



ALONIM

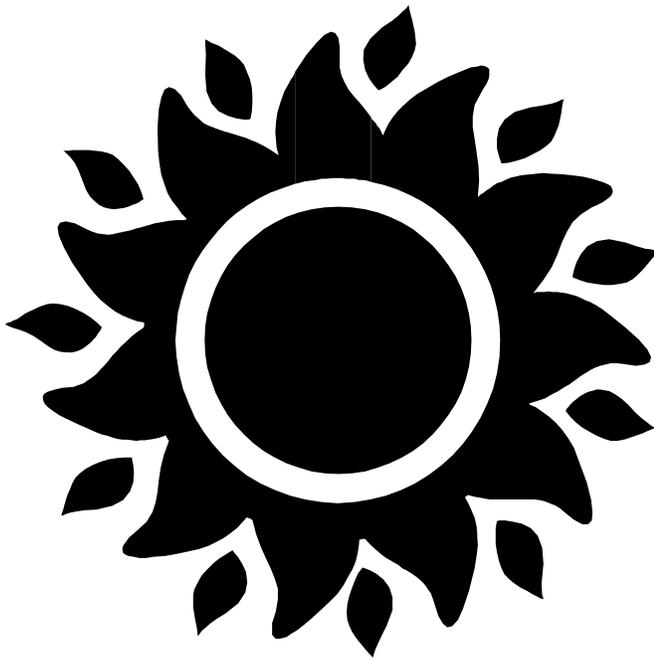
Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

*Tammuz /Av/Elul 5767
July/August 2007*

עלונים



INSIDE ALONIM THIS ISSUE



Summer Issue

- | | |
|---|--|
| Editorial p. 2 | A History of Klezmer p. 18 & 19 |
| From the Chair p.3 | Moishe's Bagel p. 20 |
| From the Rabbi p. 4 & 5 | FORUM-A Response to Richard Buckley p. 21 & 22 |
| FORUM- A Very Liberal Synagogue p. 6 & 7 | Torah: Miracle or History? p. 23 & 24 |
| Our Position Within LJ p. 8 & 9 | Trip to Warsaw p. 25 & 26 |
| FORUM-In Favour of Liberal Judaism p.10 | Talk by David Newman p. 27 & 28 |
| FORUM- Let's Look Before We Leap p. 11 | |
| Oxford Shabbaton p.12 & 13 | |
| FORUM- It's the Season for a Boycott p. 14 & 15 | |
| Getting to Know You- Maxine Gosden p. 16 | |
| May Shiur p. 17 | |



We have a very meaty issue for you this summer. Consider it summer reading. A lot of interest has been generated by two of the articles in the last issue. Hopefully the responses will generate still more articles. Healthy debate fosters strong communities and Bristol & West is certainly that. We feel that it is important to stress that Council has made no decision to consider the issue of becoming independent, let alone actually devised any proposal. The articles in this issue are merely the thoughts of individuals who were stimulated by the Rabbi's article in the previous issue. This is the purpose of Alonim – to act as a communication channel between members. Feel free to add yourself to the conversation.

The Editors

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
August E-lonim	Thursday 26th July	
Sept/Oct Alonim	Monday 19th August	High Holy Days/ Sukkot
October E-Lonim	Monday 24th September	
Nov/Dec Alonim	Tuesday 19th October	Channukah

Editorial and Production Team

Judith Lazarus, Malcolm Rawles

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 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.

Contributions and communications can be sent directly to the Editor at alonim@bwpjc.org or by post to 4 Villiers Rd, Bristol, BS5 0JQ. The 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 the day after joining the cheder/family weekend in Slimbridge for their Friday night meal. It was a lovely occasion, delicious food, a very warm and welcoming atmosphere despite the rain outside and especially nice to see so many children enjoying the evening and being with their friends and families.

The Rabbi's article in last month's article opened the discussion on our congregation's links with Liberal Judaism, and I look forward to reading responses in this issue. It seems to me that this is a conversation worth having to gauge opinions of those who feel strongly and to give an opportunity for those of us who are unsure of the issues to find out more.

Memorial Woodlands A number of members and prospective members have raised questions about our funeral policy and burial grounds. Currently a number of different possibilities exist and it was suggested that we find out more about Memorial Woodlands near Alveston. So last month on a particularly sunny day, Bernard Barnett, Robert Hurst and I went to visit Woodlands and to meet with one of the Directors. We toured the very beautiful and peaceful woodlands, saw the chapel (multi-faith) and discussed the possibility of buying a tree circle plot for any members who might be interested. We were all very impressed by what we saw, and want to arrange a trip to Woodlands later in the summer for anyone who is interested in finding out more. Please contact Bernard, Robert or me and do look at their website: www.memorialwoodlands.com

Volunteers to paint If you have been to synagogue recently you may have noticed some maintenance underway or completed around the building. New downpipes have been put in from the gutters on the roofs at the back of the building and walls have been plastered in the Kiddush area, the downstairs toilets and in kita aleph upstairs. These walls now need a coat of paint, and Council decided it would be good to get some work parties organised for a couple of fun painting days in July, August and/or early September (dates still to be fixed). It would be wonderful if we could get this done as a community in time for the High Holidays. Please volunteer – contact Yoav Ben Shlomo or me (contact details on the back of Alonim).

On behalf of us all I want to warmly thank David Jewell who is standing down as Chair of Rites & Practices after many years of dedicated service. Our community has been so very fortunate and so enriched by his contribution and will continue to be, as I know he will stay involved in R&P as well as other aspects of community life. Gary Webber will be taking over as Chair of R&P which is fantastic news and I'm sure he will be able to count on all our support. Finally from the community, many thanks to Jon Tobias and Gary Webber who are stepping down as cheder teachers at the end of term after many committed years of teaching.

Happy summer holidays

Keren Durant
Chair of Council



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

It is difficult to look into the future, perhaps even quite a daunting exercise. You never know.... maybe you don't want to face up to it! It can be even more difficult to look into oneself. Critical self-appraisal can also reveal uncomfortable and unpalatable truths! Is everything really as all right as we had hoped and thought? Perhaps now might be a good time for some self-appraisal. If we look around synagogue communities and review especially the age structure and consider where we are going to be and what we shall want in 25, 30, or 50 years time, we may feel a sense of foreboding. Does anybody think that we can possibly carry on in the way we have been doing for the past 50 years? The decline in numbers and the changes in attitudes must surely persuade us a radical rethink is not out of order.

In order to achieve a viable future for progressive Jewish synagogues in Britain it might be necessary to envisage alternative forms of organisation. The current competitive culture wherein the *masorti*, reform and liberal movements essentially struggle with each other in their efforts to gain members is wasteful in terms of both human and financial resources. This is especially true when most of the rabbis who are the spiritual leaders of these synagogue communities studied together and learnt the same Jewish texts and traditions; the same Jewish history and liturgy; the same Jewish ethics and spiritual techniques. We are the same Jews, but are split into combative strands and fight amongst ourselves, participating in a power play, which fragments us even more.

I would like to suggest an alternative future scenario. Even more, I suggest that as an inevitable need, if we are to survive, we must

switch to a culture of cooperation rather than competition, recognition rather than denial of the authenticity of the other and work together with good will to overcome our differences by recognising them as strengths rather than weaknesses.

For example, I was told that *masorti* communities decided, on a synagogue-by-synagogue basis, whether men and women would sit separately or mixed. This was never dictated by any central body, neither an organisation nor by a rabbinic authority. Another example; there were reform synagogues which did not allow women on the *bima* and others that did. The congregations themselves were respected as autonomous bodies and their rabbis were respected for their spiritual authority and moral leadership. Another example; some liberal rabbis carried out blessing ceremonies, in private, after civil marriages between Jew and non-Jew, others would do so publicly, others not at all. The move to organisational status in the form of 'movements' has, arguably, limited rabbinic freedom and their spiritual leadership. In so doing it has reduced progressive Jewish life to little but a kind of Jewish political party status, each movement vying for votes. The movements may otherwise be viewed as commercial competitors striving to make a profit from members' capitation and competing for an ever-diminishing pot of supporters' charitable contributions.

I think we need to work together more to support each other and avoid waste and duplication. Therefore, I suggest we immediately delegate small teams to start negotiations to bring about:

1. Amalgamation of central office resources.
2. Amalgamation of rabbinic courts.



The Rabbi's Summer Dates

Some newer members of our Congregation might not know that I have an arrangement whereby I am available full-time for two thirds of the year, i.e. from September to April. Between May and August I am away, generally at the Jewish Study Centre and Multi- Faith Retreat House Kathy and I have developed in Brittany. However we remain in touch and available for consultation as usual **by telephone [0033 296 21 65 51] or email berryuk@freeuk.com** for most of that time and can return if needed in an emergency.

This year we are having most of June as our holiday month and will be out of touch during that month.

Our actual dates back in Bristol are as follows:

22nd - 27th May; 26th June - 1st July; 27th - 30th July.

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry

3. Appreciation of rabbinic spiritual authority.

4. Recognition of synagogal autonomy.

The aims of these negotiations, which ought to be pursued as a matter of urgency and with sincerity, are for a positive outcome so that:

1. All synagogues are respected as autonomous communities of Jews with responsibility for decisions affecting their members

2. Rabbis are respected for their spiritual leadership, providing educational direction, Jewish ethical and moral guidance and spiritual inspiration for their synagogue communities.

3. Progressive Jewish communities are organised as a confederation, which all synagogues can join whichever style of approach they may have had in the past.

4. Individuals who feel a need to belong to a movement as well would have that freedom, so could pay a membership fee. However

individual members of synagogues who do not wish to be members of a movement would not then be coerced into payment of a capitation fee to a movement they did not want to be a member of, as happens now.

What is more important is that Jewish people who consider that a multifaceted style of being Jewish is a necessary part of the community, bringing strength through respect for difference, are not restricted to being members of one particular movement, simply because their synagogue has that movement affiliation, because I think that Judaism is more than a movement; it is a people and a faith, a tribe and a religious culture, an approach to God and human beings which manifestly transcends any particular movement. Movements are limited and therefore essentially limiting; being Jewish, though, is surely about overcoming limitation and embracing unlimited, indeed infinite, potential.

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry



I have recently realised that I'm liberal. What I mean is not that I am a Liberal, but that I'm liberal. Perhaps libertarian would be a better word. Or even anarchist: I don't know – see what you think.

I have a vision of a liberal (but not Liberal) synagogue. It would be liberal because it would not be affiliated with any body, but just be a group of Jews getting together and allowing everyone to do whatever they liked. It's that simple.

I would start out with just two things: the Torah and the Siddur. It would have to be the traditional Siddur. This is because the Siddur is such a basic text that changing it around formally excludes us from so many things and resources that are fundamental to Judaism. If you can't use a traditional Siddur, you are cut off from all of the past and most of the present of Judaism. OK, you don't agree with all of it? Hard luck: just put up with those bits. (This is the basic rule for how the liberal synagogue works.)

But within these two resources, you can do what you like. The person who leads the service decides how it's done that week. They get to say how much is included, if it's in English or Hebrew, how long it is, what tunes to sing, how it's structured. If other people don't like it, either just put up with it, do your own thing, or don't come that week: it's that simple.

This principle underpins all the controversies that are such a mainstay of communal life, for example:

- ☞ What about women leading?
- ☞ Who counts in a minyan?
- ☞ Who counts as Jewish?
- ☞ What if I don't like the views expressed?
- ☞ What if I don't agree with what is being said?
- ☞ What if I don't agree with the Siddur or Torah reading?
- ☞ Etc, etc, etc.

The answer to these and all other questions is the same three alternatives - either just put up with it, do your own thing, or don't come that week: it's that simple.

Let's look at these options

Either:

1. just put up with it – just swallow your objections for the sake of the community. The group is more important than just me, and sometimes I just have to accept that and get along with the others for the sake of our development.
2. do your own thing – if you don't like the way the service is run, go into a corner, quietly and sensitively, and daven by yourself. That's fine. If you want to add a few more prayers, or miss out some, that's OK. Just don't make a big deal out of it.
3. don't come that week – if you really can't stand it, and the above two options aren't working for you, because you feel it's such a point of principle, just miss that week out. Come along next week. Remember:



when you are leading the service you get to do it the way you want! And if you don't like the way I run the service, go into the next room with your own minyan and do your own thing.

What is it that really breaks up congregations? The Ego. What *I* want. But what if, for a brief moment, I can start to put my Ego to one side and let other people do what they want to do and let them be what they want to be. The spiritual life, after all, is to a great extent a process of controlling and restricting the Ego, in pursuit of a larger goal – the service of God. But this process has to work the same way for everyone: I'll let you be yourself if you let me be myself.

You can believe what you like. The liberal synagogue has no creed. You can be a Chasid, an atheist, a feminist, a Zionist, a Yekke, a Litvak or anything else (or any combination of anything else) that you want to be – so long as you let me be as well.

Why is this whole project so laughably and hopelessly optimistic? Because to make it work would take qualities which are in very short supply in organised religion: respect for others; concern for their feelings; sensitivity to the needs of the group; honesty; integrity. As I start to list them I am aware of how difficult this is. I have to give up some things very dear to me: always being right; using principles as a weapon to dominate and get my way; familiarity and cosiness; fear of engaging with others honestly. And many more.

I suppose that part of my vision of Judaism is that it is a body of knowledge and practise that has been defined historically. We are all

on some point along the continuum of belief, knowledge and practice, or we wouldn't be synagogue members in the first place. Where I am in my personal life will decide where I choose to be on this continuum. I can choose to be completely non-observant, or I may choose to be completely observant. That's up to me. That's what I mean by liberal. The liberal synagogue does not provide answers or direction as to where one should be, it provides resources for members to develop in the direction and pace that they choose. The liberal synagogue does not "take a stand" on things: it allows members the opportunities to look into Jewish resources and decide for themselves what position to take. The liberal synagogue does not promote any viewpoint – it promotes the use of as many resources as possible to try to help members get an understanding of Jewishness.

I'm not going to go on any more. The liberal synagogue is a group of people who get together as often as each chooses to come, to explore and celebrate what it means to be Jewish. The form that takes will vary, perhaps wildly. But remember the simple principle: you can do what you want, and allow everyone else to do what they want. If other people don't like a specific thing, service or event, either just put up with it, do your own thing, or don't come that week: it's that simple. It doesn't need a building, or lots of money, or any of the usual stuff. It just takes the willingness to give up a bit of Ego to make it happen.

Peter Walters



OUR POSITION WITHIN LIBERAL JUDAISM

I have been considering for some weeks now replying to the article by Rabbi Berry as to whether or not the synagogue should become independent.

I have been for the last 2 ½ years an officer of Liberal Judaism and before that was a representative on its Council. I recently stood down as an officer.

At Limmud last year I attempted to find out what interest there was for the proposition that rather than there being two progressive movements in this country there become one looser federation of independent progressive synagogues. I also raised this matter at last year's Liberal Biennial conference. I must say that I did not receive much support for the idea.

I floated the matter again with the Liberal Judaism officers earlier this year and received little support. I asked to put forward my arguments to the Rabbinic Conference (of Rabbis of Liberal Judaism) and I did address them in the spring. The gist of my argument to them was that without the support of the Rabbis of the Movement the lay members would not be able to effect any change. The movements themselves, the bureaucracy and the paid employees do not, I fear, have any enthusiasm for changing the status quo.

The large London congregations are in a competitive environment for members and I think are satisfied with the current position. Provincial communities, such as ours, where there is only one "show in town" are in a different position. If there is no enthusiasm for some sort of federation, would there be any benefit or advantage in becoming independent. I would argue that there would be some benefit in becoming independent only if it would strengthen our particular community in any way. By becoming independent would we attract non-affiliated Jews who otherwise would not wish to join a constituent synagogue of Liberal Judaism? I doubt it. Would we be more likely to achieve the aim of having one synagogue in Bristol and the surrounding area and bring the two Jewish communities of Bristol together? Possibly. Would our current members be happier if they were not affiliated to any movement? That is hard to say.

What is undoubtedly true is that our members are not terribly interested in the workings of LJ. It is hard to involve them. This community is not alone. Currently, and I find this very difficult to accept, there is no representatives of either of the two largest communities of the movement as officers of Liberal Judaism. That in my view is simply unsustainable.

I think that we should move to have a debate on the whole subject within our community. Should we become independent? I would only support such a move on three conditions:



1. We will have to continue to support the Leo Baeck College. Currently 36% of our financial contribution to LJ finds its way to the college and that must be maintained.
2. Our contribution to the Leo Baeck College and to either or both LJ and the Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ) should be no less than it is currently to LJ. The college and also the bodies that provide relations with other Jewish bodies in the country and the non Jewish world should be supported.
3. We preserve our Jewish "identity". If we were to become independent we should preserve in our constitution that people would be entitled to become members of the community/synagogue if they were eligible to join a constituent of either LJ or MRJ. i.e. no one who is currently a member

under any current rules would be excluded.

Some people may argue that with those provisos it may not be worth leaving the movement. If that is the case so be it. I think that we should have a debate. I think there is an interest in having a debate and I would welcome it. If the consensus is to maintain the status quo then every effort should be made to educate our members about and involve them with LJ and that process should be reciprocal, in that LJ itself should also work towards gaining our support and understanding.

Michael Romain



In the last edition of Alonim our Rabbi discussed the continuing role or otherwise of our synagogue as part of the Liberal Judaism Movement.

In the article Rabbi Berry also told of how many people talk to him in private and that he felt people should not be afraid to express their opinions in public, “openly and without the need to feel they have to hide their opinion”.

This seemed to be a ‘lead in’ to whether this congregation should remain within the movement. Indeed, a strong argument was put forward to say that this congregation has a tendency towards independence and that we have developed over the years our own *minhag*.

This is all very true. Then again, I believe that this would be the case with many other Jewish congregations, no matter they be Reform, Liberal or Masorti.

As you may have gathered I am personally in favour of us remaining part of the Liberal Movement. I think it would be folly for us to become independent, if not now, certainly in the long term.

The argument about two movements being in competition in the London area does not arise here in Bristol or indeed the West Country, which we as a synagogue endeavour to serve and meet the needs of ‘Progressive Jews’.

Once again the example of the synagogues in Belsize Square and Westminster does not ‘hold water’ here in Bristol and the West. This is because we do not have that many Jews to choose from to make such a proposition viable.

Our synagogue, under the Liberal banner either locally meets, or is in accord with, a

number of contemporary issues. We do this in a warm, intelligent and welcoming way.

Some examples:- The acceptance of patrilineal descent, the full role of women as members within the various synagogues and indeed also as Rabbis, we have access to a Shlicha, if times got tough we would have wider support of the movement to guide us, then there is the brave issue of ‘civil’ partnership acceptance, the welcoming of proselytes and a rabbinic board for them to attend, our links to the Leo Baeck College etc.

I would dearly love to see the amalgamation of the Reform and Liberal movements, however, until then I am proud to be and remain a Liberal Jew.

In an article in ‘LJ Today’ entitled ‘A reminder of why we are proud’, a review of Peter Tobais’ book ‘of Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty First Century’, Baroness Julia Neuberger says, “For Tobias, Liberal Judaism is the only branch of Judaism in the United Kingdom that seeks to re-discover and emphasise the underlying principles that have been at the heart of this ancient faith since its inception more than three thousand years ago”. She goes on to say, “The thing I’ve had most pride in is that ours is the first faith organisation to have offered a service of blessing in civil partnership ceremonies. Liberal Judaism is about welcoming people and making them feel comfortable”.

So for me I hope we remain part of the Liberal movement that has endeavoured ever since its foundation to bring an inclusive Jewish way of life to men and women in the United Kingdom

Bernard Price



FORUM– Let's Think Before We Leap



It is very good to have an opportunity to discuss the identity of our synagogue and to think about the direction of our affiliations. I hope that there are some principles that we as a community would be unwilling to surrender, should we ever have a serious proposal about becoming independent -the foremost of these being complete inclusivity for anyone wishing to share in the life of our synagogue. For me this includes accepting as full members those of patrilineal descent and those of our community who are homosexual. This is particularly important because such groups are prohibited from worshipping as Jews in any other setting. This is not about mere 'political correctness' but real concerns for individual human beings who would otherwise be rejected and devalued. Judaism repeatedly calls us to justice and the need to consider all people equally.

However, there are some other principles which I feel are also important e.g. gender inclusive language. Liberal Judaism has led the way in this and many other areas. It is at the forefront of modern Jewish thinking. In isolation we could easily become stale and narrow. I believe that a synagogue needs to belong to a community as much as an individual. It is by being in community that we learn and grow.

As members of LJ we receive complete freedom in the format of our services. Throughout the Liberal Jewish movement there has been a return to more Hebrew to reflect present interests and requirements. In our own synagogue we continue to process the scroll which some synagogues consider as primitive ritual, but we are not excluded from it - indeed our siddur guides us in how to do it. We are gifted with a beautiful liturgy, which challenges us toward a spiritual life without asking us to accept concepts which have repelled many people from modern day Judaism, such as temple worship.

I know that a lot of people complain about the money we send to LJ. Before we stop sending money, I would like to know that we had truly and fully repaid our debt to them. That is, have we repaid in full the loan and support to help our synagogue become established and to train our Rabbi; further have we provided sufficient income to the movement to enable other synagogues to be helped in the same way?

Bristol & West is currently a very creative congregation and we are blessed with many wonderful service leaders, in addition to our Rabbi, as well as excellent Council leadership. However, we have no way of knowing that this situation will continue. Only two years ago we were struggling to find enough people for Council and an appeal also went out for more service leaders. In two years time we may have returned to that situation. Communities grow, but the individuals within them come and go. To leap into independence on the strength of our current membership and its skills would be foolhardy. As long as we belong to a movement we also have an external pool of resources to access, should the need arise.

Finally, it is worth remembering that we have among us many who joined the synagogue exactly because it is a member of the Liberal Judaism movement. Being part of a movement means that people can join a synagogue in confidence, aware that they know the underlying principles, even if the specifics vary. It is harder to identify the beliefs and precepts of an independent congregation. Having said this, I am aware that many members of our congregation are not informed about the principles of Liberal Judaism and perhaps this is something that we need to address.

Judy Lazarus

NOT writing as Editor



Four of us from Bristol Progressive thought the recent Shabbaton held in the delightful Oxford Synagogue was a wonderfully stimulating day, thanks to Oxford for being wonderful hosts, to Leo Baeck and the participating Rabbis for their support and to all those who put so much effort into making it such a success. We all came away feeling that we should do more shared events like this. Inevitably we wished for more time in our chosen sessions; so perhaps slightly less choice, longer on each, might be worth trying in the future. I really enjoyed the Service too and the fact that we were enhancing a Shabbat in this way.

Oxford is a stunning example of a Synagogue that accommodates all the established UK traditions, including Orthodox and Progressive, sharing all their educational and social resources under one roof yet offering different forms of worship. This getting together in the smaller communities seems to be catching on elsewhere. A few of us attended a pre-Passover day in Exeter recently at which similarly, everyone was welcome *and no-one was asked to prove their Jewish status at either event*. Things need to change and Anglo Jewry sorely needs more of this. I believe this is much easier to achieve away from the larger Jewish centres where there is intense competition for members.

It is always a bonus to meet people from other Progressive communities and to get the chance to exchange ideas. It was equally satisfying to meet people there, tolerant of us but who prefer a more traditional *orthodox* service – I hate the word, too – as this avoids the divisions that separate Synagogues create.

It was a joy to be altogether as just Jews!!

Turning to Richard Buckley's letter in the May/June edition of *Alonim*, he asks if the ability to *leyn* is being lost. Dare I suggest that some liberal and anglicized approaches have resulted in a laid back attitude to the importance of Hebrew and that it is not a priority until that last rush before Bnei Mitzvah?

We have excellent examples of members who have acquired this skill in our Synagogue, but it does not come easily in an environment where there is less emphasis on it and this is one of the issues that the Oxford model solves. In their case the religious instruction for all religious shades is shared and this inclusive approach enables the children to benefit from serious Hebrew study from those with the background to teach it well.

Elsewhere in this issue, I guess the debate has started following the Rabbi's thoughts on our becoming an independent Progressive community. I just wonder if the Oxford model might be even better. It would also solve the problems the Bristol Hebrew Congregation face.

It is not our fault the Liberal and Reform movements can't or won't get their act together by uniting so why can't we have the best of both!

Repetitive, segregated dogmatic services are becoming a thing of the past and many regional synagogues are now a blend of both

traditional ideas with a reformed approach. Political Correctness must never dominate our minhagim and create Judaism Lite. Creating our own Minhagim to protect our members on the issues of descent and same-sex commitments are neither non-negotiable but nor must we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Our small "L" liberal attitudes must not be stopped from sitting comfortably alongside an equally sincere respect for those traditional Jewish values that have been the cement that have bound us to each other throughout history. Who today slavishly keeps all the 613 Mitzvot anyway?

My Father told me I was a Levi (a Levite) and after he died when I was only 9, when reciting Kaddish every week, it left me with a link to

him and a responsibility to engage with Judaism, to pass it on. I know that this has always helped me find some spirituality in the hardest of times. My Grandfather told me to always remember my Identity as a Jew and that being a Levi was special. Yet this too has been ditched by the Progressives along with the rich heritage of Cohanim.

There could be one Synagogue to suit all but the handful of fundamentalists in this city. For me that is what being independent should mean. Oxford is worth a visit.

Robert Hurst



You can't have but noticed that it is now officially the "let's boycott Israel" season. The Irish Actors union have tried to do it as has the UK National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at a time when one of their members is still held captive in Gaza. UNISON are talking about doing it and of course the Union of College Union (UCU) has recently passed a motion to consider boycotting Israel. It is this last body that I wish to address, as I am a fully paid up member of UCU. For many of us it came as no surprise as one of its predecessors the AUT boycotted Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities in 2005 on the claim of supposed suppression of intellectual freedom. When Haifa University threatened to sue the AUT for its libellous misrepresentation, the Union were quick to drop this and the motion was rapidly defeated after a re-vote. In the case of Bristol University, academics rejected the boycott as they felt it was both hypocritical and failed to help bring peace and justice to all sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict

The anti-Israeli lobby has learnt from this experience. The recent motion that was passed by UCU on Friday 8th June did not actually call for a boycott per se but that all branches should debate the arguments for and against an academic boycott of Israeli universities. Sally Hunt, President of the UCU has repeatedly argued that she does not believe that the majority of UCU members support such a boycott but it is still to be seen whether there will be a national referendum to allow the membership to vote. This episode raises several interesting questions.

1. *Is a boycott of Israel justified?* The pro-motion boycott cited ALL Israeli academics as "complicit" with the actions of their government. This is a strange argument as it essentially endorses "collective punishment.

The same academics are the first to condemn Israeli army actions, which often also inflict collective punishment on Palestinians because of the actions of a radical sub-group. Secondly, it smacks of hypocrisy as presumably they as academics are complicit with the British government's action to invade and occupy Iraq and Afghanistan despite the fact they probably opposed this action.

2. *Does a boycott achieve anything?* Yes – it has clearly generated much media attention and even a lot of political fuss. I suspect that this is a large element of motivation. The more anti-Israeli feeling that is generated the more likely it is that governments might put pressure on Israel. Interestingly the boycott of South Africa is frequently cited as an effective analogy, despite any evidence that it achieved much. Michael Yudkin in his article "Is an academic boycott of Israel justified?"¹ cites Jonathan Hyslop, Deputy Director of the Wits Institute, at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Throughout the 1980's he witnessed the effects of the boycott at first hand, and was for a time a supporter of it.

"I can honestly say that, throughout the 1980's, I did not talk to a single South African scholar or university employee whose political views had been changed in any way by the academic boycott. Whereas the economic boycott had some palpable effect on the regime, and sports and cultural boycotts had irritant effects on white society, the academic boycott had little in the way of visible achievements."

As someone who knows some Israeli academics I believe Hyslop is correct. Israelis already believe that the whole world is against them and rather than change their views they, if anything, become more insular and are prone to bury their heads in the sand. This doesn't help Palestinians.



3. *Is a boycott a subtle expression of anti-Semitism?* You may have heard Sir Lord Claus Moser, a refugee from Nazi Germany, discuss the rising acceptability of anti-Semitism on the radio. His belief was that the anti-Israel discourse served as a cloak to hide anti-Semitism. Classical anti-Semitism is the discrimination against, or denial of, the right of Jews to live as equal members of a free society; the new anti-Semitism—incorrectly referred to as "anti-Zionism"... — involves the discrimination against, denial of, or assault upon the right of the Jewish people to live as an equal member of the family of nations. All that has happened is that it has moved from discrimination against Jews as individuals to discrimination against Jews as people. (above taken from wikipedia)².

Many of my left-wing colleagues who support the boycott would be horrified to be considered anti-Jewish. Some merely wish to see some sort of justice for the Palestinian people and would support very reasonably the notion of a two-state solution with security for both parties. However, there has been a change in the left-perspective on Israel, from its earlier days of socialist glory (and the triumph of the kibbutz movement) to a belief, amongst some, that no Israel should exist and that the only fair solution is a single state of Palestine with Muslims and Jews as co-inhabitants. Such a view is both totally unrealistic and denies Jews the right of a national homeland whilst fulfilling the nationalistic aspirations of the Palestinians. These same academics would support other national movements such as the Armenians. So what's the difference? Some argue this is driven primarily by anti-Americanism as Israel is so closely linked to the US in their minds. It may also reflect anti-religion. Israel is de facto a Jewish homeland for Jews to live in religious freedom. Palestine is an ethnic homeland for Palestinians regardless of religious background, though with the rise of fundamentalist Islamic

groups like Hamas this becomes more questionable. For example, how many Jews are left in Iraq?

Most left wing academics may not appreciate that Judaism, unlike other religions, rests on a fundamental covenant between God, Abraham and his descendants. This promises the Jewish people a specific piece of land in return for their faith. Thus the existence of the land of Israel, (we can argue about the specific boundaries) is part and parcel of being a non-secular Jew. This of course does not stop one being critical of Israel and the policies of its government. But such criticism is not the same as questioning its very existence. Those against a state of Israel are anti-Jewish, whether they appreciate it or not.

Academia to me is all about debate and argument. To stop talking to one side is anti-academic. It does not help Palestinian academics and it does not make Israeli academics more sensitive to their problems. Wouldn't it be better to foster academic links so that Israeli academics could appreciate the difficulties of their Palestinians counterparts? Joint research projects would allow both sides to share and help each other with common problems, such as infectious diseases that care little about geopolitical boundaries or water shortages. Wouldn't it be great if British academics helped facilitate such a process rather than perpetuating stereotypical negative views on both sides. The boycott is a senseless political action that does little credit to British academics.

Yoav Ben-Shlomo

1. http://www.engageonline.org.uk/journal/index.php?journal_id=15&article_id=61.
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism#New_antisemitism



This issue's 'Getting to Know You' is slightly different. Instead of an interview on the life of one of our older members, we have a snapshot into the life of Maxine Gosden and her new business.

Maxine Gosden (a member of BWPJC) has been living in the area for ten years. She was born into an orthodox Jewish family . She lives with her two sons in Axbridge, Somerset. Both boys attended Cheder at Bristol & West and had bar mitzvahs here too.

Maxine has just decided to launch into a new career. She has spent her whole life in a service industry and enjoys talking to her customers and giving them the service that they deserve. Her last job was working in customer care for the Business Team in a well known high street Bank. Before that, while the boys were young, she ran a successful and popular Pets Hotel locally.

Now Maxine has launched into the travel business and has set up a new Travel Agency called Dynamic Travel. She has started the business because of her love of travel and has a great deal of

experience having been to both Poles, the Antarctic and the Sub Arctic, also she has traveled most of the USA, toured Thailand, Borneo (seen Orangutan in the wild), visited Chile, Argentina, The Seychelles, Maldives, Egypt (Nile and Red Sea) Israel, Tunisia, ridden through game parks in South Africa, Europe, plus fabulous cruises and so the list goes on. (Perhaps we'll hear more about some of her travel in the future.)

Maxine says that she is looking forward to helping her customers go to the places of their dreams, with no nightmares.

The agency is based in Loxton and is a member of the Global Travel Group, able to source holidays, flight and, accommodation from all over the world at competitive prices, and by the sounds of it much more too.

If you would like to book your next holiday with a member of our congregation then call Maxine on

01934 751206

www.dynamic-travel.co.uk



Where in the world would you like to be ?

- The Caribbean for Christmas ?
- Skiing in Val D'isere at New Year ?
- The Canaries in February ?
- Crusing the Nile at Easter ?
- Relaxing on the beach in the Mediterranean in July ?
- Prague Christmas Markets in November ?

Where ever in the world you want to go Dynamic Travel will ensure you get there with a quality professional service and excellent value for money!

Tel: 01934 751 206

E-mail: maxine@dynamic-travel.co.uk

W: www.dynamic-travel.co.uk





Parashat Emor: Leviticus Ch 21. vv16-24

Sylvia Murray introduced the discussion by centring on the ruling that “no man among the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall be qualified to offer the food of his God”...nor....“the Lord’s offering by fire”.

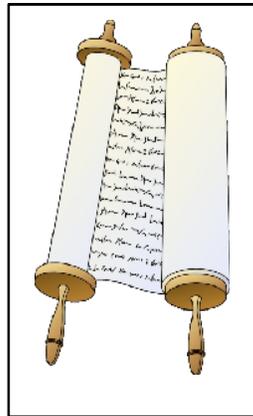
Why should these men be disqualified for reasons beyond their control? It is difficult for the modern mind not to be concerned about possible psychological damage to a person who is pronounced unfit for a task on grounds of some, even minor, physical defect. We feel that outward appearance should not debar anyone from doing any job.

There are still some prejudices and preconceptions concerning appearance; for example: “the outside reflects the inside”, “ugly equals evil”, “meeting eyebrows reveal a deceitful nature”...

However, there is no moral issue involved in the acceptance or non-acceptance of a man for the priestly functions. There is no question of his being unworthy. He remains entitled to all the benefits of belonging to the priestly tribe; only the carrying out of particular tasks is affected.

It was not the task of the Cohenim to rule. Their job was to perform the Temple ritual; and none other was open to them. They had no land, they could not even do voluntary work.

Judaism involves obligations and responsibilities, not rights. The collective responsibility of the priestly caste was to create a “holy space”. Such a task requires perfection on the part of the person performing the task; any blemish would detract from this. Temple worship was a mirror image of divine perfection; the Cohen’s task was to return a perfect object to God.



Thank you Sylvia for leading us into an interesting discussion. I would like to thank Jo Schapiro also for his thoughts on Orthodox and Liberal Judaism which he presented for the June Shiur. He has kindly consented to offer these as an article elsewhere in this Alonim.

Kate Withers

There will now be a break over the Summer months. Please note that the next Shiur will take place on the first Shabbat in October



A brief History of Klezmer Music—part 4



To conclude this series of articles I will now take a look at the instruments commonly associated with *klezmer* music.

In many cities (like Metz, Frankfurt or Prague), the Jewish musician's activities became heavily taxed also they were restricted as to when they could play and how many or which instruments they could employ.

In the Ukraine, of the 18th and 19th centuries, Jews were only allowed to play on 'quiet' instruments (fiddle, *tsimbl* and flute). 'Strong' ones (brass and drums) were forbidden. Even the number of musicians and the length of the concerts were restricted.

The violin or *fidl* was therefore the most appropriate instrument under these restrictions. Apparently in the sixteenth century, the violin was considered the lowest in the hierarchy of the musical instruments, but it was easier to flee a pogrom with a fiddle than with a piano.

"The *"ershter"* (lead violin) of a *'kapelye'* (orchestra) used to play the main melodic line on the top of the register. The *'tsweyter'* (second violin) played an 'heterophonical' version, often one octave lower and the *'fturke'* or 'secunda' made a

rhythmical accompaniment" (Josh Horowitz & Seth Rogovoy).

The fiddle embodied the essence of Klezmer style and soon became the symbol of the Jewish music and the old Yiddish expression *'Yidl mit'n Fidl'* inspired a famous song and a movie. Some synagogue members may recall showings of this 1936 film at our own synagogue cinema starring Molly Picon *'Yidl'*.

The flute (*fleyt* or *shtolper*) was used since the 17th century. Mikhoel Guzikov played it before creating his *'shtroymfidl'* in the 1830s. Piccolos were common among *klezmerim*, as they were cheap and easy to make.



The clarinet (clarinet, *foyal* or *forsht*) wasn't adapted to the Jewish *'kapelye'* from classical orchestras nor replaced the Hungarian or Transylvanian taragot (tarogato), but was brought in during the second half of the nineteenth century by (Jewish) musicians from German and Russian (or possibly Napoleonic) military bands. The Klezmer clarinetist acquired a better social status than the fiddlers did.

If many melodic instruments were present in the band, the higher (fiddle or clarinet) played the lead voice; the reverse was used only for short moments, to obtain a contrast effect.

The cimbalom (*tsimbl*), a hammered dulcimer,



was already popular in Galicia, Bukovina (Poland) and Belarus in the sixteenth century, but it's not clear if it was brought by Jews, Gypsies or Hungarians. With a hundred strings, it was not easy to tune and the listeners' ears must have been more tolerant at that time than today.

The accordion (sometimes: *harmoshke*) was expensive and rare but highly regarded in the late nineteenth century. Its key-frame with buttons, its bronze vibrating blades (actually they are made of zinc or aluminium), "its little rigid goat leather bellow gave a soft, hot sound close to the human voice and allowed a large gamut of nuances and ornamentation but demanded strength to play it" (Josh Horowitz).

The piano was seldom used by the European *klezmerim* for, as a middle-class instrument, it was not easily available to poor people, for street music or at weddings. "It became more present among the American immigrants at the end of the 19th century, as part of their socialization into the American life" (Mark Slobin).



The cello (*tshelo* or *barok*), lighter and more flexible than the double bass, could be strapped to the shoulders during the processions. "The thumb wasn't usually needed because the gut strings weren't very stretched and the high notes rarely played. The bow was

shorter; more curved and with less stretched coarse hair than nowadays. It was holed in the 'first position', in the middle. The instrument was supposed to sound like a 'burden' or a percussion, to give a greater sound volume in front of noisy listeners or dancers" (Josh Horowitz).

The percussion was often reduced to a little drum (*tshokal*) or a bass drum (*poyk,puk* or *baraban*), sometimes with a cymbal (*tats*).

Many other less typical instruments were included in Klezmer bands: brass, guitar, piano and later saxophones (considered by the Nazis as instruments of the 'Jewish-Negro subversion'), xylophone, banjo, tambourine and even tablas, Indian sitar or didgeridoo.

Klezmer music and Yiddish songs today offer a large treasure chest of music that portrays the many facets of human emotion. Happiness, melancholy, and spirituality, and not forgetting humour and romance.

So that concludes my short history of klezmer music. There is indeed much more, for instance, regarding the different themes and rhythms e.g. 'Hora', 'Freylekhs', 'Sher' or 'Sirba' and 'Doina' etc but that is a whole subject in itself and I cannot claim any expertise. However, I am sure eager fans of klezmer will already know about this or seek out further information.

Long Live Klezmer!

Bernard Price



On Sunday 22nd April, the Scottish klezmer band, Moishe's Bagel, played at St. George's in Bristol. Many of our synagogue members turned out to enjoy the performance, and, indeed, took up nearly a whole row of the auditorium!

The band consisted of five musicians with very varied backgrounds. It was interesting to note that there was no clarinettist, which is quite unusual for a klezmer group. This did not detract, however, from the depth and vitality of the music.

The atmosphere in the hall was electric, crackling with barely - suppressed emotion, as Moishe's Bagel launched themselves into a heartfelt and exhilarating repertoire of lively freilachs and bulgars, Balkan dances, and slow horas. The music was interwoven with many rich stylistic threads. On a background of Eastern European cadences and Middle Eastern rhythms, splashes of jazz, Celtic folk and classical music blossomed, producing a rich and satisfying tapestry for the ears and the heart.

Greg Lawson cut a strikingly passionate

gypsy figure, as he bowed his way through intricate, fiery violin passages. Phil Alexander, on the piano, was the master of improvisation, as well as the occasional entertaining anecdote. Pete Garnett on accordion, Mario Caribe on double bass, and Guy Nicholson on percussion, also provided much colour and interest to the feast of sound.

The only thing that prevented the audience from getting to their feet and dancing were the fixed, cramped rows of chairs in the hall. We were completely in the grip of the music. One moment, we would be bouncing in our seats in paroxysms of joy, the next, wiping the tears from our faces as the music turned sad and soulful. The applause between the pieces was rapturous and wild.

This was an intense, spirited and emotional evening, and it was obvious that everyone in the hall enjoyed it immensely. If Moishe's Bagel ever comes to play locally again, I urge you to go along and see them. It will certainly get your heart beating and your blood flowing again.

Reported by

Miriam Patrick



I was intrigued by Richard's challenging piece in the last issue of *Alonim*. At first glance it is a surprise, because on the surface it is so easy to refute. But I think he is touching on a concern that we all share.

So first the refutation. I have now been Chair of Rites & Practices for some years; I am a regular service taker, and have taught a number of people (children and adults) preparing for bar- and bat-mitzvah. My childhood was in what was officially a reform community, though we went infrequently and I learnt little there. I picked up some Hebrew during a trip to Israel in 1968, but almost everything I know about Judaism dates from the time I joined this community about 1991. In truth I feel lucky that I have been able to learn progressive Judaism without having to graft it onto earlier knowledge – not only orthodox Judaism, but also the traditional learning acquired by boys in preparation for their bar mitzvah (I never had one).

Almost everything I know now has come from this community, the two rabbis I have known here and the huge resource of the community's collective wisdom. I can leyn the torah and have taught others. I don't do it very often, but only because I only rarely give myself enough time to learn the trope. I was taught to leyn by my younger son, a rather relentless and unforgiving teacher. He learnt it for his bar mitzvah from Paul Freedman, one of the members of our community who left to become a rabbi.

The collective concern is about the validity of progressive Judaism. Is what we do and say

here really Jewish? After all, the orthodox communities would say not, and their claims for being truly Jewish are not going to be challenged by anyone (or hardly anyone – just wait). This doubt expresses itself in all kinds of ways. We continue to use 'tradition' as a refuge in arguments over matters of liturgy and ritual, and it always feels to me as if there is a strong force pulling us all back towards orthodox forms of worship. On a couple of occasions in the past I have conducted services entirely in English, and it didn't feel right, even to me. It's hard to imagine any form of Judaism that doesn't acknowledge tradition and historical continuity in one way or another, and more orthodox strains can lay claim to more authority on that score. For those who were brought up in a more orthodox community it will always be difficult to adopt wholeheartedly something that claims to supersede the certainties of their youth.

However it seems to me that, as progressive Jews, we should be more confident about what we are doing. It is sometimes difficult to get Christians to understand that Judaism has moved on from the customs of the second temple. But we all know that for most of its history there is a strong thread in Judaism of learned men (unfortunately almost always men) struggling to adapt traditional teaching to modern circumstances. The Talmud is a vast repository of such debates.

Two examples will suffice. I recently found myself in a discussion about the law forbidding the mixing of wool and linen in clothes. I imagined that this would be interpreted as a general prohibition against



mixing different fibres, so that when silk was brought to the Middle East it would be included as something not to be mixed. But, I was told, the reality was exactly the opposite. Because the rule is obscure, and because nobody is quite clear why it exists, it is interpreted by Talmudic rabbis in the narrowest sense, not the broadest sense.

Second, the laws in the Torah are full of capital offences, so that it comes across as a very punitive society. Yet, as a recent writer in the Guardian reminded us, judicial killing was a rare event, and the Sanhedrin went to great lengths to find reasons not to sentence convicted people to death; a Sanhedrin that pronounced one death sentence in 70 years was considered bloodthirsty. If that is correct, then one has to wonder why progressive attitudes to Judaism didn't continue. My own explanation is that during the centuries of oppression in Europe, Jews clung to traditional practice to give themselves a sense of security. Judaism never lost its intellectual rigour, but used it to maintain certainty, not to challenge it. We think of progressive Judaism as a late response to the European

Enlightenment, but it's not a surprise that it should start in mid 19th century Germany, among prosperous Jews well assimilated in their local culture, nor that the modern powerhouse of progressive Judaism is in the USA, where Jews are prosperous, secure, and confident.

Of course as a movement that is, on the surface, young in the context of Jewish history it's not surprising that we should sometimes feel unsure of what we are about. But remember, as people try to adapt traditional teaching to modern life we are the true heirs of a Jewish tradition extending at least as far back as the Babylonian exile, at least 2500 years. In their attempts to treat a particular tradition as set in stone, it is the orthodox who are out on a limb, not us.

David Jewell



Ref. SHAVUOT 2007.4.2

This Paper is an attempt to describe the Liberal and Orthodox views of the origin of Torah and give a brief comment. Essentially, it is the material I presented at the Shiur of 02 June 2007.

The Liberal View on the origin of Torah is that it was written by humans and displays the religious worldview held by them at their particular time in history. Ref. A. The Liberal or historic approach is based on the Torah text itself, when explored by critical scholarship. That activity uncovered, over many centuries, numerous clues to the origin of Torah. Those clues developed, toward the end of the 19th century, into the so-called Documentary Hypothesis which suggested that different parts of the Pentateuch, the Chumash, are attributable to different authors and different time periods, and that those parts were combined into a single document, long after the time of Moses but attributed to him. This is disputed and research continues. Ref. B. But generally, Liberalism accepts that the Chumash is a composite of the endeavours of diverse authors embedded in the religious culture of their times.

The Orthodox view on the origin of Torah is based on the Revelation at Sinai (Ex:19,20). This was a theophany, that is, God 'speaking' to Moses. Whichever way we interpret the term 'speaking', the theophany is a direct communication from God to man. How this was done is not knowable in human terms. Therefore I think the theophany would have to be regarded as a supernatural event or miracle. Further, in Orthodoxy, the divine

authority of the Revelation at Sinai is regarded as extending over the whole of the Written Torah (the Tanach), and, at least to some extent, also over the Oral Torah (the Rabbinic interpretations). Thus the extended Revelation becomes a direct and comprehensive communication of God's will for the people of Israel. Ref. D.

It is of interest to see what the three different Chumashim, in use in our synagogue, have to say about Biblical Criticism. Of course, they all have the same Biblical text but their different approaches to that text are found in their introductory pages.

The Artscroll Chumash, an ultra-orthodox work, ignores the Hypothesis and says in its Introduction (p:xix,xx) that it is an essential part of the faith of a Jew that the entire Torah now in our hands, every letter and word of it, is the same as that given to Moses by God. It has not been and cannot be changed, and its divine origin, or that of the traditionally accepted interpretation [the Oral Torah], must not be questioned.

The Hertz Chumash, regarded I think as the standard work of mainstream Orthodoxy, condemns the Hypothesis as a perversion of history and a desecration of religion (Preface and p554) and I take it that Hertz follows the traditional Orthodox view of the divine origin of Torah.

The Plaut Chumash has a Liberal introduction



(p:XXIII,XXIV). It gives cautious acknowledgement to the Documentary Hypothesis and, in general, favours the position that the Torah, as we know it, is essentially the repository of centuries of tradition which eventually became One Tradition and One Book representing the teaching tradition of Israel. But he says that while an antiquarian assessment of Torah would always be of historical interest, "to us the Bible is primarily the living textbook of the Jew."

The next question is of course: are the Liberal and Orthodox views of the origin of Torah compatible? Both sides would agree that Torah is the word of God. But did it come to us directly as a miracle or indirectly through human perception in the course of history? And what are the consequences of that difference?

I think it is obvious that, at the theological level, the two views are not compatible. Orthodoxy asserts, and Liberalism doubts the concept of miraculous Revelation. I cannot take the theology further; certainly not within the frame of this shiur. However, I can say this. As we have seen, Orthodoxy attributes absolute authority to Torah. This is reassuring for its adherents but leads to rigidity in the application, in our day, of laws formed in antiquity. Such rigidity is not present in Liberalism whose historic approach does not require an absolutist stance and justifies a selective view of the biblical laws. e.g. giving greater significance to moral laws than ritual laws. But the Liberal position is not an easy option. While giving us greater freedom of interpretation, it gives us greater

responsibility to get it right.

Another aspect relates to personal religious development. If someone brought up in the Orthodox mode begins to doubt the doctrine of miraculous Revelation, the disappointment can lead the sceptic to abandon religion altogether. Then the Chumash, which was given as a Bar Mitzvah present, appears later as a donation in the synagogue library. The more rational doctrine of historic Revelation may well enable the potential sceptic to retain a religious worldview and, following Plaut, appreciate the Chumash as the living textbook of the Jew.

I hope as a layman I have done justice to what is after all rabbinic material. Also I hope that, as a Liberal, my points on Orthodoxy were fair. At a human level the two views may well be compatible. In religion we all try to live with the mystery of human existence. We take this mystery seriously. We try to give a sensible explanation of it and try to develop a constructive response it. Perhaps that is where the two views can meet.

Joachim Schapiro

- A. Sermon on Revelation by Rabbi Stephen Howard (LJ website).
- B. 'Who Wrote The Bible?' by Prof. R E Friedman.
- C. 'Liberal Judaism' (p168) by Rabbi Pete Tobias.
- D. 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' (p:39-41) by Rabbi Louis Jacobs.



A MEMORABLE JOURNEY

Take 7 Jews and 6 non-Jews, many of whom had never met before, on a five day visit to Krakow in Poland. The dynamics were fascinating and, by the end of the visit, we were good friends, having gone on a journey of discovery in which we learnt so much about what happened in Poland before, during and after the holocaust and, in our response to these events, about ourselves.

We were fortunate in many respects. The weather was wonderful, which enabled us to sit outside in the many cafes. Our hotel was very comfortable with staff who went out of their way to cater for us. Our driver, Joseph, charmed us with his smiling good nature and patience, while our young Polish guides, Karina and Marta, were superb, extremely knowledgeable about all aspects of Polish history, Judaism and the holocaust.

To begin our visit, the curator of the Galicia Jewish Centre, Chris Schwarz, gave us an impassioned introduction to the exhibition of photographs of Jewish heritage in southern Poland in the museum that he has created in the heart of the Jewish quarter. We shared a Friday evening meal at the museum which brought the group together. A meeting in England with Martin Cahn, who is trying to establish a progressive Jewish community in Krakow, greatly enhanced our visit. Martin lives in Myslenice, just outside Krakow, with his wife Agnieszka who has been relentless in finding out about the Jewish heritage in the town, a heritage which she was told as a child in communist Poland did not exist. She has suffered opprobrium in uncovering this past but this has not quelled her commitment which has resulted in a plaque being erected in the town square commemorating the roundup, deportation and ultimate annihilation of the 1,300 Jews of her

town. The realisation that this was a scenario which was repeated in so many towns and villages in Galicia set a sombre backdrop for our visit to Auschwitz.

What struck me most forcefully during the visit? One of the highlights was definitely the service in the Remu (the only functioning synagogue in Krakow). Once everyone was singing and praying together, there was an intensity about this orthodox service that was moving, particularly as it represented an acclamation of the continuity of the Jewish faith in Krakow which the Nazis had tried to destroy. We all greatly enjoyed our fascinating day with Martin and Agnieszka, including a visit to the forgotten and overgrown Jewish cemetery at Myslenice and to a forgotten wooden synagogue in Wisnowia, the only one of its type in southern Poland. They also took us to a beautiful walled village, castle, church and lake in Dobczyce, not far from the site of a ruined and overgrown town mikveh.

And so to Auschwitz/Birkenau and all its horrors. We were overcome firstly by the hordes of people visiting, with the chilling thought that the several thousand people on site were about the same number that the Nazis could exterminate in one day with their ruthless efficiency. The testimony of the huge mountains of hair, shoes, suitcases, glasses and even callipers removed from the concentration camp victims before they were sent to the gas chambers speaks for itself. The tour of the wooden barrack blocks at Birkenau, originally erected as stables for 52 horses but housing up to 1,000 prisoners, gave us an incredibly vivid picture of the brutal existence of the survivors in the camp. Finally, there was the overwhelmingly poignant experience of walking through the "Death Gate" and along the railway line to the 'Judenrampe' where the SS 'selections' for the gas chambers took place. After our visit we went to the restored synagogue in the neighbouring town



of Oswiecim, which once housed a thriving Jewish community, where we said kaddish, followed by a prayer from Helen (who is training to be an Anglican priest) – again affirming a continuity of worship and unity in a place notorious for dividing and destroying. It also reminded us, as Chris Schwarz remarked, that, “to remember the Jews only through the Holocaust is to do their memory an injustice.”

Other memories include the peace and quiet of the ‘new’ Jewish cemetery in Krakow and the moving tableau of empty chairs in the Podgorze square, representing the furniture that the Jews had to leave behind when they were forcibly resettled in the new ghetto area by the Nazis. The fascinating displays in Schindler’s factory invigorated our debate about his motives in his very office, while simple and stark memorials marked the site of the Plaszow concentration camp on the edge of Krakow, surrounded by people jogging and taking their dogs out for a walk.

The city centre itself is fascinating, being the ancient capital of Poland and residence for centuries of its kings. It was also the only major city in the country to come through World War II relatively unscathed. I particularly enjoyed hearing my favourite Klezmer band, ‘Di Galicianer Klezmerim’, and the superb Rachmaninov/Stravinsky concert at the Philharmonia, both highlighting the rich musical heritage of the city. The little jewel of the Czartoryski Museum displays a wonderful selection of paintings, including a Leonardo and Rembrandt, in contrast to the massive glittering splendour of the wooden altarpiece at the Mariacki. Other delights included watching the world go by in the Rynek Glowny, the largest market square of medieval Europe, and hearing the lone trumpeter playing his sombre truncated melody from the top of the church tower. As for the food – the high points for me were the

unique zurek soup, the smoked salmon breakfasts at the hotel, and the delicious coffee and cakes which rival Vienna’s but are a lot cheaper.

The visit left us with many memories and many questions, the most obvious being how to begin to explain or comprehend the mentality behind the holocaust? Were the anti-semitic graffiti which we saw in even some of the more remote places, evidence of a continuing problem? How strong is the threat of a right wing resurgence in Poland? What is the future of the Jewish community in Krakow? Will Krakow become another Prague, overrun by hordes of raucous hen and stag parties or will they move on to new haunts? How will Poland deal with the mass exodus of its talented youth to the money pots of western Europe? Can Auschwitz cope with the huge numbers that are already descending upon it? Should it be a site of mass tourism? My hope for the future lies with the young Poles that we met – Agnieszka, Karina, Marta and the staff at the Galicia Centre – who want above all to help create a new Poland, free from prejudice.

I would urge anyone who hasn’t visited Krakow to go soon as development is taking place rapidly and something of its special character is inevitably being lost. Meanwhile, our expedition of 2007 will stay in the memory for a very long time.

The Party: Alan and Rosemary Schiller (BWPJC); Ruth and Simon Baker (BWPJC); Bernard and Val Price (BWPJC); Robert and Janet Eisenthal (BWPJC); Mark Walton (BWPJC/Herefordshire Jewish Community); Shirley Goldstein (HJC); Helen Rodwell (Forest of Dean); Isobel Daniels (Forest of Dean); Peter Walton (London).

Mark Walton



Israel and the Middle East: Changing Geopolitical Realities

Professor David Newman was born in the UK but is now an Israeli. He is a world renowned professor in Geopolitics, which involves the interrelationship between geographical and political theories. His specialty is in the field of borders - how they function and how they are managed.

Attitudes to borders have changed recently. In the 1990s NAFTA funded a project focussed on how to cross borders—the most pressing question being the role of borders in globalisation. Since 9/11 the Dept. of Homeland Security in the US has supplied funding for research into how to close them.

Many borders are disappearing but an equal number of new ones are being created. Nowadays, David stated, very few conflicts are about territory. Oil, water and fundamentalism are more common causes. However, three notable exceptions are Cypress, the Balkans and Israel/Palestine.

There is an on-going internal Israeli discourse about borders. Even in Palestine there is a diversity of opinion that didn't exist 15—20 years ago. There is a growing conviction within Israel, and definitely, in the rest of the world, that the way forward is a two-state solution .

Professor Newman is an active contributor to

'Track 2' Israeli/Palestinian peace negotiations. Below the very public peace talks ('Track 1') there are several tiers of other negotiations. We were told that all the peace negotiations are 85% the same. The purpose of the track 2 negotiations is to have the detail in place for whichever solution is finally chosen so that it can be implemented easily and quickly when the time comes. These involve politicians, academics and professionals from many fields of life negotiating the fine detail.

He spoke about the need to reach the human being by communication through conversations about football teams and families held over long lunch breaks. These, he felt, were probably the most important conversations to take place.

There is a constant drive to broaden the circle of people involved especially members of the Hamas government, though this is slow. It is very much a case of individuals being willing and interested enough to join. David expressed the opinion that Hamas will have to negotiate as much as any other political party now they are in power.

The issue of demography is currently very relevant to Israel's sense of security. Despite the recent influx of large numbers of Russian Jews, the Arab population continues to grow at a faster rate than the Jewish population. Most Israelis are concerned to keep a Jewish majority in Israel, hence the increased support for a two state solution.



There are now two lines dividing Israel and Palestine. The Green Line drawn up in 1949 during the Rhodes armistice, and the Security Fence. Despite the visual impact of the Security Fence, David asserts that the Green Line is still the most important border.

Israel claims to have moved the green line in 1967, but it is interesting to note that there are different rules for the use of fire arms within undisputed Israel and the West Bank. Soldiers are allowed to be much freer about firing in the West Bank.

If a two state solution is implemented there will need to be territorial exchanges. This is an area of much controversy. There are 250,000 settlers in the West Bank and those furthest in are the most ideological. Likewise there are significant Arab communities living in the Galilee triangle. David feels that it is immoral to suggest disrupting these communities. When asked, almost all Arab Israelis, despite their support of Palestinian independence, want to remain in Israel themselves.

David pointed out that to resolve conflict it is not necessary to start loving each other, merely to stop killing. He feels that the two state solution is the only realistic one, but acknowledges that there are peace spoilers on both sides. Though settlers do not equal suicide bombers, none-the-less...

We heard that many initiatives happen across the border anyway. Water, for example, is

much less of an issue than it was ten years ago because of cross border talks. The situation was resolved by using modern technology and having jointly owned reservoirs. This has the advantage of meaning that neither side will pollute the water supply.

We were informed that the Israeli economy is very strong but that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Israel is much more technologically advanced than Palestine, although Palestine has one of the most highly educated populations in the Arab world. However, there is a real economic urgency for Palestine to have peace. Israel would also benefit from having an affluent society next door.

The big challenge now is for the peace talks to move beyond the educated elite of track 2 and into the general population of both countries. With this in mind the EU is funding many grass roots initiatives.

This talk was lively and challenging. It was very informative but also raised many questions. I felt privileged to be present.

Reported by
Judy Lazarus