



ALONIM

Newsletter of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

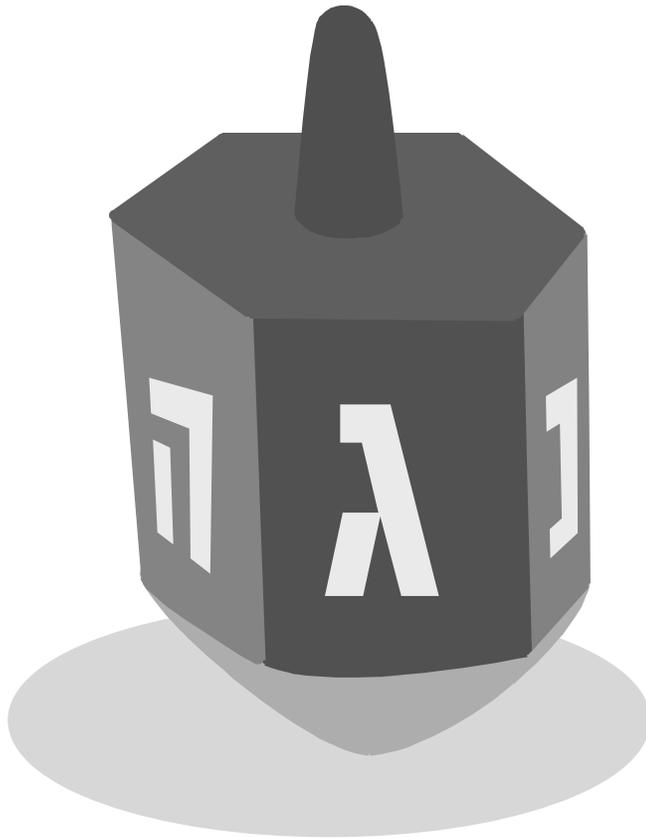


Cheshvan/Kislev/Tevet 5769

November/December 2008

עלונים

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Chanukah Issue



Well here we are in another Jewish new year and hopefully all set for some interesting articles (see p.18 for ideas). I dreamt about Malcolm Rawles last night and it reminded me that he was intending to write an article for Alonim about a synagogue that he visited in Marakesh. If anyone else has been there or anywhere else do let us know all about it. Perhaps your experiences are more distant. Do you have an interesting event that you lived through? I know that there are poets among our numbers, but what has happened to all those poems we were hoping to receive? Alonim is only as interesting as the articles we receive, so please send them in.

Judy Goldsmith

Editor

ALONIM & E-LONIM copy date deadlines

Month	Copy date	Festivals covered, notices needed
December E-lonim	Monday 24th November	
Jan/Feb Alonim	Sunday 14h December	Tu'b'shevat

**Editorial and
Production Team**

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Anthony Cowles & Yoav Ben Shlomo (E-lonim distributors),
Ruth Squire & family, Sheila Wilson (Alonim distributors)*

This version of the newsletter has been prepared for use on the synagogue website.

For reasons of personal security, all contact details, dates and times have been removed. Also all photographs of people, articles of a personal nature, references to children etc.

ALONIM Contributions & Editorial Policy.

The editorial policy is to encourage contributions from all Synagogue members and  ALONIM readers, concerning any aspects of communal and Jewish life, including advertisements of forthcoming events, cultural and communal reviews, information concerning synagogue activities, letters and feedback, and articles of Jewish cultural and religious interest.

Typically, contributions that fit on one side of A4 being approximately 500 words are preferred, and PC format submission by e-mail is particularly appreciated.

The editor will NOT print anonymous or unattributed articles. Contributors are asked to be aware of the need to protect the copyright of others. Opinions expressed in  ALONIM do not necessarily reflect those of the synagogue Council or the Editor.

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



Many people approached me over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and afterwards to say how much they enjoyed the High Holyday services and what a strong and vibrant community we have. I certainly agree and on behalf of us all want to thank the following people: our Rabbi for all his work to bring us such excellent services; Gary Webber and the R&P team for the organisation; Max Kammerling for coordinating security; Linda Hurst and Sheila Wilson for meeting and greeting members and visitors; and everyone involved in running the children's services.

I am pleased to welcome Steven Harris as our Treasurer. Steve has taken over from Julian Sims who has been our treasurer for almost two years, but now has decided to stand down as he has a heavier workload and more commitments. I would like to thank Julian for his time on Council and I look forward to working with Steve.

On to other money matters. The synagogue has recently been left some generous bequests: from Joachim Schapiro's estate which Council has decided to allocate to purchasing a series of new books for the Schapiro Library; from Tony Smythe's estate which will be used to commission white curtains around the ark and a white cover for the bima for the High Holydays. Malcolm Rawles's earlier bequest is going to be used to commission a design for a torah scroll crown as well as for the establishment of a synagogue education trust fund which is in the preliminary planning stages - we will keep you informed of

developments.

I am delighted to inform you that our application to the Jewish Chronicle's Kessler Foundation for funding for the window decoration project was successful. These lovely glass hangings, made by the children of our cheder at the Slimbridge family summer weekend, are a brilliant addition to our building. We are very grateful to Louise Block who led the project and to the Kessler Foundation.

Council has now set a date for the AGM. It will be on **Sunday 25 January 2009 at 2.30 pm.** so please note the date in your diary now. There will be elections for new Council members, and full details and forms will be circulated with the January issue of Alonim. If you think you might be like to join Council, or would just like to find out what that involves, do get in touch with me.

This will be followed by refreshments and a talk from Paul Edlin, Vice Chair of the Board of Deputies. We are inviting both the Bristol Hebrew Congregation and the newly formed Gloucestershire community to join us for this, so it should be a very sociable occasion. Be sure not to miss it.

Keren Durant
Chairperson



Squeaks of the Scribe's Quill

It was the day after *simhat torah*. Rabbi Zed carefully removed his *etrog* from its special carved box and cut it in half with a sharp, clean, new scalpel blade. He looked at the cut surface to see whether there were any exposed pips. He removed all he could find by scraping them out with the tip of his scalpel and shook them off one by one onto the top of a pile of sand lying in his wheelbarrow. Then he took a large flowerpot and shovelled in a few trowels full of soil and mixed it up with gritty sand. He pressed the mixture down with the back of his fist so it was firm and then did the same thing again several times until his pot was almost full. Then he pronounced the *b'rakhah* for planting, poked a pencil in several times around the surface and dropped in the *etrog* pips. Finally he watered into the holes with a small watering can, a small stream into each, before covering the surface with a layer of clean yellow sand. Others had planted in the past, he thought, so that he could have *etrogim*. Now he was doing his best for future generations. He hoped his *etrog* seeds would sprout, germinate and grow into new saplings, to mature and bear fruit of their own. Thus Rabbi Zed's soul soared into the future..... It hovered and contemplated, wondering and wandering.

He observed the wheels of the engine of evolution turning smoothly, he saw how energies accumulated and discharged, the ebb and flow throughout creation. He marvelled at good deeds and bad having long-term effects and prayers whizzing around on their way between earth and heaven. Growth strained at the leash and potential stretched and flexed its muscles waiting for the Holy One of Blessing to give it the 'off you go'!

Rabbi Zed had waved his *lulav*, dwelt in his *sukkah* and fasted during *yom kippur*. He had experienced the reverberation of his soul during the *teki'ot* and *teru'ot* of the *shofar* blasts and had seen most of his congregants make *t'shuvah*. Now was the time when torah was going to once again make its way through the ears and hopefully into the minds of the Jewish people and he was interested to know how it might affect the entirety of creation during the coming year.

The seeds, deep in the dark in their pot, nestled down in their bed of sandy soil, felt the scratches of the grit scrape their skins and shivered in anticipation. They relished their long, slow winter of gathering strength. They sensed their latent genetic impulses gathering for their spring growth spurt. They longed for their first sight of the sun as the instructions for making chlorophyll hovered unused in leaves not yet formed. The future beckoned them forward with infinite patience under the watchful, careful gaze of the Holy One of Blessing. An immense dynamic was in motion. On another planet in a solar system in a galaxy far, far away, across the other side of the Universe, a butterfly slowly opened its wings and a tiny gravitational pulse rolled out on its way to being a wave. 'What would it cause? What was going to happen', Rabbi Zed wondered? Then he smiled. He had studied and he had prayed. He felt confident that the universe was unfolding as it should.

He came back down to earth with a bump when his wife called out; 'breakfast is ready'. In he went to wash his hands. He enjoyed his porridge and was soon ready to start his new year's work, in partnership with God.



Cheder year has started with a buzz.

The Window Project

Children, their parents and other members of the congregation, came back from their holidays to find their Glass Hangings, made at the Community Weekend, decorating the Synagogue – what a sight!

When I was approached by council, months ago, with the suggestion that Louise Block could run a workshop at the Community Weekend, I thought it was a great idea. We would get some colour into the Synagogue, work on a Community Project - children and adults side by side and of course, I could tick off the list of what to do at Slimbridge one more item – how to entertain/craft activity.

I have to admit, it turned out even better than I expected. The comments I heard afterwards about the enjoyment of making and the satisfaction of seeing the final work displayed, about how children sat in the service mesmerised by the decorations, how adults found them inspiring, about the variety of topics people have come up with, based on our Jewish heritage and tradition. Seeing children's' pride at recognising their handcraft on display, decorating the sanctuary at Shul. What an overwhelming sense of joy!

The icing on the cake was to find out that the application to the Kessler Foundation for the funding of the window project was successful.

On the page overleaf you can see once more the pictures of both windows and the names of the 'artists'. If there is any mistake, misspellings or omissions, please do not hesitate to contact me for a correction.

Family Education Sessions

This year Rabi Ron Berry has offered to lead four Family Education Sessions to Children and their parents. Two of these sessions have already taken place, concentration on Havdallah – the ceremony

separating Saturday from the rest of the week, on which occasion the Rabbi presented Cheder with its own, unbreakable Havdallah set, and Birkat hamazon, the blessing after the meal. I personally enjoyed the second session much more since all the children and parents were gathered in one room, singing together, asking and answering questions, in a very relaxed atmosphere, with a true community spirit.

High Holidays

The first term of Cheder is always a busy one, learning about and participating in the High Holidays. This year the children baked Challah and prepared plates with apples and honey to serve the congregation on Rosh Hashanah with the wish for a "sweet new year". They participated in children services, made cards and Jewish calendars and reflected on what they would like to do differently in the new year...

Many thanks to all the grown ups – parents, teachers, post Bnei Mitzvot and other members of the community who helped us in leading, assisting, and supervising (not necessarily in this order) with the kids services and activities upstairs.

This Term

We have welcomed some new families with young children into Cheder and we have welcomed back a family resettling in the area. We wish them all Bruchim Habayim' -welcome! And hope they enjoy our Cheder.

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

Iris Segall
Head of Cheder



We have been privileged and honoured to have had a special light glowing in the midst of our Congregation. With great personal charm and profound inner dignity, Jo Schapiro nourished the development of the spiritual life of our Congregation for much of his lifetime. He contributed direction and renewal, inspiration and dedication. Jo's life was a triumph of survival. He escaped the awfulness of the holocaust to ensure the enrichment of Jewish life here in Bristol. At the same time Jo was an honest, straightforward character to whom we all could relate with ease. We can rejoice at having had the privilege of sharing life with Joachim Schapiro.

Jo combined mysticism and the mundane; spiritual sensitivity and intellectual giftedness. He was also a practical man a clever designer and inventor who became a patent engineer. Jo moved to Bristol after the war, but had been brought up and educated in Chemnitz, Lower Saxony, in the East of Germany. There he had successfully sat his engineers' apprentice examinations, but being Jewish was not allowed to accept the qualification. After *Krystallnacht* he was arrested and sent to Buchenwald Concentration Camp for two months, then released. He came to England in April 1939 under the auspices of the Jewish Refugees' Agricultural Committee, arriving with one suitcase, a bike and £1! At first he worked on farms.

When he came to Bristol he had the good fortune to meet our friend, Beryl, who married him in 1946. In our synagogue library, now renamed the Joachim Schapiro Library in his honour, there is a photograph of Jo working with Neville Lewisohn and Henry Harris

laying concrete to make the floor when the original first house was being converted into the sanctuary. That small group flourished and developed into our Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation of today, three times the size and numbers. Jo and his friends established the foundations and he had the satisfaction of seeing it grow. Over many years Jo developed our library, classifying and arranging our books into a superb learning resource.

Jo was both an intellectual and a holy man. He had a gift for combining simplicity with profundity. He could awaken our minds as well as delight our hearts. Just a little while ago he sat in my Maimonides class studying medieval Jewish philosophy with us. With his wise words he could evoke the presence and the power of the living God, before whom he walked in prayer and in learning. Jo has led us along our pathways into the future, showing us the way from our history towards our destiny.

Jo loved teaching children at our Religion School and also had a great influence on his own children and grandchildren, who thought he knew everything. Though he didn't, he enjoyed looking things up in books, finding out about everything, showing Adam and Nicola, his children, and James and Alex, his grandchildren, the secret of how to be clever, at the same time as being an ordinary family man who loved his wife and children and was proud of their achievements.

Beryl and Jo had over half a century of married life together. He was very meticulous. Whatever he did was precise; planned,



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measured and thought through, whereas Beryl just got on and worked it out as she went along! What a wonderful complementary partnership! When Jo was up in the clouds Beryl would bring him back down to earth and set his feet upon the ground. Now no one can do that any more. Yet our memories of Jo can continue to guide us, lighting our way as we bring them to mind occasionally. Let us think of Jo from time to time with enduring affection and gratitude for all he did for us.

zeikher tzaddik librakhah;
the memory of the righteous is as a blessing.

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry



Board of Jewish Deputies

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I have served as our community's deputy to the "Board of Deputies of British Jews" with only a short gap, for the last sixteen years.

I have decided not to seek re-election for the next tri-ennial, starting next May, as a further three years will take me, g-d willing to the age of 82. This would not be reasonable for the Board, our members. or me.

I have told the Congregational chair, Keren Durant of my intentions, and my willingness to help find someone to take on this important role.

There are 8 plenary sessions a year, 7 in London, held on a Sunday and one held in a regional city, which lasts for a weekend.

The Board is the elected representative body of the British Jewish community, and through its various committees plays a large part in influencing government legislation that might affect us and other groups in this country. Through the Community Security Trust, it looks after our security at many Jewish events, and during the High Holydays gives advice to all synagogues.

I urge anyone who wants to know more about helping all our fellow British Jews, to consider, at least asking me for more of what is involved. I will give any assistance they may need, and take you to a future meeting in London to see for yourself what takes place.

My phone number and e-mail address can be found on the contacts page of this Alonim.

Bernard Barnett



Parashat Shofetim

Deuteronomy 18 v18 - I will raise up a Prophet...

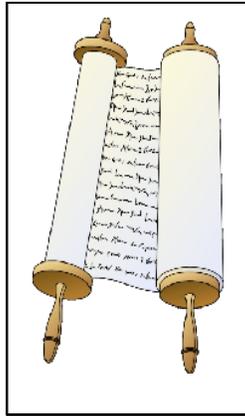
In this month's Shiur we talked about the role and task of the Prophet. Verse 18 continues: "He will speak to them all that I command him". A Prophet therefore does not speak on his own account, but is sent for a particular purpose.

The message that came most readily to mind was that rebuking the people for doing evil, a call to repentance, and a warning of impending disaster if they did not return to the Lord.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel were remembered, together with their warnings before the defeat at the hands of the Babylonians and the consequent exile. However, once the disaster had taken place, these Prophets changed to speaking words of consolation, assuring the people that they

would return to Zion, for Adonai is faithful and they would not cease to be God's people.

So the message of the Prophets is not only to rebuke, but to remind the people of Israel of God's fidelity, of the Eternal Covenant made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of their delivery from captivity in Egypt, of the Law given on Mount Sinai and of their special position as a "light to the Nations".



Kate Withers

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 9.45a.m., before the Morning Service. All are welcome.

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Thank You from David Gilbert

Dear Friends,

I would like to thank everyone who has sent me 'get well' greetings during my recent illness. It did mean a lot to me in my time of weakness to know how many friends I have among the congregation.

I am now home again and slowly regaining my strength. I hope to see you all again soon and be able to thank you personally,

Shanah Tovah to all,

David Gilbert

We are delighted that you are recovering and look forward to your return among us, David.



- October Shiur Report

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Shabbat Shuvah

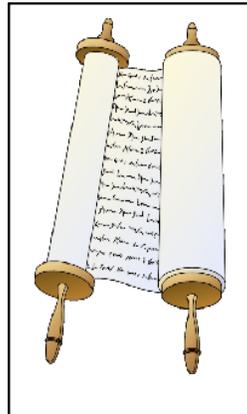
Deuteronomy 29 – You stand this day, all of you...before the Eternal your God....

30 – Choose Life 31 – Be strong and resolute

These passages, taken from last week's portion Nitzavim, have a far greater personal impact when we hear them on Yom Kippur.

come to nothing. We feel sadness and regret, but in today's portion *Vayelech* we are encouraged, not just once, but three times, by the words: *Be strong and resolute*.

We have been looking into ourselves during the run-up to and during the Days of Awe which are to bring us to the Day of Atonement. There are things that trouble us.



Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. We stand as individuals, but we stand together and draw strength from each other, as well as from the words of Moses: "*For it is indeed the Eternal your God who marches with you, who will not fail you or forsake you*". (Deut 31).

Yom Kippur cleanses of us of sins committed against God, but not of sins committed against another human being unless we try to correct the wrong we have done.but what if we are unable to do this in a particular case?

Kate Withers

We find that our sins and failings over the past year are the same as last year. Our resolutions

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 9.45a.m., before the Morning Service. All are welcome.



Library Missing Books

Sorry to say that there are quite a number of books that have gone "walkies" within the past few months. In other words they have not been signed out and are not on the library shelves. Can you please all have a look around the side of your bed, the boot of your car and underneath the pile of papers you mean to go through and return any books you might have that are not signed out. No questions asked, no recriminations. In particular, there is a set of "Rashi Commentaries" that are quite valuable which Jo purchased. In honour of his memory, it would be very nice if these could be found and returned to the synagogue library.

Many thanks

Sheila Wilson
Librarian



Leaders of the Liberal, Reform and Masorti branches of Judaism have recently proposed an alliance in order to make a unified 'progressive' approach to the Orthodox community with proposals for greater co-operation.

This proposal stems, apparently, from a lack of satisfaction with the 'Stanmore Accords'. These were signed in 1998 following the appalling state of affairs into which Orthodox / non-Orthodox relationships had fallen after the failure of the Chief Rabbi to attend the funeral of Rabbi Hugo Gryn and his later description of Rabbi Gryn as a '*destroyer of faith*'.

No doubt these proposals are well meant, although I have serious doubts about the judgement of some of the individuals involved, but they are, in my opinion, a complete waste of time and totally misconceived.

Firstly, I don't know what the Stanmore Accords say or what they were meant to achieve. What I do know is that they were negotiated by the great and the good of British Jewry and have no relevance whatsoever to ordinary Jews. My understanding has always been that they were entered into by the Orthodox in a cynical attempt to try and repair the image of the United Synagogue following the damage caused to it by the Chief Rabbi's extraordinary and offensive comments about Rabbi Gryn and that they had no real intention of allowing the Accords to change anything.

Secondly, whilst I greatly admire the Masorti movement, it is, by any reasonable understanding of the term, 'Orthodox'. It uses the Singer or Art Scroll *siddur* just like the United Synagogue. Men and women generally sit separately. Women are given very limited

aliyot, far less than is usual in Reform or Liberal. The United Synagogue says that Masorti is not Orthodox - well, they would, wouldn't they? Masorti is undoubtedly a 'nicer' and more open movement than the United Synagogue but it is Orthodox just the same. Best of luck to them, I say, each to their own. But I do not understand why Liberal and Reform need to make common cause with them. If anything, including Masorti makes a joint Liberal / Reform initiative even less likely to succeed.

Thirdly, I used to think that Orthodoxy, like Coke, was the 'real' thing and that 'progressive' (oh, how I hate that word) Judaism was a pale imitation of it. I no longer think this. The Orthodox bang on about how only they are 'authentic' Jews but the truth is that no branch of Judaism is 'authentic' - it is entirely man made. If Moses came back to earth next Shabbat he would be totally mystified when attending any synagogue service, progressive, Orthodox or whatever. And I am absolutely positive that if the great Rabbi Akiva himself came back to earth he would approve of progressive Judaism.

If any Jews want to be considered truly authentic then let them go and wander in the desert for 40 years. Or let them re-build the Temple (actually there are a few in Jerusalem who want to do just that). But as far as I know the United Synagogue does not want to go down these particular roads. But why don't they? After all, aren't they meant to be 'authentic'!

Fourthly. I can see no common ground whatsoever between Orthodoxy and progressive Judaism. The Chief Rabbi's comments at the time of Hugo Gryn's death



- FORUM-Should We Co-operate?



were unforgivable and given the manifest hostility of United and their members to progressive Judaism (just look at the letters in the *Jewish Chronicle*) I see no reason why we should even try to be friends at an institutional level (local relationships are, of course, a different matter). The fact is that the United Synagogue and the Federation of Synagogues and the *charedi* don't think we're Jews at all and don't want to be friends with us. And, to be frank, I couldn't care less.

Finally, my biggest objection to these proposals

Editor's note

What do you think? Is Richard right? Is he too harsh? Perhaps you think he doesn't go far enough? Should we make a public statement rejecting co-operation with Orthodox Judaism. What about his position on the Masorti Movement?

I am interested that Richard doesn't like the word progressive. I wonder what he would chose to use as a collective noun.

I think we are in an interesting position at BWPJC as the only progressive synagogue in Bristol.

Although we have opted (and continue to opt) to affiliate with Liberal Judaism we must have

is that they exhibit a degree of insecurity or uncertainty about the legitimacy of progressive Judaism. They suggest that in some way we need Orthodoxy's approbation. I fundamentally disagree with this. Liberal, Reform and Masorti Judaism are as authentic as the form of Judaism practised by the Orthodox, arguably more so in some respects (this is not the place to make this argument). We can stand on our own feet as the equal of any other form of Judaism and we shouldn't be ashamed to do so.

Richard Buckley

members who would prefer to go to a Reform synagogue if there were a choice locally.

Bearing this in mind, how far do you think we should be specifically Liberal? Would you like us to have more features of Reform services or less than we currently do, e.g. should we stop parading the scroll as many Liberal congregations do not do this?

Write in and let us know your views. Time, I think that we had another one of our lively debates. They are so interesting and really help us to get to know each other.

Judy Goldsmith

Editor

E-mail Alonim

We are now able to e-mail copies of Alonim and LJ Today in .pdf (Acrobat) format. If you prefer to receive your newsletters in this way please let the editor, Judy Goldsmith, know and she will add you to the list.

E-mail: alonim@bwpjc.org.

Judy Goldsmith