



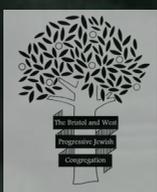
ALONIM

עלונים

March – May 2017

Adar, Nisan,
Iyyar, Sivan 5777

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. For postal contributions please contact the editor on **07989 974133**. Copy date deadline for submissions is notified below. 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.

ALONIM copy date deadline	
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Summer	31st May 2017

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Front cover photograph:

Purim at BWPJC

Photograph © David Finkel
Photography

A funeral... and four weddings

Sheila Brill
Editor



Please forgive me for hijacking the editorial column...

Hollywood doesn't normally impinge on my personal life but 2017 has begun as a kind of Hollywood reversal movie (A Funeral and Four Weddings).

As a family we've always known that we would lose our daughter Josephine but that didn't ready us for the shock. Since the day she was born, one way or another, she has had to fight for survival. On the receiving end of medical negligence, Jose had to face years of discomfort and pain, frustration and exhaustion witnessed by those around her who would have dearly loved to take it all away and make her better.

Being completely honest, it's hard not to feel bitter about the

loss of a daughter who never got the chance to reach her potential, to worry her parents with late nights out, mixing with the 'wrong' people.... How I would have loved to have had a right royal argument with my daughter, share precious moments shopping together or advising her on possible careers. But it wasn't to be.

When Jose was twelve she had a batmitzvah (yes it was a year early!). People talk of their pride when their child reaches this Jewish milestone. For us it was THE most amazing experience of our lives.

The outpouring then of love from all who knew and cared for her and us as her family, has again been echoed since her death, giving us a feeling of being held and cradled by the people who matter to us. To realise that people recognised the person who Jose was inside and the power she had to transform others is truly enormous and fills me with pride.

Now we've set aside the mountains of paperwork which describe Jose's medical conditions. We've set aside the equipment needed to move her and help with her care. We've gathered together the endless photos and videos which capture the beauty, serenity and wonder of our gorgeous daughter. We're trying hard to focus on the good memories which can hopefully sustain us into a brighter future.

Our community's capacity to support and comfort is matched by its ability to celebrate the lives of its more challenged members – witness Celyn's batmitzvah (see the next issue for the full story).

And the four weddings? Well, yes, there are at least three for us this year – two in London and one in France. We're just waiting to hear when the fourth one is.

Life, as they say, goes on.

Membership news



Sheila Wilson

Membership Secretary

A belated mazeltov to Yana and Jermaine Yivsiyevich-Smith on their wedding which took place over the summer. Wishing them many happy years together.

Sincere condolences to Mark Carmen on the death of his mother and to Nigel Finkel on the death of his mother and the mother-in-law of Rabbi Monique.

A great many of us went to the funeral service of Josephine Brill, daughter of Sheila and Peter, granddaughter of Frieda Pass and sister to Asher. It was a most moving service and celebration of a special young woman.

We wish them all long life.

And now for my annual plea....

done in the strictest confidence.

By now you all will have received your annual membership invoice either by email or in the post. Please don't ignore this or add it to your "to do later list " (in other words don't file it away and forget about it!)

Look forward to hearing from you all!

Please remember that all standing orders have to be altered to take into account the increase in subscription rates.

The sooner your standing order form has been sent in to the bank, the longer you will have to spread your payments over the year.

Be sure to include your subscription number on any Standing order, BACS payments or cheques that you pay in.

If there is any issue with the amount of the subscription owed, please contact me ASAP. Subscription rates can be negotiated if it causes any financial burden. This will be

Pull up a Chair



Jane Clark
Chair

Growing the membership

In January, we had a meeting to plan how to grow our membership. We have the rudiments of a strategy for finding and retaining new members.

We will be looking to hold a social event for new members in the near future.

We plan to segment the potential membership and work out a route map to find them and encourage them to join

We plan to set up a 'buddy' system to welcome new arrivals at the synagogue and to offer some simple training. If you are interested in becoming part of this group, please let me know.

We also need to begin the process of asking around to see if anyone knows potential

members who could be contacted. Obviously this will have to be done sensitively. We don't want to do anything to embarrass anyone.

Finally we have begun to collect the names of people to host Shabbat dinners at home; and of people who would like to attend them.

Grants

Peter Brill has agreed to do some research to see if there are any grants for which we could apply.

Education Fund

Our education fund originally came from a bequest, into which we have eaten substantially. Even though the fund has recently benefited from a generous gift, we have to use its finite resources wisely and carefully. We will normally be asking recipients to contribute to fundraising for their grants in order to eke out the fund. This might be via something like a sponsored

walk.

Social Events

Hati South, a new Council member, has taken on the role of Social Secretary with gusto. She recently arranged a games night. There's more to come: Tipples and Tricks on 1st April and Matza Ramble on April 16th.

Visiting Rabbis

We have now had four visiting rabbis from other parts of Liberal Judaism, each of whom stimulated a lot of discussion by giving a shiur. Over the coming weeks we will have Rabbi Leah Muehlstein, talking on Kabbalat Torah and a Friday night Chavurah Supper and session with Rabbi Rebecca Birk on Liberal Judaism and Inclusion in Life Cycle Events.

Festivals

As I write, Purim is almost upon us: the season of sanctioned silliness. Of course

there's a great tradition of April-Fool-style jokes at Purim. In other synagogues I have heard of orders being issued that in order to add dignity to services, the wardens will be required to wear top hats. I have also heard that bills would be paid during the Torah Service: the Cheque Scroll would be paraded before being solemnly signed at the bimah.

Exactly four weeks after Purim comes Pesach. This year our Communal Seder will be on the first night, Monday 10th April. Please contact Martine Hawley if you can help with the meal preparation.

I have occasionally thought that we are in danger of losing the rich tradition of Jewish festivals in this synagogue because not many of us participate in some of them. Most of them are child-friendly; and most of them are a lot more fun if we get a good crowd. I do hope you will join in our festivals.

Dancing to the beat of a Jewish heart



Rabbi Monique Mayer

*(Adapted from a sermon given on
25th February 2017)*

There is a video making the rounds on the internet. A weary young woman enters her apartment building after a long day. She watches another tenant stroll past, tapping away on his mobile. She looks over to the security desk and shakes her head; the guard gives no acknowledgement, also tapping away on his mobile. She next stands in the lift full of people who are all staring at and connected with their mobiles, disconnected from each other. No one looks up. When the lift doors open, everyone walks past the young woman, no one looking up from their phone. One man grazes her shoulder without

so much as a “pardon me”. The young woman sadly watches her neighbours access their respective flats, still glued to their phones. She enters her own flat, unnoticed by a flatmate in headphones whose eyes are fixed on a laptop screen. The young woman deliberately drops her bag loudly on the floor, but her flatmate doesn’t look up. Tapping her fingers, she seems to be reaching a decision.

In the next scene, she and her flatmate are placing tables and chairs in the corridor, setting an inviting table with food, sitting and waiting. A young family exits the lift, parents focussed on their mobiles. The young women motion for the family to join them. The daughter excitedly pulls her parents toward the table, which they do as they reluctantly set aside their phones. They join the meal, smiling as food is passed along, and a conversation begins. Doors open one by

One, people come out into the corridor, bringing tables and their own contributions to the feast. Introductions are made and stories are exchanged. Toward the end of the scene, a young girl knocks on the door at the far end of the hall, taking the hand of an older man to join them. He steps back into his flat and closes the door, but then emerges with two bottles of wine and a smile, joining the meal with the others.

We are taught in the 8th-9th Century commentary Avot d'Rabbi Natan that "three things make a person beloved to his fellow human beings: an open hand, a set table, and a sparkling wit" (A.R'N 31). Although we perhaps aren't all blessed with the third of these, we can all aspire to having an open hand in friendship and inviting others for a meal.

Jewish tradition provides a beautiful example of welcoming others to the table.

Abraham and Sarah, our founding parents – if you will – were models of hospitality. In Genesis we read of them almost falling off their feet to serve three visitors Abraham invited to remain and refresh themselves in the heat of the day. And in Exodus (22:20) we read "*v'geir lo toneh v'lo tilchatzenu, ki geirim heyjitem b'erezt mitzrayim*" – Do not wrong the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Our community is actually quite wonderful at extending an open hand to guests – visitors who are away from their home synagogues for a short time, people who are reconnecting with Judaism, and even those who are thinking that Judaism might be the right path for them. When they show up at our door, we are warm and inviting, introducing ourselves and finding out a bit more about the person and their background. We can congratulate ourselves for that.

However, the instructions in the biblical text do not end with strangers who come into our community: *kol almanah v'yatom lo t'anun* – You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If we are obligated to help the stranger, *kal vachomeir* – how much the more so must we extend a hand to those in our midst. In ancient times, widows in a community did not have the support of a husband to provide a home and protect them. Orphans did not have parents to take care of their needs and keep them safe. The Divine response for afflicting orphans and widows to the point where they cry out in suffering, in isolation – is burning anger and a swift death (Exod 22-23). But Jewish tradition teaches us that the examples in the Torah are not always literal; they may refer to general categories. Widows and orphans are not just the husbandless and the parentless, they are representative of the vulnerable and isolated members of the community.

Their vulnerability may be the daily worry of how to keep warm or keep a roof over their head. But their vulnerability may also be isolation and loneliness. We have an obligation to look after each other to minimise isolation. And while our community does extraordinarily well inviting in the stranger and making them feel welcome, it needs to work harder at attending to those within our membership who are silently crying for human contact. Just like the young woman in the video, many in our community feel disconnected. Saying “why don't they call” is not addressing the problem because the truth is that people want to be invited; they want to feel like they matter enough that someone rings them and asks if they'll come. They want to be encouraged to sit at the table. And we have an obligation to make that happen. Indeed, we read every year in our Pesach haggadah *Kol dichfin yeitei v'yeichul* – let all who are hungry come and eat.

A few years ago, I restarted the *chaovurah* suppers on the first Friday of the month in attempt to create a home experience of Shabbat for anyone seeking to celebrate with others. Initially, I always set the table in advance so that when people arrived, they would be greeted with a prepared table, ready for them. Attendance has fluctuated, but recently something beautiful has begun to happen. People now arrive a bit earlier to help set the table together. And we are beginning to lose track of time over the course of the evening, chatting away until 9 or 10pm. The evenings have become relaxed and pleasurable, and as we monthly continue to welcome in Shabbat, we have created a small (but growing) family. And no doubt the Divine presence is there, too.

In that spirit, I challenge each and every one of you to extend the joy of Shabbat beyond your own friends and family, help break down the walls of isolation, and commit to the *mitzvah* of reaching out to others in the community. Our new Council secretary, Derek Brown,

is collecting names of those who want to extend an invitation or who want to be invited. Please send an email to Derek and include your name, phone number and post code; your preference for Friday night, Saturday morning or no preference; and also please indicate whether you are willing to host or want to be hosted. This will help us match up individuals in the same area.

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in his beautiful book *The Sabbath*, "The soul cannot celebrate alone". Let each of us help the other to experience the joy of Shabbat. Let all who are hungry come and eat.

Somewhere over the rainbow



Peter Brill

This article was previously published in the Bristol Post.

Over the days and weeks since our daughter passed away, I have been comforting myself with the thought that she is free of the disabilities that haunted her life and is now in some unknown place where she can truly be the person she could and should have been.

However, when I recently told a friend about this particular idea (accompanying it with the usual caveat that I don't believe in God, or Heaven and Hell, or "all that stuff") his response surprised me.

His immediate reaction was: "That thing you believe about where your daughter is now – that right there is evidence that you believe in God!" He then

went on to explain that, for him, God is not some stereotypical individual with flowing white locks, omnipotent powers and prophets for sons. Rather, God is a state of mind, an essence that works outside our daily lives which allows things to happen beyond the physical elements we can touch, see and feel and working in a time that is not governed by clocks or planetary rotations.

It was an interesting idea which certainly made me stop in my tracks at the time and has continued to wander around my mind since the conversation. Now, for regular readers of this column, if you think I have had some sudden Damascene conversion (a Biblical reference in itself) to God and religion then you can relax a little.

I have always believed that there are things beyond our understanding and control that happen for a reason. Call it fate, call it spiritualism, or don't give it a name at all – but

I think there is some kind of forces, or forces, which operate despite us.

That moment when the phone rings and there is a long-lost friend on the other end you happen to have thought about an hour before. Or a sequence of events that don't seem to make any sense at the time, but on later reflection are too well-ordered to just be coincidence.

There is every manner of scientific research, philosophical discourses, religious doctrines, or drug-fuelled ramblings that have been used to prove or disprove these events or ideas. Some are compelling, others have a distinct smell of male cattle.

But perhaps somewhere within it all lies a kernel of truth and, when times are at their most emotionally challenging, maybe there's some comfort to be found in that.

Losing a granddaughter

Frieda Pass



I have been so lucky that I have been blessed with a wonderful granddaughter. She was a huge part of my life and will always be there for me. However nothing seems right without her and although life goes on nothing will ever be the same without her. She always knew when we were there and this always such a comfort. She was a very strong girl. She knew what she wanted and this gave her such strength and also such support to us. We are lucky that this shows in the many photographs we have. Never to be forgotten our darling.

Focus on nature

Signs of Spring

Jack Wolf



robins and the occasional wren. It has not always been so; when I first moved in, the high number of cats in the area, combined with the fact that nobody in the area seemed interested in feeding the birds, meant that the smaller species

The sun is finally returning to my tiny, north facing back garden, having vanished completely from it over the winter months. Now I'm watching the light progress down the back fence as on the opposite side of the house, the sun creeps higher in the sky and the daylight hours steadily increase. Normally, I barely go outside to the back of the house between October and April, but this winter has been different. This is the first year I have had birds visiting my garden and the effect has been like flowers appearing in the dark.

In this part of Bath we are lucky enough to have a small, rather neglected, nature reserve within walking distance, and so my garden attracts a mixture of great, coal, blue and long-tailed tits, blackbirds, dunnocks,



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stayed away and the peanuts I put out remained uneaten. Small birds, such as members of the tit family, are creatures of habit, tending to follow already established daily routines which take them to certain places at certain times of day, but not bothering to explore very much beyond them. I

would see magpies, crows and pigeons, but nothing else - although as soon as I began to walk in the woods and fields of the reserve I would be surrounded by the songs of thrushes, robins, wrens and so on.

However, last autumn I began to see a small flock of tits regularly patrolling the hedge line at the back of the house, which made me wonder whether it might be worth putting out some seed; so I picked up a hanging table and a feeder, and put some sunflower hearts, suet, and mealworms to see what would happen.

Almost immediately, the feeders became a magnet for small birds - within days they had drawn the attention of the tits, and the local robin had expanded its territory to include the garden. My greatest surprise and delight, though, was when on the third or fourth day I spotted a pair of nuthatches investigating the feeder. I'd heard nuthatches on the reserve, but had never seen

any so I was very pleased to see this.



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Of course the other unmistakable sign of spring in my house is that my spaniel has started to shed her coat. Unless I brush her for at least five minutes every single morning, the entire house ends up covered in dog hair, which is a nightmare to deal with. This year, though, I am hoping to have found a use for the piles of soft fur, and I am putting these out for the birds to use as nesting material. I don't know if they will take them - but watch this space! Maybe the reserve will have a number of blue tit chicks raised in nests warmly lined courtesy of Lexie!

Some thoughts from Lamdeinu

Valerie Russell
Emmott



Having studied the Prophets/ *Nevi'im* the first two terms of this years, in January we began a new unit on Prayer/ *Avodah* from the Chai Curriculum our religion school, *Lamdeinu*, uses. For the next two terms, our class of Year 7 and 8 children will be studying core prayers from our liturgy: the *Amidah*, the *Aleinu*, and the *Kaddish*. We will also look at the place of Israel in our prayers.

In the very first introductory class of term, we explored the relationship between prayer and our actions, and we considered the question of how prayer can affect what we do.

Specifically, we talked about ways in which own behaviour can help make our prayers 'come true.' For example, we can pray that an ill friend be restored to health, but the prayer can remind us that we can make the friend feel better by visiting or calling more often.

It was inspiring to hear the young people's responses to the texts supplied in the lesson. They came up with this list of reasons why prayer can help us.

It helps me remember /reminds me what the right way of life is.

Prayer is calming, it helps me to slow down.

Prayer helps me to think carefully

It is a time to reflection.

It gives us reason to live.

Doing tzedakah helps me in my life.

It helps me feel better about myself.

It brings more light into the world.

It helps us to enjoy everything we do.

It makes me realise that you have to make it happen yourself, rely on yourself more.

God will follow your prayers.

Praying for other people gives them hope.

Prayer extends our views about God and the usefulness of prayer!

A Jewish treasure from the silent era

Jeanette Monaco



A review of 'An evening of silent movies starring Max Davidson' - DAVAR screening

If you didn't have the chance to pop over to Scott Cinema in Henleaze (aka 'The Orpheus') on Wednesday evening, February 22nd, well, I'm sorry you missed out on all of the slap-sticking hilarious fun, and what I would describe as one of DAVAR's most successful events. The night complimented DAVAR's wonderfully diverse Orpheus film line-up - to be followed soon by *Indignation* (James Schamus, 2016) on March 29th, the film adaptation of a Philip Roth novel of the same name. It also tied in nicely with the context of last year's talk from Nathan Abrams, whose focus on the role on Jews and Jewishness in British film and TV began with a look at some of

the problematic representations of Jews in early silent film.

The three films shown, all starring the under-celebrated Jewish silent film comic actor Max Davidson, were presented with brief introductions by James Harrison from South West Silents (<https://southwestsilents.com/>). While there wasn't time for discussion after the screenings, a group of us headed across the road for drinks where we had an informative Q and A with James. If you're interested in seeing other silent films, consider heading over to the Lansdown Pub in Clifton where South West Silents shows a selection. See South West Silents' website for details.

Davidson, born in 1875 in Berlin (there is no record of his original name other than 'Davidson'), emigrated to the United States around 1890 and began performing in vaudeville with the Louisville Kentucky Theatre Troupe. While Davidson did not gain regular employment in the

theatre, he was able to build a secure career in film, in which he gained steady, annual paid work. He moved into film by 1912 and developed a successful working relationship with actor, writer and director, D.W. Griffith, well-known for his films *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916). The latter film included Davidson in a role in which he is credited in the BFI cast list as the 'kindly neighbor'. Here and in later films he became known for his scruffy hair and 'bearded look'; this appearance was the mark of a distinctive European Jewish stereotype that would be used repeatedly for comic effect and both the studio's and his financial success. Playing up stinginess and greed with a few pork jokes thrown in, became a large part of Davidson's trademark; he was good at it and this is what kept him employed.

The first big break for Davidson in terms of audience popularity for his performance of this Jewish character type came along in the MGM produced film *Rag Man* (Edward F. Cline,

1925). Here Davidson played Max Ginsberg, a Jewish rag man peddler/disgruntled inventor who roams the streets of New York with his junk wagon. Within the course of the sixty-eight minute film, Max befriends the young orphan, Tim, who finds a way to help them both move up and out of their meagre existence, from rags to riches.

Although Davidson would never reach the kind of high-profile stardom of Charlie Chaplin, he was widely known and respected in Hollywood circles. His work for the Irish-American comedy producer Hal Roach of Hal Roach Studios no doubt helped him to achieve this status. Roach employed Davidson in a series of fast production Jewish dialogue comedies which became a hallmark of the studio's best work. James Harrison presented a well-selected sample of three of these films to illustrate how they helped build Davidson's reputation.

In the first film, *Why Girls Say No* (Leo McCary, 1927), running time 23 minutes, Davidson plays an obviously scripted Jewish father role. His 'Papa Whisselberg' unsurprisingly kvetches over whether his daughter's new admirer, with whom she falls in love, is Jewish. In a typical scenario that depicts her new admirer (who Papa later claims looks like an 'Irisher') engaging in a silly kind of stalking behaviour as a way of gaining her attention, we spot the famous Oliver Hardy cast as the police officer. His attempts at halting the stalker result in him repeatedly falling into a masked, dirty, water hole at a construction area. Papa's son, played by 'Spec O'Donnell', the actor often paired with Davidson as the mischievous son, partakes in continuous gags throughout, such as when he places cake on someone's chair before they sit down. Contemporary viewers like me may have found themselves wondering if 'Spec', like Davidson, is a Jewish actor – while his face is 'speckled' with freckles, his facial features,

especially when performed in exaggerated comic expressions like Davidson's, easily fit the stereotype. He and Davidson are indeed a perfect comic father/son fit. But this common game of spotting the Jew that many of us fall into, highlights some of the difficulties that films like this can pose. The film's comic outcome relies on our willingness to accept and laugh at Jewish stereotypes. The script itself questions the identity of the daughter's new love. In spite of his 'Irish' appearance, the boyfriend is later revealed to have Jewish parents, that is, if we are to believe, at least within the comic terms of the film, that the stereotypical Eastern European older couple he introduces are his parents. In films like this the contemporary Jewish viewer, or any sensitive viewer, may feel uncomfortable about having a giggle at all of this – it is easy to get pulled into the pleasures of this comic world, problematic as it is. An important question my dear friend Lisa Lipman asked was, what kind of audience was laughing at these films? What was the

experience of the Jewish audience at this time? A quick glance on the internet hasn't shown any answers, so it seems there's some promising potential of an original academic study out there. The possibility that these films might prompt anti-semitism was actually acknowledged by Hollywood executives. Davidson's contract for the series was cancelled after *Pass The Gravy* (Fred L. Giol, 1928) was produced. While Davidson continued to work, his roles in talkies were minor. The new talkie medium, however, had this effect on other silent film actors whose careers were challenged at that point.

In the other two films shown, the Jewish identity of Davidson's character (and his family) is less clear and the plots that follow are simple vehicles that allow slapstick to shine at its best. The films could be about any family with a bumbling father at the head who gets caught up in the whirlwinds of outrageous activities.

The second film, *Flaming Fathers* (Stan Laurel, Leo McCary, 1927) 25 minutes running time, features Davidson as 'Papa Gimplewart' whose wife sets him the task of chaperoning his daughter and her boyfriend to a day out at the beach to stop them from eloping. This script could be about any over-protective father hovering over the young couple, but it is Davidson's slight 5'4" size, his famous beard and grumpy grimace that sets him apart. It is this that a couple of children notice about him when he's on the beach wearing a hired costume that fits him like a tent as it is several sizes too big. After two of the kids ask him to make a funny face, the young followers grow by the minute and soon hordes of them are chasing him for the next laugh. The usual copper shows up to see what all the fuss is about, Davidson is chased by him and the kids. A series of tidy picnics on the beach are trod on for good measure and a tussle with a dog gets Davidson's kit off. We've seen this kind of thing repeatedly over the course of slapstick film history, but still, in spite of our high

expectations, this simple humour keeps up laughing hard. We appreciate it even more knowing that films like this are slapstick comedy in its earliest conception for the film medium.

The third film, *Pass The Gravy* (Fred L. Giol, 1928) 23 minutes running time, was lauded by James as the one that best illustrated the classic Davidson's comic act that is all about the face and expression. Spec O'Donnell again features as the naughty son whose actions cause chaos for the dinner that Max hosts for his neighbour 'Schultz'. Although Max and Schultz have their differences, they reconcile them over a meal to celebrate the union of Max's daughter and Schultz's son. Spec, who plays Max's son 'Ignatz', is in charge of buying a special chicken. Instead of spending the money, he steals Schultz's beloved prize winning chicken to serve up at the table. This would be fine if the 'winner' tag/medallion wasn't still attached to the cooked chicken's leg, which the unknowing Max serves up to Schultz. This film

was my favourite, not only because it showcased the wonderful facial performances of Davidson and O'Donnell, but the well-executed theatrical work played by the daughter (Martha Sleeper) and Schultz's son (Gene Morgan) was impeccable. It was during the time they worked to show Max that he should get rid of the tagged checked leg on Schultz's plate, as they mimed a series of chicken-killing actions behind Schultz's back, I felt that should have won them an Oscar. It was slapstick at its absolute best and for me, the type of well-considered script and choreography that found a way to celebrate the slapstick genre itself. What a pleasure, and what a wonderful reminder of how slapstick has evolved into what we see today in some television comedy and in mainstream slapstick films. It is a fascinating art form worth paying attention to and one we can attribute to the likes of Max Davidson.



Pesach message

Nissan 5777



President Jonathan Arkush

Pesach is a time both to look back and to look forward. We remember the slavery and ultimately the regaining of freedom of our forefathers and we look forward with optimism to what the future holds for the Jewish people.

Our community in Britain has certainly faced some serious issues over the past year but I believe that we can look forward with confidence. The problems of antisemitism have figured prominently in the year gone by but we have taken positive steps to ensure that hatred or prejudice directed against us is called out for what it is and those who trade in abuse suffer the consequences. In these efforts we have had the resolute support of the

Government and most leading political figures across the political spectrum. Two years ago Prime Minister Theresa May stood before the meeting of the Board of Deputies and said: “Britain would simply not be Britain without its Jews”. As Prime Minister she has overseen the adoption – the first by any country – of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism which includes, among other things, an explicit acknowledgement that the demonisation and singling out of Israel is antisemitic.

We have been strong on antisemitism on the left and in the Labour Party. I was the first witness to give evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on Antisemitism and was gratified by its report which responded positively to all of the points the Board of Deputies made in its submission. Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has many times since his election as party leader professed “zero tolerance to antisemitism and all forms of racism”. With the

case against Ken Livingstone to be decided after months of delay and cases of antisemitism in the party still being reported, we have to say that in this case actions will speak louder than words.

The Community Security Trust recently released troubling figures on the rise of antisemitism. Without for one moment minimising their implications, it is nonetheless important to take note that this is part of a disturbing climate of popular resentment that all too often expresses itself against all minorities. In the aftermath of the Brexit vote there was a general rise in hate crimes. I like to think that we can play our own distinct role in influencing the country's political atmosphere. We have begun a busy period of nationwide engagement with Muslim and other communities around the country with the aim of improving relations between faith groups, creating understanding and, importantly, promoting strongly British values. Our team has travelled to Leeds,

Leicester and Bradford among other places in the past year, meeting with community leaders, travelling to mosques and schools, and promoting the message of integrating while not losing our identity in the modern Britain whose way of life we believe in.

There have been other achievements. In education our campaign to end the 50 per cent cap on faith admissions to faith-based schools was accepted by the government who agreed with our analysis that the measure has inhibited the creation of Jewish schools and has not demonstrably improved community cohesion. Another major contribution we made in the field of education was to publish the definitive guide for GCSE Judaism, written by renowned educationalist Clive Lawton. This will give those studying the subject a great overview of both the richness of the tradition and the diversity of Jewish life.

We cannot talk of Pesach without mentioning Israel, the modern miracle of the Jewish people. Millennia ago Israel was formed from a nation of slaves but in the 21st century it is transformed into a veritable powerhouse of innovation and success, both economically and culturally and with a robust democratic tradition encompassing freedoms unheard of anywhere else in the Middle East. The people of Israel crossed the Red Sea to achieve freedom and thousands of years later the Jewish people again achieved self-determination in their independent historical land. Israel remains a beacon and a refuge for Jewish people everywhere and we derive huge pride in all of its achievements.

Surely one of the keys to the miraculous survival of the Jewish people is exemplified by the ancient rhythm of Seder night - guided and inspired by our past we look forward to the future.

Chag sameach

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

There are individuals in the community suffering financial hardship. This fund makes it possible for the Rabbi to 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 if you would like to help or need help. All enquiries are kept confidential.

Purim 2017



Purim cards on display in the synagogue



Baked by Iris Segall: Hamantaschen (right) - traditional poppy seed filled Purim triangular cookies, Turkish Delight cookies (left) with ground walnuts. The round cake is a chocolate brownie cake and the small balls are Snow Balls (not necessarily a traditional Purim item). Iris took these desserts to a recent International Women's Day Event.



Fab glasses, Celyn!



David and Kelly Finkel. The photos on this page are courtesy of David Finkel Photography.



Rose taking Purim very seriously!



Purim spiellers:
Rabbi
Monique and
Nigel



The synagogue band



My working life

Hati South



I have been sat in front of my iPad for at least a day without any luck. I couldn't think of how to start this piece of writing about my working life, so maybe I should start from the beginning.

I have always been in fashion retail and when it came time for me to go off to uni, I enrolled in a Foundation Degree in Creative Practices: Fashion Pathway and studied fashion construction and design, textiles technology and printmaking, photography and graphic design. After two years I entered the third year of the BA(hons) Fashion Design course and emerged a year later, graduated and ready to throw myself into work.

I have always had a talent for working with others and I am an excellent co-ordinator, so naturally I was at home again

when I landed a job in House of Fraser as a brand supervisor. I eventually transferred a few times and finally I have found myself a Sales Advisor at Mango. I am near fanatical about fibres and material composition as well as cut and design so this job suits me down to the ground and many of my interests play a big part in helping boost my sales.

As much as I love my job, I am ever more conscious of the impact that fast fashion and consumerism is having on our society and others. A lot of the clothes that you love and buy on the high street are involved somehow in unfair labour and exploitation as well as contributing to consumer waste and also to the pollution of our planet. The average British woman, my customer, will hoard £285 worth of clothing (22 outfits) which are never worn and it takes 2720 litres of water to make a single t-shirt; that's how much we normally drink over a three year period.

As a Jew, I feel it is my duty to help, heal and educate so with that in mind, I decided to work towards becoming a qualified teacher with an aim to specialise in textiles technology and teach the next generation and beyond about the impact of our excessive consumption and priority of price over impact.

I realised that we have a duty to educate and to be informed of the effect that our everyday indulgences have and this has also inspired me to write a book on what I perceive to be our moral obligation (with an autobiographical twist).

I love fashion and I love my job but I can't wait to start this new chapter in my life and, if all goes well, hopefully I get into my first choice for my PGCE in September!

My immigrant journey

Evan Rudowski



When Iris Segall offered me the opportunity to represent the Jewish community at the Mayor of Bath's recent Multi-Faith Gathering, I was both honoured and humbled. And also realistic. Let's face it -- with the limited number of Jews in the area, sooner or later you're going to get a tap on the shoulder and be asked to stand up and say something!

I was also somewhat daunted. Alongside all the other delegates of various faiths, I would need to hold my own and do justice to 5,777 years of Jewish history and tradition. Yet it would be a stretch to suggest that my Jewish knowledge was anything close to rabbinic in scope. What would I present?

In the end I decided to tell a story. One that couldn't be wrong, because it was my story - - but one that also typified the story of many Jews today and

indeed throughout history. The exodus from Egypt. Tears shed in exile by the shores of the river Babylon. The desperate migrations of the 20th century. Migration is bound up in the story of being Jewish. And it's the story of so many people today. We Jews know something about this. So I decided to tell the story of my immigrant journey.

Yes, I'm an immigrant. But, admittedly, my immigrant journey hasn't been one of hardship. It's even a bit embarrassing.

When I first made my trek across the ocean, landing finally on British shores, I was sent from San Francisco by my employer. They paid for me to fly Virgin Upper Class. I ate good food. I drank wine. I watched films. I reclined. Richard Branson happened to be on my flight; when we landed in London, he shook my hand and thanked me for flying.

Contrast this with another journey some 80 years earlier, when a teenage girl named Anna Kirschner embarked on a

long sea voyage, leaving Poland, accompanied by her mother and two brothers. They were bound for New York, where Anna's father awaited them; it had been several years since they'd seen him.



A young Anna

Anna and her family left everything behind. The journey was hard. All they could afford was steerage, and conditions were deplorable.

Somewhere on that journey, Anna's middle brother died. Eventually Anna, her mother, and surviving brother made it to New York, to a tenement apartment on the Lower East Side that her father had managed to secure for them. After a few years, Anna met Joe. They married and, like many immigrants to this day, became shopkeepers. Their soda fountain in Williamsburg sold magazines, comic books and soda pop and was known for having the best egg creams in Brooklyn.

Joe and Anna had a son, Freddie, born in 1938 -- just around the time the Nazis marched into Poland and laid waste to everything and everybody that Anna and her family had left behind.



Anna and Freddie

No wonder Joe taught Freddie how to box. Freddie joined the U.S. Marines, won some medals for marksmanship, married Joan (herself the granddaughter of immigrants), started an insurance agency and later some shops in New Jersey.

In 1964, Freddie and Joan had their only son. That son was me.

And there I was, many years later, with a university degree and a post-graduate degree, a good and exciting job, a lovely and talented wife (also the grandchild of immigrants -- German Catholics!), and eventually two beautiful sons full of promise and potential. All of us fortunate to enjoy the abundance that eventually is bestowed upon the descendants of immigrants, if the immigrants

are simply permitted to get on with their lives.

Could young Anna Kirschner ever have imagined in her wildest dreams, while she was floating across the Atlantic on that dismal boat to a place she had never seen, that decades later her grandson would be soaring overhead enjoying such abundance, with his only problem being deciding between "red or white wine with your meal, sir?"

And wasn't that exactly what she would have wanted? Yes.

My prosperity was her success, and the success of her parents, and the others who came before me, with their similar struggles. Against all the odds, they had triumphed.

Sharing this story made me think of the immigrants who are bobbing at sea in rickety boats even as I write this -- the families just like mine was, who are driven by forces beyond their control to risk everything to hope initially just to survive.

All too many -- like little Alan Kurdi, who washed up on the

shores of a Turkish beach (much as the boy who would have been my uncle died on his own desperate journey) -- don't make it.

As for the ones that do, like my grandmother Anna, maybe if they are fortunate and left to their own devices, they can carve out a decent life for themselves, and their future generations can thrive.

Reflecting on and sharing this story filled me with gratitude: for my ancestors and their sacrifice; for 20th Century America which welcomed them with open arms; for New York, a city where anybody could strive to do anything; and for my heritage, which instilled in us the resilience and desire to fulfil our potential. I shared with the attendees in Bath the Hebrew phrase, "l'dor va dor" -- from generation to generation -- a thread that runs strong through thousands of years of Jewish history and experience. We feel that connection.

And I shared the Jewish value, "Tikkun Olam" -- to repair the world. This is something we all

must do, especially when we enjoy abundance ourselves. How can we share that abundance with those who need it most?

How can we build a society that values learning, debate, discussion and interpretation, just as scholars of the Torah have been doing for millennia?

How can we build a community and a society that welcomes the stranger and the gifts they can bring -- just as we were once welcomed? How can we embrace the diversity that brings us together from different places and backgrounds to mix, mingle, form friendships, fall in love and collaborate to build something better, together?

That's the Jewish story I shared at the gathering in Bath. And while I might not be able to accurately quote much scripture, and I'm not always as observant as perhaps I should be, I felt I had somehow managed to articulate what the essence of being Jewish is about.

Thanks, grandma.

Psalm 42:

Michael Picardie



As the hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee O God.

[...] My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, 'Where is your God?'

[...] Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

The unaffected beauty of these lines lies not only in their content - the return of faith and hope after despair - but in the intimate style which is typical of the "Elohist" author, speaking to Elohim as to an absent sense of quite a practical Being who soothes and comforts and strengthens. To me as an existentialist what has happened to the Elohist is that he has been thrown down, he is fallen, what was ready-to-hand in his life's work is present somewhere but out of reach for the moment.

Nothingness, *Ayn Sof* is invading the integrity of his self.

This psalm which the Elohist or someone using his style was probably edited in the Babylonian exile period or later. The author seems to know Being as a something to be loved as the female aspect of God, the Shekhina, or as the Kabbalistic *Binah*, "female" Understanding, the recipient of "male" wisdom and of "male" and "female" *Da-at*, scientific knowledge: in this case knowledge of the unconscious which contains the repression causing this spiritual/neurotic illness.

The Elohist style is different from the Jahvist's tones echoing YHVH Himself who is the LORD of power, war and retribution, Adonai.

There is another special meaning touched upon in other lines in the psalm: the justified anger of the author: "As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say continually, 'Where is your God?' "

What a brilliant simile: the absent God extracted from the body leaving a wound which will kill the Elohist. In clinical depression the body-image can be felt neurotically to have holes in it because it is not filled with Being-in-the-body-as-an-organic-whole.

The Elohist was a supporter of Elohim: “[...] how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.” No wonder he feels betrayed.

Still, the Elohist tries to enter into dialogue with Elohim acknowledging the power of Being in the form of the endless energy of nature: “Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me.”

Elohim, however powerful, is out of reach. There is a loss of a sense of meaningful Being. This is not the fault of the Elohist but the “blame” is denied and attributed to a spiritual / emotional drought and the

enmity of his adversaries.

A certain pattern emerges which was researched by the Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler- Ross – commonly found in situations of loss. Her book *On Death and Dying* has brought greater gentleness and understanding to this most important and often neglected field of medical and social care.

Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are in the subtext of dying and of spiritual alienation in this psalm. It is as if the writer is dying of a spiritual thirst the source of which is located in the inherent dryness one feels when one has lost the sustenance of a previously plentiful love.

Loss is part of life – yet one denies it – so painful is it to acknowledge that love-loss-abandonment are inherent in mortal Being: so one composes an art-object, a hymn of praise to the very Being one has lost so as to recapture it imaginatively.

Being was originally present in

the Imaginary - perhaps one's mirrored good self-image as a small child in the arms of a mother, father or other loved one - an image which one imagines will be reflected back and forth forever.

Perhaps when we are bereft - we deny that we are ill, ageing rapidly, have made a terrible mistake - and we blame Elohim for denying us His or Her (the Shekhina's) "liquid" sustenance, symbolized by thirst. But all we need to do is to accept that we with our limitations are in a state of thirstiness, drought, deprivation, sickness, loss, fatality, not to deny it. Perhaps if we accept our facticity and our being tied to Fate we shall be allowed to drink again the spiritual richness of Elohim and Shekhina. Being or God is surely there all the time. That is exactly what the psalmist asserts.[...] "...therefore I remember thee..." We need to remember when we *were* surrounded by a mother's or a father's or a child's or a friend's love, not accept that our devastation and grief stops us remembering. We are not fated forever.

We are angry that we were so loyal to Elohim and His Shekhina - she who is an immanent Being-In-The-World - "how [I] led them in procession to the house of God" - but now (S)He leaves us thirsty, deprived of His / Her love.

I may even bargain with Elohim/Shekhina. I may say I will acknowledge Your power over nature and the endlessness of Her/His love if only You will show me your actual face- or at least some sign of your manifestation.

If all else fails, I can always say: "there is nothing for it: I am depressed, abandoned, mourning because of the oppression of my enemy.

Finally however there is acceptance: "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

Rabbi Moshe De Leon the 13th century Sephardi Kabbalist, author of *The Zohar* suggested that the face of God is revealed in *B'Tselem* - in the image of God. However surely this is a potential - the Zohar errs on the

side of a constantly and repeated ecstasy through a mystical Midrashic discourse on the Torah of its protagonists Shimon bar Yochai and his *chaverim* who create a total world-view based on the *sefirot*.

But, more realistically, the *sefirot* are not in all *actual* human beings but in (Platonic) ideals reiterated in Philo Judaeus' *logos*. The mystical *chaverim* are a small Kabbalistic sect not a world movement although allied to other mysticisms like Hindu yoga, Sufism, and of course Isaac Luria's full-blown restorative, redemptive *Tikkun* Kabbalah of 16th century Tsvat (Safed).

The *sefirot* are in those who strive consciously to express the emanations of the sacred myth of God in the particular form of the *ideal* Adam Kadmon and the *ideal* Chava Kadmona. In visualising *B'Tselem* one emerges from denial, anger, bargaining, depression and achieves at least self-acceptance and one might move on to *Tikkun*, the restoration of the upper world (the Platonic world of ideal forms) through

mitzvoth. This, to the existentialist, happens not in Heaven but in an ego-ideal enlarging and ethically enriching the person and his significant others.

Reflections on my visit to Palestine

David Jewell



I first visited Israel in 1968. It was the heady time when Israel was basking in the astonishing triumphs of the Six Day War. The mood was open confident and looking forward to peace that would be negotiated in return for the land won. I fell in love with the place, but even then something wasn't quite right. It felt then that the country was too much in love with its all-conquering military. So, regardless of coming back to the UK to take up my university place, I had already concluded that Aliya was not for me. Every time I go back I get the same sense of feeling at home, and the excitement that this is a society vigorously creating itself. In 1968 the mood was all optimistic. The tiny, beleaguered state of Israel had pulled off an extraordinary military victory, and was keen then to exchange land for

peace. However shortly after, the Arab nations' met and made a joint commitment not to negotiate, and for some years that decision stood. As negotiation has become acceptable, and especially since the Oslo Accords of 1993 onwards I have watched with increasing dismay as progress has faltered.

Living in Nablus, as I did for the best part of four months last year, it would be easy to see life as normal. There is plentiful food, apparently clean water, the drains work, good public transport, and only occasional power cuts. The people I meet go about their business apparently freely. It's easy to get used to the obvious aspects of the occupation. I've written before about the numerous checkpoints. For most of the time they are only a minor annoyance, and everyone drives through watched by bored looking army personnel. The same is true for many of the border crossings, but that turns out to be true only because the

drivers know which ones are easy. Once during Ramadan a friend (a UK doctor) and I had to cross from Jerusalem to a Palestinian village to enjoy a meal with a colleague in her home. This one turned out to be a one-way crossing for us. On return we were not allowed back into East Jerusalem there and our hosts had to drive us 10 miles to a larger crossing. On another occasion, I decided to go through the Kalandiya crossing into Jerusalem that the Palestinians (those who have permits) have to use. This was an unpleasant, humiliating experience. Everyone is processed through cages designed to let people only stand in single file, with a turnstile that stops every so often to control the flow. I was one of those left standing in a turnstile for a few minutes. As someone I met there said 'They treat us like animals. But it's our fault, we let them treat us like this.'

In the same way it's easy to get used to the settlements, because anybody spending any

time in the West Bank must. Simply travelling around one sees frequent signposts in Hebrew announcing their presence. I was taken to a nature reserve close to Nablus, in a wadi. As we walked one of my companions pointed out this area is overlooked by no fewer than four. They don't seem to impinge a great deal, though as a visitor I am insulated from the difficult areas of tension such as the allocation of fresh water between Palestinians and settlers. If you happen to be wandering in the market in Hebron, there are regular foot patrols to protect the settlers in the heart of the city. Otherwise the military seems to intrude little on the lives of the urban Palestinians, though it's obvious they are never far away.

On hearing of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien on false charges by the consulate government of France in 1804, a previous supporter of the revolution remarked 'It's worse than a crime, it's a

blunder.’ The quote comes to mind every time I think of the West Bank and its Israeli settlements. Whether you take the fashionable line and see Israel as an apartheid state, or whether you think of it, first and foremost, as a small state surrounded by hostile neighbours who still hope and plan for its destruction, the building and continued expansion of settlements is surely a ghastly error. The occupation is an open wound, and it damages Israeli society, with citizens pushed either to defend it, or to close their minds to its existence. I don’t entirely blame Israel that it continues nearly 50 years after it started, but I do blame Israel for settlements that make resolution of the occupation so much more difficult. The Palestinians I know who have welcomed us and become our friends do their best to live normal lives and bring up their children just as we do, hoping to give them the skills to lead moral, worthwhile and fulfilled lives. Most of them have lived all their lives under Israeli occupation. I worry

about the way that Palestine has become a client society, dependent on donor money from outsiders. Palestinians have a perfect excuse; as one of my friends pointed out, anything that doesn’t work properly is blamed on the occupation. But I worry just as much about what it is doing to Israeli society. It seems to me to be eating away, slowly corrupting the place that I fell in love with all those years ago.

Whether it's a siddur or a story,
a candle or a kippah:
Ask at the shop!

BWPJC

•Shop•

Creative assemblies

Lisa O'Brien

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

When I was asked to do assemblies I felt the same, but said that I would give it a go, as the story says, Anybody can do anything. Sarah my daughter was adamant that assemblies were boring, and they needed to be changed. Ok, says I, what would you like, Sarah says assemblies are boring and you need to change them. Hmm, says I.

So I sat down and thought about all the things that would need to be covered!

One assembly for each festival, there are over 30 lessons in a year so there is not enough to cover all the assemblies. What else could I cover? Then I thought about all the things that are Jewish, our traditions, foods, clothes, Kiddush, Shabbat, Israel and some non-related ideas, friendship, dancing, and learning the cup song for instance.

I took each idea and built an assembly around them. Me talking for a minimal amount of time, showing silly videos, making things, letting the kids get involved and giving out biscuits.

My assemblies are no more than 10 minutes long and yes they have taken up a lot of my time to create, however if everyone in the Synagogue took the time to create one assembly and present it to the children it would be awesome. Every one of you have

something different to offer,
some of you can sing, some can
dance, some have interesting
jobs, some have interesting
stories of growing up here or
abroad, some have interesting
hobbies, collections, the topics
are endless. If each of you took
the time to pass on your
knowledge to our children
imagine the stories they will
tell their children.

Have a think and let me know
if you would be prepared to
talk to the children, they don't
bite.

And remember the story I
started with Everybody
blamed Somebody when
Nobody did what Anybody
could have done.

 **ALONIM** is published quarterly by The Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation,

43-47 Bannerman Road, Bristol BS5 0RR.

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