had doubts that this was the right career for him. On arrival in Edinburgh, he quickly became aware that he had come to a 'warm, friendly and supportive' community. However, he was very conscious of his youth – he was only 27 years old. To the inevitable comments that 'he is awful young' came the answer 'so he will get older'. He soon came to appreciative the predominantly older community and realised the necessity of combining age and youth. He regarded the older members as 'young at heart' and found his own age to be a distinct asset in communication. There is, however, no doubt that the ease with which he establishes relationships is mainly attributable to his own very relaxed and easy-going personality.

Due to the dedication of the small band of part-time teachers, Rabbi Sedley found a well-run *cheder* and capitalised on this by encouraging children to enjoy attending. He maintains that Jewish education should be both fun and interesting and that this contributes to making Judaism a positive learning experience. Keen to extend this to all age groups, the Rabbi organises classes in *Gemorah* and *Halacha*, brings speakers to *Melave Malkas*, teaches pre-and post-*Barmitzvah* boys, conducts innumerable school and adult groups round the Synagogue and is heavily involved in all facets of a small but very active community. Modern technology has resulted in computer presentation of regular *Shabbas Parsha* sheets and with Alit, who is responsible for the design, he has prepared a web-page on the Synagogue. On top of all this, he has recently obtained an MA in Education from the Open University. Whenever he has time for relaxation, he is fond of music, especially rock, and plays the guitar. Alit settles for pop music – she is an avid reader and for some time has been employed part-time in telemarketing for a courier company.

Sadly for Edinburgh, Rabbi Sedley has been offered a position as Rabbi of Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Synagogue in Leeds and he will take up his duties there in May. A much larger congregation and attendant clergy will inevitably result in a different emphasis in his work, allowing him to pursue further avenues which are of particular interest to him. He insists that he has gained considerably from his stay in Edinburgh and that this experience will benefit him greatly in Leeds. He will certainly be missed. The Edinburgh Star wishes the Sedley family good luck and much happiness and thanks them most warmly for their contribution to the well-being and success of our own small and invigorating community.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH

In this issue, we continue our occasional series with two very contrasting accounts.
The Editor would be very pleased to receive further contributions from readers

Rabbi David Sedley

Before beginning this article I must stress that these are my personal views. It is not my intention to agree or disagree with any of the other opinions which have been previously expressed in this magazine, but merely to provide food for thought. 'What it means to be Jewish' is a topic which I have great difficulty writing about. Not because of difficulties in defining 'who is a Jew', which has become a political issue rather than a theological one. We can safely take the standard Talmudic definition of a Jew as being someone who is born Jewish, or converts to Judaism, and leave the politicians and different branches of Rabbinic authorities to work out the precise details of that definition. However, being 'Jewish' is something more than 'technically' belonging to the Jewish religion. It seems to me that we must distinguish between Jew-ish and 'Jewish'. Half of New York is probably Jew-ish, based on the number of kosher-style restaurants, and the amount of bagels which are consumed daily. Half of Hollywood is Jew-ish if we go by the credits of any movie.

The reason that I find it difficult to write about being Jewish is because it is so much a part of who I am that I cannot imagine being anything else, and it is almost impossible to define something without recourse to contrast with an alternative. Another difficulty in defining what it means to be 'Jewish' is that our society, and particularly our language and concepts, are based on a Christian viewpoint. Whenever we talk about ideas such as 'faith', 'goodness' or even 'God', we often have to make a conscious effort to distinguish between the Jewish meaning of these terms, and the way it is used in the vernacular. In truth being 'Jewish' for me is not about philosophy or dogma, but about actions. Paul Johnson writes that "Judaism is not so much about doctrine – that is taken for granted – as behaviour; the code matters much more than the creed." To this I would add the famous Talmudic dictum that it is better to fulfil the commandments for the wrong reasons, for through this one will come to fulfil them for the right reasons. In other words, even if doctrine cannot be taken for granted, it will follows from one's actions and lifestyle.

In my experience philosophical discussions very rarely lead to direct action or making life changes. And to my mind, being 'Jewish' is about actions. The Talmud states that, since the destruction of the Temple, God only has the four cubits of

Halachah (Jewish Law). That means that creating a connection with God – finding spirituality – is achieved not through meditations or studying *Kabbalah*, but through fulfilling the commandments. Unlike other religions, Judaism is not even primarily concerned with the 'Big Commandments', such as belief, or Synagogue attendance, but rather with the small details. Ours is virtually the only religion that governs every aspect of life, and everything we do throughout the day. On everything from waking up in the morning, to eating, working, sleeping or speaking, there are books of laws to tell us how to act. Some of these laws are from the Torah, some are Rabbinic, and some are customary, but each of them reminds us constantly that we are 'Jewish', and gives us a direct connection to God and spirituality. Even the most mundane acts are thus translated into acts of worship.

Someone who has never experienced my definition of 'Jewish' will not be able to imagine finding spirituality in the minutiae of Jewish law. When I tell people about the myriad laws that comprise Judaism they ask incredulously how it could be possible to keep all of these laws? Others take the position of 'Does God really care about the details?'. To which the answers are 'No, we don't have to do the impossible – just try our best', and 'Yes, he does!'. To me being 'Jewish' without recognising the importance of Jewish law is like having a bagel without the *lox*. It may be Jew-ish, but it is not the total package.

Ruzena Wood

Most Jews are born Jewish. Converts achieve Jewishness. And doesn't everybody occasionally feel overwhelmed by the challenges of a Jewish identity? What about those 'wicked sons', not quite identifying with *Pesach*? But there is always a place for them at the *Seder* table. Judaism recognises the need to grow. Following a pilgrimage of their own, our teenage rebels may yet return to the fold. Diverse patterns illuminate our Jewish experience, not all of them of our own choosing.

I was not born Jewish. Yet, here I am, a convert to reform Judaism 'by profession of faith'. Asked casually how I came to be joining in that richly tapestried tune *etz chaim hi* along with everyone else, I try to think of a reply that is neat, logical and compatible with small talk: 'You know my father was a Professor of Hebrew'.

The truth lies elsewhere in time, requiring a different perspective. My father's devotion to Christianity and my own conversion to Judaism both represent attempts to create a better environment in the face of adversity. Always have been, ever since the Garden of Eden or, at least, since Abraham loaded tents into the landrover and left town. It was my father who, initially, made Judaism accessible for me.

The real story begins a couple of generations before I was born, in Glasgow in the 1920s where my paternal grandfather, Joseph, worked long hours in a grocery store. He hoped his fourteen year old son, James, might one day go to university, the dream of every poor family. Joseph had a heart attack and died and James left school. As a surveyor's apprentice, James supported his mother and two younger sisters and, as time went by, fended off his violent step-father with a poker.

James Wood graduated from Glasgow University with an MA in Philosophy and Political Economy. But, no longer believing that politics and economics offered the ultimate hope to mankind, he headed for Mansfield College, Oxford to read Theology. Ordained as a Congregational Minister in Macclesfield, Cheshire, James studied part-time at Manchester University, obtaining a degree in Semitic languages under professor Paul Kahle, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany.

One cold, wet day in 1939, my Dad encountered two men in *chassidic* garb. The men were ringing all the doorbells in the street , asking if there were any refugees from Nazi Germany who needed assistance. My Dad invited them in, the men hesitated, no doubt anxious about *kashrut*. They came in and the three men sat round the fire.

I was too young to remember the family from Germany who moved in with us. News reached us that the outspoken anti-Nazi Pastor, Friedrich Niemöller, had been arrested in Germany. My Dad contrived to send a letter of support to Mrs Niemöller which, quite remarkably, reached her. Months later, a reply was slipped through our letter box, delivered by hand. We never found out who delivered it.

The British Government informed us that my dad had been proscribed by the Nazis – the British had intercepted a 'hit list'. We were offered places on a ship going to Canada but my parents decided not to emigrate – a good thing, as it turned out, because the ship was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic and sank.

My Dad was struggling with a duodenal ulcer and subsisted almost entirely on milk. I can recall seeing him, hunched over the table, studying Hebrew texts. The square letters did not talk to me. I had a picture book of my own, all about God making the world and I used to wonder why it referred to 'fowls of the air' rather than 'birds'.

When I was four years old, things began to go wrong. I was diagnosed 'spastic' and both my legs were set in plaster at Stoke Orthopaedic Hospital. When I got rid of the steel callipers, my legs were so thin that I fell with unfailing regularity. The road to school was unpaved and covered with heavy brown gravel – probably industrial waste left over from the now silent silk mills. Every time I fell, I just sat there and bawled. This was too much for my Dad who told me 'When you fall, tell God what happened immediately and get up!'.

We moved to Aberdeen in 1943 and stayed until 1947 when the Scottish Congregational College in Edinburgh offered my Dad the post of Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. A series of books followed, my favourite being *Job and the Human Situation*. My own interests lay else where – friendly with other youngsters, including Jewish children, I was interested in music and the theatre.

Until 1950, when I decided to become a musician, my main interests were teaching myself Greek and exploring traditional Czech culture. I cherished one Czech characteristic: a defiant, gritty compassion which suffuses some of the finest Czech writing. Sadly it is rare and getting more so - Capek is not an example of this but Joseph Wechsberg, a Czech Jew from Moravia, is. The hypersensitive observation in his partly autobiographical *The Cooking of Vienna's Empire* is an enchanting essay in nostalgia. Gradually it occurred to me that there were too many Jewish connections for it to be a coincidence. I know now that this compassionate vein has its roots in Yiddish culture and traditional Judaism and was at home in the *shtetl*.

As a student at Edinburgh University, Jewish anthologies (largely aimed at the American market), liturgy and poetry injected a degree of kashrut into my compulsory reading of English Literature. I came to realise that post-war Christianity was trapped between an apologetic lack of confidence on the one hand and an increasingly hostile secular establishment on the other. I was more attracted by the vigorous interactive confrontations of Judaism. Abraham arguing, and arguing. Jonah sneaking off on a package holiday to Nineveh and getting more than he had bargained for. Christianity seemed to offer the Creator a diminished role in his own production, our world. It became more than I could tolerate.

I relied on Jewish friends. The Czech Jewish conductor, Walter Susskind, had me listening to so many rehearsals of the Scottish national orchestra that, after graduation, it was a natural progression from the Usher Hall to the National Library of Scotland where I became music archivist and creative consultant. And then, in 1981, the Hungarian-born, Jewish publisher, André Deutsch, published my anthology of Czech folk tales, *The Palace of Moon*. What I appreciated most about both these two men, Walter and André, was their ability to meet me half way. They were encouraging.

Health problems, and responsibility for my mother, now in her nineties, have made it impossible for me to mark my spiritual journey with a formal conversion to Reform Judaism, so far. Rabbi Hugo Gryn took a very positive view of my difficulties. He referred to Psalms 116-118, which include references to converts in the time of King David: 'the ones who fear the Lord'. 'As he put it 'You have to say you are Jewish and if anyone doesn't think you are, that is their problem'. That was compassion from the Carpathian mountains.

In January 1986, a member of the Community invited me to the Literary Society to hear a talk from the cookery writer Claudia Roden. The next *Shabbat*, I attended morning service. Like 'The Man who came to Dinner', I stayed.

Just a few months ago, a visitor returned to *Shul* after a few years working abroad. Recognising me, he exclaimed innocently, 'Are you still here?'. His expectation was clearly that I would have given up and gone away. I paused to give him a beaming smile and then replied 'How else could I study?'.