



ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

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עלונים



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Purim & Pesach Issue


liberal judaism



Dear Readers,

I have been busy moving house, yet again, having only just moved in October last year. This newsletter seems to have emerged out of a chaos of papers and I sincerely hope that I have not missed anything out. Please note my new e-mail address and phone number in the contacts list on the back cover.

Judy Lazarus

The Editor

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
April E-lonim	Monday 24th March	
May/June Alonim	Monday 21st April	Shavuot

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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. 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.



Council has had its first meeting of the year, and it was a positive start with some familiar faces and some new faces. Following the AGM in January there have been changes on Council and for the full picture please see the contacts page on the back of Alonim. For information, Council now meets on the first Monday of each month, except for August when we have a break. If there is anything that you would like Council to discuss, please contact me or Miranda at least a week before our meeting so we can add to the agenda if possible.

There are a number of activities and social events already being planned, such as the Purim party, and a Matzah Ramble, followed later that same day by the always popular Communal Seder. Full details of these events are in this issue, including a booking form for the seder, so do be sure to note the dates. Other forthcoming events include a visit, hopefully in May, by CST to update us on security issues and the family weekend. This really is a family event where everyone is welcome. Full details will be included in the next issue of Alonim. We would like to form a small social committee to help coordinate activities such as these and other events like the Garden Party and Chanuka party so do let me know if you want to be part of this.

Council also discussed the value of the weekly Kiddush and quickly agreed that it has been a strong force for building the community, but

was only concerned to reiterate the guidance always given out that people realise there

really is no competitive element in how much food you bring - the message is keep it simple and easy, and do please remember to clear it all up so that it is ready for the next event!

AGM Meeting

At the AGM it was agreed to defer the meeting with reference to the approval of last year's accounts, as they were not available. Council would now like to invite members to the deferred AGM, immediately preceding the monthly council meeting. A full set of accounts will be made available to all members before then.

Keren Durant
Chairperson

P.S. Since writing this in early February, John and I have had a holiday in Cuba where we were delighted to join a Shabbat service at a synagogue in Havana. They too have a weekly Kiddush which is very much an established part of their communal activities. Read more about this community in the next issue of Alonim.



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

The *purim – pesah* season is upon us, which is a strange transition involving a reversal of time, because *purim*, which we arrive at first, is set later in history and in the Bible than *pesah* week and the Exodus experience which that evokes. Therefore going from the parody of *purim*, when we mock our persecutors in burlesque, to the celebration of the *pesah seder*, when we relive our ancestors' escape from Egypt, involves going back in time from later to earlier stages in our religious evolution. This feels weird to me, though the weirdness is relieved by an awareness of the common theme central to both these festivals; that of our people being saved from the threats and plans of genocide by Divine power, though that is covert in the case of our former, minor festival, *purim*, and overt in the case of our later, major festival, *pesah*.

Both festivals have special food, of course. *purim* has *hamantaschen* and *pesah* has *matzah*. Both partake of high drama, when we act out part of the formative experiences of our religious culture and in so doing learn anew the valuable lesson that survival cannot be taken for granted, but that there are people

who see us as their enemy, hate us and want to destroy us and thereby justify evil deeds against us. Nevertheless, we are able to either flee to escape or fight in self-defence, in both cases aided by God and by our ability to take action on our own behalf.

These days we must retain our interpretation of these festivals as the threats remain. Really we don't want anyone to get hurt. We feel especially threatened by Islamic extremists who preach anti-Zionism and use that as an excuse to attack Jewish people, but my impression is that the intimidation and hatred inculcated into young children and students by these extremists fuels a hatred that is blind and ends up being so indiscriminate that ordinary Muslims suffer much more from the effects of violence and intimidation than Jewish people, either in Israel or the Diaspora. We do not rejoice at the death of our foes but are saddened at the fate of those who attack us when we see them turn and attack each other.

The transition from *purim* to *pesah* depends on how we savour the flavour of each festival and how we mingle the composite in our spiritual imagination. We are always reminded of our need to be aware of and alert



to our responsibility to survive at minimal cost to our enemies; this is another peculiar aspect of Jewish culture. The taste of Lapsang Souchong is a blend of tea and smokey flavours. How well these two go together and their reception upon the palate depends on the perspective of the connoisseur. Our two festivals are so different yet combine in certain essential respects to teach lessons on a similar theme.

As we roam back through the past of our religious culture and move from fighting in

self-defence to fleeing into the wilderness to escape genocide we are reminded yet again. Our history inevitably is based upon our ebb and flow; to and from our holy land; to and from our prophetic and rabbinic texts and teachings; to and from our traditions, customs and practices. I look forward to seeing you at our *purim* party and at our communal *seder*!

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry

Our new windows.

I know everybody is very pleased with the windows and all the work John Durant did meeting builders and being on site. We did consult with the CST - the Community Security Trust - about 2 years ago because they were offering help - both financial and practical - to fit security glass in synagogues. They advised us of the specifications appropriate for the position of the windows and offered us a substantial amount towards the cost.

Just a few days before the AGM the cheque arrived from Lance Ettinger at the CST. I just want you all to know about this grant. Thank you CST.

Effie Romain



One of the things I find deeply irritating is the assumption by non-Jews that the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks, leads and represents all British Jews. He is, of course, the head of the United Synagogue only.

Far from representing all Jews, Dr. Sacks rejects the non-Orthodox and even the Masorti movement, which most people would consider as being Orthodox. He is happy to enter into dialogue with Islamic leaders and representatives of other faiths but will not talk (publicly at least) to the Liberal, Reform or Masorti movements.

The more liberal days when a Chief Rabbi could affectionately describe Progressive Jewry as *'our loyal opposition'* are long gone. This is largely due to the fact that Lubavitch and other ultra-Orthodox rabbis now fill the pulpits of over half the synagogues which belong to the United Synagogue.

We all remember the row at the time of Rabbi Hugo Gryn's death, a greatly loved man who had survived Auschwitz. Dr. Sacks refused to attend the funeral and claimed he had only attended the memorial service in order to prevent giving the Reform movement a reason for appointing its own Chief Rabbi. He later wrote to an ultra-Orthodox rabbi in Israel saying that Hugo Gryn was *'a destroyer of the faith'*. He then had the nerve to say that he was using a form of rabbinic Hebrew which had been misunderstood and he really meant nothing of the kind. But there was no apology.

He has since agreed to make changes in a recent book at the behest of the ultra-Orthodox who objected to his suggestion that the beliefs of other faiths might have some

validity.

Dr. Sacks is, I am sure, a decent enough man at heart but his record is flawed. We should not allow him to represent us by default.

The Chief Rabbi is a member of the great and the good. He is given a prominent position in the Remembrance Day service in Whitehall and at other state occasions. After years of lobbying, the Progressive movement is now represented at the Cenotaph by Rabbi Tony Bayfield as Chief Executive of the Reform movement but he is placed well 'below the salt' as the saying goes. I mean no disrespect to Tony Bayfield to say that it seems absurd to me that a religious movement is represented at a religious service by a 'Chief Executive'.

I believe that the Liberal and Reform movements should appoint their own Chief Rabbi. It would raise the status of the non-Orthodox in the eyes of non-Jews and would avoid the non-Orthodox point of view going by default as tends to happen at present.

It would also absolutely infuriate and, I suspect, undermine the United Synagogue, which is no bad thing. It might make them think and might actually help with intra-faith relations. It certainly wouldn't do any harm. The ultra-Orthodox would not be in the slightest bit bothered because they don't think that we (and quite a few members of the United Synagogue for that matter) are Jews anyway.

Let me be clear. I do not see this appointment as being the 'head' of the Progressive movement in the same way as the Chief Rabbi is the undoubted head of the United



Synagogue. He, or she, would certainly be the public face of non-Orthodoxy but I don't see the Progressive Chief Rabbi making rulings or laying down doctrine or interpretations of the *torah* or the *halacha*. That said, there is no reason why 'our' Chief Rabbi should not make pronouncements or give suitable guidance from time to time.

I see the position as being very similar to that of the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, an appointment made for one year only. The Moderator is an important public figure in Scotland with considerable prestige and moral authority. The position is honorary and to a large extent a reflection of respect for the individual concerned.

I would be tempted to appoint the Progressive Chief Rabbi for longer than 12 months, perhaps three years, which would give him or her the opportunity to develop a public persona.

The limited period, whatever it may be, would avoid the difficulties the Sephardi face in that they will not appoint a Haham (their

equivalent of a Chief Rabbi) because years ago they appointed someone they found they could not stand and were then lumbered with him.

The appointment need not cost much money – I see no need for chauffeurs or lavish offices. Only a minimal secretariat would be necessary. Some money would need to be found for travelling expenses and, I suppose, security but that would be about it.

Likely candidates will almost certainly already have a synagogue appointment and I envisage the appointee retaining this. I am sure that most congregations would be only too happy to find the extra resource needed for a short period for the honour of their rabbi being the Progressive Chief Rabbi.

A Progressive Chief Rabbi would heighten the position and status of non-Orthodox Judaism in the UK and would detach us from being thought of by non-Jews and the media as being led by the (United) Chief Rabbi.

Richard Buckley



Sidra Mishpatim – Exodus Ch.24 – “Come up to Me on the mountain”

The passage that Gary Webber proposed for study covers the events surrounding Hashem’s call to Moses to ascend the mountain to receive the Tablets inscribed with the Teachings and Commandments.

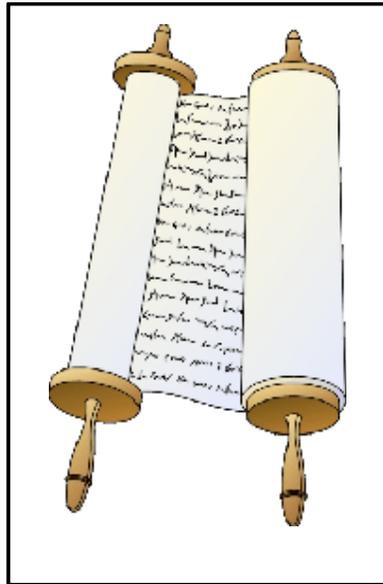
God is present throughout the proceedings. Of the people of Israel every level of the community is involved. Central to the action is, of course, Moses. Then there are the leaders of the community, those named – Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Joshua and Hur – together with the seventy elders, and finally the whole people.

Exodus Chapter 24 records the preparations that take place in the camp before Moses goes up the mountain in answer to God’s summons. The people have an important part to play. First Moses reminds them of all the mishpatim that the Lord had laid before them and he writes them all down, and all the people answered with one voice: “All the things that the Lord has commanded we will do”. Hashem has not commanded them to perform a sacrifice, but Moses engages them in this purification ritual of burnt offering and offering of well-being before reading out to them the Book of the Covenant, to which they once more give their consent: “All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do”. As Moses moves away to ascend the mountain they sit down to a meal sealing the Covenant, in the presence of the Lord, “and they saw the God of Israel and under His feet there was the likeness of a

pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity – they beheld God and they ate and drank”.

The presence of God rested on the mountain and the cloud hid it for six days; the presence appearing to the people like a consuming fire. God called Moses to enter the cloud on the seventh day. Six days of preparation - for God as well as for Moses? He is now to spend a further forty days and nights on the mountain. Time he needed for it all to penetrate his being?

The people have heard and assented to the words of the Covenant, they have witnessed God’s presence – but have they understood?



Thank you, Gary, for guiding us through the chosen passage. I find the method of analysis used very helpful, discovering something new in even a very familiar text.

Everyone is most welcome to join us in our monthly discussions which take place on the first Saturday of the month at 9.45am, before the Morning Service.

Kate Withers



– FORUM-Snapshots of Singapore

Trisha Fine is a member of our congregation and is currently teaching in Singapore. Over the next two issues we will hear something of her experiences.

I am now in my second year of living and working in Singapore. Most visitors only experience Singapore as a brief stopover point en route to a more enticing location. In "Snapshots of Singapore" I'm bringing you the inside story, which I hope you'll enjoy reading as much as I enjoy reading Alonim.

Singapore is an island in South East Asia, underneath Malaysia and surrounded by sprawling Indonesia. It covers 247 square miles. The population density is 16,800 people per square mile, which is the second-highest in the world.

Ethnic groups in Singapore, in descending order of size, are: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Caucasian. The current population of about 4.5 million is predicted to increase to 6 million by 2010, mainly due to the government's need to increase immigration in order to maintain the very healthy economy.

With such a mixture, inter-racial tensions do exist, but the one topic uniting all Singaporeans is food.

EATING

The standard conversational greeting in Singapore is: "Have you eaten yet?" When I'm at work, anyone I meet between about 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. will ask: "Have you taken your lunch yet?" If the answer is yes, details may well be requested. Eating is fundamental to living, and these questions include "Do you have enough money to buy food?" as well as "Have you allowed yourself time to eat?"

The range of cuisine here is just incredible. Chinese food includes Sichuan, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, Hokkien and the indigenous variety known as Peranakan. Then there's Malay, Indian, Eurasian and international dishes plus combinations of these. Seafood on the island,

across all cuisines, is really outstanding. Singaporean friends regularly give me detailed instructions on how to find great eating places. Unlike them, I'm not prepared to undertake a considerable journey, followed by up to 40 minutes of queuing, to have this eating experience.

Cooking at home is impractical, as food outside is almost certainly both better and cheaper. There are plenty of restaurants, but Singaporeans usually eat at food courts, which are liberally sprinkled throughout the island close to residential complexes. My nearest food court is just round the corner: eight stalls sell different styles of food, which can be eaten right there or taken away. Chairs and tables are plastic, cutlery and crockery basic, and there's always lots of noise and activity. But cleanliness and hygiene are impeccable, and the food is usually excellent. Otherwise the relevant stall would soon go out of business.

The Singaporean way is to eat little and often. At school it's not unusual to see a teacher at their desk shoveling down a noodle-based dish they either picked up on the way to work or ordered from the local food court. They'll always offer shares.

Here I must admit to cultural clashes. First, really local food tends to be smelly, especially in an enclosed space. Next,



Singapore from cable car en route to Sentosa Island



– FORUM-Snapshots of Singapore

Singaporeans tend to eat while carrying on with everything else. They eat with their mouths open, talk with a mouthful of food. Those who've travelled sometimes realise my predicament and half-heartedly cover their mouth with their hand but, really, it's my problem not theirs.

SHOPPING

Shopping has to be the second most popular activity among Singaporeans, and must be part of the driving force in an economy which has boomed phenomenally since independence in 1959. There are over 30 shopping malls in Orchard Road, which is the Oxford Street of Singapore. The ritziest is Ngee Ann City, with a brown granite façade, inside which is the Japanese department store Takashemaya, and various boutiques selling designer labels. On the third floor is Kinokuniya, Singapore's largest bookstore. At the other end of the spectrum, but almost opposite on Orchard Road, is Lucky Plaza, selling cameras, watches, luggage and plenty more from the Indian subcontinent.

UK chains like Dorothy Perkins, Top Shop and Marks and Spencer also have outlets in Orchard Road but they're seriously overpriced compared with the competition. Singapore shopping no longer means bargain prices unless either you happen to hit the right store with the right promotion or you're prepared to shop around for half a day for your chosen item. It's all about motivation and stamina. My worst nightmare is being in one of these huge shopping malls and not being able to find the way out, which has happened to me at the recently-opened VivoCity Mall.

If I admit to Singaporeans that I don't enjoy shopping, they react with sympathetic concern and ask: "So what do you DO?" At times, it seems Singaporeans are almost addicted to shopping. On a school trip to the nearby Indonesian island of Batam, I shared a room with an otherwise sensible middle-aged teacher of Chinese origin. Knowing

the island, I advised her against a proposed shopping excursion. She went, returning in despair as the shops weren't air-

conditioned, there was nothing to buy and in any case they wouldn't accept her Singapore dollars. She didn't smile again till we got to the airport, where she bought some cashmere sweaters and scarves.

Most of the younger women teachers in the schools wear very smart clothes: stiletto-heeled sandals, flimsy dresses with gathered skirts, bolero tops and so on. Clothes that seem to me totally impractical for teaching in primary school. I've recently realised that this is also all about shopping: they go out and buy the clothes in which they want to be seen. And then wear them to work, which is impressive.

Singaporeans aren't mindless consumers - in general they are very mindful people. They simply love to go shopping, are prepared to go through convoluted sequences to obtain discounted or free gifts and simply thrive on the whole experience, whether personal or vicarious. In conversation, after asking where the item was bought and what it cost, there's a short pause (usually accompanied by a slow intake of breath over the teeth of an almost-closed mouth), followed by a personal assessment of the transaction.

Trisha Fine



Chinese Gardens



—Book Review

The Apocryphal Old Testament, HFD Sparks (editor), (Oxford University Press, 1984). ISBN 0198261772. 990 pages.

This volume, though currently out of print, is well worth getting hold of second hand as a companion to the item I reviewed in the last issue of *Alonim*. Despite the confusing name, which reflects traditional Catholic usage, it actually contains English translations of books normally called the ‘Pseudepigrapha’ (‘falsely ascribed [writings]’). It includes (1) Jubilees, (2) Life of Adam and Eve, (3) 1 Enoch, (4) 2 Enoch, (5) Apocalypse of Abraham, (6) Testament of Abraham, (7) Testament of Isaac, (8) Testament of Jacob, (9) Ladder of Jacob, (10) Joseph and Aseneth, (11) Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, (12) Assumption of Moses, (13) Testament of Job, (14) Psalms of Solomon, (15) Odes of Solomon, (16) Testament of Solomon, (17) Apocalypse of Elijah, (18) Ascension of Isaiah, (19) Paraleipomena of Jeremiah, (20) Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, (21) Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, (22) Apocalypse of Zephaniah/Anonymous Apocalypse, (23) Apocalypse of Esdras, (24) Vision of Esdras, and (25) Apocalypse of Sedrach.

The term Pseudepigrapha was coined in the eighteenth century when various lost writings were newly re-discovered by scholars who could see that, though claiming to stem from the heroes of ancient Israel (Abraham, Moses, Solomon etc), they were really penned anonymously much later. Since then, of course, much the same has been concluded about the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures (and Apocrypha and New Testament).

Nonetheless, these so-called Pseudepigrapha

are ancient works from *circa* 300 BCE – 200 CE. With a couple of exceptions, they ended up in no-one’s Bible but were nonetheless preserved by the churches in various languages. Most are Jewish in origin, though some have Christian additions of different sorts. An example is the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, although similar pre-Christian materials in Hebrew and Aramaic were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.

Likewise from the Second Temple period, but without Christian additions, are 1 Enoch and Jubilees which, interestingly, are in the Ethiopian Church’s Bible. 1 Enoch is really a ‘pentateuch’ of books (four of which were found at Qumran in Aramaic), perhaps once in competition with the five books of Moses for supremacy in the Jewish community of the mid-Second Temple period. It contains what purport to be revelations to Enoch about the nature of the cosmos and the unfolding of history received in journeys into the heavenly realm.

Jubilees, found in multiple copies in Hebrew at Qumran, is a re-writing of Genesis 1 – Exodus 15. Among others things, the patriarchs keep the laws later revealed to Moses and everything is organized in terms of a solar calendar of 364 days (rather than the alternative lunar calendar that was dominant by Rabbinic times). As with 1 Enoch, Jubilees explains the fact that the world is less perfect than God created it in terms of the fall of the angels, rather than the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

Other fascinating writings are Life of Adam and Eve, Joseph and Aseneth, and the Psalms of Solomon. Claiming an ancient origin, these



and other compositions were probably treated as scripture by late Second Temple Jews who took them at face value. Certainly, for example,

Jubilees is cited as such in several sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.

Jonathan G Campbell



A small group of women have been meeting once a month to celebrate the new moon and to explore their identity as Jewish women. We meet in each other's homes moving around Bristol.

We start early (six pm) in order to share a meal before starting. A session begins with each woman lighting candles and saying how she is feeling at that moment. It ends with a short meditation or prayer and the extinguishing of the candles with another quick go round to say how we feel. However, what happens in between has varied enormously; from role play through discussion and ribbon making to gazing into mirrors and a whole host of other activities. We finish at about nine pm.

Each session is facilitated by two women and hosted by a third. We have found that having two people responsible for the planning helps to encourage a wider variety of activity and is more of a stimulus for those planning than someone on their own.

Topics covered have included: letter meditations; Who is God, what is she?; Commandments Today; What can we Learn from Biblical Women; Making our own

rituals; What do We Feel about Israel?; Introduction to Kabbalah; Exploring our Jewish Identity.

Topics that we have yet to explore include: Bringing the feminine into Judaism; Using the rituals of other traditions; Jewish women's rituals including mikveh.

Importantly the group is about spiritual exploration, so although we often discuss topics this is done in a way that allows for careful listening and supportive attitudes. We do not debate and try to win arguments or persuade each other to change our views but rather accept that we are each in the right place for ourselves and our own development. This attitude of acceptance allows each person to have the freedom to express themselves without fear of criticism or rebuff.

Now that the group is established and has a pattern of working that is caring and inspiring, we would like to invite other women to join us.

Judy Lazarus