



new london
synagogue



New Beginnings and Facing the End

Thank you to all who supported and joined the AGM held on Monday. I'm delighted to share that Miriam Lennard (nee Futter) was elected the new Chair of the Synagogue. Our new Council, including those whose term continues and new electees, is made up of Archie Baron, Joe Carlebach, Andrew Hirsch, Brian Linden (treasurer), Tony Norton, Michael Ottolenghi and Emilie Szasz-Frank. Thank you all, We will be co-opting an additional member to Council with that announcement to be shared shortly. Mazal Tov.

On Wednesday night we hosted a remarkable event; two Professors, one Bishop and an Imam walk into a Synagogue. That's not the start of a dubious joke, but our discussion on Assisted Suicide. The conversation can be viewed [here](#).

I remain deeply concerned by the prospect of the proposed legislation passing, not because I am blind to the claims made by the Bill's supporters, but because I do not believe either of the two principle 'safeguards' proposed have any chance of being taken seriously. As senior consultant, Professor Jules Wendon, who lead the NHS's intensive care response to COVID shared, she is "rubbish" at predicting when people are going to die. She also professed no competency at assessing whether or not a vulnerable person at the end of life is capable of making decisions free of coercion.

As Professor Julian Hughes noted, editor of an extraordinary survey of the many issues involved – The Reality of Assisted Dying, Judges do not have a record of understanding coercion and neither legal nor medical experts have the time, training or expertise to engage with the levels of care and precision the legislative framework assumes will be possible. Professor Hughes also reported on the experience of the jurisdictions that have passed similar legislation in ways that haunt me. The book cites a study from Belgium suggesting that 1.6% of deaths by euthanasia fail to record correct consent procedures – a figure of over 1,000 deaths a year. On the other hand, the aspect of end-of-life that seems most feared by many of those with whom I speak – extreme pain – is simply not a medical expectation. There is a lack of sufficient palliative care and hospice provision in this country, but that will not be solved by this legislation, indeed the international experience, as shared by Professor Hughes, is that palliative funding falls after passing this kind of legislation. We are at risk of a radical coarsening in the attitude we take towards life, and the life of the vulnerable most of all. I've cited no religious texts or principles in this account of my concerns. Of course our religious tradition values life deeply, but it also have a deep desire to remove suffering and pain when un-necessary but, I believe, those values can and so often are lived out within the current legislative framework. They are deeply threatened by the prospect of change.

I am in touch with our local MP in The Cities of London and Westminster on the issue. I urge all members – even those who take a different view, which I understand and respect – to seek to understand further and engage with our democratic representatives who will be debating this issue on 28th November. To allow our further consideration as a community, please join me for the short adult education series – Facing the End of Life, Thursdays 28th November and 5th December.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Jeremy