



ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation



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עלונים

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Chanukah Issue



ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
December E-lonim	Thursday 23rd November	
Jan/Feb Alonim	Monday 18th December	Tu b'sh'vat/ Purim (notices about)
February E-lonim	Thursday 25th January	
Mar/Apr Alonim	Monday 19th February	Purim/Pesach

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This version of the newsletter has been prepared for use on the synagogue website.


For reasons of personal security, all contact details, dates and times have been removed.

Also all photographs, articles of a personal nature, references to children etc.

ALONIM Contributions & Editorial Policy.

The editorial policy is to encourage contributions from all Synagogue members and  ALONIM readers, concerning any aspects of communal and Jewish life, including advertisements of forthcoming events, cultural and communal reviews, information concerning synagogue activities, letters and feedback, and articles of Jewish cultural and religious interest.

Typically, contributions that fit on one side of A4 are preferred, and PC format submission is particularly appreciated by e-mail.

The editor will NOT print anonymous or unattributed articles. Contributors are asked to be aware of the need to protect the copyright of others. Opinions expressed in  ALONIM do not necessarily reflect those of the synagogue Council or the Editor.

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Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

One night I took a boat out on Lake Tanganyika at the time of the full moon. As the moon rose I motored along a shining stream of reflected silver light towards it, like a great ball of light on the horizon. The lake reached out ahead of me along the great African rift valley but I knew that, though invisible in the darkness, the shore was close on either side.

Now we are heading towards our minor festival of *Hanukkah* and I think of its twin themes; of the oil which lasted for seven miraculous days more than was considered possible; and the few warriors who defeated the many, which was considered unlikely. The optimism these themes bear in common is that God will provide, that Divine intervention will make the limited means serve their enhanced purpose, that human beings can do more if our will echoes God's will.

The militaristic overtones and overt nationalism of *Hanukkah* may sit awkwardly in our assimilated psyche, yet we all know that there is a pride to our Jewishness today which was probably lacking a hundred years ago. No longer are we ever likely to tolerate being told to dig our own graves and climb into them meekly to be shot. Nowadays we would resist, refuse, protest, fight back!

We are far too aware of the disasters of our history to want to ignore the story of the Maccabees, who waged a successful campaign of guerilla warfare to drive the Assyrian troops of Antiochus Epiphanes out of Jerusalem and liberate the Holy Land from the Greek culture which had gripped it. Though

few, and not trained as regular soldiers, the Jewish fighters were determined and were fighting to free their homeland, defend their families and liberate their faith from corruption. Forced to eat the meat of pig, bow down to idols and even worship a human being, naturally this was sufficient to cause a Jewish revolt. Do the decadent excesses of our own time warrant any protest, I wonder, or are we glad to join in, wallowing in our equality, allowed to participate in anything and everything, even though we are still Jewish?

It is perhaps easier to head towards the blaze of our *Hanukkah* candles, its symbolism rather safer. Energy efficiency is fashionable these days and the idea of spinning out fuel and making it last longer is surely going to be much more popular than the images of Jews fighting successfully in self-defence. The Talmud tells the tale of the small cruse of oil giving light to the Temple *menorah* for eight days though it was only enough to last for one. Ah! If only modern engineers could do the same with power stations and motor cars! Darkness lies on either side; poverty and waste, pollution and prejudice, ignorance and superstition. To live a Jewish life means heading towards the light, keeping on the pathway of understanding and tolerance, heading towards the brightness of a future clarified by teaching, learning and thought. We need to spin the wick much finer! This is the inspiration of *hanukkah*

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry



The recent war between Israel and Hizbollah resulted in many tragedies on all sides of the conflict. Most of these were shown in graphic images; the rubble of destroyed buildings; parents holding a dead or wounded child; soldiers carrying their dead comrade in arms. One of these many tragic events was the death of Uri Grossman, a young idealistic Israeli soldier and son of the celebrated writer David Grossman. David Grossman belongs to the group of left-wing Israeli writers such as Amos Oz, who are patriotic but not fearful of criticising the Israeli government. Three days before the death of his son, Grossman publicly called for Israel to instigate a cease-fire. His non-fiction book, 'the Yellow Wind', highlighted the feelings and views of Palestinians in the occupied territories and prophetically forewarned of the second intifada. His fictitious work, 'See Under: Love' is a remarkable vision of a young child growing up in Jerusalem and trying to make sense of his grandfather's holocaust experience, a process that still deeply penetrates the Israeli psyche.

I know little of Uri Grossman other than that, like his father, he shared this independence of spirit and critical mind-set. He was not afraid to challenge the orders of his commanders if he felt they were not justified but nor did he hesitate to protect Israeli citizens from Hizbollah rockets aimed indiscriminately at civilian targets. It takes little courage to criticise Israel from the safety of Bristol, where you can eat out without fear of being killed by a suicide bomber; where, as you kiss your children goodbye for school, you do not fear them travelling on the bus. It takes real courage to live with such danger every day of your life, but still defend your nation and speak out when you feel that the ends do not always justify the means. This eulogy is, for me, more than just a truly moving account of a father son relationship.

Yoav Ben-Shlomo

✧ ✧ ✧ Excerpts from the article by David Grossman ✧ ✧ ✧

On Uri

My beloved Uri, during all of your short life we all learned from you. From your strength and your determination to follow your own path. To follow it even if there is no chance that you will succeed in it. We followed with wonder your battle to get accepted to a tank commanders' course. How you would not give in to your commanders, because you knew that you could be a good commander, and you were not prepared to be

content with giving less than you are capable of giving. And when you succeeded, I thought, here is a person who knows his abilities in such a simple and intelligent way. In whom there is no pretense and no arrogance. Who is not influenced by what others say about him. Whose source of strength is within himself...

And today we are hearing from your friends and your soldiers about a commander and



friend, who would wake up before everyone in order to organize everything, and go to sleep only after everyone had dozed off...

You were the leftist in your battalion, and they respected you because you stood by your opinion without giving up any of your military tasks. When you went out to Lebanon, Mom said what she was most afraid of was your "Eliphelet syndrome." We were very much afraid that like Eliphelet in the song, if it became necessary to rescue someone who was wounded, you would run right into the line of fire, and you would be the first to volunteer to bring a supply of ammunition that had long run out. And just as you were your whole life, at home and at school and in your military service, and just as you always volunteered to give up a furlough because another soldier needed a furlough more than you, or because his household was in a more difficult situation - that is exactly how you would act there, too, in Lebanon, in face of the difficult fighting...

At this time I am not saying anything about the war in which you were killed. We, our family, have already lost in this war. The State of Israel will now make its own reckoning of conscience. We will huddle into our pain... I fervently hope that we will know how to give one another this love and solidarity at other times as well. This is perhaps our most unique national resource, our greatest national spiritual treasure.

I fervently hope that we will know how to be more tender toward one another. I fervently hope that we will succeed in extricating ourselves from the violence and hostility that have seeped so deeply into all aspects of our lives. I fervently hope that we will know how

to straighten up and save ourselves now, at the very last minute, because very hard times still await us.

Uri was a very Israeli child; even his name is so Israeli and so Hebrew. He was the essence of Israeliness as I would want to see it. The Israeliness that has almost been forgotten. The Israeliness that is sometimes considered almost a curiosity. And he was a person with values. This word has been much eroded and has been ridiculed in recent years, because in our crazy, cruel and cynical world it is not "cool" to be a person of values, or to be a humanist, or be truly sensitive to the other's distress, even if the other is your enemy on the field of battle. But I learned from Uri that it is indeed both possible and necessary. That we indeed need to preserve our soul. To defend ourselves in both senses: both to protect our life and to preserve our soul. To insist on defending it from simplistic might and simplistic thinking, from the corruption that lies in cynicism, from the pollution of the heart and the scorn for human beings that truly represent the biggest curse for everyone who lives his whole life in a disaster zone like ours.

Uri simply had the courage to be himself, always, in every situation. And finding his precise voice in everything he said and did is what protected him from the pollution, corruption and shriveling of the soul...

by David Grossman

(taken from the Haaretz website www.haaretz.com)



I have just read a challenging article by Jonathan Freedland in the Jewish Chronicle entitled “Don’t we want to save the Planet?”

When I first saw this article I groaned inwardly and thought it would be dry and uninspiring. How wrong I was. It challenged me and I wonder if it challenges anyone else.

At the time of writing this, we are still in the season of the High Holy Days; this of course is a time for personal reflection and a time of challenge for our lives. In his article, Freedland wishes that Rabbis would decree that congregations should attend a showing of a documentary film called “An Inconvenient Truth”. This film shows Al Gore, the former Vice President and Democratic candidate (at least winner of the popular vote) in the 2000 election with George W Bush. In this film Gore, through travelling, gives an illustrated lecture on climate change.

Freedland states that the film, surprisingly, is far from boring. “Instead it is one of the most gripping, most affecting films you’ll ever see. Calmly and clearly, Gore, aided by some hi-tech visuals, walks you through the ABC of global warming. He explains what it is, what’s causing it and what threat it poses to the entire human race”.

The challenge to us is how to manage our lives when we consider environmental issues in such hum drum everyday matters, as when we drive our cars, fly away on package holiday—even when we ignore the minutiae

of our lives by leaving the TV set on ‘stand by’ or the home PC in ‘sleep mode’.

In the film Gore sees this “planetary emergency” not as a political issue, but a moral one. Freedland goes further and says it is for religious Jews a religious issue.

So what as Liberal Jews should be our standpoint and can we individually and corporately do more?

In Liberal Judaism’s ‘Principles of Jewish Ethics’ by the late Rabbi John D Rayner we are urged to exercise stewardship. Rayner quotes Psalm 115.6, which states that humanity is God’s ‘steward’ responsible for all that the earth contains. Also, further quoting from the Psalms, this time Psalm 19.2 it is argued that we should abandon our tendency to think of nature as existing only for the benefit of humanity. We should as the Psalm declares exhibit humility and reverence for the environment. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork”. So at this season of atonement let us examine ourselves and see how we can combat the decline of our ever-diminishing resources for ourselves and future generations.

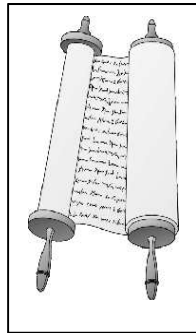
Bernard Price



Sidra Ki Tetze (Deut. 21.10 - 25.19)

From the 72 Commandments in this Sidra, Kate Withers selected three passages which refer literally to agricultural situations. They can however be generalised to other contexts and it is in that sense that we debated how we should regard them.

The first passage [Deut. 22.6-7] tells us that when finding a mother bird sitting on eggs or chicks, we must let the mother go but take the young "that you may fare well and have long life." Was this a general commandment or did it only apply if the alternative would be starvation?



We were very troubled by the Talmudic story of Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah, who lost his faith after he saw a boy fall to his death while climbing to a nest as his father instructed. This incident raises many questions:-

- Was the death a punishment or an accident?
- Had the boy or the father sinned?
- If the father sinned why should the boy suffer?
- Compare the response of ben Abuyah (on seeing someone else suffer) to that of Job (to his own suffering).

Is this a commandment whose purpose we cannot understand, and if so what attitude should we take?

The second commandment we considered was about etiquette in vineyards and

cornfields [Deut. 23.25-26]. The rule here is that one may take sparingly and for immediate need but not greedily or for long-term catering. It may also depend on the relationship, to the landowner, of the visitor passing through the crops.

- Would the owner wish to extend hospitality regardless of need?
- Is the passer-by destitute and entitled to sustenance regardless of the wishes of the owner?
- Are these rules directed at employees e.g. reapers, to indicate an equitable relationship between the (wealthy) employer and the (poor) employee? This could be an extension of the commandment not to muzzle the ox treading out your corn.

The third commandment we discussed is that, having collected the main harvest (of grain or fruit) one should not go back for anything which has been dropped or missed; these are for the stranger, the orphan and the widow [Deut. 24.19-21]. The overall effect of these and similar commandments appears to be regulation of the dilemma between providing charity for those who have no other resource for survival, while restraining those who (while capable of independence) "freeload" off the work and forethought of others.

Those who have more must have thought and make provision for those who (of necessity) have less. But that must not mean indulging and encouraging the greed and selfishness of the (self-appointed) freeloader.

David Gilbert.



Nativity

(The exiled Shekhinah will come again to redeem the feminine.

The Shekhinah mediates between God and humankind.)

The Chinese staff nurse

And the Jamaican ward orderly

And the Irish theatre porter

All had a dream on Christmas Eve:

A divine baby girl would be born next day in Maternity Ward E.

Sharon Levy was rushed in after midnight

From her Euston bedsit.

Blood everywhere.

“We must have got the date wrong,” said the midwife ruefully,

Holding the groaning girl’s hand.

Her Arab boyfriend had left her five months back.

In St John’s Wood Mr. and Mrs. Levy were still arguing.

“No daughter of mine, Rosalie...”

“What can you do? It’s a love-child, Monty. Have a heart.”

Sharon’s baby arrived very quickly, howled,

And fell silent on her mother’s breast.

“She’s determined to live,” remarked the house-doctor.

“I had this strange dream—” said Sharon, sitting up in bed.

“Yes,” said the staff nurse, and the ward orderly,

And the Irish porter who came in specially to see her.



The Jewish Christmas Day volunteers

Kissed the child on the forehead.

“A little Maccabee!” joked Simon the rabbinical student.

“Then maybe the North Sea oil won’t run out,” said Ruth from LSE.

Camden Single Mother’s Group sent in grapes, nuts and raisins.

The baby slept peacefully.

Sharon dozed, dreamed, stared out of the window:

Tried to foresee the next thirty years.

Mrs. Levy arrived late that evening, frowning.

“Your father doesn’t know I’m here.”

Held the baby’s tiny, strong fingers.

“She’s a beauty, Sharon. Looks just like you.

Poor little thing. But I dare say you’ll be as headstrong as your mother.”

“And grandmother,” said Sharon.

Visiting time was soon over. Lights out.

“Is she coming again?” murmured Sharon drowsily

On the borders of a dream.

Written by
Alix Pirani

MODERN YIDDISH

Modern Yiddish covers the period roughly from 1750 to the present day. Sadly its future does not look encouraging but it may continue to exist amongst Hassidic communities. Should it finally die out, it will be very difficult to resurrect - as has been the case with Cornish, last spoken in 1777. Various groups have tried to revive the language but in vain.

Like English, Yiddish had evolved as a *Mischsprache* (a mixed language) - having a Germanic basis but absorbing vocabulary according to location and time. This had become very evident in the evolution of western and eastern Yiddish dialects, yet both retained a Germanic basis of 70-75%.

The western Yiddish dialect had died out but Yiddish was to return to western Europe following migrations in the 19th century spreading into the UK, North and Latin America, Palestine and even Australia. However these migrations involved the eastern Yiddish dialect - the western dialect continued to thrive only in Alsace. Also at the end of the 18th century the Hassidic movement had evolved with an emphasis on spontaneous expression which valued the use of the popular language and as a result the tales of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav were written in Yiddish as were the legends concerning the movement's founder, the Baal Shem Tov.

The pinnacle of modern Yiddish was expressed by Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) though initially his writings were in Hebrew

and Russian. Later he was to advocate Yiddish as a national Jewish language and spent much of his personal fortune to encourage other Yiddish writers. He produced two issues of "The Yiddish Popular Library" (*Die Yiddische Folksbibliotek*) to encourage and publicise other young Yiddish writers - sadly this was discontinued after 1890 when he lost a fortune on the stock exchange and at the same time had contracted tuberculosis. I still think his classic line is:-

"No matter how bad things get, you got to go on living, even if it kills you"



. Before the Second World War, Yiddish was spoken worldwide by 11 million people. In 1948 Stalin started purges, suppressing Yiddish cultural life. Yiddish authors and writers were executed as late as 1952. Yiddish newspapers, magazines, institutes and theatres had been banned since 1948. The largest group of Yiddish speakers lived in Eastern Europe until the Holocaust when tragically Nazi genocide destroyed most of Europe's Jewish population and the bulk of Yiddish speakers.

Sadly, today the prospects for the language do not seem good. Certainly there is increasing interest among Germanist academics because of the Middle High German basis - something of a linguistic time capsule - similar to Icelandic as a remnant of Old Norse. But ghettos as such no longer exist. Certainly there are areas with a large Jewish population such as NW London but there is no need for the youngsters of Edgware or Stanmore to speak to each other in Yiddish when they get



together at weekends. As a young Belgian girl said "Yiddish has become a language of grandmothers" - there is a tendency to wish to discard the past. Hopefully the language will continue amongst Hassidic communities - mainly in the Clapton and Stamford Hill

districts of London - but even here, since the language is spoken for domestic use in an urban environment, much of the rich Yiddish vocabulary of the rural Stetl dweller has been lost.

Malcolm Rawles

☆ ☆ ☆

And a Yiddish Joke

☆ ☆ ☆

A goy hot amol gefregt a yidn "Far vos iz dos, as yidn zaynen azoy klug?" Makht der yid : Shayikh zogn klug? Es iz faran kluge goyim oykh" Entfernt der goy : Take emes-nor yidn,nit kleyn kluge, hob ikh nokh nit gezen. Volt ikh vein visn, vi azoy zaynen di yidn azoy klug?" Zogt im der yid: "Ikh vel dir oys-zogn dem sod; mir yidn hobn oysgefunen tsvishn ale fish eynem,vos er iz b'teve zeyer a kluger; un dem fish ess mir, un take fun dem maykhl nemen mir zikh on seykh!"

Hot der goy genumen betn dem yidn, er zol im zogn, vos dos is far a fish, nor red tsu der van.

Der yid hot afile nit gevelt hern fun dem. Nortsum sof hot er gezogt azoy; Farshteyt dokh. az aza sod ken ikh, dir nit oys-zogn, vorem du vest dokh oys-zogn andere goyim, un es vet vern a softsu undzere yidisher khokhme. Nor eyn zakh ken ikh dir yo ton; kum tsu mir tsu mittog, vel ikh dir gebn esn a shtik fun yemen fish, vestu oykh klug vern; nor umzist ken ikh dos nit ton,du vest muzn batsoln far darfar a rubl mit fuftsig kopikes."

Der goy hot sikh afile a bisl a krats geton hintern kragen, nor er iz maskim geven; es iz dokh vert tsu vern azoy klug vi a yid!

Oyf morgn iz er tsu der rikhtiger tsayt gekumen tsum yidn. Er hot sikh gezetst bay'n tish un der yid hotcim darlangt a shtikl gefilte fish. Dergoy hot batsolt dos gelt un hot gegesn mit gros tayve un mit groys kavone. Az er hot shoyng hot opgegesn, fregt ihm der yid, vi azoy es gefelt im der fish. Zogt der goy;"Dos shtikl iz ernes gut, nor fundestvegn a rubl fuftsig kopikes iz a bisl tsu tayer far aza shtikl"

Makht der yid: "Aha! Du zest - es virkt shoyng!"

A gentile once asked a Jew: "How come Jews are so smart?" Said the Jew: "Smart Eh? There are clever gentiles as well." The gentile replied: "Quite true but I have never seen a Jew who wasn't smart. I would like to know why the Jews are so clever." The Jew says to him: "I'll tell you the secret: We Jews have discovered one fish among all fish which is by its nature exceptionally smart, we eat that fish and acquire wisdom from it."

The gentile began to ask the Jew to tell him which fish it was: but the Jew would hear nothing of it.

Finally the Jew said: "You must understand that I can't reveal such a secret to you, otherwise you'll tell other gentiles and that will be the end of our Jewish wisdom. But I'll do one thing for you: I'll give you a piece of that fish so you'll become wise too. I can't do it for free however, so you must pay me one rouble and fifty kopeks".

The gentile scratched the back of his neck a bit, but he decided it was worth paying so much to be as clever as a Jew. Next day he arrived at the appointed time and sat down at the table where the Jew set a portion of gefilte fish before him. The gentile paid his money and ate with great gusto. When he'd finished the Jew asked him how he'd enjoyed the fish. "That piece of fish was certainly good," replied the gentile, "But I reckon a rouble fifty is a bit steep for such a little helping." "Aha!" Cried the Jew, "You see- it's working already!"

Translated by **Malcolm Rawles**



My visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau



I am a strong supporter of Israel and its right to exist. Now after a recent visit to Poland I am even more convinced. Why? Well as anyone knows who has taken a holiday or trip there it is almost impossible to avoid a guided tour to Auschwitz/Birkenau and so it was with my wife and myself when we recently visited Krakow.

Our visit was on perhaps one of the hottest days you could imagine. The approach alone to the site as one drives towards Auschwitz conjures up pictures of the many innocents who were transported there, as the rail tracks are still very much in evidence.

As one enters through the famous gates inscribed "work will make you free" a shiver travels down one's spine. It is as if you can sense the voices of the dead screaming out for justice.

In fact the site seems strangely serene. Intermingled with the watchtowers and electric fences there are Poplar trees and well-

clipped grass areas. However, I detected no birds or their song. The place reeks of injustice to mankind.

As one sees the displays of human hair, suitcases, with names and address labels of people from all over pre-war Europe, then you see photographs in the corridors, the faces of past inmates, men, women and children. The faces of the children in particular jumped out at me: Young boys and girls apple-cheeked smiling at the camera, not knowing what awaited them. That is until the SS stopped photographing and just tattooed inmates.

You see museum display cases of prosthetics containing such items as false limbs, and surgical corsets, shoes and tins of polish, tooth brushes etc but again it was the display of children's clothes which I found particularly poignant.

Then it is but a short ride away to the more utility-like Birkenau, with its bleak Nissan style huts, with the three tiered bunks and primitive toilet facilities. All very heart-wrenching.

There are also the inevitable tourist souvenirs for sale at Auschwitz, which I found





questionable, but then again it has been a world heritage site since 1946, and has served to act as a constant reminder of 'mans inhumanity to man'. It should remain as a factual reminder for every generation of why Europe lost its Jews and why Israel was a necessity. It was virtually impossible for those who survived to stay in Europe having lost home, livelihood and suffered rejection from their former friends and neighbours. Israel was the future, and for many this still remains true.



Bernard Price

Festival of Succoth :Lev 23:43 (all citizens in Israel shall live in booths) “ in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt”.

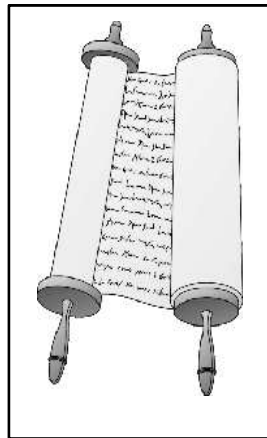
The discussion, led by Derek Brown, centred round the Succah. He began by quoting the differing views of Rabbi Akiva, that the Succah was a literal “booth” of the kind used on the journey out of Egypt, and of Rabbi Eliezer, that the Succah was a “cloud of Glory”. So the Succah, being a flimsy structure, built to be portable for the journey across the wilderness as much as to provide shelter, is a reminder of our vulnerability before the forces of Nature that we ignore at our peril. At the same time it represents the protection against the vicissitudes of life that Adonai gave the Israelites during the Exodus.

So the Succah is a reminder of our wilderness days, where our people grew to adulthood on a journey that brought them away from the shackles of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. A journey that is symbolic of each one’s “journey of the soul”.

The Prophets saw the desert experience as the ideal state, (as do the Bedouins today). Civilisation corrupts. The further a people is removed from nature and the discipline of the seasons, the greater the need for the discipline of prayer, the need to enter into a desert experience. The Succah reminds us of this. Maimonides described the value of remembering the wilderness days as: “to teach man to remember his evil days, in his days of prosperity. He will thereby be induced to thank God repeatedly and to lead

a modest and humble life”.

In the Succah we are close to God’s creation. Those who have slept with a roof open to the stars have felt a sense of awe, an awareness of Power and Glory. The “Cloud” is protective, but the very holy can also be “dangerous”.



The Succah is a Festival offering. “You shall hold the Festival of Succoth for seven days”. As such it is ritually clean and therefore more than just a structure. An awareness of its symbolism is the beginning of its holiness. Just as the Festival offering is a thing which is not susceptible to (ritual) uncleanness and grows from the soil, so the Succah must be unsusceptible to (ritual)

uncleanness and grow from the soil. The objects used to build the Succah must not be used for any other purpose.

What God creates He divides into two: the physical reality and the meaning behind it. So with the Succah.

Derek’s exposition and the contributions by the members of the group gave us much food for thought. Thank you, Derek.

Our next meeting will be on Saturday 4th November. We shall begin at the earlier time of 9.45am. Everyone is most welcome.

Kate Withers