



ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

Tevet/Shevat/Adar 5769

January/February 2009

עלונים



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Tu b'shevat Issue



Dear All,

Welcome to the first issue of 2009. Thank you to all those who rang up to wish me well following my minor op in late November. I am making a speedy recovery as I write (mid-December) and looking forward to attending the Chanukah party. Of course by the time you all read this Chanukah will be a memory and we will be looking forward to Tu b'shevat. It is wonderful to have such a vibrant congregation to share the cycle of the Jewish year and Alonim will be there to remind everyone of the dates.

Happy New Year to everyone,

Judy Goldsmith
Editor

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
February E-lonim	Monday 26th January	
Mar/Apr Alonim	Sunday 15th February	Purim & Pesach

Editorial and
Production Team

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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 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



A View from the Chair

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We are approaching the end of the year and Council has worked hard to get everything ready for the AGM. This includes finalising the AGM report, which you will find enclosed with this Alonim, and ensuring the accounts are completed and ready for auditing. As happens at this time of year, we will be seeking new members to join Council at the AGM. We will also be looking to appoint a Board of Deputies representative to take over from Bernard Barnett who has done a tremendous job in this role over the last few years.

We are a small community and yet a thriving and active one and it is through the efforts of individuals that the "business" of managing the community's affairs is undertaken. Much gets done by large number of active and involved people who provide the services that our Jewish community here in the West of England needs to remain viable and involved and supportive. However, being a member of Council is a regular and important commitment as it is the body that can make those big and small decisions that matter and make a difference to our community. The work is easier and more enjoyable if there are enough people to do it and so this is a plea to think that maybe 2009 might be a good year to give it a go.

The building has new double-glazed windows upstairs in some of the classrooms and library. This expenditure was approved

by Council to replace those that were causing some potentially serious leaks from the rain down the walls of the sanctuary and Kiddush area. We also gave the go-ahead for the outside of the building to be painted, as a number of members felt that our synagogue was in need of a face-lift; this has just started and should be finished quite soon.

By the time this edition of Alonim is distributed, we will have celebrated the festival of Chanuka and had our party which I know a number of people have worked hard to plan and I am certain we all enjoyed.

Following the AGM on Sunday 25 January we will be welcoming Paul Edlin, from the Board of Deputies, to give a talk to us and to members of the Bristol Hebrew Congregation - a joint event that we all hope will further cement the relationships between the two communities. We have also invited members of the newly formed Gloucester Liberal Community, so do make a note in your diaries and ensure that you are there to welcome these guests.

May I wish you all every good wish for a fulfilling and peaceful 2009.

Keren Durant
Chairperson



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

Between *hanukkah* and *purim* is the dark time of our year. These two minor festivals bracket the winter gloom with festive cheer and it is our Congregational *minhag* [custom] to enliven our lives with celebration. How ironic, one might think, that we commemorate attempts at genocide by having parties on such occasions! For both these minor festivals commemorate dark times in our history, when other peoples derided the Jewish way of life, despised our culture and attacked our ancestors to try to put an end to us altogether.

hanukkah commemorates the attempt by the Assyrian dictator Antiochus [Epiphanes] IV to wipe out Judaism because he thought he was divine. He thought his culture, essentially Greek culture, was superior so could be imposed on the Jewish people in their own land by force, backed up by superior military might. He accompanied his megalomania with ferocious cruelty, banned the practice and celebration of circumcisions, rest on *shabbat* and other sacred days and tried to eliminate the practice of *kashrut*. Has everything modern anti-semites have in their

arsenal to attack us today already been tried? He failed because brave people fought against him and they did so because they did want to continue with the religious culture called Judaism. They appreciated the moral and social value of clinging to their faith, despite the hardship and struggle that entailed. Jewish people then as now realised that meant Jewish life would be perpetuated, but that not bothering meant that our world would lose something precious; being overcome or just giving up means annihilation of the Jewish people. That disaster would indeed bring everlasting gloom and darkness.

We light candles to improve the illumination, and we increase the light to symbolise our duty to dispel the gloom of ignorance more and more. Our Jewish culture is meant to disperse the darkness of our world and shine out a message of tolerance and goodwill, respect for all and freedom to worship in accordance with conscience.

The biblical Book of Esther read on *purim* illustrates the scheming of Haman, an evil politician in the court of an ancient Eastern potentate, Akhashverush. The Jewish people are again threatened with genocide. The



intrigues and power struggles within the court are depicted but the main thrust of the story is to show how one weak inexperienced young woman in the right place at the right time can step forth and say the right words to save her people. Once again the celebration is to show how hatred and enmity can be transcended by the ability to stand up and fight in self-defense. In the story of Esther the Jewish people are heartened and encouraged because although a royal decree has been sent out to all corners of the Empire giving permission to all people to attack the Jews, it is followed, at Esther's request, by another royal decree allowing the Jewish people to stand and fight in self-defense.

The party with which we celebrate *purim* is a fancy dress party. We lampoon our enemies by dressing up, enjoying the party, eating and laughing together as a Congregation perhaps in relief at our narrow escape from total destruction. Our drinking and singing is a religious way of saying 'thank You' to our God, who is not mentioned at all in the Book

of Esther, yet who we feel sure continues to watch over us. For, despite dispersion and persecution throughout the centuries we are still here, persistent, tough and resilient. Why is that? How do we do it?

I like to think that our survival is actually a lesson to give hope to other peoples. Perhaps all of suffering humanity can gain encouragement when they see how we have not merely survived but prospered despite difficulties, never given up whatever the awfulness. The inhumanity human beings are capable of is countered by the moral demands placed upon us by God. Jewish life is an on-going involvement with life as a whole, including the duties of building our religious values of justice, freedom and peace into the fabric of the society wherein we find ourselves living. This challenge is what continues to inspire us. We celebrate the aim and purpose being Jewish puts into our existence. We have reasons for being alive! This is why we need to celebrate and thank God.

BBC press release: serialisation of Anne Frank's Diary Monday 5th - Friday 9th January 2009, BBC1 7.00 - 7.30pm.

The direct link is as follows:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/12_december/08/frank.shtml



Dear Editor,

Why do I hate the word 'progressive' (Alonim, Chanukah issue)? Because it is invariably linked with the word 'liberal' which these days has an implied meaning (wrongly in my opinion) of being 'a good thing'. I am by nature a libertarian conservative. What's wrong with the term 'non-orthodox'?

I am shocked to learn that some Liberal communities do not parade the scroll. Our learned rabbi may correct me but I was always under the impression that parading the scroll was to remind us of the 40 years wandering in the desert. Indeed, do not some synagogues in the Middle East scatter sand on the floor to make the analogy more meaningful (although I have to say that from my observations the desert areas in Israel are not sand but rock)?

Yours sincerely

Richard Buckley



Dear Richard,

Personally, I dislike any term that defines itself by something that it is not. For me saying non-orthodox links us permanently to the orthodox movement and does not allow us to develop our own form of Judaism. I believe very strongly that our religion has survived as long as it has because of its willingness to adapt and even alter down the centuries.

I agree that there are difficulties with the meaning of both the terms progressive and liberal within the more general society. Reform is perhaps a more positive term. However, I like the term progressive because it contains an implication of growth.

I was very interested in what you said about the scroll. I have never heard of this before. Liberal Jews that I know who object to the processing of the scroll see it as a form of idolatry-worshipping the scroll itself. Personally, I am always very moved when the scroll passes by, so I would hate us to stop doing it.

I do hope you will continue to write such interesting articles for Alonim.

Thank you for responding to my comments on your article. I was, I hope you realised, not in any way criticising but merely trying to stimulate discussion. I wonder if it will work!

Judy Goldsmith



SHALOM

I love you
But our hard shells
Keep us apart -
We're bouncing off each other
In a mad pinball game.

In a crowd
I'm in solitary
Prison of flesh
Longing I
Look inwards to nothing
Tunnelling into forever.
Only the questing me
Looking for you
In the vast emptiness
Of a single point.

Maybe
When God realised Itself
As One
And alone
It created two
To see and be seen.

What joy to see you!
Such happiness to be seen!
Reflections of ourselves
In fragments -
But love
Makes us whole.

Miriam Patrick



Cheder Corner

At Cheder

Recently the children have been improving their Hebrew, learning about Hanukkah through stories and songs, and joining their parents in Family Education Sessions to learn from the Rabbi about Jewish traditions.

Older Cheder children had the opportunity to participate in a Street Wise course in which they learnt about personal safety.

Community Weekend

Once again, Cheder is inviting the wider Synagogue community to join us on a relaxing weekend of activities and bonding with a Jewish flare. The centre is located in an

idyllic rural area, providing accommodations in the building as well as the possibility to put up your own tent and/or bringing your own caravan. This will add a new dimension to our Community Weekend. We hope many Cheder children and their families, as well as other members of the congregation will join us for the weekend or parts of it. Please put the date in your diary. More information and enrollment forms will be provided nearer the time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, regarding Cheder, with any queries, concerns, suggestions or offers to help.

Iris Segall
Head of Cheder