



new london
synagogue



The Really Important Thing In Which to Believe

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard and supported us so warmly as we celebrated Shavuot together this past week. As the last of the cheesecake crumbs are swept away, my mind moves from Year-cycle to Life-cycle.

As a Shul we will be celebrating seven weddings in the eight weeks between end of May and end of July. That's a remarkably wonderful 16 people, supported, celebrated and danced into married life together. And, with this week, we begin a run of thirteen Bnei Mitzvah celebrations in the seventeen weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah. That's a run which includes, if you will forgive a moment of self-indulgence, my own daughter's celebration on 29th June.

Perhaps more than any kind of theological demand, religious Judaism really requires a belief in ritual. Ritual is designed to carry us from one zone of our existence to the next. The Mezuzah on the door, gently draws our attention to what it means to cross liminal space. Shabbat candles draw our attention to the a transition from work to rest. The transition of one year to the next is marked with Shofar call and sweetness. And lifecycle celebrations – and even lifecycle ritual around death – holds us, draw in our attention and carry us from one stage of our existence – or that of our fellow human beings - to another.

I have a great love for the way that Hebrew roots unfold in so many interconnected ways scattering meaning as they do so, but every now and again there is an English word that does something that, even!, Hebrew cannot manage. "Observe" is such a word. I am an observant Jew. I hope you are too. "Observe" carries both the sense of commitment to ritual pathways but also, the ability to see what can so easily be overlooked. These things are absolutely interconnected.

To be observant means more than a bare observance of ritual. It means to feel – to see – ritual demarcate transitions - as spring turns to summer, as first infatuation turns to committed love, as child turns into adult. I believe in the power of ritual to reveal these moments that could so easily pass us by. To stop, to commit ourselves to marking both the tiny and the dramatic increments of life in the company of a community of fellow travellers is, I believe, at the very heart of what it means to be a member of this extraordinary social, thinking human species. The privilege of being able to mark these moments as a Jew is extraordinary. I welcome your company as we continue to commit ourselves to this work.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy