people, the people Israel, the *Sh'ma* begins with the imperative: *Sh'ma Yisrael! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad* - 'Listen Israel! The Eternal One is our God, the Eternal God is One'. It then continues with this key phrase: *V'ahavta eit Adonai Elohecha b'chol-l'vav'cha u'v'chol-nafsh'cha, u'v'chol m'odecha* - 'You shall love the Eternal One your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might'.

Translation from one language to another is always tricky, and this translation is a little misleading: starting with the phrase, *b'chol-l'vav'cha*, it is important to acknowledge that within the biblical worldview, the word *leivav* denotes mind more than heart. 'With your entire mind' would be more precise.

Turning next to the phrase, *u'v'chol - nafsh'cha*, we find that in the biblical context, there is no distinction between 'body' and 'soul'. In the accounts of

Creation, related in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, the expression *nefesh chayyah* - 'living being' - is used, not only to describe the first human being (2:7) but also the living creatures (1:20;21;24): each creature, both human and animal is *nefesh chayyah*, a living being. Not surprisingly, the English word 'being' is much more nebulous than the Hebrew word *nefesh*. The physicality of *nefesh* is brought home in Genesis chapter 9, which focuses on the aftermath of the flood: previously vegetarian, after the flood humanity is permitted to eat 'flesh' - *basar* - but not to eat 'blood' - *dam* - because the blood is the *nefesh* of the animal (9:4). The *nefesh* is the stream of life that flows within each one of us, what makes each one of us palpably alive. So, 'with all your life-force' might be a more appropriate translation.

And what of *u'v'chol m'odecha*? The translation, 'might', conveys the physical energy and abundance associated with *m'od*, but because it's so familiar, we do not often pause to explore the implications of the word. The *Mishnah* (*B'rachot* 9:5) interprets *m'od* as 'wealth' (*mamon*), which suggests a concrete dimension to *m'od*. So, if *leivav* connotes the 'mind', the centre of understanding, and *nefesh*, 'life-force', connotes the pulse of life within us, *m'od*, 'might', expresses the power to act on and shape the external world around us. 'With all your energy' would be another way of translating this phrase.

The key to unlocking the significance of the use of the three words, *leivav*, *nefesh* and *m'od*, lies in the very first word of the passage - in the imperative *Sh'ma!*, 'Listen!'. The people Israel are exhorted first to listen, then to think about and make sense of what we hear, then to experience it within our whole being, and finally to **act**. In the account of the aftermath of revelation, in Exodus chapter 24, the text tells us that the people responded to Moses' reading of the Book of the Covenant by saying, *na'aseh v'nishma*, 'we will act and then we will listen' (24:7). This phrase, *na'aseh v'nishma*, has become the central catch-phrase of Orthodox Judaism. For Liberal Judaism, on the other hand, the process is reversed: *nishma v'na'aseh*. We listen first, and then we act. But it is not enough to listen, think and act. A holistic approach to religion in general, and to Judaism in particular, involves both the mind and the heart. The challenge of living as a Jew involves all of who we are — all our mind and heart, all our being, all our capacity for creativity and action. Put another way, Judaism needs us to think and also to feel — to engage the whole of ourselves, our minds, our hearts, and our creative energies.

## LIBERAL JUDAISM CENTRES ON LIBERAL JEWS MAKING INFORMED CHOICES

But Liberal Judaism is not just about what *we* do. While the text of the *Sh'ma* addresses the singular collectivity of the people Israel, ultimately it is the individual, each individual Jew, each one of us, who is challenged to listen, to think, to engage, to experience, to act. From its inception, in embracing modernity and searching the sources of Judaism for guidance rather than instruction, Liberal Judaism acknowledged the crucial role played by individuals in defining and perpetuating communal life. Unlike Orthodox Jews, who bear *ol hamitzvot*, 'the yoke of the commandments', Liberal Jews are free to choose. So, while Orthodox Judaism continued to demand compliance to Divine authority, with the dawn of the modern age, in true liberal fashion, Liberal Judaism championed the autonomy of the individual.

Rather than dictating to individuals, Liberal Judaism is rooted in the principle of informed choice - that is, the notion that individuals make choices on the basis of knowledge about how to act. But what does this mean in practice? That question has concerned me for a long time. Some years ago now, in the context of a study of 'Women and *Tallit*', I expressed my concern in these terms: 'The Progressive debate on the performance of *mitzvot* seems strangled in a false dichotomy. On the one hand, there are God's commands — the preserve of the Orthodox... On the other hand there is — "personal choice" — the privilege of the Progressive Jew... But what does "personal choice" mean? Why do individuals "choose" one practice or another... what impels me to perform this ritual and not that one?'<sup>5</sup> Since then, an even more urgent question has been uppermost in my mind: if individual Jews are free to choose, what happens when autonomous, fully 'informed' individuals decide not to make Jewish choices?

Individuals do not make 'informed choices' in a vacuum. The availability of information about Judaism plays a part, as well as personal life experience and a host of other factors, internal and external — from personal interest to the social environment in which each individual Jew lives. The central task of Liberal Judaism, as I see it, is to create a framework for Jewish life, which acknowledges that each individual Jew will make choices, and also that the choices we make are constrained by our personal dispositions and circumstances. To distinguish this framework from that of both Rabbinic Judaism, rooted in *mitzvot* (Divine commandments), and classical Liberal Judaism, rooted in the principle of



informed choice, I prefer to speak of compelling commitments, which emerge out of our continuing experience (including the on-going interplay between external and internal forces) framing the choices individual Jews make.

## COMPELLING COMMITMENTS: PUTTING LIBERAL JUDAISM INTO PRACTICE

*Compelling Commitments* is not a new *halachah* - a Liberal alternative to traditional Jewish law. The Jewish people as a whole has always focused on the practice of Judaism. For Liberal Jews, both collectively and individually, practice emerges, as I have indicated, out of a process that begins with listening and thinking: *nishma v'na'aseh* - 'we listen' and then 'we act'. What I am proposing, directed primarily at individuals making informed choices, is in the spirit of Liberal Judaism through and through. While Orthodox Judaism follows the tradition that there are 613 *mitzvot* (commandments), I would argue that from a Liberal perspective we might identify just three key compelling commitments, which constitute a framework of action for Liberal Jews today. Possessing both a particular and a universal dimension, that is a concern for Jewish life and for the life of the world, each of these compelling commitments does not spell out exactly what Liberal Jews should be doing each and every moment of the day, unlike the orthodox understanding of the *mitzvot*. It is up to each and every Liberal Jew to make choices about what to do and how to act. However, individuals might find the examples presented here helpful.

## **COMPELLING COMMITMENT ONE:**

### **EMBRACING JEWISH TEACHING**

**AND**

### **ENGAGING WITH KNOWLEDGE IN THE WIDER WORLD**

**The commitment to nurture and cultivate our own Jewish lives and the life of the Jewish people as a whole, by continuing to learn and engage with the Torah, with our Jewish stories, teachings and traditions, and by participating in the various ritual acts, which celebrate life with Jewish flavours, colours and tones.**

**And:**

**The commitment to engage with the accumulating wisdom of the world, to study and to learn about the major developments in human knowledge, and to find ways of ensuring that the developing wisdom of humanity in all its dimensions connects with and informs Jewish teaching.**

### *Examples of Embracing Jewish Teaching*

- Becoming familiar with the key sources of Jewish teaching: the *Torah*, the *TaNaKh*, and the *Talmud*
- Participating in Jewish learning programmes - at the synagogue, the Montagu Centre, Leo Baeck College, other colleges and universities, and during study days and conferences (e.g. organised by *Limmud* and Liberal Judaism)
- If you are a parent, providing age-appropriate Jewish books and educational materials for your children
- Exploring the languages of Jewish life: classical Hebrew, modern Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino
- Visiting Jewish websites for web-based Jewish learning
- Reading Jewish books, including modern Jewish and Israeli poetry and novels
- Celebrating *shabbat* and the festivals at home and in the synagogue, including lighting candles, making *kiddush*, and eating *challah*, and lighting the *havdalah* candle and smelling the spice-box at the conclusion of *shabbat*
- Engaging with the visible signs of Jewish life - for example, fixing one or more *m'zuzah* to the door posts of one's home, praying the morning service in a *tallit* and *t'fillin* for week-day prayer; wearing a *kippah* for prayer and study, lighting the *chanukkiyyah*, the special *chanukkah m'norah*, preparing a *seder* plate at *Pesach*, lighting a *yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary of the death of a loved one
- Preparing, eating, and sharing Jewish food
- Singing Jewish songs and/or playing Jewish music
- Listening to Jewish music
- Attending Jewish cultural events, such as film festivals and plays
- Visiting Jewish museums and places of Jewish interest in Britain and elsewhere in the world

### *Examples of engaging with knowledge in the wider world*

- Reading and learning about contemporary global ethical issues — for example, poverty and third world debt, human trafficking and slavery, refugees and asylum seekers, climate change
- Reading and learning about recent developments in medical science, and related ethical issues — for example, the human genome project, stem-cell research and genetic engineering
- Exploring contemporary philosophical ideas
- Engaging with all the various cultural forms and expressions, including drama, film, dance, literature, art and mixed-media

## **COMPELLING COMMITMENT TWO:**

**SUSTAINING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**AND**

**REPAIRING THE WORLD**

**The commitment to honour both those that have gone before us and those who are yet to be born, by becoming links in the chain of the generations of our people, and by maintaining, restoring and re-creating Jewish communal life in Britain, in Israel, and throughout the world.**

**And:**

**The commitment to love not only our neighbours but also the stranger in our midst; to liberate the oppressed, protect the vulnerable, and support the fallen; to pursue justice and to seek peace; to participate in the great task of tikkun olam, repairing the world.**

### *Examples of Sustaining the Jewish Community*

- Participating in congregational life
- Participating in Jewish communal life, which encompasses Jews of other denominations
- Joining a Jewish choir, and/or drama group, and/or football team, etc.
- Supporting Jewish organisations, such as Jewish Care and World Jewish Relief
- Engaging in *g'milut chasadim*, 'deeds of loving kindness', including visiting those who are ill and those who are bereaved
- Visiting Israel, keeping informed about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and supporting peace and justice initiatives and projects, as well as the organisations involved in funding and promoting them, such as the Leo Baeck Education Centre in Haifa, the Israel Religious Action Centre, and the New Israel Fund
- Celebrating personal life-cycle moments and milestones in a Jewish context — including birth, *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, *kabbalat Torah*, marriage, civil partnership, special birthdays and anniversaries

### *Examples of repairing the world*

- Becoming an ethical shopper, and buying Fairtrade, free-range, organic and local produce
- Re-cycling paper, glass, plastic, and so on
- Taking measures at home to reduce water and energy consumption, for example - by turning off the tap while brushing teeth or washing up, switching off the TV at night, only switching on lights when necessary, and using energy efficient long-life lightbulbs
- Walking rather than driving where short distances are involved, and reducing plane and car journeys by taking the train or bus, wherever possible
- Engaging in *g'milut chasadim*, 'deeds of loving kindness', including extending hospitality to strangers
- Engaging in *tz'dakah*, 'acts of justice', including supporting organisations concerned with ethical, social justice and environmental issues, such as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, the Refugee Council, Asylum Aid, Amnesty International, *Tzedek* - Jewish Action for a Just World, UNICEF, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Shelter

## **COMPELLING COMMITMENT THREE:**

**THE ETERNAL IS OUR GOD**

**AND**

**THE ETERNAL IS ONE**

**The commitment to explore the meaning of existence, to journey, search and listen out for the voice of the Eternal, who calls each Jew to become part of Am Yisrael, the People who 'struggle with God', and to strive to sanctify life each day through our actions and our relationships.**

**And:**

**The commitment to acknowledge that the Eternal is One, and to work together with all the peoples of the world to recognise the essential unity of existence in all its diversity.**

### *Examples of the Eternal is our God*

- Praying with the community and in our homes
- Creating time to study a few verses from the *Torah* portion each week, and to reflect on the connection between the God of our ancestors and what God means to us today
- Reading the prayerbooks - the *siddur* and *machzor* - at home, and forming a personal connection with particular prayers and blessings
- Reading the Psalms and/or other spiritual poetry
- Creating time for personal reflection
- Creating time to be with the most significant people in our lives
- Pausing before eating or enjoying anything else with our senses to acknowledge the gift we are receiving

### *Examples of the Eternal is One*

- Finding out about other peoples' faiths and religions - including those that are not mainstream, such as Native American and Australian Aboriginal spiritual approaches
- Engaging in dialogue with people from other religions and faith communities, for example, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Bahais, including the adherents of the different denominations within each tradition
- Creating opportunities to be in nature, and/or to grow plants, herbs, flowers, and/or vegetables
- Appreciating and/or engaging in fine art and crafts
- Appreciating and/or engaging in music
- Listening to the 'still small voice' within ourselves and being attentive to that voice in others
- Endeavouring to treat ourselves and everyone we meet as individual images of the Divine
- Trying to make the most out of each day

## EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE

Liberal Judaism has a vital role to play in ensuring that Judaism continues to live and flourish in the twenty-first century. At the centre of Liberal Judaism as a movement lie the congregations, which are dedicated to creating, maintaining and developing living Jewish communities wherever there are enough interested liberal minded Jews around to sustain Jewish communal life. It is individual Jews' choosing to engage and live as Liberal Jews — at home, in the synagogue, in the community, in the world — that makes Liberal Jewish life possible.

Ultimately, the future of Liberal Judaism depends on each and every one of us. I offer *Compelling Commitments* as a framework for enabling individuals to embrace that challenge.

Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS (Alphabetical order)

<i>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</i>	Son/daughter of the Commandment ( <i>bar</i> is Aramaic for ‘son’; <i>bat</i> is Hebrew for ‘daughter’). Traditionally, boys at 13 and girls at 12 become responsible for living a Jewish life. Within Liberal Judaism, both young Jewish women and young Jewish men become <i>bar/bat mitzvah</i> at thirteen
<i>Challah</i>	Bread eaten on <i>shabbat</i> and festivals from which an ‘olive’-sized piece has been taken and burnt - in remembrance of the offering of bread made on the altar in Temple times
<i>Chanukkah</i>	Dedication. Eight day festival, involving the cumulative lighting of candles - or wicks floating in oil - day by day, celebrating the re-dedication of the Temple (desecrated by Antiochus IV) in 164 BCE
<i>Chanukkiyyah</i>	The name given to the nine-branched candlestick, based on the <i>m’norah</i> (see below), lit to celebrate <i>Chanukkah</i>
<i>G’mara</i>	Completion (Aramaic). The commentary on the <i>Mishnah</i> (see below) by the succeeding generations of sages
<i>G’milut Chasadim</i>	Deeds of loving kindness. A key <i>mitzvah</i> (see below)
<i>Halachah</i>	The term used to describe Jewish Law, based on the Hebrew root, <i>Hey Lamed Chaf</i> meaning, ‘walk’ or ‘go’
<i>Havdalah</i>	Distinction. Ceremony at the end of <i>shabbat</i> that marks the ‘distinction’ between <i>shabbat</i> and the six working days
<i>Kabbalat Torah</i>	Receiving of the <i>Torah</i> . Ceremony involving fifteen/sixteen year olds, marking the completion of a period of post- <i>bar/ bat mitzvah</i> study
<i>Kiddush</i>	Sanctification. Blessings over wine on <i>shabbat</i> & festivals
<i>Kippah</i>	Dome; cap. Hebrew word for a skullcap
<i>Ladino</i>	Mediaeval form of Spanish, including Hebrew, spoken by Sephardi Jews - Jews whose ancestors settled in Sepharad (Spain)
<i>Machzor</i>	Cycle. Name for the Festival Prayerbook
<i>M’norah</i>	The seven-branched candlestick lit by the priests in the Sanctuary during Temple times
<i>M’zuzah</i>	Doorpost. The box placed on the doorposts of the home containing the first two paragraphs of the <i>Sh’mā</i> : Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deut. 11:13-21 (see below)
<i>Mishnah</i>	Another term for ‘Teaching’. The first post-biblical code of law containing the teachings of the first rabbis, edited c.200CE
<i>Mitzvah/mitzvot</i>	Commandment(s). Word used originally in the <i>Torah</i> (see below) to designate the laws commanded by God and binding on the people of Israel
<i>Pesach</i>	Passover. Seven day festival celebrating the Exodus from Egypt

<i>Seder</i>	Order [of the Telling] of the story of the Exodus on the first night of <i>Pesach</i>
<i>Shabbat</i>	The name given to the 'seventh' day that denotes the cessation of work
<i>Sh'ma</i>	Listen. Derived from the first word of a series of three <i>Torah</i> passages: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deut. 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41, which constitute the liturgical text known as the <i>Sh'ma</i>
<i>Shoah</i>	Devastation. The word chosen by Jews to describe the Holocaust (a word meaning 'burnt offering')
<i>Siddur</i>	Order. Name for the Sabbath & Daily Prayerbook
<i>Tallit</i>	Shawl worn for morning prayer, to which are attached <i>tzitzit</i> 'fringes' (see Numbers 15:37-41 - the third paragraph of the <i>Sh'ma</i> )
<i>Talmud</i>	Learning. Name for the combined work containing the <i>Mishnah</i> (see above) & <i>G'mara</i> (see above). In two versions: <i>Talmud Bavli</i> (Babylonian) c. 500 CE, and <i>Talmud Y'rushalmi</i> (Jerusalem) c. 400 CE
<i>TaNaKh</i>	An acronym for the Hebrew Bible, which falls into three parts: <i>Torah</i> (Five Books), <i>N'vi'im</i> (Prophets), and <i>K'tuvim</i> (Writings)
<i>T'fillin</i>	Rabbinic name for the leather straps & boxes worn on the arm and head for daily morning prayer, which contain related <i>Torah</i> texts, e.g. the first two paragraphs of the <i>Sh'ma</i> (see above)
<i>Tikkun Olam</i>	Repair of the world.
<i>Torah</i>	Teaching. Denoting both the 'Five Books of Moses' (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and the whole of Jewish teaching
<i>Tz'dakah</i>	Acts of Justice ( <i>tzedek</i> ). The Jewish form of charity
<i>Yahrzeit</i>	Yiddish word denoting the 'anniversary' of a death
<i>Yiddish</i>	1000 year-old vernacular Ashkenazi Jewish language written in the Hebrew alphabet with a Germanic grammar and a mixed Germanic, Slavic and Hebraic lexicon

- 1 Published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1899.
- 2 Entitled 'Religious Education'. Undated - c.1905-7.
- 3 *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 140. First published in 1947.
- 4 'Religious Education' *ibid*.
- 5 'Wearing my Tallit: Thoughts on the hidden agenda'. *In Women and Tallit*. Working Party on Women and Judaism, RSGB, London, 1987, p. 27. Second edition, with a new introduction by Dee Eimer and Elizabeth Sarah, published in 1997.

## BIOGRAPHY

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah studied Sociology at the London School of Economics (BSc. Soc. 2:1, 1974-77) and Rabbinics at the Leo Baeck College in London (1984-89) where she received *s'michah* (ordination) and was awarded a distinction for her rabbinic thesis (40,000 words). Prior to her rabbinic studies she engaged in research, writing and editing. Since ordination she has worked as a full-time congregational rabbi (Buckhurst Hill Reform Synagogue, 1989-94), as Director of Programmes for the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain and Deputy Director of the Sternberg Centre (1994-97), as Chair of the Leo Baeck College Rabbinic In-Service Training Team (1996-2002), as a lecturer at LBC in 'Classical Hebrew' and in 'Spirituality' (1997-2002) and as a free-lance rabbi, including a part-time congregational appointment at Leicester Progressive Jewish Congregation (1998-2000).



Currently, in addition to her role as rabbi of Brighton & Hove Progressive Synagogue (2000-), she also remains a rabbinic tutor at the Leo Baeck College (1994-), and is now the lecturer on 'Liberal Judaism' (2005-). Having served on the Liberal Judaism Rabbinic Conference Working Party on Same-Sex Commitment Ceremonies, she is currently chairperson of the Liberal Judaism Publications Action Group.

A writer, Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah has edited three books and contributed over three dozen articles and several poems to various journals and anthologies. She also teaches and lectures in many settings on a variety of topics and has delivered three conference sermons and four conference 'key-note' lectures.

An active feminist for more than thirty years, her passions include: Classical Hebrew; biblical study; celebrating Jewish life; creating new *midrashim* (interpretations), prayers and rituals; ethical action; doing what she can to make Jewish life more inclusive; and helping to build bridges between different faith and ethnic communities. She has participated in a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue Group for the past thirteen years and is a supporter of a variety of campaign groups including the Refugee Council, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, Stonewall, and the Jewish Council for Racial Equality. She is also a member of the UK Friends of Rabbis for Human Rights, which campaigns on behalf of Palestinians.

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