

September,  
October,  
November,  
December  
2016

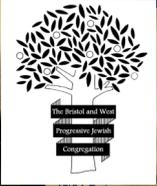
Av, Elul, Tishrae,  
Cheshvan, Kislev  
5776



ALONIM

עלונים

Autumn Issue



Magazine of the Bristol & West  
Progressive Jewish Congregation



**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 cultural and communal reviews, information concerning synagogue activities, letters and feedback, and articles of Jewish cultural and religious interest. Typically, contributions of approximately **350 words** are preferred.

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 Editors.

Contributions and communications can be sent directly to the **Editor** at [alonim@bwpjc.org](mailto:alonim@bwpjc.org). For postal contributions please contact the editor on **07989 974133**. Copy date deadline for submissions is notified opposite. 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.

<b>ALONIM</b> copy date deadline	
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Date</b>
Winter	28th November 2016

# Contents

- 4 Editorial
- 4 Membership news
- 5 Towards a sustainable  
synagogue  
*Jane Clark*
- 7 Dancing to the beat of a  
Jewish heart  
*Rabbi Monique Mayer*
- 11 Unity: It's hard to keep us  
together  
*Peter Bill*
- 13 BWPJC photos
- 14 My working life  
*Karen Warren*
- 16 Arts review—The flying lovers  
of Vitebsk  
*Lisa Lipman*
- 19 My creative life  
*Mimi Colman-Deveney*
- 21 The myth and reality of Jewish  
Care
- 22 Rosh Hashanah message—  
Board of Deputies  
President  
*Jonathan Arkush*
- 24 Focus on nature—Kestrels  
and yellowhammers  
*Jack Wolf*
- 26 Justice and gender based  
violence—research
- 28 On numbers  
*David Jewell*
- 30 Israel Tour 2016—memories  
*James Colman-Deveney*
- 31 Psalm 102—The dark night of  
the soul  
*Michael Picardie*
- 36 Synagogue contacts

***Front cover photograph:***

Bristol Pride celebration, 9th July 2016

*Photographer: Rabbi Monique*

## Editorial

Sheila Brill,



It's nearly Rosh Hashanah and some of us are contemplating new beginnings as well as reflecting on past challenges. Many of our teenage members will have crossed the threshold from GCSEs to sixth form or 'A' levels to university, college or the world of work for the first time.

On a personal level, perhaps it's my recently acquired senior railcard that has focused my mind on things philosophical.

Whatever you're contemplating, I hope you enjoy this issue of Alonim. Shanah Tovah!

## Membership news

Sheila Wilson  
Membership  
Secretary



Writing this on a rainy bank holiday weekend (so what else is new?)

End of summer, new academic year coming up and of course

the High Holidays nearly upon us.

Why is it that the summer months fly by and winter months drag along, I often wonder if there is a law explaining this, like Murphy's or Sod's?

Wishing you all a healthy and Happy New Year, with much nachus coming your way.

Our sincere condolences to Andy Segal, Yana Yevsiyevich and Yoav Ben Shlomo who have recently lost loved ones over the last few months. We wish them and their families a long life.

On behalf of the community I'd like to welcome the following new members: Hattie South, Gerald and Marion Keen, Judyth Sassoon, Rosalee Dorfman and Jonathan Mohajer. I'm sure they will find strength and friendship in our community as we all have.

Our thoughts and prayers are also with Celyn Williams who has recently undergone a major operation. We wish her well and the speediest of recoveries.

# Towards a sustainable synagogue



Jane Clark,  
Chair of Council

There are a few steps we need to take to put our synagogue onto a sounder long-term footing. They are all simple, but all more easily said than done.

## Calling All Members with Chutzpah!

The first is that to secure our finances without a swingeing fee increase, we need to increase our membership. Council has set a target of a net increase of forty more adult members over the next twelve months. We have done some research into how best to do this, and are beginning to recruit volunteers to help. Of course we need to be doing all sorts of things to get our name out, but the most effective method has been proven to be to talk to lots of people. Many of them won't be Jewish, but some will; and a minority of these will join

us. This requires a mixture of elbow grease and chutzpah in about equal parts. And it takes time. We can't sub-contract it to the rabbi or an agency. So if you have lots of chutzpah, please get in touch with me and we'll put it to good use.

## Thank you

Without the effort of volunteers, our services would not happen, there would be no cheder, no-one to turn to at times of bereavement, no representation of the synagogue on outside bodies, no Deanfield away weekend, no youth group, building maintenance, no library, no shop, and no-one to do the work of Council and the other committees, and on the list goes. The risk of naming all the voluntary activities and volunteers is that someone will take offence at being missed out. If I have overlooked your activity, please let me know. Anyway, to all our volunteers: a big thank you from me.

## **We need a Treasurer**

Karen Warren has been doing a great job, for which I am delighted to thank her publicly. But she wants to retire, not least because of increasing work commitments.

If anyone wants to be the next treasurer, please contact me. You are welcome to have a quiet word with me at some point, e-mail me or phone me, but please not after 8:30 p.m. because I have to be up early for work.

I have an open mind about whether the bookkeeping is done by the treasurer as at present or whether that part of the job is done by someone else. This can be part of the conversation.

## **Re-Balancing the Volunteering**

It seems to be an iron law of voluntary organisations that fewer and fewer people end up doing more and more of the work unless the balance is redressed from time to time. It's nobody's fault. It just happens. In our little shul, the time has come for the balance to be re-dressed a little. If we each

do a little bit according to our time and ability, nobody ends up feeling as if they are doing everything.

We are all busy people. Although I am past the child-rearing stage of life, I have a full-time job, am the Director of Observing of Bristol Astronomical Society, the Hon. Sec. of the South West Branch of the Institute of Physics, wrote a play which was produced at the Alma Theatre in Bristol this Summer, have written and had published one book since I joined the synagogue in 2011 and am working on and collecting observational data for the next. Last December I bought a little house and have renovated it, doing most of the work myself. Yet still I find time to work for the shul.

Please think long and hard about how you can contribute to the running of the shul. A lot can be achieved in even an hour a week. We're a flexible organisation and will work with you to help you to contribute in whatever way works for you.

# Dancing to the beat of a Jewish heart



## Rabbi Monique Mayer

Down in the Goytre valley where Nigel and I live in Wales, are the remains of a dilapidated stone cottage. The most prominent feature is the chimney which, in recent years, has collapsed to half its original height. The walls have crumbled to a few short feet, but indicate a two-room structure, which may have housed both people and livestock. Records indicate that the cottage dates back to the 18th century, and I sometimes wonder what it must have been like to live there in the countryside with a flock of sheep, alongside a stream. A few years ago I had a mind to rebuild the structure and make it a retreat or meeting place; however, due to a number of logistical issues, including a rather large tree growing out of the centre, I've revised my plan to preserve what is left of the original cottage while building another working structure nearby, thereby honouring the

past while providing for future use.

Fifty four years ago, the founders of our synagogue did not have to build something new. Instead, they put countless hours into refurbishing the old structure at 43 Bannerman Road (which at the time smelled of rotting potatoes) and transforming it into a true synagogue – from the Greek *synagoga* meaning meeting or assembly – where Jews come together to pray, study, socialise and celebrate. Various members did the carpentry work, electrical wiring, drywall installing, plastering, painting and decorating. It was a labour of love and we still benefit from the fruits of their labours. For the past five and a half decades, BWPJC has seen both within and outside its walls regular Shabbat and Festival services, weddings, memorial services, book discussions, adult education, *cheder*, *tot Shabbat*, *chavurah* suppers, community weekends, *inei mitzvah*, gift parcels at *Purim* and *Rosh Hashanah*, the synagogue magazine and many more activities. These activities do not and cannot happen without the many volunteers who have selflessly given of their

dedication, money, time, and vision to make sure BWPJC stays a vibrant, growing community. And yet, for the most part, the running of all these activities as well as the day-to-day operations of the synagogue tend to fall to a small group of individuals within the wider membership.

When I ask potential members why they want to be part of our synagogue, they respond in a variety of ways: they're looking for like-minded people, a Jewish education for their children, social activities, exposure to Jewish values and ideas, prayer. As the conversation continues, invariably the individual mentions a desire to be part of a community. Funny thing, this word community. Like many words, it does not have one simple definition, and three definitions have particular relevance for us. Community in the broader sense is "a group of people having a common characteristic". In this context, a Jewish community would be the collective group of individuals who identify

themselves as being Jewish, just as the scientific community is comprised of those who are scientists. They may have nothing tying them together beyond the label of "Jewish" or "scientist". Another definition is "the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common". In this understanding, a "sense of community" is felt by those who connect through participation in various activities. They get together to hike, or eat, see a movie, or pray or play bridge. Finally, in relation to ecology, "A community is "a group of interdependent plants or animals growing or living together in natural conditions or occupying a specified habitat".

[oxforddictionaries.com](https://www.oxforddictionaries.com))

To have a thriving Jewish community at BWPJC requires fulfilling all three definitions, above. Firstly, we must be a place where people come together who identify as Jewish or who are interested in Judaism. Although a Jewish community is and can be many

things to many people, the reality is it can't be one without Jews! Secondly, we must have activities in which Jews and potential Jews participate (even if those activities aren't *per se* Jewish). But lastly and most importantly, following on from the ecological meaning, we must be a group of interdependent people. By supporting and depending on each other – not just on the efforts of a small group of committed individuals, we become part of community.

Jewish tradition teaches us in Ethics of the Fathers (5:13) that “there are four types of people: those who say ‘what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours’. This is the average type of person. Then there are those who say, ‘what is mine is yours and what is yours is mine’. This one is ignorant. Those who say, ‘What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours’ – this type is a kind, right-acting person. Finally, those who say, ‘what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine--this type is wicked’ because they see the world only for their own

benefit.” Their heart is hardened like that of Pharaoh to the feelings and rights of others.

In a synagogue, and – well – in general, most people are one of two types. The first is “what’s mine is yours and what is yours is yours.” This sort of person is happy that Jewish activities are happening, they might even show up, but they don’t feel any responsibility to the organisation and leave the work to others. The second type of person is “what’s yours is yours and what’s mine is yours”. This kind of person promotes interdependence, perceiving the needs of others and giving of themselves to fulfil those needs. By investing themselves in the community, not only do they have the pleasure of seeing others benefit from their efforts, but they themselves feel connected to others and feel more fulfilled. Giving to others has the knock-on effect of giving our lives meaning. President John F Kennedy said in his 1961 inaugural address: “Ask not what your country can do for

your country. As the High Holy Days fast approach and we reflect on the previous year and consider how we can improve ourselves, let each of us think of those words in relation to our synagogue: ask not what your community can do for you, ask yourself, "What can I do for my community?"

At the Deanfield Community weekend, there was a wonderful collaboration to produce a Bristol tallit. It's since been used to bless the children on a July Shabbat. Further tallit travels have been to the Biennial weekend.

# Community tallit



**Important message about burial arrangements**  
 The Grandfields have stepped down from being burial secretaries. Rabbi Monique has assumed the role until another person can be identified to take over.

# Unity: it's hard to keep us together



**Peter Brill**

*This article was previously published in the Bristol Post.*

It seems the world is beset by division, hatred and violence. The reality is it's probably no greater than at any other historical period, but it certainly seems hard to miss right now.

The senseless murder of MP Jo Cox was the culmination of a week that only served to highlight the divisions in our society – nationally and globally. The massacres in Orlando, violence of extremist football 'fans' at the European Championships in France and the increasingly bitter and personal divisions between individual politicians and political parties ahead of this week's European Referendum.

Hostilities have, apparently, been suspended in a battle of words which has increasingly appealed to the lowest common denominators of

immigration and money in an effort to win a vote which could change permanently the entire future of this country.

The tragedy is that it has taken the murder of an MP who, beyond her constituency, was relatively unknown, to bring some kind of sense of reality and perspective. Like many of our current MPs in Bristol, while they may not feature on the global stage in the way their leaders do, they have often played a significant role in the communities they represent.

One wonders whether, while they are duty-bound to toe their party line (or in this case Euro-destiny group), they have watched the rising hysteria of their leaders and felt increasingly distanced from their behaviour?

The result of the Referendum may have wider implications than just those of border control and the economy. The rise of nationalism and far right politics across many European countries, including our own, has some echoes of European history of the 1930s.

Then, the spotlight was on the Jews then (amongst other minority groups). Today, it is on Muslims and other Eastern European ethnic minorities. But it a fine line.

The act of ghettoisation - of isolating a country or a community - may give a superficial sense of security. But, whether by force of by choice, the reality of isolation and separatism - as evidenced in pre-WW2 Warsaw, Israel, Gaza, Kurdistan and many other cities and countries - is the ease with which their occupants can become targets.

It is wonderful to celebrate our individuality and identity, our religious beliefs and our cultural differences. But we should never forget that the survival of our individual communities also depends on our ability to unite with those communities around us. The outpouring of emotion from straight society after Orlando and the non-political in the wake of Jo Cox's murder is testament to that.

### **High Holy Days**

As the High Holy Days approach, I am putting together a Security Rota, as usual. Would anyone with a half hour or so be able to help out? It will involve welcoming arrivals at times when Services are starting and being a visible presence on the door when Services are ending. I will be aiming to organise pairs of volunteers so that no one is alone in the task, though that naturally requires sufficient volunteers to come forward. If I am able to achieve this, then ideally we would have one person inside the Synagogue and one outside. The Community Security Trust (CST) have provided two way radios for communication between volunteers.

Outside of those times, it involves an occasional tour of the grounds immediately outside the Synagogue, so that we are to be seen having a security presence, in line with CST recommendations. Closer to the time I will be offering some more detailed feedback from CST regarding best practice.

**Derek Brown,  
Community Security Rep.**

# B'not mitzvah and a special birthday: mazeltov all round!



Mischa Marrett



Daisy Horne



Sheila Yeger celebrated her 75th birthday.



# My Working Life

Karen Warren



When Sheila asked me to write about my working life, my first reaction was, “Why would anyone want to read about a profession with a reputation for being boring?” But then I thought, this is my chance to flag a little known profession to any of our young people who like numbers.

I’ll start by dispelling some clichés. Contrary to expectations, actuaries are not people who found accountancy too exciting and I’ve not been on the stage (at least not since I was about 13). Having said that, many people would find my working life boring since, on the surface, there are only really two or three things I do: read other people’s papers (usually with numbers in them) and discuss them (by email, phone or in a meeting). What makes it exciting for me is that I never know what each

day will bring. My ‘catchy’ job title is ‘Insurance Model Oversight Lead.’ My team has oversight over every team in the business who use actuarial models, helping the business show Senior Management and the Regulator that our models remain ‘fit for purpose’ and materially accurate.

‘Models’ are computer programs (which can be written in Excel but more often use specialist software) which are designed to test how much profit (if any) we are likely to make, and to test the financial health of the company, so they’re really important to the good running of the company. The variety comes in because of the sheer number of models we have and their different uses. A large proportion are used to determine how much capital we need to hold in case of an economic or other shock (e.g. a financial crisis, leaving the EU, major floods or a flu pandemic). Then there are models to determine the price you pay for your insurance, enabling us to cover our costs, including the economic cost of holding that capital, and to

make a profit, but also to meet the regulatory principle to 'treat customers fairly'. And a number are used to provide information to help Senior Management take appropriate decisions.

Each model requires an owner - a person responsible for it. To ensure the model is fit for purpose lots of testing is carried out and the Model Owner writes a long report all of which my team reviews before making a recommendation to the Model Governance Committee which I chair. Our purpose is to provide further challenge and hopefully approve the models or endorse them for approval at a higher committee, or for the most material models to go up to the Board and the Regulator.

As Chair I read every paper which comes through so I get to see the full breadth of actuarial work carried out in the company, ranging from complicated statistical models of assets, future life expectancy or the climate, to models where we have so little data that

'expert judgement' has to be applied.

Further variety comes from the people who we work with. Some teams understand the purpose of model oversight but there are a few which consider us to be an annoyance and require a lot of stakeholder management so that we can ensure we meet regulatory and internal governance requirements. It also means I need to travel though I'm still waiting for my work trip to Leeds (where Bridget is at Uni). Trivia fact - door to door, it takes about the same length of time from home to the Edinburgh office as to the London one!

I also have a team to manage, some of whom (along with my manager) are based in Edinburgh and who range from the geek who in a couple of weeks when work was light wrote a programme in R (a statistical programming language) so that we can independently validate other teams' work, to the weakest member of the team who struggles to challenge other

teams when information is missing.

And if I've not sold this as a profession to any of our youngsters, there's a shortage of actuaries in the country, so you should never be out of a well paid job. The downside is that you need a good maths-related degree, and then have to pass 15 fiendishly difficult exams before you qualify.

### **Rabbi's Discretionary Fund**

There are individuals in the community suffering financial hardship. This fund makes it possible for the Rabbi provide assistance to those in need.

Donations may be made directly to the Fund by cheque, payable to "Bristol & West Progressive Jewish Congregation", and marked "ATTENTION: Rabbi's Discretionary Fund". Monies may also be transferred directly.

Please email Rabbi Monique on [rabbi.mmayer@gmail.com](mailto:rabbi.mmayer@gmail.com) if you would like to help or need help. All enquiries are kept confidential.

## *Arts Review*

### **The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk**

**Lisa Lipman**



What greater joy is there, than to enter the warm glow of a theatre, not quite knowing what's coming? If you're lucky, in those two to three hours, you feel you've discovered a whole new world. Better still, it's hit a nerve that makes you want to learn more.

The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk is the swansong of Emma Rice, the much lauded Director of Cornwall's exuberant Knee High Theatre and now the Director at the London's Globe. With these credentials, I hoped this two-hander tale at the Bristol Old Vic, about Marc Chagall the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish painter and his wife and muse Bella, would be creative and daring. Besides that, I knew very little (I admit) about the protagonists of the story.

Marc Chagall's beginnings and his artistic awakening in the

rural town of Vitebsk in Belarus are told by two actors. More vivacious actors you couldn't wish to find. Touselled Marc Antolin and diminutive actress Audrey Brisson, perfectly cast from a visual point of view, pirouette and twirl across the stage, capturing the movement of Chagall's work. The set is an earthy wooden structure of balanced poles, part stetl, part circus, hung with the detritus of rural life, so often depicted in Chagall's work. Short scenes, interspersed with Yiddish-style original music by Ian Ross, tell the story of the Chagall's love affair which starts in 1909 and plays out against the backdrop of the pogroms, the revolution, the forced migration of Jews, the Marxist regime. Marc woos his Bella, they marry and move to Petersburg where Marc is offered the chance to become the Commissar of visual arts. It is Bella who advises him to say no, but he accepts the offer to start a new art school in the place he loves- Vitebsk.

But it is the domestic scene, the relationship of lovers Marc and Bella that predominates- as the

play examines the tension between the creative mind and personal commitment. The predictably single-minded Marc (most great artists are, aren't they?), his obsession with his art is in conflict with Bella's role as muse, and traditional housewife. She might be his inspiration, but she is left behind during the day while he goes out to harness the turmoil of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe, in art. Bella wrestles with this role- missing Marc when he leaves, calling on him to include her in his kaleidoscopic world of art and politics.

Delightful as the play is with its parading oversized stuffed cockerels and dancing lovers, the construction of the set implies stetl life might fly and soar above our heads across the wooden structure. This is what Kneehigh is known for, but there are few of Chagall's images in the play and it never quite "takes off" visually.

Despite being beautifully acted by both actors, this is not a story of equal parts- more his tale than hers, the story is linear

(always a mistake in biopics in my view) and it ends before Chagall even gets to Paris in 1922. Yet, there would be so much more to tell, not least about Bella, herself a writer.

I left the play unsatisfied, but that's when theatre can still fly. I was inspired to learn more about the Chagalls. They left Russia before the horrors of the Second World War, watching it unfold from France. I discovered more about Bella – she was a writer in her own right – setting her passion aside to support her husband, but during the last few years of her life she wrote a lyrical memoir in Yiddish, *Burning Lights*, about her childhood in Vitebsk. Bella died of a throat infection in 1944.

I wonder if that is the story that should have been told or maybe, there will be a *Flying Lovers*, Part 2?

#### TERROR, TRAUMA AND TRAGEDY



What happens when a tragedy occurs – be it terrorist attack or a personal trauma?

How does it affect our faith? What does Judaism have to say both to those who are victims and to those who witness it from afar? And where does God fit into it all?

Twenty-three Liberal and Reform rabbis have tried to provide answers that acknowledge the pain, anger and confusion that can arise, but which also offer ways forward and hope for the future.

**The book costs £9.99 but is available to LJ members at a discount price of £5.00 (if sent, p&p is an extra £1.80).**

Send your name, address and contact phone number/email along with a cheque (payable to 'MRJ') to Marcia Singer, 80 East End Road, London, N3 2SY.

**Remember, each copy costs £5.00 + £1.80 postage.**

# My creative life

Mimi Colman-Deveney



Ready for her tap exam



Ready for her character dance in ballet



At musical theatre summer school

"It's not just chicken soup. It's not just kosher. It's one of the ways we put the 'Jewish' into Jewish Care."  
Simon Morris, CEO



## WHAT PUTS 200,000 BOWLS OF CHICKEN SOUP ON OUR TABLES EVERY YEAR?

Every day, we serve 8,000 delicious hot kosher meals. We serve them to people visiting our community centres; to people we're helping to stay in their own homes, and to people living in our care homes. And it's not just about good food. It's a sign of the Jewish values we share with our entire community. We can only do it thanks to kind people who have remembered us in their Will. Because £1 in every £4 we raise comes from Gifts in Wills.

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REMEMBER  
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To find out more about including a gift in your Will to Jewish Care in complete confidence, please call **Alison Rubenstein** on **020 8922 2833** or email [arubenstein@jcare.org](mailto:arubenstein@jcare.org)

[jewishcare.org/legacy](http://jewishcare.org/legacy)

**REMEMBER** **JEWISH CARE**

## The Myth and Reality of Jewish Care

A popular myth is that Jewish Care only provides advice and support for those living in the London area. The reality is that we touch the lives of over 10,000 people every week through a wide range of support and services. These are individuals who live throughout the length and breadth of the country and even overseas, who often reach out to us when they would like information or support, advocacy, benefits advice or are at their most vulnerable and in greatest need.

Jackie Kramer Social Work Team Manager explains "Whilst it is true that the majority of our services are located in and around the South East, we are here to offer guidance and support, regardless of where you live. Often people do not realise we can offer support, information and services to the Jewish Community, their families and friends who are offering support to a friend or loved one, around the country and

liaise with local services to support the person to achieve what is important to them. Our teams have also been to shuls and communities, facilitating training sessions on all subjects from dementia to safeguarding issues as well as advising communities to develop and up support networks, memory cafes and befriending groups, as well as new services that are relevant to their community. One of our greatest successes is enabling communities to help themselves within a supportive framework. "

Jewish Care's confidential and free helpline, Jewish Care Direct is often the first port of call for most people.

We have also recently launched a new website called Jewish Care Interact [www.jewishcareinteract.org](http://www.jewishcareinteract.org) It is a great source of information on health issues, aging well and living with purpose. It is full of useful hints, tips and has a great interactive forum.

For more information on any of our services call Jewish Care Direct on 020 8922 2222 or email [helpline@jcare.org](mailto:helpline@jcare.org).

## Message from the President

**Jonathan Arkush,  
President**



In 5776, the Board of Deputies' profile has been raised to a new high. We are setting and leading the national agenda on the matters which count for Jews in this country.

When allegations of antisemitism emerged in Labour we confronted the problem head-on, raising concerns robustly in a face-to-face meeting with party leader Jeremy Corbyn. We were quoted throughout the national media on our response to Ken Livingstone's outrageous antisemitic remarks about Hitler and Zionism and when I gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on antisemitism. We made a detailed submission to the Chakrabarti Inquiry into antisemitism in the Labour Party and responded to what we saw as the shortcomings in Ms Chakrabarti's report.

This has been the most tumultuous year in British political life in living memory, with a decision by referendum to leave the European Union and a new government. Throughout it all the Board of Deputies has been heard as the clear and calm voice of British Jews, addressing the issues with clarity and firmness of purpose. The Board has had a long and warm relationship with Prime Minister Theresa May. After the Paris attacks, she addressed the Board of Deputies and held up the sign "Je Suis Juif". I met with her as Home Secretary – raising issues ranging from antisemitic demonstrations to the Syrian refugee crisis – and she lit the Chanukiah at the Board's most recent Parliamentary Reception.

Early in my tenure as President, I was pleased to have a number of meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. On each occasion I assured him of the Board of Deputies' and the community's steadfast support. Whether it is speaking at demonstrations, making the case in the media, challenging BDS or supporting grassroots advocacy organisations and Christian allies around the country through the excellent work of Steven Jaffe, we

have kept that promise and will continue to find new ways to do so.

We continue to be staunch defenders of Jewish schools and Jewish education in both the mainstream and Charedi sectors. When the Hebrew GCSE and A-Level came under threat again this year, we successfully campaigned to protect it. And we have continued to educate others about Judaism, challenging prejudice and ignorance through our sector-leading new textbook on Judaism for non-Jewish schools, written by leading educationalist Clive Lawton. Meanwhile, we have redoubled efforts at interfaith relations with Christians, Muslims, Hindus and others, including through the Government-funded Muslim-Jewish Women's Network Nisa-Nashim and an interfaith project where girls from Jewish, Muslim and Catholic schools came together at Twitter's UK HQ to study computer coding.

We have continued to interact through all levels of government, from desk officer to secretaries of state. This year, we produced the first-ever Jewish manifestos for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish elections, and are planning

seminars for local councillors across the country. Our Employer's Guide to Judaism, launched by then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith, is available online and provides clear and comprehensive information, and we continue to support individual Jewish employees and students to get time off for religious festivals.

We have provided vital services for the community without asking for any more money for 10 years. As our costs have risen over this time, this year the Community Contribution will be slightly increased from £25 to £30 per annum. By working efficiently and keeping costs to a minimum we are happy that we have been able to keep the Community Contribution down to a very affordable figure. I hope you will agree that we are providing excellent value in return for a very modest sum.

In 5777, we will continue to represent your interests as only a democratically elected body can. May this New Year bring you, your families and all of Am Yisrael health, strength and peace.

## Focus on nature

# Kestrels and Yellowhammers

Jack Wolf



Walking over the ridge near Stoney Littleton longbarrow, on a clear, warm day in August, I hear an unfamiliar song. It's a small bird, I'm guessing, from the



pitch and tone, but the pattern - a zig zag, descending see saw

of short notes, ending in one longish, thin peep, is unfamiliar. Hoping that this is something special, I walk on, peering at the spot in the hedge where the cascade of song is coming from - until the bird sees me and flutters off. But not before I glimpse it - a pert, cheeky little head with a thin, seed eater's bill, a flash of pale gold, about the size of a sparrow. I've already ruled out goldfinch from the song, so I'm stumped. I make a mental note of the sound and sight of the bird, and walk on.



Over the other side of the ridge a Kestrel is hunting. Kestrels are not as common as they once were - persecution, intensive farming and habitat loss has had a devastating effect on the populations of all small raptors - but they are still found here, and this one is a

female: brown feathered, slightly larger than the male; and she is hovering over the pasture, her eyes fixed on the grass. I sit down to watch her as she hovers, dips, and dives. I hold my breath, but when she rises again I can see from her empty talons that that she hasn't been successful. Only one in three or four hunts is: most of the time the prey - mouse, vole or shrew, or occasionally common lizard or grass snake - sees the descending shadow just in time and darts away, leaving the bird, which can't, at this late stage, change tack, to thump down into the space that it has just deserted.

She's going hungry, but she's lucky that she's not on a grouse moor - early this month a young satellite tagged Hen Harrier named Elwood disappeared on a grouse moor in Inverness. Shooting a raptor, particularly a member of an extremely rare species like the Hen Harrier, is illegal, but that does not stop the odd criminally minded gamekeeper. Unfortunately, government cuts to budgets

have seen many wildlife crime units scaled back, and it can be hard to investigate thoroughly enough to secure a conviction. Public awareness and willingness to report crimes - for instance handing in a bird that has obviously been shot, with clear directions to the location it was found, or reporting suspicious behaviour - will obviously help, but until the great British public unites behind raptor conservation the results are still going to be rather patchy.

When I get home I listen to sound recordings online (British birdsongs UK is a good place to start) until I succeed in identifying the little hedge singer. It's a Yellowhammer - another once common British bird whose numbers have crashed over the past twenty five or so years. I hope that hearing it singing here, where I haven't heard it before, is a good sign. Populations can recover, given the chance to do so. I hope they get it.

# Research – Justice and Gender Based Violence



What does 'justice' mean to you?

Would you be willing to speak to a researcher about your experiences?

We are a small, experienced group of women researchers from Bristol and Cardiff Universities. We want to speak to women victims/survivors of different types of abuse about what 'justice' means to you. It doesn't matter if you have or have not used the police or the courts. We want to know your views. If you are interested and would like to know more, or to contact us, please follow the link: <http://tinyurl.com/hj5oda5> or email: [sps-justiceproject@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sps-justiceproject@bristol.ac.uk) or phone: 07807 799967.

## What is this research about?

We are interested in what victims and survivors of gendered violence and abuse think about 'justice'. Gender Based Violence can include many different forms of domestic and sexual abuse, forced marriage, or 'honour'-based crimes. Individuals with these experiences might have different ideas of what 'justice' means to them, and we are interested in those ideas. We will use the findings to inform government policy to make sure that victims' views are included when looking at different types of justice.

## What does the research involve?

If you agree to take part we would arrange to interview you once at a safe place or over the telephone. The interview will last up to 60 minutes. You can choose whether or not you answer specific questions.

## **What happens if I don't want to take part?**

*Nothing.* If you do not wish to take part in this research, you do not have to and this will not affect any of the services you receive.

## **What happens to my information?**

All the information will be confidential to the research team. The only exception to this is if we are told that a child or vulnerable person is at risk of serious harm. In this case we may need to inform someone.

The service you receive will not be affected by your taking part in the interview. When we write the report, we may include what you have said but we will make sure that no-one can be recognised.

## **Will the interview be recorded?**

We would like to record the interview because this enables us to document your ideas accurately. We would type up the recording in to a 'transcript' and then check again to remove

any identifying details (e.g. place names or names of people). The audio files will be deleted at the end of the project. We will only record the interview if you are happy with us doing this. If you are not happy, then we will take notes instead. You can decide on the consent form.

## **Who is doing this research?**

We are an experienced team of women researchers who work at the University of Bristol, and Cardiff University.

## **What do I do if I want to take part?**

If you want to take part, then please either discuss with your service worker, or contact the research team directly below via a confidential online form: <http://tinyurl.com/hj5oda5> or via email: [sps-justiceproject@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sps-justiceproject@bristol.ac.uk) or via telephone: 07807 799967.

## On numbers

David Jewell



*David has been working in the West Bank helping to develop better primary medical care.*

**O**, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. For as long as I can remember I have known these as Arabic numbers. Then I learnt the Roman numerals, and learning them made it very obvious why the Arabic system is better. Just for the record I haven't managed to master Hebrew numbers, and don't ever expect to. Only years later did I come to understand that the breakthrough was the idea of zero as a number and giving it a symbol. Yet another example of the primacy of Arabic science, mathematics, astronomy etc before the European enlightenment.

The other day I saw one of my Arab colleagues writing some numbers and they looked nothing like the ones above. Arabs, it turns out, can choose between two systems of notation, the same one that the rest of us use, and another

altogether. Sorry, but despite my best efforts I haven't been able to print the other system here. If you want to see what they look like you should Google them to see what I mean. When questioned they had no explanation and just laughed. So where do our 'Arabic' numerals come from? With apologies for my laziness, the answer was found on Wikipedia. Turns out that the system comes from India, so that it's more accurate to describe them as Indo-Arabic numerals.

Other interesting factoids gleaned from Wikipedia: the first description of the system appeared in a treatise of 825 Al Khwarizmi, a Persian, not an Arab, though still Muslim. From a translator's version of his name, Algoritmi, we get the word algorithm. It was introduced into Europe by none other than Fibonacci with a book published in 1202. He referred to the system as Arabic because he learnt it from Arabs in North Africa. In this last respect a bit like syphilis, which when it spread throughout Europe with the dispersal of the armies of the Italian War of 1494-98, it was

always called by the name of the country from which the soldiers had come – Italian pox in France, and French pox in England.

One last curio. Nominally for clarity, but as what looks like another example of Western imperialism, Unicode now describes 0-9 as European numerals.

## The hijab

The hijab is common enough in Bristol. I had always understood that women wore it as a badge of identity: 'I'm a Muslim and I want you to know', or even 'I'm a Muslim, and I want you to know that I take my religion seriously.' Just as some Jewish men wear a kippa. Here in Nablus wearing a hijab is almost, but not quite, universal. One of my friends said that it was not always so, but became much more widespread after the second intifada. So is it more a political statement than a religious one? Political symbols are always difficult to decode, especially in a different culture and context. We went for an iftar meal at quite an up-market restaurant where very few women were in hijabs. A (non

hijab wearing) Palestinian friend drew a general conclusion that the better off women are less likely to wear them. What does that mean?

The university where I'm working has more female than male students and feels very much like a women's space. (The men sit around in groups looking slightly cowed). The profusion of colours and styles makes the hijab look more like a fashion statement. Like my ties perhaps, an otherwise functionless item of clothing offering an opportunity for more dandyism. One colleague has more than a hundred at home and told me she chooses one to fit whatever outfit she is wearing. She also refers to it as her 'shell' (what the word hijab means, or at least so she told me), so perhaps also protection, though she wasn't sure against what. With a different colleague, who doesn't wear them, I wondered if it's a protection against sexual advances. She thought I might be right, telling me that the one place she wanted to wear one was in Egypt, where it might have protected against random gropings (or might not). My female Jewish Bristolian friend

thinks the best thing is that it means not having to do one's hair every morning. Not so much like my ties as like my beard (not having to shave every morning). In the end difficult to put in a single pigeon hole. Whatever else, the hijab is a reminder to people like me, who like to categorise things, not to make assumptions.

Kibbutz Lotan. It's very ecological, for example they have houses made out of mud!



It was an amazing place to stay at and very insightful into a different style of life. In general the whole experience was incredible and I've made so many friends.

## Israel tour 2016 memories

James Colman-Deveney

Earlier this summer I went on Israel Tour with LJY. It was one of the best experiences I've ever had, with so many great times.



One of those was snorkeling in the Red Sea. I'd never done it before and it was brilliant with all the beautiful scenery. Another great experience was staying on



## Psalm 102: The Dark Night of the Soul



Michael Picardie

“Hear my prayer O LORD; let my cry come to thee!

Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress!”

Many Jewish theologians such as Martin Buber write of God as veiling His, or Her face when confronted with atrocities such as Auschwitz. What are we to say when we acknowledge the historical truth of tragedies such as the *nagbah* which means the catastrophe, the disaster of the loss of their homes and livelihoods when about 700,000 Palestinians became refugees in the aftermath of the 1947-1948 war between the new incipient state of Israel, the Haganah and the Irgun, fighting Palestinian militias and volunteers and regular armies invading from seven Middle East states? Of course Israel won this war. The Palmach and the other Zionist forces outnumbered the Arabs, and besides, the future

Israelis were fighting for not only their lives but for Jewish existence in a Palestine that had seen them conquered by Romans, Greek-Syrians, Mohammed’s 7<sup>th</sup> century invasion from Arabia , slaughtered by crusading knights in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the diaspora: they were recurrently tortured, hanged and finally exiled by the English King in 1290, and expelled by Ferdinand and Isabella from Spain in 1492.

In Russia and eastern Europe they suffered pogroms and segregation in a Pale of Settlement where they were resented by Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian Christians who saw them as the pawns of the local nobility for whom they acted as bailiffs, agents, tax collectors and enemies of God whose Son they had betrayed and handed over to Pontius Pilate for crucifixion. All the Nazis did was carry normative European anti-Semitism to a final conclusion in carrying out the two main purposes of the second world war: the final solution of the Jewish question – genocide; and *lebensraum* for the 1000-year Reich.

The psalm goes on: "Incline thy ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace.

My heart is smitten like grass, and withered; I forget to eat my bread.

Because of my loud groaning my bones cleave to my flesh.

I am like a vulture of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places."

The wonderful thing about poetry about sadness, depression, the state of spiritual loss whether you are a believing Jew or Muslim or Christian or Buddhist or Hindu or an agnostic is that this state, called the dark night of the soul, is transcended in the aesthetic image, rhythm, an emotional and cognitive sense of recognition, called *anagnorisis* by Aristotle in his *Poetics* leading to a *catharsis* a cleansing of the soul.

There is a parallel dark night of the soul for the Greek dramatic hero, the Athenian equivalent of the sinful but heroic Kings Saul and David – Oedipus the King. In the eponymous play he realises his *hamartia*, his mistake in killing the man who attacks him on the road from the oracle at Delphi who turns out to be his father King Laius of Thebes, but who was also a sinner in previous mythology not mentioned by Sophocles (he seduced, abducted and raped a prince, Chrysippus who was his student in charioteering).

Oedipus puts out his eyes with his wife/mother Jocasta's hair pins. But in *Oedipus at Colonus* having wandered blind led by his daughter/sister Antigone his dark night of the soul comes to an end when he has an apotheosis. The gods call him to join them after death in Elysium.

Again, as with the Psalmist we feel *catharsis*: trouble eventually comes to an end. But we should *see* not blind

ourselves to the truth. Likewise Holocaust and *nagbah* mourners should feel comforted by the prayers and songs, plays, films and novels which honour and commemorate their suffering, which *see and acknowledge* their dark night of the soul.

When I lived in a *shikkun* near Ein Kerem in 1958 working for *Kol Tzion La'golah* the overseas service of *Kol Yisrael* I walked around the ruined houses where I think fleeing Arab Palestinians used to live near Jewish Jerusalem. It was springtime and I sat next to the church commemorating John the Baptist. I felt like "an owl of the waste places."

When I was working near the hay-barn on Kibbutz Hazorea learning Ivrit at an Ulpan I became very unhappy. I had overheard two Rumanian *olim, chaverim* in the kibbutz or perhaps nominees for kibbutz membership trying to impress two girls from Manchester with their *macho* attitudes and behaviour, their military

prowess. They boasted of how in the 1956 Suez War in Sinai they took no surrendering Egyptian prisoners.

A group of Egyptian army conscripts had been manning an outpost in Sinai and they were outgunned and outmanoeuvred by the IDF. The Rumanians announced that just shot these prisoners, killed them, in cold blood. Incidents like these are corroborated by Benny Morris in his book *The Origin of the Palestine Refugee Problem* but which happened 10 years earlier.

We all know that Israeli soldiers are not like Nazis, that the Israeli government, still less the Israeli state, is not committed to a holy war of genocide against Palestinians or other Middle Eastern Arabs. However it is *as if* all the enemies of Israel are like "my enemies who taunt me, those who deride me, use my name for a curse" in the words of this psalm.

The psalm commemorates God who "of old didst lay the foundation of the earth". Maybe my being-in-the-world is connected to the totality of Being as such including the foundation of the earth and this connectedness and its loss are, for me, really the psychodynamics of regret, sadness and depression - and great joy - when I recognise that, despite everything we are all connected to Being as beings.

### Apology

I would like to apologise to readers and admirers of Baruch Spinoza. The end of the first paragraph of my article on Psalm 23 in the Summer 2016 edition of Alonim should read:

"He [my uncle Benny Bloomberg] showed me his copy of Baruch Spinoza's "Ethics" and urged me to read it - Spinoza, the heretic Jew from Amsterdam who was excommunicated by both Ashkenazi and Sephardi synagogues in the 17th century for pan-en-theism: the belief that God was an expression of reason and rational causation and everything was in God. Even evil. Spinoza must be wrong. God entails Nature and Nature entails evil. There is a logical connection here. But God does not cause evil. He is only immanent in us, not transcendent. Our freedom causes evil and good. One is praying to the immanent God in oneself for good to prevail over evil and for God to become transcendent as ethics-in-politics. "God" is a metaphor for ethics-in-politics."

Michael Picardie

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