



ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

Elul 5768

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עלונים



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liberal  judaism



This issue is very practical. We received not a single forum submission, which I assume is because everyone is busy enjoying the summer despite the weather in the UK. If you have been anywhere exciting this year, please let us know. We would still welcome articles on synagogues in other countries, reviews of books borrowed from the library, poetry written by members and any other topics that you think might be of interest to our members. We seem to particularly enjoy controversial topics. I think perhaps that it is a safe and healthy way for us to explore the range of views within our community, so if you have any ideas of a new thread for discussion please start the ball rolling. Likewise any insights, words of wisdom, or jokes would be welcome. Wishing you all well over the fast,

Judy Goldsmith

Editor

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

| Month | Copy date | Festivals covered, notices needed |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| October E-lonim | Wednesday 24th September | |
| Nov/Dec Alonim | Sunday 19th October | Hannukkah |

Editorial and Production
Team

Judith Goldsmith, (editor) Jill Pomerance (proof-reader), Anthony Cowles & Yoav Ben Shlomo (E-lonim distributors), Ruth Baker (Alonim distributor)

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.



This month I will be using my regular column to make the annual **Yom Kippur Appeal**. Council made the decision to support three categories of organisations - a local charity, a national Jewish charity and a charity based in Israel. In addition Council agreed to select these from suggestions made by members of the community. This year, Council would like to recommend the following four different charities for our Yom Kippur Appeal. They differ in scale and context but all, we believe, are equally worthy.

Dorothy House Hospice

Based in Winsley, near Bath, this is a small local based hospice providing physical, psychological, social and spiritual care to patients and their families facing life threatening illness, death or bereavement, who have specific problems which need specialist skills. In partnership with all others involved, they focus on quality of life, respecting the uniqueness of each person and their family. Dorothy House Hospice seeks to promote the development of palliative care through education of others and research.

www.dorothyhouse.co.uk

Womankind

Womankind is Bristol Women's Counselling & Therapy Centre. Founded in 1986, the organisation has, for the past 21 years, provided a range of services for women from all sections of the community. In particular Womankind supports women who are in need of social care and are at risk of being hospitalised. It is Womankind's aim that women will be able to reduce their dependence on medication, alcohol and drugs; reduce their use of statutory health and social

services; break the cycle of inappropriate or abusive relationships and be better able to care for their families. The goal of Womankind's work is to enable women to develop a sense of well-being. What began as an unstructured self-help group in 1986 has become a valuable resource for General Practitioners, Health Workers and women throughout Bristol.

www.womankindbristol.org.uk

JCORE – Jewish Council for Racial Equality

As many of us will remember, at our last AGM, our guest speaker was Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director of JCORE. JCORE works with the Jewish and wider communities to promote a positive multi-ethnic UK free from all forms of racism. The organisation, established in 1976 to combat discrimination and promote racial justice in Britain, believes that concern for social justice should become an integral part of our identity, our values and our interaction with the rest of society. It is JCORE's belief that the Jewish community needs to speak out in order to help to bring about change and challenge racism at its roots. JCORE works closely with other minority ethnic communities and refugee organisations, with anti-racist organisations, interfaith groups, schools, colleges, community and youth groups, and agencies such as the Refugee Council, the Commission for Racial Equality and The Runnymede Trust. www.jcore.org.uk

Jerusalem Peacemakers

Jerusalem Peacemakers, founded in 2004, works extremely hard to promote reconciliation and peace between Israelis and Palestinians through interfaith work and various joint

View From the Chair is continued on page 4

View From the Chair continued

activities and events. It is difficult to think of any more important task in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Some of you will know of the organisation from the visits made by its director, Eliyahu McClean, to Bristol and Bath in the past. www.jerusalempeacemakers.org

The money will be divided equally between the four charities unless you indicate specifically on the attached form that you wish your donation to be split in different proportions

With every good wish for a happy and peaceful New Year

Keren Durant
Chairperson



Synagogue Council

A very warm welcome to **Ruth Baker** and **Anthony Cowles** who have both joined Synagogue Council as co-opted members this month. I would also like to express thanks to David Dwek, who has decided to step down from Council, for his very valuable contributions and active participation over the last few years. If anyone is interested in joining Council, or just finding out more about what we do and whether this might be for you next year or in the future, please contact me or any other Council members.

Keren Durant
Chairperson



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

Rabbi Zed was at prayer. It was *yom kippur* so he was fasting. He had repented of all his sins. It was a quiet period in the afternoon. His body had tasted neither food nor drink so it was at rest. His soul was receptive to the silence and his body was permeated by stillness. His spirit ascended and hovered over the face of the earth and scanned far and wide to see what it would see. Birds soared around it like jewels flying through the air. It was buffed by the clouds until it shone. His prayer time had left his spirit gleaming. He observed with approval a generous spirit, that of a young man as he left his comfortable European home and his wealthy background to work on development with poor people in Africa. His spirit turned and met yet another, that of a lonely girl, a lovely though poor young waitress who wondered about her future as she gave crumbs from the tables she cleared to the wild birds. Her generosity also shone forth, heartening, like a warm smile. These two were young Jewish people estranged from their heritage. They didn't come to synagogue. He didn't know them and they were unaware of each other's existence. Rabbi Zed smiled a peculiar style of smile as he associated their souls with each other without them knowing.

A few years later Rabbi Zed was travelling on a train journey. He smiled at the girl serving behind the counter of the buffet as he bought a cup of hot chocolate and a packet of peanuts from her, causing her to feel better. Then he went and relaxed into his seat. He was soon fast asleep as he was sped along. At high speed he dreamed. In his dream he was a fish. He wriggled his silvery scaly body with its iridescent spots as he swam lazily, by swishing his tail from side to side. He spread out his fins

and waved them gently to and fro to compensate for slight variations in the direction and strength of the current. Thus he kept on course; but does a fish know where it is going, or why? He spotted a wriggling worm dangled on a hook by an angler far overhead and he realised hunters were attempting to catch him. He didn't stop to take the bait. He swam just under the surface where the water was warm, taking advantage of the dappled sunlight to stay active, moving freely upstream.

On the river bank a pair of lovers lounged, waiting, unknowing, for him to pass. They had a ring to exchange, a ring of promise. The young man and woman smiled at each other in the delight and awe of the moment. Absorbed in each other, they failed to notice a large black bird, which swooped down as the young man held out the ring for the young woman to admire, snatched it away in its beak and tried to fly off. The man lashed out as the bird rose in the air and managed to knock it sideways, so it dropped the ring, which fell into the river. Rabbi Zed saw the glint as the ring wafted down through the current. He opened his mouth and swallowed it, as he would have taken a fly, without a pause. Then he took off from the river and soared into the sky using his fins to fly, as though they were wings. He wheeled round like a ship searching for someone who had fallen overboard, and cruised back along until he found the disconcerted couple gazing at the surface of the river. On the opposite bank sat an old jackdaw missing a few tail feathers. Rabbi Zed dived in and swam to the shallows, regurgitated the ring and woke up to find that he had dribbled onto the front of his shirt which was now stained faintly brown, from the hot chocolate. The train was just pulling in to his destination station, so he gathered his books, clothing and



luggage together.

As he passed the buffet on his way to get off he was in time to see the girl serving there give a spare sandwich free to a hungry young asylum seeker, simply out of the goodness of her heart, as she felt pleased with life. Rabbi Zed made his way to the synagogue office and interviewed the young couple planning to get married. They showed him the ring and told him about the jackdaw which had tried to snatch it. He smiled a peculiar smile.

He smiled the same smile at the *huppah* as the groom put the ring onto his bride's finger during their ceremony. A year later they had a baby boy. Rabbi Zed offered up a prayer as he officiated at the *brit milah* of the baby boy, that he would grow up to be gentle and kind, as well as the regular prayers that he study torah, do good deeds and eventually go under the *huppah* himself. The young couple employed the asylum seeker, who had succeeded in her application for permission to stay in the

country, so could obtain work. When the little boy grew up he was bright and successful and became a prominent barrister, representing asylum seekers without charge and helping them to find work too.

Rabbi Zed dozed in his office chair with a peculiar smile on his face. Where was he off to? What was he doing? He was getting old, but still wondered why he was so tired. If anyone had told him he was working hard both in his prayers and even in his dreams, he would not have believed them! As he dozed he began to plan his *sukkah*, the fruits of faith intermingling with the structure and materials of secular existence.

Kathy and I wish you all health, happiness and prosperity during the coming year; 5769

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry

Synagogue Windows

Many of you will have noticed by now the new glass window decorations in the sanctuary. These were created during this year's community weekend at Springhead under the guidance of Louise Block.

They are a addition in with blue This photo is of the bima all of Jewish theme, in the other more abstract



wonderful many colours dominating. the pieces above which have a whilst the ones room are of a nature.

We will have more information, including the names of all participants, in the next issue of Alonim.



- July Shiur Report

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Parashat Chukat Numbers 19, vv1-20 –

“Gather up the ashes of the heifer – to be kept for water of lustration. It is for cleansing”.

By choosing this passage for discussion Sylvia Murray invited us to explore the mystery of the red heifer.

Two rituals are involved: (1) that of the slaughter of the red heifer itself, and (2) the preparation of the ashes for the ritual of cleansing a person who has come into contact with the dead.

The questions, Why a heifer? and Why red? have never been adequately answered. A heifer is a young adult cow that has not as yet borne a calf. Does this fact add to the “purity” of an already “unblemished” animal? Red is the colour of blood, which is Life. Is this of significance here? Perhaps there is no explanation and it is just one more ordinance that we take on trust.

When combined with the cedar wood, hyssop and crimson stuff that is thrown onto the fire the ashes are to be set aside for the water of lustration to be used for cleansing those who

come into contact with the dead, whether in the normal course of events or accidentally.

Death is part of the natural order; yet touching somebody who has died renders a person “unclean”. What does it mean to be “unclean”? What happens to the person who comes too close to the mystery of Life and Death? Perhaps it is that a ritual accompanying a death stresses the mystery and at the same time protects from the consequences of coming too close.

In the rituals of the red heifer, the priest and the others involved deliberately incur “defilement” in order to produce the water of lustration that will be used to purify others.

If I were looking for a lesson arising from our discussion I might find it here.



Kate Withers

Thank You

My family and I would like to thank everyone, especially Rabbi Berry and Kathy, for their support during Jo's illness and many messages of sympathy received after his death. We would also like to thank Keren Durant for organising the Library Dedication which made us feel very proud and I am sure Jo would have been proud too.

Beryl Schapiro

We had a visit from the Community Security Trust on 12th July, who came to talk to us after a Shabbat service. About ten of us stayed on and had a real insight into the security situation facing us all. Even though we may feel safe and secure here in Bristol, there is evidence that synagogues and other Jewish institutions are being actively considered by people planning terror attacks. And as the more obvious targets likely to have more visible security, attention may well fall on smaller places, considered to be softer targets.

However, the message wasn't one designed to cause us panic- overall, attacks on the Jewish community in England are rare. It also seems that potential attacks have been averted by the relatively simple approach of having an alert and aware community and visible evidence that the community is keeping an eye on its own security.

Even though much of the audience had been dragooned into attendance, most of us came away with the conviction that we needed to up our game a bit on the security front, and that to do so need not be intrusive, difficult or off-putting. The CST offers a short one day

training course on security issues, and it would be a real advantage if we arrange one locally and as many of us as possible attended. They also offer programmes specifically on street awareness for children and teenagers, which could be run at the same time.

So, rather than go for another short session in September as previously advertised, we are trying to gain commitment to a much larger session later in the year. We probably need at least twenty people to commit to spending most of one Sunday involved. We will work with Cheder so that, for that week, Cheder will be on the Sunday- with CST running the street awareness course. We hope also to have a crèche for younger children, so parents with younger children can also come along.

We are looking for people to commit- so if you are interested, please let me know, and also about any dates in November that are impossible for you.

Max Kammerling