

Article taken from [www.liberaljudaism.org](http://www.liberaljudaism.org) following the Montagu Centre's formal accreditation to the Living Wage, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2013

### Liberal Judaism: the First Synagogal Movement to Become Living Wage Accredited

Liberal Judaism has become the first synagogal movement in the UK to receive official accreditation as a Living Wage employer. This means that everyone employed by the central movement is paid at least a Living Wage.

The Living Wage Foundation, which administers the accreditation, recognises that the UK's minimum wage is not enough to live on, and sets a new standard wage which must be paid in order for a worker to support themselves and their family. In the UK the hourly Living Wage is set as £7.65; in London it is £8.80. This is in comparison with the current UK minimum wage of £6.61, which makes no allowance for geographical variations in the cost of living.

Liberal Judaism is now encouraging all of its constituent communities to achieve accreditation in their own right; many of them are already very advanced in this process. The movement's accreditation comes as part of its collaboration with Citizens UK.

Commenting on the accreditation, the chair of Liberal Judaism's Rabbinic Conference, Rabbi Charley Baginsky, said: "Liberal Judaism has always seen itself as inheriting the work of the Prophets and social action is therefore at the heart of this. However, like the Prophets we are very clear that we have to play an active role in transforming vision into reality; ideology is meaningless without its accompanying action. Ensuring that we are a Living Wage employer is just one step in a long journey towards helping to build a better world for all its inhabitants."

## [Living Judaism, Living Wages – Rabbi Richard Jacobi](#)

Liberal Judaism's self-proclamation as the heir to the social justice ideals of the prophets cannot be achieved by words alone, it requires action. That action can be taken by you, yes you, dear reader, as well as by your synagogue and by our national movement.

There are those who argue that the concept of 're-distribution of wealth' is no longer relevant. There is more evidence to support the case that societies fracture when the gap between the richest rich and the poorest poor grows too extreme. Our Judaism surely must be concerned with healing society and preventing such fracturing. When I attended the parliamentary reception to mark Living Wage Week in November, I heard some shocking facts and some inspiring ones. One shock was that since the National Minimum Wage was established in 1999, it has risen from £3.60 per hour to £6.31. If the National Minimum Wage had risen at the same rate as the pay of the directors of Britain's top 100 companies, the Minimum Wage would now be £19 per hour!

One clear focus for Liberal Judaism, which is entirely in keeping with our purpose of contributing to the betterment of society, is to ensure that anyone from whose work we benefit is paid a living wage. Internationally, the FairTrade kite-mark has become well known for assuring us of this. Until recently, there was no similar way to know who in this country was receiving a living wage. Citizens UK and The Living Wage Foundation have been campaigning with increasing success to change this. Liberal Judaism and its synagogues support this campaign, and I would hope every Liberal Jew will too.

The Living Wage nationally is calculated by the Centre for Social Policy at Loughborough University and is currently £7.65 per hour. The London Living Wage is currently £8.80 per hour, and is set by the Greater London Authority. Both rates aim to enable an employee to achieve a basic but acceptable standard of living, something we would see as totally in keeping with the teachings of Judaism. One of the key laws of the 'Holiness Code' that we read every Yom Kippur afternoon relates directly to the wages of a hired servant, which must be fair and paid on time (see Leviticus 19:13). Maimonides set the highest level of tzedakah (meaning social justice) as being to enable someone to earn a living.

As of November 2013, 432 employers have committed to be Living Wage Employers and the number is growing increasingly rapidly. Liberal Judaism has participated in events and actions designed to encourage other employers, such as Premier League football clubs to improve their community relations and reputations by following suit. National and international companies report increased productivity and commitment following from their decisions to pay the Living Wage. This is not just from the staff on that pay rate, but from others who feel more proud of their company! The Living Wage

is a voluntary commitment for employers, one which we see as morally and ethically right, as well as economically justifiable.

By next May, when our movement gathers for its Biennial Weekend, we aim for our headquarters and all synagogues to be Living Wage employers. It would be even more wonderful if every single Liberal Jew could say that anyone and everyone who is paid to provide goods and services directly to you receives the Living Wage - if you have a cleaner or care support in your home, ask the local authority or the agency that provides them to pay them a living wage. It's only just!

Rabbi Richard Jacobi

## Letter to Tottenham Hotspur regarding the Living Wage – Rabbi Lea Mühlstein

Tottenham Hotspur FC  
FAO Donna Cullen (Executive Director)  
Bill Nicholson Way  
748 High Rd  
London  
N17 0AP

Northwood, 14 February 2014

Dear Ms Cullen,

I'm writing to you regarding the living wage campaign by Haringey Citizens with the request that you accept their invitation to meet with you to discuss Tottenham Hotspur FC becoming a champion for the living wage.

As a Rabbi, I embrace the Bible's requirements on how one should treat labourers. In Deuteronomy 24:14, we are instructed to treat workers with justice: "You shall not oppress a hired labourer that is poor and needy, whether they be of your people or of the strangers that are in the land within your gates." Jewish tradition recognizes the importance of wages to a worker's sustenance. In the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metzia 112a), we are taught that, "one who withholds an employee's wages is as though he deprived him of his life." Based on these and other Jewish teachings, rabbis and members of the Jewish community advocate measures which would assure that every worker willing and able to work receives a wage which makes possible a decent standard of living.

The minimum wage has been dubbed the 'poverty wage' because it is so grim to live of it. The 2012 Living Wage report of the Greater London Authority (GLA) shows that for all 14 household types analysed in the report, the national minimum wage is insufficient to cover basic living costs unless all relevant tax credits and benefits are claimed. Further, the research shows that even if all relevant tax credits and benefits are claimed, a lone parent working full-time at national minimum wage does not earn enough to cover basic living costs thus forcing these families into poverty despite the fact that the parent is working full-time.

In contrast, the living wage would allow a person working full-time to rise to the poverty line, rather than be perpetually stuck below it. The great Jewish philosopher Maimonides teaches us that we have the responsibility not only to feed the hungry and provide basic necessities for those in need, but also to ensure that those in need

are able to become self-sufficient. Raising the minimum wage to a living wage would allow families currently living in poverty to attain a decent standard of living.

When Mayor Boris Johnson announced the Living Wage in 2010, he said: 'I am determined to ensure that London remains an international, diverse, competitive and socially cohesive city. The capital relies on the work of many who carry out the city's essential functions on a daily basis – from office cleaners to care-workers in social services. It is right that their skills and commitment to London's success are recognised, and one of the most fundamental ways of doing this is to ensure that all Londoners are paid properly. That means receiving at least the London Living Wage, which is designed to combat poverty and also ensure that people are better off in work than out of work.'

I hope that under your leadership, Tottenham Hotspur FC will become a champion for the living wage, because, as Mayor Johnson stressed in the above mentioned speech, "the success of the London Living Wage depends on the extent of its acceptance by employers. There are huge benefits to employers and society of implementing the London Living Wage and today I urge all employers in the capital to follow the GLA's lead and pay a fairer wage."

I therefore urge you to accept Haringey Citizens invitation to discuss the matter further during the upcoming Living Wage Week.

Yours sincerely,

Rabbi Lea Mühlstein

Dear Members and Friends,

The weather was definitely unpromising as I left home for Tottenham Hotspurs Football Club on Wednesday afternoon.

A group of about 100 people, including children from a local school, the youth movements of Liberal Judaism, Reform Judaism and Masorti Judaism, as well as a small collection of Rabbis, assembled in the Roman Catholic Church of St Francis de Sales opposite the Club to listen to a number of presentations on the Living Wage Campaign before crossing the road to present 100 letters to Tottenham Hotspurs, asking them to be the first football club in the UK to subscribe to the Living Wage Campaign. This would mean that those who are in low paid, minimum wage jobs would receive a salary allowing them to live without having to top up their weekly pay with benefits. This is a club which probably pays their top players per day the equivalent of an average annual salary in this country.

One of the speakers was a young man, Habib, born in Malaysia and now doing his A-Levels in a Sixth Form College in West London. 'I have always been passionate about business,' he told the audience, 'but with university fees at £9,000 per annum, it's going to be difficult to find the means to continue studying.' As well as his school work, he works seven days a week, and told us that he hadn't been to bed earlier than 2.00 am for weeks, taking on menial and often rather degrading jobs at a minimum wage. It is the only way he can hold on to the hope of further education.

The Living Wage Campaign is about fairness, humane employment practices, welfare of employees and the mutual obligations between employer and employee. *Gedolah mal'achah she-m'chabedet et b'alehah* – 'Great is work, for it confers dignity on those who do it' says the Talmud (*Nedarim* 49b). For that reason, says Rabbi John Rayner in his *Principles of Jewish Ethics*, 'it should be an aim of social policy as far as possible to provide employment or all who are able to work and wish to do so.'

Earlier on this year, the staff of a large department store celebrated a 17% bonus for its staff as they shared a £200 million bonus pot. But according to a report on the Living Wage Campaign's website, 3000 of their cleaning staff had no share in the bonus and were simply there to 'clean up after the party.'

That is why Citizens UK – an alliance of Synagogues, Churches, Mosques and community organisations, ‘unlocking the power of civil society’ – is encouraging Liberal Judaism and others to get involved in the Living Wage Campaign. And that is why my bike and I stood outside Tottenham Hotspurs on a very wet Wednesday afternoon with local community leaders, head teachers and others to state very simply that work is a way of regenerating areas like Tottenham, ensuring that people are paid a wage that allows them to live with dignity and not have to choose between enough food to eat and their winter heating bills. <http://www.citizensuk.org/> That’s me in the orange jacket, soaked to the skin standing under the sign for Tottenham Hotspurs with my Liberal colleagues, Rabbis Sandra Kviat, Janet Burden and Lea Mühlstein, and Sam Grant, Tom Francies and Bethany Stone from LJY-Netzer.

Tonight there is a tweet from a Millwall supporter saying: ‘Please don’t let Spurs become the first living wage football club.’ Let’s hear it for all employers in the UK who don’t subscribe to a Living Wage – the race is on!

Shabbat Shalom,

Alexandra Wright