Dec 2018–Feb 2019

Kislev, Tevet, Sh'vat, Adar I 5779

ALONIM

עלונים

Winter Issue

Magazine of the Bristol & West Progressive Jewish Congregation

liberal judaism

The Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation

The NLPS Trust for Progressive Judaism

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	
Issue	**Date**
Spring	28th February 2019

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Front cover photograph:

Scrolls in Avraham Avinu Synagogue
Photographer: Jennifer Clements

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Editorial

Sam Waite

So, here goes my first editorial for Alonim!

As we move past the busy month of Tishri with its many festivals and enter the darker winter months, we welcome Chanukah into our hearts and homes and embrace the gift of light that it brings.

In this (jam-packed) edition of Alonim, Sheila and I have expanded our new multifaith section to shed light (excuse the pun) on three different religious festivals that all have one thing in common – light.

We have an article about the Pagan festival of Yule written with a local, Somerset based twist, an Orthodox take on Chanukah and an article detailing the *true* meaning of Christmas.

Sheila and I were both delighted to host recently the first Alonim social evening, a screening of the Jewish comedy "Dough" with nibbles and drinks. We were pleased with how cosy we managed to make the shul look and thank everyone who came for their efforts. The plan is to host an open mic night in Shevat where anyone who wants to perform or contribute can do so. Equally, those who prefer to watch can sit back and enjoy a glass of wine and admire the talents of our community.

On a more serious note, communities around the world have been shaken by the recent heinous antisemitism in Pittsburgh. The Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, has written a message of solidarity for the local Jewish community which can be found inside this issue. It was life affirming to see our community well represented at the vigil for Pittsburgh in central Bristol – showing we stand together against antisemitism.

BWPJC member Iva Stather has written about flying the flag for Jewish culinary delights at the Frome Multicultural fair and Jennifer Clements has written an interesting account about her visit to Hebron, highlighting the fragile nature of Jewish-Arab relations there, but also detailing the sheer religious majesty of the place.

We are still hoping to get younger members of the community involved with Alonim – watch this space!

However you are spending the next couple of months, chag sameach!

Membership news

Sheila Brill

Last month Sheila Wilson and I sat down over coffee and cake (obviously) so that she could hand over her work as membership secretary.

So what did she tell me? That people come from many places both geographically and spiritually; that there is a genuine passion out there to embrace Judaism; that, once visited, our community makes a big impression on people (no surprise there). As membership secretary I've already 'met' interesting people who want to reconnect with their faith or their spirituality. Sheila W has promised advice and support (and more cake) if it's required. Rabbi Monique has offered welcome words of wisdom.

We honour the memories of Sheila Clark, Jane's mother; Christine Ottolang, Max's mother; Beryl Schapiro, a great supporter of our community and wife of Jo; Naomi Moller's mother; Carol Green whose parents were founding members of the synagogue and Natasha, mother of Iris Segall. We offer our condolences to Jane, Max, Naomi and Iris and to Beryl's and Carol's families.

We offer a warm welcome to our newest and youngest members – Sarah Elizabeth, daughter of Julia Alvarez and Andy Miles; Mollie, daughter of Julia Gardos and Sean Carroll; Tamir, son of Alon Aviram and Ellen Segalov; and Juliette, daughter of Vicki Collinson. Mazeltov to all the families. We look forward to seeing (and hearing) these new little ones in the synagogue! Welcome to Rosie Brown and Nathan Gregory, our newest members.

We wish Davide and Rand Irons-Scelsi mazeltov on their recent marriage.

Mazeltov to Shay Spencer-Hutchings on becoming Barmitzvah. He is an accomplished young man of whom we should all be proud.

Mazeltov to Valerie Russell Emmott who was honoured for her work in improving relationships between the different faiths in Bristol and fostering greater understanding of the Jewish faith in the Bristol Multifaith Forum "Love Your Neighbour" awards. See page 19 for BWPJC's award details.

You may have noticed new faces at the services. True to form, you have made our visitors feel welcome. Many come back again and some join our community. It seems we offer a warm and inclusive experience and, very often, good cake – am I detecting a theme here?

Update from the Chair

Jane Clark

Building Upkeep
We have new toilets, fully equipped and legal for disabled users. Not only that but they look a lot nicer than they did. Thanks to the building team, Steve Harris and Kalev Israel, for their hard work managing the building contractors and sorting out the problems.

The library is also now refurbished. We again have a library we can be proud of. Thanks go to Steve and Kalev again, to Evan Rudowski for obtaining a grant to fund most of the work, and to our librarians Yoav Ben-Shlomo and Valerie Russell Emmott for organising the safe removal and storage of the books during this project.

Pittsburgh
Needless to say the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting sent a great shock through the Jewish world. Several of us attended a candlelit vigil arranged at short notice in the Centre of Bristol. We sent a condolence card, again at rather short notice, and I am grateful to those who were in the synagogue when I collected signatures.

The Council received many messages of concern about security. We do not believe that the risk of an attack in Bannerman Road is greatly enhanced by this event, but we do need to deal with a few issues regarding our security. Council has responded by creating a senior Council post of Security Officer and appointed Derek Brown to the role because of his experience and contacts with the police: he sits on the Avon & Somerset Police Independent Advisory Group.

Derek is trying to organise security training. If we get 12 volunteers from across Jewish Bristol who are willing to give up a day, we will be able to hold a funded course in Bristol. If you are willing to help, please contact either Derek or me.

Secretary
We will need to replace Derek as Honorary Secretary. Please would anyone who is willing to do this important job contact me.

Chanukah Party
This will be on Sunday 9th December at 2pm at the Synagogue. It will be a fun filled celebration for all ages. I hope to see as many of you as possible there.

We can shine light in the darkness

Rabbi Monique Mayer

Summer is now a distant memory, days are getting shorter and temperatures are dropping. Feeling the winter chill, many of us may be inclined to stick closer to home or spend more time indoors. But for those among us who are mostly indoors and feeling isolated – whether due to illness, mobility issues, or feeling low or depressed – the shorter, colder days and the inability to get out and about can amplify and exacerbate loneliness.

There is an oft quoted teaching by Hillel: *Al tifrosh min hatzibbur–Do not separate yourself from the community.* (Pirkei Avot, 2:4). It's one of my favourite quotes because it serves as a reminder that we are all responsible for engaging. The problem is, if someone is already feeling disconnected or isolated, Hillel's teaching can feel like a criticism and can be used by others to blame the sufferer by claiming that loneliness is their fault and they just need to get out. Aside from the fact that such misuse betrays a lack of compassion or empathy toward the isolated person, the interpretation is clearly wrong as we see in commentary on this verse:

"*Do not separate yourself from the congregation*: but rather share in their troubles. As anyone who separates from the congregation will not see the congregation comforted". (Bartenura on P.A. 2:4, 3-4)

In other words, the onus is on each of us to connect with each other and support each other. We need to reach out to those who need support and connection.

According to research collected by the Campaign To End Loneliness, 59% of adults aged over 52 who report poor health say they feel lonely some of the time or often, compared to 21% of those who say they are in excellent health. Some five million elderly Britons are socially isolated, relying mainly on the television for company. The charity puts the number of "chronically lonely" people in England at 800,000.

Loneliness threatens to be an even bigger problem within the Jewish community. One in three Jewish adults over the age of 60 live alone; twice the proportion in the general population. In communities like ours in Bristol, where people are so spread out, the challenge becomes even greater to create consistent support for those feeling isolated.

And the truth is, loneliness can also be hidden. Even those who come to services on Shabbat may be suffering in silence.

Daren Gordon and Linda Hurst have been working to develop the Care Team with my support, and I would like to encourage each of you to think about how you can build connections within our community toward everyone feeling supported and valued. We are looking for ideas to bring people together. In the meantime, please consider: what would it mean for you to do the following for someone in the community?

Call twice a month

Visit once a month

Invite for a Shabbat meal (once to start)

The ultimate goal is to strengthen the network of support within our community. In this season of increasing darkness, please don't let Chanukah be the only source of light for those who are on their own. Thank you.

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 on rabbi.mmayer@gmail.com if you would like to help or need help. All enquiries are kept confidential.

Who was the Psalmist?

Valerie Russell Emmott

Have you ever wondered, as I have, who wrote the Psalms that we read every Shabbat and in fact every morning of our lives, if we are so inclined?

I wondered for many years who King David was and what led him to write this extraordinary oeuvre of tragic, inspiring, uplifting and challenging poetry. I knew about his action as a child, brave enough to use his slingshot against Goliath and thus end a war with the Philistines.

To get some sense about his adult life, I had been dipping into the Samuel volume of The People's Bible from the shul's library. This new interpretive translation by Rabbi Sidney Brichto takes the text and brings it up to date, splitting the epic story into palatable clearly marked sections such as "David becomes King of Judah" and "Absalom's revenge and exile."

However, the book that changed everything for me is the novel King David by Allan Massie which someone recently donated, it wasn't yet even catalogued. As a first person novel, I suddenly was hearing King David's thoughts, doubts, love affairs, betrayals and military campaigns.

I think this is a highly recommended way to gain a more personal sense of this complex and highly influential Jewish leader and those around him such as Saul, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Solomon. To say nothing of the general Joab, the concubine Abishag, and the lover Laish all of whom were brought to life by this page turner of a story.

"Semites" at the Loco Klub in Bristol: *A guest review*

Helen Vegoda

Member of Bristol Hebrew Congregation

Why, at the start of the performance of "Semites" were we invited to remove our shoes and have them placed upon the stage? To make us reflect that 'you can't buy new shoes without removing your old ones'; that, as an audience, we have to feel (*the humility of*) what it is like to get inside the shoes of the 'other'.

We were often led out of our comfort zone to confront the complex and conflicting kaleidoscope of Israeli and Palestinian history and attitudes. Our discomfort mirrors that of the Israeli character who discovers that 'to learn *their* history, I must learn *my* history'. In a brilliant, tragicomic exchange of verbal ping-pong, Palestinian and Israeli voices reduce the history of a Jewish presence in the area, batting each historic stage to a single reference, 1967, 1948, Balfour, Ottoman Empire, until they reach the Romans, pre-history and Abraham. This batting of emotive periods of history brings into sharp focus why the conflict is not resolved, attitudes have hardened, one side cannot hear the words of the other, 'there is blood on the ground'.

In 2017, Ben Nathan, the creator of this verbatim theatre project for Bristol's Salaam Shalom, recorded over sixty hours of interviews with ordinary residents of Israel and Palestine, Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs. Their verbatim words build up the thought-provoking presentation that is "Semites".

The two actors are clearly not seeking 'a truth' behind the conflict, as there is no one truth. In occupying a space in which his interviewees can speak, Ben and his fellow actor, Lara Sawalha, encourage us all to remove our blinkers, open our minds, and be alongside those (note: not all) protagonists who are painfully searching for peace and mutual understanding. The peace activist challenges the soldier at the checkpoint to reflect on the suffering that is being inflicted not only on the Palestinian people but also on those controlling them.

Two of the most poignant moments of the evening were when both actors removed their virtual masks and spoke in their own voices. Lara is a Jordanian who expressed how challenging and difficult she had found her role, often not agreeing with a character she portrays, whether Israeli or Palestinian. Ben movingly confessed that in attending an Israeli Day of Remembrance [Yom Hazikaron] where both Israeli and Palestinian dead were recalled, he was admonished by his Israeli relatives, and asked himself 'am I betraying the people I love?'

'Non-violence is seeing the humanity of the other', a message that will remain with many of us privileged to have seen this evocative theatre piece.

Bristol SW's first day-Limmud

Reflections by the Chair six months on

David Memel

10th June 2018 was a major day in the history of Bristol Jewry – our first ever Limmud event. Limmud has been running Jewish cultural events for nearly 40 years, and has spread right around the world, but this was the first time this had been attempted in Bristol or the South West. 242 people turned up at Bristol Cathedral Choir School on a fortunately warm and sunny day. So what are my thoughts as Chair six months later?

My main feeling is one of pride – that a small Jewish community like Bristol could pull it off. As the months go by, the memories of all the hard work and endless Planning Group meetings fade, and what remains is the vision of lots of people happily socialising in the dining hall, and rushing from one stimulating talk to another.

So where did the 242 people come from? 104 came from Bristol. Many belonged to either Park Row or our synagogue, and others were members of DAVAR, but plenty had no affiliation. We were keen to attract anyone interested in Jewish affairs, including lapsed Jews, half Jews, and non-Jews and it seems that we succeeded. 36 people came from other parts of the South West, including Devon, Gloucestershire and Bath, and there was a small contingent from Cardiff and South Wales. 48 came from London, many of whom had some link to Bristol, either through family or having previously lived here.

We attracted some young people, including some as volunteers, but could have done better. Next time we will try to attract more students, and definitely have a Junior Limmud event, so that people with children can attend.

I am proud of the broad range of topics that we had in our programme, and the main complaint was that people could not attend all the sessions that they wanted to, as they ran concurrently. A great strength of Limmud is that all the presenters are enthusiastic volunteers, and nobody gets paid for speaking. Every teacher is also a learner.

So what is the legacy of Limmud Bristol SW 2018? When I chatted to the Chief Executive of Limmud, he felt that as well as the number of people who attended on the day, and enjoyed themselves, it should have a lasting effect in strengthening the local Jewish Community. I hope this turns out to be true.

So what of the future of Limmud in Bristol? We will be starting to form a new planning group in the New Year, with a view to running another day event sometime in 2020. If you are interested in helping, please get in touch. dmemel5@gmail.com

I'll leave the last word to Alex Schlesinger. Hon President of Bristol Hebrew Congregation, who sent a lovely email after the event. "All I can add is that Limmud was by far the best and biggest `Jewish` event that I have ever had the pleasure to witness in Bristol." And he has lived in the Bristol area all his life.

Cambridge Limmud

4th November 2018

Sam Waite

On Sunday 4th November, Jennifer Clements and I made the long journey to Cambridge for their day Limmud.

This summer's event in Bristol was my first taste of a Limmud, which I enjoyed thoroughly, so Jennifer and I decided it was worth the four hour drive for another jam packed day of Jewish learning.

First up on the agenda was a talk by Simon Goldhill entitled "Conversion: a history no-one wants to tell". Simon discussed the complicated history of conversion and shed light on some insights which I found interesting, such as how the notion of converting to a religion was a relatively unusual thing until it started becoming a requirement for people wishing to convert to Christianity to renounce their former spiritual life and practices. In the early days of Judaism, no formal conversion was required, and it would have been a personal, private decision to become Jewish. This changed later when Rabbis decided it should become more of an official affair and formal conversion became required. In Egypt in the early centuries A.D.

Jeremy Dronfield gave a talk on his new book "The Boy Who Followed His Father In Auschwitz". A rather, remarkable true life story of how a Jewish father and son from Vienna managed to stay together through sheer luck and determination throughout the Holocaust – despite being moved to various concentration camps and deteriorating health.

A talk by Dave Rich was my personal highlight of the day. "The Left's Jewish Problem: Labour, Antisemitism and British Jews" covered the very topical issue of antisemitism within the left wing of

British politics. Being a writer for an antisemitism charity, it seems like hardly a day goes by without some new story of alleged antisemitism coming out of Corbyn's Labour Party. Dave Rich gave his analysis of the current political situation and the background history of how things came to be in the dire place they are.

The last talk of the day was by Rabbi Jonathan Romain who treated us to "Confessions of a Rabbi". Rabbi Romain gave us highlights from his recently released book of the same name relating to various moral dilemmas and intriguing tales he's encountered in the course of his years as a Rabbi. Infidelity, embezzlement, divorce, it seems the Rabbi has come across it all. An amusing and thought provoking way to end the day.

Jennifer & Sam

Jennifer and I both agreed it had been a worthwhile trip and will be looking out for more Limmuds to come!

Film review

Damascus Cover

starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Olivia Thirlby, John Hurt
Directed by Daniel Zelik Berk
Available on DVD, streaming and download platforms

Sam Waite

Set in the late 1980s, the film follows an Israeli Mossad agent, Ari Ben-Sion, as he is given a mission to smuggle a chemical weapons expert out of Syria. Expect Bond-esque glamour and love interests along the way!

Playing a Mossad spy handler, veteran actor John Hurt makes his final cinematic appearance in the film before sadly dying of cancer last year. His character's speech on the futility of the spy game at the end of the film adds a touch of poignancy.

Critics of Damascus Cover have said the film suffers from being clichéd, predictable and even boring! I disagree, whilst the 'handsome spy meets girl' story has been done many times before, I think it is an enjoyable spy thriller, with a good cast and enough suspense to keep you on the edge of your seat.

Definitely worth watching.

A Day in Hebron

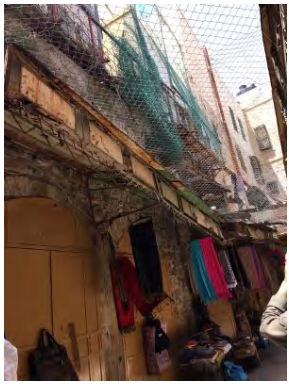
Jennifer Clements

My first ever trip to Israel in June was an action packed tour with LJS which took us to Haifa and a stay in a northern Kibbutz hotel down through Golan along the Jordanian border to spend a few days in Jerusalem. There are far too many experiences to talk about here but several people have asked me what stood out the most, and although I'm sure no one could ever get enough of Jerusalem, I have replied that the day trip to Hebron was very special and has made a deep impression.

We went by coach with Abraham Tours to Hebron and straight to the Tomb of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs.

This was a "Duel Narrative" tour, carefully crafted to give a Jewish and a Palestinian view of the city. When we arrived we were introduced to a young Palestinian who lives next to the monument. He escorted us into the Muslim side of the monument, known as Abraham's Mosque, to see tombs of Isaac and Rebecca. Later, our Jewish tour guide took us to the Synagogue side to the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Leah, Jacob. The monument itself has been subject to horrific demonstrations and murders over its lengthy history and both guides wanted to make sure that we got as much of the history and their side of the story as possible, but I took time to move a few steps away from the party to appreciate the sacredness and awesomeness of where I was.

We left the tombs and the young guide took us through the Palestinian souk. As we inched our way through, the shop keepers were keen to point that the Jews had built their settlements right on top of the Palestinian properties and hence there was a wire mesh roof covering us in order to prevent Jews from throwing bricks or other weapons down on to Palestinians below. We were told shortly afterwards by the Jewish manager of a museum that this might have happened once five years ago but the Palestinians were now exaggerating and using it as one of their many anecdotes in the debate to win tourists over. This was a common theme throughout the day.



We went to lunch at the house of our modern self educated guide and a chance for us to understand the rhythms of everyday life. This young man lives behind an IDF road block, has to go through a neighbour's garden in order to leave his house,

and has never been able to visit Jerusalem (although he admitted to sneaking there on a boys' night out)

Back in the hands of our Jewish tour guide we were taken a few streets away to the Avraham Avinu Synagogue. The original shul was set up in 1600 by Jews expelled from Spain and myth has it that on one occasion the ghost of Abraham himself appeared to help make up a minyan at Yom Kippur. However, it was abandoned during 1929 massacre and after the Jordanian authorities took over in 1948 the synagogue was demolished and the area used for animals and latrines.

The synagogue and surrounding area were rebuilt after 1967 when Israeli forces took the area back. Beautiful and striking Sephardic scrolls have been placed in the ark and such care has been taken to replicate the original from photographs that it is difficult to believe you are not in an ancient shul. The little village that now surrounds it seemed to be built of gold blocks and dazzled expensively in the sun. It was remarkably peaceful apart from the sound of children playing. I realise I should feel guilty because it was a stark contrast to the scruffy overcrowded living conditions of the Palestinian market, but I was completely mesmerised by the Synagogue and the village.

Our tour guide then said he had a surprise for us and insisted that even those flagging from the heat and the hills follow him for it would be worth their while. We climbed up some iron steps through a derelict building. Beyond it a on a narrow footpath led us by an ancient olive grove and suddenly we were at the tomb of supposedly Jesse and Ruth. There was a complete lack of 21st century sound. Apart from a solitary IDF soldier I don't think much had changed for 4,000 years.

Next to the tomb was a crumbling ancient synagogue and it was magical and humbling at the same time. There were incongruous signs of attempts to revive it, the unlikely formica furniture covered in thick dust and a precarious string of light bulbs draped around.

The day in Hebron was beautiful but exhausting. As tourists we were used like pawns in an ancient game but ultimately it is the deep spirituality of the city which has left a lasting impact on me.

I am very grateful to have shared this experience with Valerie Russell-Emmott who has helped me to understand the experiences and I look forward to travelling with her again in the future.

Alonim's first ever social evening. The first of many....

Kol Nidrei

Sheila Yeger

Kol Nidrei... the plaintive notes of the cello mingle with Robert's voice, powerful yet gentle, reassuringly familiar. I've heard it so many times, but somehow each time is the first. I am greeted by friends old and new, recognised, remembered, valued. I know I have come home. Babies nestle, cosy in their slings, their soft cries like fledgling prayers.

In front of me a boy sleeps on his mother's shoulder, as she tenderly strokes his hair. Next to me a woman cries, not knowing why. A young man arrives in cycling gear. I hear French spoken. We are all family here.

The rabbi speaks of forgiveness, dares to be very honest. In response we sing out our regrets, our promises and open our hearts in hope, trusting in the compassion of the Divine, in the support of those around us.
We ask to be remembered in the Book of Life. We are held, secure in this loving familiarity, yet open to change.

We have come home.

Trowbridge International Food Festival

Iris Segall

The Trowbridge International Food Festival is an annual event that promotes interaction among people of different backgrounds, cultures, and religions.

Back in September, on the day of this year's event it was pouring with rain. The kind of day when you would think twice if it is worth getting out of your house. Therefore, it was even more rewarding than at other times, to see how well attended the event was.

People stop by the stalls not only to taste the food, but for the opportunity to have a friendly chat, ask questions and talk about their experiences. We discover more about our diversity as well as our unity through culinary experiences. I had a chat with a priest who had attended a synagogue service and we talked about the differences between Orthodox and Progressive synagogues, I also discovered some new (to me) Jewish people who later joined the Nosh and Natter.

Frome multicultural fair

Iva Stather

I have lived in Frome since 1981. For over 30 years I thought I was the only Jew in Frome! Iris put me in touch with Elaine who has also been in Frome for many years but our paths didn't cross until October 2017 when we had a Jewish/Israel stall at the first Frome Multicultural fair. We were amazed at how many people approached us saying 'I thought I was the only one in Frome'. We collected email addresses and now a little group in Frome (and surrounding area) meets up for occasional coffee mornings.

This year we decided on the theme of Jewish food and festivals. We both made some old favourites and were delighted when Iris came along and brought lots of her homemade goodies. Lots of people stopped by to try our food, and some stopped to chat about their Jewish/Israeli connections. One couple came from Devizes. While I was talking to the lady, I noticed that her husband had tears in his eyes. I was worried that he was choking on my lokshen pudding. It turned out that he had become rather emotional as the food reminded him of his mother's cooking. We had a lovely afternoon celebrating Frome's diversity.

Remembering the dead

David Jewell

Four times a year I wrap a cold towel around my head, sit at my computer and work out the yahrzeits for the next three months. As with every other repeated task it has speeded up over the years and now is less of a headache than it used to be. Also, as with everything else the internet makes the job a lot easier. Working from a spreadsheet and the calendar(s), the output is the lists of names that appear both in the weekly email and live in the folder to be read out by the service leader each week.

Why the wet towel? We're happy to announce anyone that members wish to be remembered, as well as the former members of the community that many remember with affection. The first difficulty is that it's not one spreadsheet but two; one for each of the Gregorian and Hebrew calendars. If I'm asked which one to go for, the answer is always that it is a personal matter. The date itself might push someone in one direction or another. I quote my own experiences: our grandfather died on my older sister's birthday so it would be odd to lose that link by remembering it according to the Hebrew calendar. My own father died in the depths of a wintry January, and I like remembering him at that time of year. Some members have lost relatives around the time of Jewish festivals, and for me that would make me want to remember them according to the Hebrew calendar. It's very personal. For me it just makes it a fiddle because the two spreadsheets have to be kept separate and brought together to compile the lists.

The Hebrew calendar is a thing of great beauty and impenetrable mystery. Twelve lunar months together are shorter than a solar year, hence the need for extra months to keep the festivals coming around the time of the agricultural events with which they coincide. So we have Adar 2 (Adar sheni), inserted – wait for it – 7 times every 19 years. How did they work that out? The names of the months are apparently, at least in part, Babylonian. Did you know that Tammuz is named after the Babylonian God Dumuzi? Come to that, how many of you can name all twelve months and put them in order? I certainly can't, and I've been doing this job for some years. Some of us were asked recently

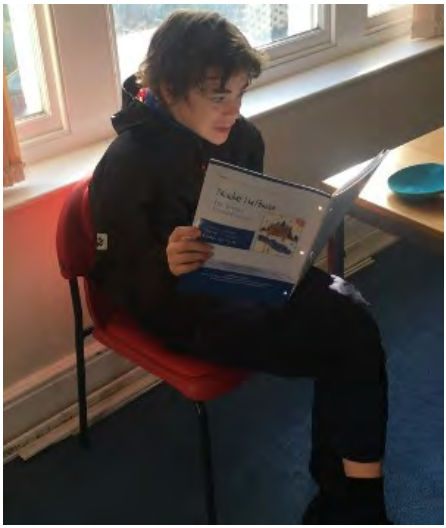
whether we should like to simplify our lives and make the Jewish holidays run according to the Gregorian calendar. Even I said no to that. Someone else at that class pointed out how big a part the moon used to play in human life, and it struck me how sad it is that we have become so detached from the natural world. Sad.

As for remembering, this piece originated from me wondering at a service (as I do four times a year) what is it all for? Specifically are we in danger of making a fetish of the dead, and risking lapsing into ancestor worship? One of those present put me right straightaway: this custom is for the living, not for the dead. It is for the comfort that we receive from fellow congregants when the names of our loved ones are recited. I also take consolation from remembering the members I knew who have died in the last twenty years. And I have just learnt something I shall treasure. Remembering the dead is a special mitzvah – it's one that they can neither thank us for nor reciprocate.

BWPJC receives an award!

On behalf of BWPJC Sheila & Peter Brill received the Bristol Multi-Faith Forum Love your Neighbour Award 2018 with Hafiz Shakeel Qadri, the Imam at Easton Jamia Mosque. The award was made for promoting community cohesion and inclusiveness and making Bristol a better place to live. Our two organisations were jointly nominated by Thangam Debbonaire, MP.

Young people learning at BWPJC



Alfred working hard on Parashat haShavua

Lynn and Rebecca studying some of the exceptions in Hebrew

Sarah and Josh enjoying the siddur.

Youthful wisdom

Valerie Russell Emmott

This term I have been privileged to be teaching our oldest children Level 7 of the Chai Curriculum. For all age groups, we use these lesson plans to teach the Judaism lessons that take place after the large noisy communal Hebrew lessons and break time at the local playground.

For many of the children in this class which I co-teach with Dan Colman, this is their last year in cheder before having a bar or bat mitzvah. A new feature in this year's lessons is an invitation at the end of each to do a collective reflection about what the lesson we've just done means to them. I've introduced this as a recap of the day's topic and asked them 'If you wanted to encourage a friend of yours who's having a tough time, what message would you share with them from today's lesson?'

Hoping that some of this youthful wisdom might inspire the wider community, here are some of the things that our Dalet/Hey class students (who are in Years 7 to 9 in secondary school) have come up with.

Our first lesson this year was on the theme of Journeys, and based around the Lech Lecha story of Abraham and Sarah leaving to go to a place they knew not, trusting that God would show them where to go. We talked about journeys the children had made, to see family members and friends or to go to a new school or start a new activity. Their advice for people embarking on journeys, metaphorical more than physical was:

> "Life is never a perfect circle."
> "The easiest path might not always get you where you want."
> "Life is short, and the world is wide."
> "Don't be scared."

We explored the themes of the festival of Sukkot in another lesson. We used the folk associations of the four species of the lulav and etrog with the human body and came up with wonderfully apt and fanciful ways we can all serve God and be good Jews using our spines (palm – lulav), eyes (myrtle – hadassah), mouths (willow – arava) and the etrog (heart – citron)

The children then shared these impromptu proverbs but sadly those pearls of wisdom got misplaced so must left to the reader's imagination!

Letter from Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

Dear Rabbi Mayer, Jane (Clark), Alex (Schlesinger), Rabbi Singer, Rabbi Tsykin, Yoav (Ben-Schlomo), Martin (Vegoda), Lauren (Chiren) and Peter (Brill),

I wanted to write to you following the murders at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

I appreciate the community will be feeling real pain at this time for the victims themselves. I anticipate that there may also be a mix of concern, anxiety and possibly anger coming from the questions asked about the social and political context within which the attack took place.

To be honest, as I write this, I feel a deep inadequacy. I have words of support and commitment to doing what I can with the tools we have at the City Council to ensure we maintain a culture of openness and, where that falls dawn, that we have taken action to ensure people are safe. But as I look around the world at the moment, from the US to the UK, Hungary, to Sweden, to Poland and beyond, I am aware that so much more is needed.

I wrote to the Mayor of New York about this yesterday sharing my concern that we have fallen into a lazy assumption that the political equilibrium is one of openness and human rights, with the forces intolerance and nationalism attempting to knock us off balance. We need to contend with the possibility that the opposite is true, and that democratic values are the reward of ongoing vigilance and effort. It's a jump to blame President Trump for the shooting. But it's not a jump to recognise that there has been a rightward and violent shift of the line that marks the centre point of acceptable political expression, and the President is in part cause and in part product of that shift.

I will continue to do all I can in Bristol to ensure we live in a diverse, dynamic and interdependent society. And I will continue to do all I can to ensure Bristol plays its role in ensuring every person in every country can live with hope and without fear.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Kind regards

By the strength of our common endeavour...

Thangam Debbonaire

Bristol West MP

"By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more together than we achieve alone."

These words are printed on every Labour Party membership card. It signifies my party's long and historic commitment to work with all communities we seek to represent, and to empower everybody to work cooperatively to bring about change.

As the Member of Parliament for Bristol West, the unique nature of this city brings about opportunities for me to do just that every day. I represent a constituency which is home to people from across the world. Residents in Bristol West speak 91 different languages, are from 180 countries of birth, and follow 45 different religions.

I know how important faith and customs are in helping to bind communities together – to share occasions, traditions and meals, and to invite our neighbours and friends to participate and help deepen our understanding of our identity.

I was recently privileged to be welcomed to the Bristol and West Progressive Synagogue to meet members of the local Jewish community. In May, you very kindly welcomed me to a Shabbat service. I was deeply moved by the service – especially the wonderful Hebrew singing – and it was such a pleasure to meet so many people over a delicious meal afterwards.

And at this year's Yom Kippur service, I was honoured to be asked to play the cello in the Kol Nidrei service. As a former professional cellist, taught by Raphael Wallfisch, whose mother and cello teacher survived the Holocaust, this has huge resonance for me and I know how important it is for the service of atonement.

Both of these wonderful and moving services underscored for me the importance of community in helping us all work together and live harmoniously. We do that best when we welcome strangers, and find common purpose across our cultural, linguistic and political divides.

I am all too aware that we shared these experiences in a context of rising intolerance and division and of antisemitism. On so many levels, our country is divided, the world is divided and as I write, the recent appalling murders of Jews at the synagogue in Pittsburgh make this particularly clear. We are living in a time where religiously-motivated hate crime is increasing. Antisemitic incidents – including here in our own city – are rising and that is a huge

cause for concern for me and other political leaders in Bristol.

Standing against Anti-Semitism means standing against it everywhere we encounter it, however close to home that may be. That's why I joined Labour colleagues and Jewish friends to register my disappointment at what I feel are unacceptable delays and shortcomings in our party's disciplinary processes where allegations of antisemitism have been made. I did this with a heavy heart, and after trying, with others, every other possible course of action to get allegations of Anti-Semitism in the Labour Party dealt with.

Protesting is never enough. Progress happens by listening to and learning from each other. And that ethos was so powerfully represented at the "Invest in Peace" meeting held at Clifton Cathedral on 31 October, which I was privileged to be part of. A joint endeavour from the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, this event brought together a wide range of perspectives on the relationship between Israel and Palestine. It prioritised listening and dialogue over sloganeering. It showed that if we try to focus on listening, not just being heard, we can discuss and find constructive ways forward on even the most contentious and emotionally-charged issues.

Some people ask what such events can achieve, what difference they make. My view is that listening to each other, particularly when it is difficult, can only help increase public understanding of complex problems with emotional, economic and practical effects. This is particularly important when there are centuries of history behind these debates.

Public understanding and political will are connected. If people stick with the default setting of 'this is all too hard or too painful or too confusing' and switch off from personal or political discussion, policy makers can also duck responsibility, or become afraid to take a stand because of fear of the response. Talking in small thoughtful meetings alone will not solve world problems, but trying to solve them without thoughtful meetings is unlikely to build sustainable peaceful solutions.

Achieving things together is at the core of my political values. And it's why I am so grateful for the friendship and the hospitality that the Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation has extended to me over recent months. Because it is only by working together, and challenging one another where necessary, that we achieve progress and understanding.

PS. If you are a resident in Bristol West and need help accessing support from government departments – or there are any issues you would like to bring to my attention as your MP – please do not hesitate to get in touch. I can be contacted by email at thangam.debbonaire.mp@parliament.uk or you can contact my constituency office on 0117 379 0980.

Trowbridge Labour Party visit to BWPJC

Peter Brill

Following a successful visit by two members of BWPJC to the Trowbridge Constituency Labour Party, the Party expressed an interest in visiting the synagogue. On Thursday 25th October eight members of the Party were given a tour of the Synagogue, led by Iris Segall and with the usual superb catering of Viviane Bowell.

Other BWPJC members joined the event and there was plenty of lively discussion about religion, politics, community and culture – with lots learnt by everyone. This proved to be an excellent opportunity to enhance understanding of Judaism and the region's Jewish communities with those communities we come into contact with.

Interfaith Week

Iris Segall

Events to mark Interfaith Week are taking place all around the UK. This year, for the first time, a display was put together at the Trowbridge Library to shine a light on the work of the Wiltshire Multi Faith Forum as well as to give some more information about different religions.

Armed with some refreshments, posters, banners and artefacts, a few of us went into the Trowbridge library. The staff were most welcoming and supportive, providing us with space and tables, making sure we had what we needed.

It was very interesting to observe the people coming into the library. Some looked at us with suspicion or avoided us altogether. Others were keen to look at the displays, learn some new facts and have a friendly conversation.

Events like this highlight the fact that more education is needed. It is not enough to teach children at school about the existence of people of different faiths and none, it is also important to try and show the older population that everyone should be treated with respect and to provide more opportunities for people to get to know each other as human beings.

Being a סוֹפֵר סת"ם

[sofer stam]

Rabbi Francis Ronald Berry

A Jewish scribe, who writes sacred scrolls, is ordained as a סופר סת"ם by their teacher. In my case the Master Scribe Rabbi Dr Eric Ray. My Certificate of סופרות [sofrut] hangs on the wall of my study.

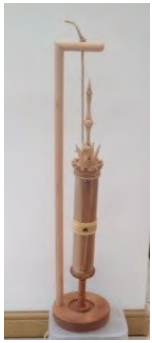
Whilst in my second year of rabbinic studies at Leo Baeck College I began to want to write a סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה [sefer torah - scroll] What impelled me is a mystery. How I'd manage to learn the skills involved, or obtain the materials needed, I didn't know. But the technical abilities required, though important, are not as significant as the spiritual requirements, for a סוֹפֵר needs to be a person of moral character and ethical deeds, always in spiritual quest and comfortable in the presence of the shekhinah when she visits to view his work.

When writing a Torah scroll, sitting in my special scribing room in the attic of my cottage I soon developed a discipline. After awakening I'd rise, wash and dress and read through the prayers of שחרית [shakharit - the morning Service]. Then I'd cut a turkey feather into a quill with the correct size tip, and carefully tip 14 drops of kosher ink into my inkwell and add a drop of water. I'd dip the tip of my quill into this and mix it by stirring it around a little. Then I'd take a piece of scrap קֶלַף [klaf-kosher parchment] write the name עֲמָלֵק [Amalek] and blot it out by drawing two or three lines of ink right through it, to fulfil the מִצְוָה [mitzvah - religious duty] commanded in Deuteronomy 25, 19. Then I would recite a formulaic declaration that my writing was for the sacred duty of writing a holy Torah scroll, and begin to copy the letters of the column of Torah following on from the day before.

I'd write about 10 or 12 lines, then go downstairs for breakfast. After eating I'd wash my hands and return to write another 10 lines before my lunch break. Then I'd return similarly and write another quarter of a column and have my afternoon drink, after which I'd return upstairs to finish the column. Each block of writing needed intense focus and concentration, so an hour and a half was enough; any longer and mistakes might be likely and they took a long time to correct so were best avoided. On reaching the Divine Name I cut a special quill the same size as the first, stripped off all the vanes of the feather to distinguish it so that it wasn't used for ordinary words, and recited a special declaration before writing the Divine Name. This prevented me from ever making any mistake in the Divine Name, as such a mistake couldn't be corrected but the entire sheet of parchment would have had to be buried and then rewritten on a fresh (expensive) sheet of kosher parchment.

Writing smaller sacred texts, such as a מְזוּזָה [mezuzah - excerpt of the Torah put up on the doorpost in a little case] is, though much shorter, more difficult, as the letters are much smaller, so more skill and dexterity is needed cutting and handling the quill.

In between comes the writing of a מְגִילָה [megillah - scroll of Esther] as this can be written any size, depending on whether it is for personal use or for public reading in a synagogue. This is illustrated here and also shows how I used my hobby of wood turning to make a case for the megillah, and a scaffold in which to hang it. Some of the motifs of the story are shown in the embellishments of the case: The finial at the top symbolises the golden sceptre of King Akhashverosh. The seven pointed crown symbolises the Jewish Queen, Esther. The tower with its castellated top symbolises the royal palace. The beading of the handle symbolises the 127 provinces of the empire, each with its language and script, as written into the story. The circular locking mechanism with its central א [Hebrew letter alef] symbolises both the signet ring of the King, symbol of his might, the hidden influence of the Divine, whose name isn't written in the book (the only Book of the Bible without the Divine Name in it) and of course also is the initial letter of the name of the Book; אֶסְתֵר [Esther]



The Archaeology of Chanukah

Why let the facts get in the way of a good story?

Tamar Hodos Lucas

We are all familiar with the story of Chanukah, and how those plucky Maccabees successfully fought back against the mighty Seleucid monarchy, liberating the Temple and rededicating it in 165 BCE. The tale was initially recorded in *1 Maccabees* and *2 Maccabees*, both written at the end of the second century BCE. *1 Maccabees* was composed in Hebrew shortly after the events themselves, but the original has been lost; the surviving version is a Greek translation preserved in the Septuagint, the earliest extant Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures from the original Hebrew. *2 Maccabees* was written in koine Greek, the form of Greek written and spoken during the Hellenistic and Roman periods into Late Antiquity. This version seems to have been written around 124 BCE and it presents a revision of the accounts in the first few chapters of 1 Maccabees. Josephus, writing in the first century CE, refers to the events and its associated celebratory festival in his *Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War*. Another source of the tale is *Megillat Antiochus*, which was originally composed in Aramaic in the second century CE. But how much archaeological evidence is there for this tale of miracle?

There is the Heliodorus Stele, which dates to 178 BCE. This inscribed block of stone cut from the Judean hills records three letters of correspondence between the Seleucid King Seleucus IV (187-175 BCE) and his overseer, Heliodorus, about the financial affairs of temples in the provinces of Phoenicia and Syria, which included Judea and, thus, Jerusalem. In one of the letters, Heliodorus is given responsibility to appoint someone to collect tax revenue from all the temples in the region. At this time, the Temple in Jerusalem not only housed money from the sanctuary itself but also served as a bank for private customers. Although these letters are addressed to the king and his trusted ally, they were written and displayed for witness by the wider public.

The stele came to prominence when it was purchased in 2007 from an Israeli antiquities dealer by Michael and Judy Steinhardt, well known New York based collectors, and loaned to the Israel Museum for temporary display. The stone was probably stolen in 2005 from an excavation site in the Beit Guvrin National Park. The excavation

director recalled arriving at the site one Sunday morning to discover an area overturned by what was clearly illicit digging. Furthermore, during the 2005 and 2006 field seasons, three stone pieces were excavated that were subsequently found to be exact matches for the broken bottom of the Steinhardt acquisition (figure 1).

In 2011, a stamped token was discovered in the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. Dated to the first century CE, the inscription on the token consists of two lines in Aramaic that translate to 'Pure for God.' The object was used to guarantee that the product or item brought to the Temple was ritually pure. It is the first piece of material evidence to be discovered that correlates with textual evidence of the activities and workings of the Temple during the Second Temple Period. But this is considerably after the period of the Maccabees.

Aside from these two objects, which only indirectly relate to the Chanukah tale, there is nothing else from the archaeological record that firmly corroborates the story. Even our understanding of what the Temple might have looked like in that era is ambiguous, for not a feature remains that can be firmly dated to the mid-late second century BCE. As for Jerusalem itself of this period, we know that Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE), who succeeded Seleucus IV, constructed a citadel to house Greek troops. It is presumed that this structure, the Acra, was located near the Temple, but its exact spot remains subject to debate.

Thus, this holiday, the miracle of which has always had an element of wonder, remains materially ethereal, as well.

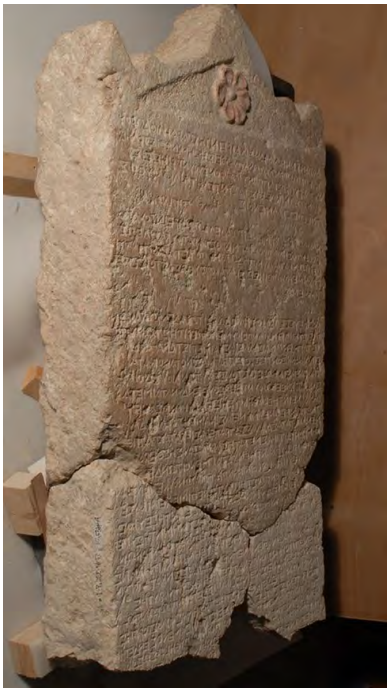


Figure 1: The Heliodorus Stele with the three additional bottom pieces reconstructed. © The Israel Museum

Chanukah Oddities

Alex Schlesinger

Honorary President, Bristol Hebrew Congregation

Like most Jews, and until being asked to write this article, I had not given a great deal of thought to aspects of the story behind Chanukah. I regarded it as a straightforward story of national liberation from the Seleucid empire: a cruel and idolatrous invader from modern Syria. The liberation was followed by the miracle of the oil lasting eight days for the *ner tamid* in the rededicated temple.

The first oddity of the story is the fact that the two books of *Maccabees* (or are there four or even five books?) have never made it into the *tanakh* (The Hebrew bible). They remain part of the apocrypha: a bundle of books including *Tobit, Esdras, Judith*. Yet we have an ancient, well loved and most widely observed midwinter festival derived wholly from the story as told in *Maccabees*, and the festival even merits special seasonal mention in the daily Amidah prayer. Although, unlike the Books of *Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes* and even the *Song of Solomon, Maccabees* never gets to be read in synagogues.

My thoughts then drifted on to the matter of the miracles, for which "we thank Thee." according to the Amidah. These days, I suppose, most of us have a conceptual difficulty with miracles. The dead are no longer resurrected by prophets, ravens no longer feed them while they are in hiding and axe heads don`t float on water for us. Yet, we still commemorate the miracle of one day`s supply of oil lasting eight days.

Bernard Shaw, in his notes for his play, St Joan, says that a miracle is any event that creates faith. Perhaps he is half right. Miracles are born of hope and underline faith. As Jews, we don`t really do Merlin with his robes and magic wand. At the binding of Isaac, even after the amazing just in time intervention of the angel and the ram, Abraham comes down from the mountain, rejoins his servants and travels to Beersheba as though the whole day`s event was hardly anything special.

We say that miracles like that don`t really happen now.....yet perhaps they still do, but only in a different and more personal fashion occurring as part of life and not as something set side. After some near miss, we might say: "That was a miracle." Indeed, my two parents both regarded their escape from Europe as individual miracles; although most of their families had no such miraculous escapes.

If you are still unsure about

miracles: try this for an experiment. When you are next holding a baby or very small child in your arms: look down at him or her, and say out loud: "I don't believe in miracles."

If you can't quite bring yourself to say it? Well, that's because you're a bit of a miracle, too.

Yule, midwinter, winter solstice ...

Emily Short
Pagan

This festival marks a significantly important part of the year for pagans. It is the mid-way point through the dark half of the wheel of the year, the shortest day and longest night. Even in the depths of the coldest months, it is a time for celebration. Pagans believe all new beginnings emerge from darkness. Once winter has reached its peak, we look forward to the New Year with the rebirth of the sun. Day by day, light triumphs over darkness, until the height of the summer solstice when the cycle begins once again.

As a child growing up in a diverse rural household, family celebrations at this time of year were drawn from various influences. Paganism follows the wheel and cycles of nature and the seasons, and my father and grandfather being agriculturally inclined folk, passed on to us old Somerset traditions. My father would take us out walking with his hatchet to find a big hunk of oak or pine, and once a suitable lumber trophy was found, we would bring it back to the house. After tying a piece of holly to the crown, we would burn the log on the open fire in our lounge. I remember warming my feet against the netted fireguard, and my father telling us the Yule log would light us through the longest night of the year, along with the assortment of candles which adorned many ledges. We would decorate with fresh wreaths of holly, ivy and mistletoe, symbolising everlasting life, fertility, and the promise of rebirth in the springtime. Their leaves never go brown and die, despite the harshness of the season.

My grandmother is from a Christian background, and she encouraged us to attend the village church together, and make candle oranges for Christingle. The smell of citrus fruits, flickering candlelight, and echo of the organ playing "Hark the Herald Angels sing," is a nostalgic and vivid memory to this day. All these customs are a huge, enjoyable part of my childhood. Perhaps, to some, it may seem I'm picking and choosing what I fancy from a smorgasbord of religious traditions

... and yet, I find the principles of community, light-bringing, and renewal of hope, encompass my beliefs rather perfectly.

The winter solstice is a festival of light. It's a time for celebrating the rebirth of the sun and the fulfilled promise of light from darkness. It's also a time to reflect upon the old calendar year, the challenges as well as the good times, and prepare to bid it a fond farewell. To cast aside any old habits or ill-feeling I no longer wish to carry into the next twelve months.

Yuletide is a perfect opportunity to contemplate the year ahead, with all of its exciting possibilities. Ultimately though, it's a time for thankfulness, love and celebration. A time for sharing, appreciating and eating and drinking together, with those we hold closest and dear.

Christmas

Peter Chave

United Reform Church minister (retired)

Christians took over the Roman and Pagan midwinter festival and claimed it as the birthday of Jesus. They hailed him as 'the Light of the World'. How so? Jesus of Nazareth was a Jewish teacher and healer who proclaimed that God loves us all and will rescue us from the many forms of darkness in the world, and in ourselves. Jesus' followers saw him as the ultimate messenger (*Messiah = Christos=* 'the anointed one') ushering in the Kingdom of God, in which God's will is done and all dwell in peace. The disagreement between Christianity and ongoing Judaism can be summarised as the latter deducing from the *non*-arrival of the Kingdom that Jesus was not Messiah but the former claiming that the Kingdom has *begun* and will arrive fully when Jesus comes again in glory.

Jesus was executed as a troublemaker, but soon reports came in that his tomb was empty and his friends had met him 'resurrected' from the dead. Holy Week and Easter, with Jesus' death and resurrection, the culmination of the story, give Christmas, the beginning, its significance.

Jesus' death on a cross has traditionally been seen as a sacrifice to 'take away' our sins but I am not sure how healthy an idea that is – making 'sin' our defining human feature and suggesting a strange deal by which Jesus takes our punishment. I prefer Peter Abelard's theory (12th century) that God's love shown forth in Jesus is so striking that it attracts us to love God in return and live in his ways.

Christianity soon gained more Gentile adherents than Jewish ones and a different emphasis came

through: that *in* Jesus God in person came down to earth to live a life of loving solidarity with us (cf. Isaiah 64:1a). Christmas celebrates 'the Incarnation' ('en-flesh-ment'): God became a human being. To know Jesus is to know God and, as the life of Jesus demonstrates, 'God is love'.

Christians should be faithful to the truth we find in our religion: but without being unloving and dismissive towards those who find God by a different way.

Peter Chave, retired United Reformed Church minister Peter has written a booklet on antisemitism and has led a training day for local Clergy on the subject alongside Rabbi David Mason using the booklet as course material.

My working life

Sophie Peel

Since coming to the UK as an au pair, most of my employment history has been in the care sector. I have first worked with adults with learning disabilities in a residential home when living in Dorchester. The job consisted in supporting these adults to lead a full and independent life and my tasks ranged from providing personal care and helping with toileting to taking individuals shopping or on a day trip out. I still remember vividly one occasion when I was taking one of the residents for a drive in the evening in the home's minibus. Out of the blue and after 40 minutes of total silence on his part, he told me in no uncertain terms to be quiet as my singing was atrocious! This 40 year old gentleman with Down Syndrome came to live in the home when his father one morning told the day centre staff that he didn't want him back home that evening. He could display some challenging behaviour alongside his swearing but was very affectionate and had a brilliant sense of humour.

When moving to Bristol in 2008 I applied to be a health care assistant at Southmead Hospital. As my children were little I decided to work as a bank staff which enabled me to choose when I worked but also to get to know a lot of different wards and specialities. It was a steep learning curve as the hospital environment is very busy and quite impersonal especially after working in a small residential home which was most akin to a big family.

The role of a health care assistant (HCA) is to help the registered nurse and revolves around assisting patients eat and drink, supporting them with their personal care and helping them mobilise safely. Health care assistants spend the most amount of time with patients, so a rapport is bound to develop, and they will be the ones to know what they like to eat and how, what their routine is when they go for a wash and how much they can be pushed when they refuse to walk or

get out of bed.

There is a big emphasis on patients' safety so minimising the risk of falls and pressure sores is high on the agenda. Patients' skin is monitored daily and patients who are at high risk of falls are under constant supervision.

I also spent many shifts on a 1:1 basis with patients with dementia who exhibit challenging behaviour. I have had my hair pulled, have been kicked, called a number of colourful names and had to duck several times to avoid being drenched by jugs of water. This is very challenging work and I admit that I could not do it on a permanent basis.

After eight years working as an HCA and about to turn 40 years old, I realised that if I did not start my nursing training at that point I would probably never do it. It was something I had always wanted to achieve, and I was also becoming frustrated to be restricted to one area of the patients' care. Furthermore, working as an HCA is a very physical job (especially when patients are bed bound and require full care from toileting to feeding) and I was worried that I may not be able to carry on for another 25 years.

I therefore applied for a place at the University of the West of England and was accepted. The first year was very hard as I had to get used to studying again at an academic level while juggling a home, dog and three children. It has been also quite difficult for my family who was used to my part time hours.

The nursing degree is a heavy full time course where placements and lectures count each for 50% of the time. Working 37 hours a week (day and night shifts) while having to write a 4000 word essay has pushed me to the limits and I would study most evenings and late into the night if a deadline was looming. It has been nevertheless worth it as I have just started my new job working as a registered nurse on a trauma orthopaedics ward in Weston General Hospital. It has only been a month but for the moment I fully enjoy the challenge.

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

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