

ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

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עלונים



INSIDE ALONIM THIS ISSUE

- Editorial p.2
- A View From the Chair p.3
- From the Rabbi p.4
- Community Weekend p.6
- FORUM-A Book for Summer p.7
- June Shiur Report p. 8
- Shapiro Library p.9
- Library Book Review p.10
- Book Review-Checkpoint p.11



Summer Issue


liberal judaism



Dear Readers,

Firstly I must tell you that I have changed my surname. My grandmother's surname was Goldman and my partner's surname is Smith. We have combined both names and created Goldsmith– a new surname for us both. My new e-mail address is on the contacts page.

Sadly the obituary for Jo Shapiro was not ready in time for this issue, but it will appear in September. In Jo's memory we will be launching a new feature each issue, called 'Library Book Review', so if you have borrowed a good book from our extensive library, please write and tell us about it.

Judy Goldsmith

Editor

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
August E-lonim	Sunday 27th July	
Sept/Oct Alonim	Wednesday 20th August	High Holy Days, Sukkoth

**Editorial and
Production Team**

*Judith Goldsmith, (editor) Jill Pomerance (proof-reader),
Anthony Cowles & Yoav Ben Shlomo (E-lonim ditributors),
The Squires family and Sheila Brill (Alonim ditributors)*

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 of people, 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 being approximately 500 words are preferred, and PC format submission by e-mail is particularly appreciated.

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.

Contributions and communications can be sent directly to the Editor at alonim@bwpjc.org. Copy date deadline for submissions is notified above. Submissions after this date cannot be guaranteed to appear in the next issue. If you are intending to send in unsolicited material please let the editor know ahead of the deadline.



I am writing this column on Midsummer's day, although it certainly does not feel like it! I do hope by the time this issue lands on your doormats the weather will have improved for a warmer summer. Happily, as fuller reports elsewhere in Alomin will confirm, the Slimbridge family weekend earlier in June was full of sunshine and John and I really enjoyed spending Friday night there and joining in the chavura supper.

In fact we have had a number of other events in the last few weeks with the the naming ceremony for The Schapiro Library at the end of May and Rabbi Danny Rich's visit in mid-June. Both of these were special services in different ways, and both were followed by a lovely kiddush and opportunities for members and visitors to get together and talk after the service.

Kiddush

Council have had some further discussions about the regular kiddush after the services and have now agreed on how to take this forward given that it is sometimes difficult to find willing volunteers to offer a kiddush. The new arrangement will be that anyone who wants to give a kiddush for a special event, major or minor, and brings food to share with congregants after the Shabbat service will let Miriam Patrick know well in advance. Her contact details are on the back of Alonim. If

there are no volunteers for any week we will have a simple kiddush of biscuits and crisps or similar from a stock cupboard in the kitchen which Miriam and Mavis have kindly offered to keep stocked for this sole purpose. This will mean we will always have the opportunity to socialise without the continual pressure of always having to rely on a volunteer.

Yom Kippur Appeal 2008

Council has decided that this year we will be supporting three charities. The aim is for these to be one each of the following: a local charity (Bristol or South West area), a Jewish charity and a charity based in Israel. If you have any suggestions for a worthwhile charity in any of these categories, please contact me by Sunday 20 July with details and any connection you might have. Council will then be able to make a final decision on the named charities in time to prepare the Yom Kippur Appeal letter.

Finally I would like remind you all of the Synagogue garden party on Sunday 6 July (see full details on p. 11).

Hope you all have a great summer

Keren Durant
Chairperson



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

Rabbi Zed wandered at will throughout all dimensions, not just time and space. He could travel through time and space just as any other normal human being does, as easily as you and I. He could also travel backwards and forwards in time, just as a certain famous Doctor who is not a real person, of course, but is merely a made-up television personality played by various famous actors. Rabbi Zed knew certain kabbalistic incantations and meditative practices with which he could manipulate his mind and also have a type of magical effect upon people around him. So as not merely to transcend time but even to slip away into other dimensions; the sixth....even the seventh!

What are these other dimensions, we mere mortals might wonder? The first dimension is a dot which lasts but an instant. The second is a momentary line; the dot stretched out either straight or curved in space. The third is a plane which lasts for a flash then disappears; the line extended sideways to enclose a volume. The fourth dimension lasts; the space goes on through time, usually only in one direction though; from the past towards the future, or, in less impersonal terms perhaps from history towards destiny. Rabbi Zed was unrestricted by these usual dimensions of existence because he liked adventures. He asked questions other than 'who'. He wondered about 'what'!

'What lies below the surface?' he wondered. What is hidden? What happens to make events occur? What underlies reality? He wandered amongst the covert, gaining mystical insights along the way. He understood the subtleties of waves and the interactions of subatomic particles, the coincidences of thought and the energies of

random interactions, the insides of locks and the behaviour of codes. Mathematical formulae were as transparent as panes of glass, though he could see in a pane of glass the thick complexity of the chemical bonds, transparent though they were.

Where did he not wander? Rabbi Zed slipped through the division between the sixth and the seventh dimensions as his prayer slipped from earth to heaven. Everywhere he went he penetrated to the origins of everything. Everything had its evolution and in seeking to understand where all things come from Rabbi Zed entered more and more into mystery after mystery. Seeking to satisfy his mind led him to become emotionally involved. Passion led him on to uncover the arising of circumstances in peoples' motivations. Through the mental processes of his fellow human beings he found his way to the hidden connections that form an invisible web, a network of connections. He began to divine the ecological web of all life and the psychological interrelationships connecting all consciousness, unconsciousness and subconsciousness.

Up the mountain of prayer he climbed, higher and higher; weaving spells, manufacturing coincidences, chances and happenings. He started to cause effects: He noticed couples falling in love who might never have met if he hadn't known one of them or spoken to the friend of another. He woke up with a start to the realisation that someone who should really have died, hadn't, because of the charitable donation he had inspired someone else to make several years ago. Rabbi Zed didn't really understand what or why. The events merged into the chaos of the universe together with his usual haphazard attitude. He couldn't plan or think through any of what happened. Divine logic was not



fathomable to the mundane inadequate human mind he was equipped with. However he did know that somewhere, somehow, as he performed his rituals or practised his ethics on others, he came across God. Either tangled in the tassels or caught up in some care and compassion, taught in some talmud or looked up in the *shulhan 'arukh* the smile of the *shekhinah* accompanied and approved every journey of his adventures. Wherever and whenever Rabbi Zed set sail upon the cloud of unknowing he was aware of the glow and pulsation of the unifying power of the universe, coming from its Divine source beyond our universe. He gradually understood that a mysterious light shone all around which we can catch a glimpse of, if we take a good look with our mind's eye wide open and very receptive. To cultivate this spiritual receptivity, he realised, was the essence of being. He tried hard. Though he remained human and could not transcend his essential limitations, for example, he still needed to eat and to go to the toilet, he found fresh delight and new vigour as his abilities expanded his consciousness even well into his old age.

Though worried about the world and concerned for the welfare of his fellow human beings Rabbi Zed knew joy. Laughter

lightened his heart and he found himself feeling satisfied with the possibilities for growth, evolution and improvement God has built in to the fabric of existence. As he adventured on in the seventh dimension he found he understood more and more the reasons for run of the mill sorrow, sadness and disappointment. He met many souls along the way, made friends and acquaintances and took care how he lived, with love and thoughtfulness. Unpredictable and exciting, his life continues still!

This is how I understand my spiritual adventures in Jewish life! One of the non-Jewish partners who came to visit Slimbridge suggested that we should organise the opportunity to go canoeing along the canal, instead of doing Jewish activities. That sounded rather slow and boring to me, but it did inspire me to think critically about some of my spiritual adventures along the journey of my life; My creation of Rabbi Zed is the result.

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry



By the time you all read this the Community Weekend would seem far gone but hopefully not forgotten. I believe that all who participated had an overall positive experience and hope that those who stayed for the whole weekend as well as those who chose to join us for a meal, an activity or a day will all feel inclined to do so again!

When I reflect on the weekend, I remember with a smile our musicians, Yoav, Julie, Neil and Valerie, the ark and Torah Scroll that Ron brought to us for a special family Shabbat Service, all the people who remembered to wear white for the Shiur on Shavuot, the very nice walk along the canal and into the beautiful village of Frampton led by Michael, the BBQ, Havdalah, and spur of the moment benching led by Gary and the ongoing glass workshop with Louise. I look forward with pride to the hanging of the final product in our synagogue. I also remember the smile on the younger children's faces as they enjoyed their Jonah and the Whale workshop and the pride on the older children's faces as they performed their production in front of parents, siblings and friends (for that we have to thank Miranda's sister Olivia who kindly arranged for us to have an actor leading the drama sessions for the different age groups).

I think back and I realize what effect the cooperation, camaraderie and willingness to

organize and to help have on such a weekend. There is an expression in Spanish to the effect that when the stomach is full the heart is happy. We certainly had lovely food and we saw people wearing a smile on their faces throughout the weekend. Some of us were "veterans" at this Community Weekend, others were new to the experience and it was heart warming to observe new comers – adults and children alike— interacting, conversing and getting to know the rest of our community. The kids were getting on so nicely and the older ones - girls and boys alike— looked after the little ones with such care.

At the end of the Community Weekend participants were asked for feed back on their experience and a very interesting conversation evolved. Comments were noted and will certainly be taken into consideration in future.

As some of you may know, the site we have been using will be closing in a few months and we see ourselves looking for a new location. If any of you is aware of a suitable facility, please get in touch.

Iris Segall

Head of Cheder



– FORUM—A Book for Summer

Isaac Rosenberg - Jean Moorcroft Wilson:
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008

ISBN: 0297851454



Sombre the night is.

And though we have our lives, we know

What sinister threat lurks there.

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know

This poison-blasted track opens on our camp –

On a little safe sleep ...

From "Returning, we hear the larks."

Isaac Rosenberg was born in Bristol in 1890 and died in the trenches in France in 1918. Jean Moorcroft Wilson's book is subtitled "*The Making of a Great War Poet*". She asserts that he should be seen as one of the finest poets. She shows how this was the result of his being different from others in race, class, education and upbringing. The son of impoverished Russian immigrants, the odds were stacked against him for his entire life- yet he thrived.

Jean Moorcroft Wilson has already written two widely acclaimed literary biographies – of Siegfried Sassoon and Charles Hamilton Sorley. Though not Jewish herself, her study of Sassoon was enlightening and she is married to Cecil Woolf, nephew of Leonard and Virginia Woolf.

The Rosenbergs lived in a state of near destitution. Barnett, the father, was a dreamy man, content to earn only a little as an itinerant pedlar. Isaac was the second child and eldest son of their six offspring, and highly intelligent. In 1901, when he was 11, they left Bristol for London, confident they would find support there from the much larger and richer community and a better education for Isaac. It proved to be a disastrous move; they found themselves living in squalid slum conditions in the East End. Hopes that Isaac could attend the celebrated Jews' Free School were dashed; the competition for places was enormous. Isaac was also disadvantaged. His English was poor because at home his parents spoke Yiddish. It is now felt that such bilingualism forces writers to express themselves in a unique way, as he subsequently did.

So it may be that the early carefree years here in Bristol were the true foundation, providing some strength for his future life. The young poet-painter was undernourished physically and culturally. A mere 5ft 2ins, he suffered many ills, culminating in TB. From the age of 14 he had to work long hours in conditions detrimental to his physical, and mental, health. His prospects seemed depressingly hopeless.

However, bit by bit, his talents came to be



– FORUM—A Book for Summer

recognised, first in painting, then in writing. Patrons were found. He was able to stop working and enrol in the Slade School of Art. Not a moment was wasted. He spent all his spare time in the library reading avidly, especially poetry. The group of artists he joined at the Slade called themselves the Whitechapel Boys. It was an exciting time. The group included Mark Gertler and David Bomberg. Stanley Spencer was on the fringes. Still, friends found him oddly shy, awkward, and tetchy.

Isaac had now become disaffected from his Jewish background. Much as any young adult today would, he needed to be free, live as he wished, unrestricted, unconventional. This didn't mean he lost interest. His parents were orthodox, and he had been barmitzvah. Jewish elements were often there in his poems as he sought to find a meaning to his life. He worked for years on a substantial drama called "*Moses*", unfinished at his death.

Restless as ever, and irked by the expectations of patrons, he suddenly decided to go to South Africa. There he had many affluent and educated relatives, including his beloved older sister, Minnie, in whose home he stayed – from January 1914 to February 1915. His TB improved markedly in the sunny climate, and he was invigorated by the social opportunities. He hobnobbed with distinguished intellectuals and was feted and valued by them – in particular early feminists. He fell passionately in love with a divorced actress – hopelessly, as she would go on to marry the Prime Minister.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 shocked him into realising he must return to England. He was homesick for his family and felt he should return when news of the hardships the war was bringing emerged. He shouldn't escape by staying in the sunshine of Capetown. He returned, reluctantly, and joined up in 1916 as a private in a 'Bantam' Battalion. He then sent what he earned to his mother, struggling to care for the family.

From France he wrote many letters, including poems and sketches. His health deteriorated and he spent a long sick leave in London and returned to France late in 1917. He was in the reserves not the front line, yet he was moved and sickened by what he saw, which he expressed in his poems.

It was an 'unexpected' death. At a vital moment, on April 1st, he was unable, or unwilling, to retreat to the reserve trenches. A German raiding party killed him and his comrades. When his family were informed some days later they were overwhelmed with grief, as were many friends and acquaintances who felt the nation had lost one of its finest writers. He was buried in a simple grave in a French war cemetery.

This biography is a wonderful, moving tribute, lavishly illustrated with photographs, and paintings by Rosenberg himself. His two best-known poems are "*Returning, we hear the larks*" from which I've quoted, and "*Break of Day in the Trenches*". I have one of his self-portraits pinned up in my living-room. He looks across and challenges wordlessly my understanding of life.

Alix Pirani



– June Shiur Report

Parashat Naso: Numbers Chapter 7

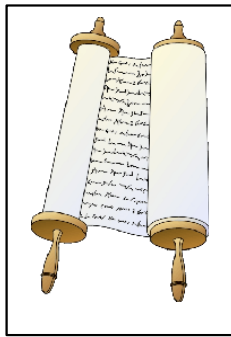
For this month's Shiur David Gilbert concentrated on the description of the presentation, in great detail and with hypnotic repetition, of the offerings by each of the tribes in turn on the occasion of the Inauguration of the Altar.

The twelve offerings are identical – no tribe offers more or less than any other, - emphasising the principle of EQUAL VALUE between the tribes. It was observed that the introductory wording for the second day's offering, that of Issachar, differed from that of the other eleven. David quoted Rabbi Mirvis of Finchley Synagogue regarding the special responsibility of the second person in a sequence (Jewish Chronicle June 2005). The first person sets a lead, but the second establishes a pattern. If Netanel of the tribe of Issachar had offered more than Nahshon of Judah, the first to make the offering, the whole process could have escalated out of control; as it was, the tribes had no cause to vie with each other and arouse dissension.

This brings up a different point. The tribes of the sons of Leah, Jacob's senior wife, approached the altar first. That would be good protocol; what could be considered the normal order of precedence when someone has to go first. But why should Judah, Issachar and Zebulon take precedence over their elder brothers, Reuben and Simeon, and later Ephraim over Manasseh? It would seem to be a question of merit and demerit, when past behaviour is recalled. However, these instances only represent displacements within a category (sons of Leah, grandsons of

Rachel). There is no banishment to the end of the line. David suggested that this could be a sort of "style-guide of How to Simcha". – "Fifty guests, fifty bowls of soup – that is equality; family members on the top table – that is protocol, but the exact placing (who is centre stage and who is behind the potted fern) can be arranged, so long as no-one is totally humiliated".

There was another suggestion made as to why the tribes are named in this particular order. There seems to be an alternating between South and North; Judah/South, Issachar/North; Zebulon/South, Reuben/North...



The whole passage is a song reminiscent of Adir Hu, or some versions of Echad Mi Yodeah. It consists of Solo and Chorus, thesis and antithesis, and has an "up-beat Finale". Was it sung in the Wilderness of Sinai? Or by pilgrims to the Festivals? David termed it a "Song of National Unity", a "Hymn to Social Harmony" and ended with the thought that, by singing such a song, the many "strands" of Judaism today might give the idea that "everyone has contributed" and that all are of equal value.

Thank you, David, for a most interesting Shiur.

After the July discussion, to be led by Sylvia Murray, we shall have a break until the Autumn.

Kate Withers



- Shapiro Library

The dedication of the library in memory of Jo Shapiro was both joyful and sad. The event had been planned before Jo's death so we all felt his loss, only a few weeks earlier. None-the-less it was wonderful to acknowledge all that Jo had done for us in this special way.

Jo had been our librarian for many years. He had worked tirelessly to organise and catalogue our books (ably assisted by Sheila Wilson).

During the service downstairs, Rabbi Ron used the time normally filled with a *davar torah* (sermon) to tell us a little about Jo and some of the many ways in which he has enriched the life of our community.

At the end of the service, Keren Durant (our Council Chair) added her own words. She read us an e-mail from Jo in which he said how he was both acutely embarrassed and also moved by the suggestion that the library be named in

acknowledgement of him. Jo was such a humble person. He was also a very private man. I asked him several times if he would agree to an interview for the 'Getting to Know You' feature in Alonim and he always declined. Eventually he told me that he thought his life was not interesting to others and that he would find it too embarrassing to be featured in this way.

After *kiddush*, as many as could manage crowded upstairs to witness the unveiling ceremony, in which Jo's wife Beryl participated. It was lovely to have his family with us for this occasion.

It was a very moving event and there were several tears among those present, but we all felt glad that we were able to thank Jo, be it posthumously, for all that he had given us.

Judy Goldsmith



-Library Book Review

The seventy faces of Torah – Stephen M Wylen: Paulist Press, New York 2005

ISBN: 0809141795

As a cheder teacher who looks after kitah Dalet, I have the good fortune to have a bookcase of as yet “uncatalogued” library books sitting in my room. For any one of a curious nature the temptation is too much and my interest was seduced by the intriguing title of “The seventy faces of Torah”. The author, a US reform Rabbi, whose previous publications include the ‘Jews in the time of Jesus’, presents a historical overview of the Torah and Tenach but also covers Kabbalah. The book is written in an extremely readable style and the examples that are presented are fascinating especially as he explores differences in interpretation. Although he is only able to scratch the surface of many topics, he leaves you wanting more. One interesting aspect of the book is how he compares and contrasts a Jewish and Christian interpretation of the five books of Moses.

I found much of interest and gained new insights. The regular reading of the Parasha was instituted by Ezra the scribe after returning to Jerusalem from Babylon and the reading in Hebrew was translated to Aramaic by “meturgemanim”. The translators not only gave the literal translation but had to place it within the social context of the audience. The portion was read three times a week, not just on Shabbat but also when the farmers came to Jerusalem to sell their produce. In the early times of the synagogue the sermon preceded the public reading of the Torah and interestingly the preachers often would conclude their homily with the opening verse of the parasha.

The book describes the historical development of the oral Torah; Tosefta, Talmud, Halakic and Homiletic Midrash and the four levels of reading the Torah for meaning (PaRDeS). For example, we

are all familiar with the expression “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Levav-cha) from the Shema. However the Hebrew word for heart is either lev or levav. The midrash explains that the double letter version used in the shema indicates that this is with both of your hearts. In biblical times the heart is not associated with emotion, as it is today, but with the mind or intellect. The two aspects of our heart(s) is considered to be both the good and evil impulse that resides within all of us. Thus one must try to fulfil the mitzvot utilising both our inclinations to good but also utilizing other desires, such as greed, in a positive manner. Only by resolving this inevitable internal conflict and tension can one really love God with all your heart.

And finally let us return to the title. In Numbers 7:19 we read of the gifts presented to the tabernacle by the twelve tribes which include “..one silver chalice of 70 shekels..” Of what interest do we have today as to the weight of a silver chalice? We must obviously search for the inner meaning. The midrash explains that the chalice was to hold wine, which is likened to the Torah as it refreshes the spirit. From here the poetic jump is made to the 70 faces of the torah (Shiv'im panim laTorah). In this way every single verse can yield seventy meanings, which may even contradict each other like the teachings of Hillel and Shammai. When we view a diamond we know that the glitters are generated from a single light but this looks different depending on which face or facet we look upon. The light illuminates a different aspect of Torah depending on our perspective. For me, like Rabbi Wylen, the Torah is not merely the words inscribed on the parchment but the interpretation and inspiration that resides in the mind of the listener. This wonderful gem of a book is truly worth a read. But before you rush up to the Schapiro library to borrow this book, please give Sheila and Ruth a chance to catalogue it.

Yoav Ben-Shlomo



- Book Review- Checkpoint



Checkpoint—Lisa Saffron:

Author House, 2008

ISBN: 143435492X

Our member Lisa Saffron has been courageous in writing this novel. She treats the theme of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, often felt hopeless, with sympathy and insight gained from her experiences. The treat, for me, lies in its surprising and rather amusing twist right at the end. That said, there is a sadness and unpleasantness in the novel, which made it difficult to read, depicting as it does the violence of the suicide bomber and the inherent violence of Israeli efforts at self-defence. The book is uncompromising in its depiction of the suffering on both sides.

The characterisation is interesting. Of the male characters, one, the Israeli husband, is depicted as a bully and has no chapter in which to express himself. His son, the young Israeli soldier, is killed very early on and we hear only the voice of his ghost. The Palestinian husband is depicted as a broken character, also without a voice of his own. The female characters are much more interesting and all have plenty of chapters of their own with lots of opportunity to express themselves. Nevertheless, this doesn't prevent the young Palestinian girl being a suicide bomber and murdering the young Israeli soldier.

Altogether, this may not be an easy story to read for those who normally support Israel uncritically, come what may. Nevertheless, congratulations to Lisa for being brave enough to publish this book, on what is, after all, not an easy topic.

Rabbi Ron Berry