
Listen

Newsletter of Beit Echud
Milton Keynes & District Synagogue

Adar – Iyar 5777
March – May 2017



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Annual General Meeting Sunday 4 June, 3.00pm

The AGM this year will be the most important AGM we have probably ever held. It is vital that you are there to discuss the future of the synagogue.

Photo

Congratulations to Sam Morrow, who had his Bar Mitzvah on 25th February. Here he is practising his parasha at Cheder.

Deadline for the next edition of Listen

- ✧ 15th May 2017
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L’Dor Va Dor – From Generation to Generation

Council Members

The time has come when we need to ask for your help.

The current council is tired and needs a break. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to be a part of shaping our community. Are there things that you don’t like or have always irritated you? Now is your time to change them.

Without you your synagogue will close. Not this year and perhaps not next but we have to start planning for our future now. Please support us all in continuing to have a community with doors wide open: *l’dor va dor* – from generation to generation.

There are so many options out there that, whether you have 10 minutes a week or are looking for the next project to sink your teeth into, your community will really appreciate you putting yourself forward. We will support you in the transition as much (or as little) as you wish and so will Reform Judaism.

We, your current council, ask that, by the AGM on Sunday 4th June, we have received firm offers of help.

- Opportunities for you to help:
- Warden
- Meet and greet
- Security
- Service taking (training is available from MRJ)
- Social events organising
- PR and communication
- Catering
- Looking after the building
- Council member

The values of Judaism enrich us; they provide us with a moral centre, spiritual depth and purpose. They link us to thousands of years of tradition that reach back to Mount Sinai. The chain of history is only as strong as the weakest link and, to ensure that the next generation remains connected to their heritage, we need you.

Volunteering for our community is very rewarding: to know that we have played a part in the continuation of Reform Judaism in our area is important to us and, we hope, to you. The time has now come that we must pass on to you the honour of leading our community for the next generation.

Senior Warden’s Column

Stan Cohen

Visiting students

We have now met the three students I mentioned in my last column and they have all brought something new to the services they have led. Peter Luyendijk is Dutch and speaks English like a native. He has led a traditional Shabbat morning service and a Kabbalat Shabbat/Chavurah Supper when he spoke about Brexodus, likening the Israelites desire to be free with the Referendum result in that both were about the desire for sovereignty. The difference between being a slave and a citizen of Europe is, of course, a question of personal perception.

Iris Ferreira is French and also has an excellent command of English. She shared some music and melodies from the French and Sephardic traditions. Gwendolen Burton also brought some new music and chanted the Song at the Sea in the Sephardic trope. She brought her husband, sons and father with her and, having led a shorter service, then led

an instructive Tu B'Shevat Seder combined with a Kiddush/light lunch that Malcolm Pruskin provided to celebrate his nth birthday.

All three students will be with us again over the next few months so do come along and enjoy their teaching, insights and music while we enjoy the privilege and pleasure of their company.

Reflective Service 24th December

I led a more reflective service on this Shabbat. We sat in a circle and recited some of the usual prayers and sang some of the usual songs but gave ourselves time to reflect on their meaning and significance.

The feedback was very positive; people who attended enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and the time to think about prayer, faith and belief.

I plan to have some more 'alternative services' from time to time and will organise one on a model suggested by Izzy Dorrance, based on a service she and her family attended in the States, with a greater emphasis on study and discussion while enjoying tea, coffee and cake. This will be on 27th May when Student Gwendolen Burton visits us. Watch out for more details in our e-newsletters.

Torah Service No 2

It's in our Siddur but we have never used it. So Sheila Goldsmith and I thought we should try something new which will involve some new music and a different choreography. Hopefully we will be ready by 13th May when one of the Student Rabbis, Iris Ferreira, will lead the service. A new experience for her and for us!

Purim Service and Celebration Sunday March 12th 10.00am

We will be celebrating Purim with a short service, a Purim Spiel and food. Purim is of

course a 'fun' festival enjoyed by children and adults alike, but it has some serious messages, if you can only stop eating the Chumantaschen long enough to discover them. So do come along to have fun, to learn and to support and enjoy our Cheder. Children come early at 10.00 to make masks and noise makers and adults can come along for 10.30.

Marie May Stone Setting

In April It will be one year since Marie died. Her family in Canada have now arranged a date for the consecration of her memorial stone at Whalley Drive. It will be at 11.00am on Sunday 16th April with refreshments afterwards at the home of Stanley and Marise Cohen.

Rabbi Willy Wolff and the Essence of Life

This book was advertised in the last edition of *Listen* and I have since bought a copy and read it.

Willy was our part time Rabbi for a few years in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. He was supposed to work for us part time while continuing in his profession as a journalist. However, he gave us much more time than he was paid for, and on Fridays would lead a service in Kettering for our northern members, and then dash down to Tinkers Bridge in Milton Keynes to lead the Erev Shabbat service there at 8.15pm! He was much loved and held study sessions at his home every Saturday for members and those wishing to convert.

He left us to work for much bigger communities in Brighton and Wimbledon and eventually became the Rabbi for aspiring Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union and Germany.

The book is very interesting and well worth reading. Our Synagogue only gets a mention in the chronology but his time with us, as precious as it was for all of us, was only a

small episode in Willy’s long and varied life as a journalist and rabbi. He is now supposed to be retired but, knowing Willy, that only means he is finding new things to do!

Letter to the Community

Henry Fried

For years the Synagogue council has been making appeals to members to join in and help our community in whatever way they are able. This has largely fallen on deaf ears and council has now reached the position where we simply cannot continue to commit to provide the services we have done in the past. Indeed the attendances at most services are in single figures and that does little for the morale of people preparing services. We understand that not everyone likes attending services and, if people came to other activities or organised other activities, it might be different.

Every year I say that we are weaker than we were the previous year and this continues to be the case. We are very spread out and lack a community feel. We lack volunteers and we lack a succession. We have few members under the age of 60 and those we have are too busy with work and family commitments. People who have been on council for many years are simply tired with carrying the community, especially where there is no indication that, short of our deteriorating health and death, anyone else will take over. I have tried many times to encourage younger members to be active within the community. For different and varied reasons this has not worked.

Whilst we can we must provide for the future in the best way we can.

At the AGM, which will be held on Sunday

4th June at 3.00pm, proposals will be put forward asking Council to pave a way forward. It is too early to say what they will be and it is important that all members are involved in this. It could be an arrangement with another community. It could be one where we regretfully close the doors and the community no longer exist. There are many other alternatives. It could be that we soldier on until we can no longer, but to do that we need volunteers to become involved. What we cannot do is to carry on the way we are. Our volunteers are getting old and are very tired. Elsewhere in this newsletter is an appeal by me. It is not too late yet, but what is needed is a new leadership, perhaps with help being offered when it is requested. I am sure that we have made mistakes and there may well be people who would have come forward if we weren’t there – well now is your chance. It will be a very dark day for me if we end up not being an independent Jewish community centre in Milton Keynes, but I can do no more. It really is up to you as members to stand up and be counted.

Loneliness: What Can We Do?

Marise Cohen

Recently I read an article about loneliness in the *Mature Times*, a magazine that Stan seems to get hold of from somewhere and which has some very informative pieces. According to research done for Age UK, ‘half a million people over the age of 60 usually spend every day alone, with nearly half a million more usually going at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all.’

As our own community ages and becomes less able, it is highly likely that loneliness applies to some of us. And it is not only older people that loneliness effects. Many younger people who suffer with a range of mental health issues from depression, drug or alcohol

abuse or bullying at school or in the workplace might also feel lonely or isolated.

The research also linked loneliness to an increased demand on health services, partly because people are more likely to develop health conditions such as heart problems, depression and dementia. Not cheering news is it?

Coming back to our community, you as individual members might be aware of synagogue members as well as older family members or neighbours who, through whatever circumstances, are by themselves. I do know that many in our community are in contact with other members either by phone or by a visit now and again. Some in the past have even ‘adopted’ elderly members, taking them out shopping, inviting them for meals or other family occasions, bringing them to shul. Numerous studies and researches have shown that any form of contact for those who feel lonely or isolated has a very beneficial effect; allowing that person to feel remembered, cared for, listened to, and to feel that they have not ‘disappeared’, even if we don’t see them regularly. It also has another benefit: those of us who take some time to contact the elderly or isolated, can feel better ourselves, knowing that we have done something for another person. Some people have called this a virtuous circle, or positive re-enforcement. It doesn’t matter what it is called, it works for good, and that has to be a good thing in itself.

So, what can we do in our community? Well, something along the lines of what I have written. I know that as our community ages, it also shrinks. There are fewer people around to do things. Perhaps it is time to move away from the idea of having one or two people coordinating things such as contacting other members, and to move towards taking on a more active individual role in which we are all responsible. I am not sure how exactly this would work, and I am not going to suggest any template which we can all follow.

Perhaps it is enough just to think about these things now and think about how we would feel, perhaps do feel, if we are by ourselves and haven’t spoken to anyone in the past week or seen anyone for days. It might be that an unexpected phone call might lift our spirits and let us know that we are not forgotten.

Age UK is working to end loneliness amongst older people, and is running a telephone befrienders service. I think we could follow that example too and make it more inclusive so that all ages are covered in our community. I am happy to speak to anyone who, having read this article, is interested in doing something active and positive to help.

Here There is No Why

Zvi Friedman

Primo Levi, finding himself at Auschwitz, was haunted by the question ‘why’. Why was he there, why the daily acts of random brutality? He was soon to learn that ‘here there is no why’. In such a place reason, with love, together the two most essential of human qualities, did not exist.

There have been many attempts to explain the Holocaust. Nothing comes close. At best we can point to a millennium of Christian Jew-hatred which culminated in Nazi madness, while the Nazi madness that resorted to industrialised mass murder was a conditioned response to the fear, by early 1942, that Nazism was losing some of its glamour in the eyes of the German masses. Attacks on Jews had so far been largely uncoordinated; an organised and well resourced campaign of murder would be a popular move. The Party would be seen to be doing something for the people, now that the war was coming home to them.

Hence the Wannsee conference in January 1942, at which Reynhard Heydrich presided

over the details of a planned programme to destroy Europe’s Jews. It was a short meeting, the participants then dispersing to enjoy, no doubt, a full German breakfast. (Some time ago, there was an excellent TV reconstruction of this meeting. Well worth viewing if you can track it down.)

This year, as in previous years, a number of us were involved in commemorations of Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD). Stan and I joined with a few others on a small organising committee to plan the MK Council’s annual HMD event, held in the Council Chamber. Members of our choir contributed three songs, while Stan conducted the event. A few of us also braved the cold to be present at a short ceremony of remembrance at the MK Rose on the morning of HMD.

Sarah and I also attended a third commemorative event, one we were not expecting. Sir Nicholas Winton, organiser of the kindertransport, had been one of the first pupils at Stowe School, near Buckingham, when it opened in the 1920s. To commemorate its old alumnus and his distinguished contribution to saving the lives of several hundred Jewish children, the school held an evening of music and readings presented by its pupils. It was an evening of sadness and joy as, I’m sure, Sir Nicholas would have wanted.

These are small but necessary remembrances. My only regret is that so few members of our community take part, though I admit that publicity could be improved. It’s been said many times, that as survivors grow fewer the need to remember grows greater, especially at this time of ‘fake-news’, often perpetrated by those who, if they recognise it at all, would consign the Holocaust to ancient history. And these days few people have a use for history. Each year we repeat ‘Never Again’, and although it’s impossible at this point in time to imagine an event of such scale and horror being repeated, with the present day resurgence of anti-Semitism and the virulence

of hostility towards Jews and Israel found in the Arab world and our social media in particular, can we be complacent?

I don’t subscribe to the belief that large numbers of people are consciously anti-Semitic, but I do believe that centuries of religious anti-Semitism in the Christian west have morphed into a cultural preference for Jews as the favourite scapegoat; we know that choosing a scapegoat for the world’s perceived ills is a necessity for the ideologies of the political extremes, both left and right. Not consciously anti-Semitic perhaps, but quite a few people are easily persuaded by conspiracy theories of Jewish power.

The Community Security Trust (CST) reports that 2016 was a record year for instances of anti-Semitism. It was also a year when a major political party twice chose a leader at best indifferent to anti-Semitism. Coincidence? You decide.

Interfaith Report

Lynda Gilbert

Hello everyone!

It appears that I somehow missed the last edition of Listen, so you may have thought I’d retired from the post of Interfaith Coordinator! Well, for better or worse, I’m still here, and still active, as far as I’m able, in my work in bringing people of different faiths together.

Mostly these days that’s being done through my One Voice project which, as many of you will already know, was begun 2 years ago as a joint response from the Jewish and Muslim communities within Milton Keynes to the atrocities that took place early in 2015 in Paris and Copenhagen. We had a very successful meeting last November in the shul when people of 6 different faiths talked about their own faith journeys, and a great social

gathering in January at the home of Interfaith Convenor David Rennie.

However, our most successful venture to date took place just recently on Sunday 5th March, again at the shul. Andy and myself, together with Henry and Rebecca Fried, and Denise Latner and her son Tom, were delighted to welcome nearly 50 people, many of them from the Muslim community, to the synagogue, for a presentation and discussion on Mental Health: Modern Issues for Modern Times. The speakers were myself with my counsellor's hat on, together with Dr. Nazia Syed of MK Hospital, a specialist in women's health, and guest speaker Khadija Abdelhamid (pictured below), who gave a moving testimony of her own struggle with depression. Following the presentations the guests were able to intermingle and ask questions of the speakers while enjoying a vast spread of refreshments donated by a number of guests. Special thanks go to Denise Latner for her wonderful plate of bridge rolls with cream cheese and smoked salmon in true Jewish style!



As well as the One Voice activities, I've continued to attend MKInterfaith meetings and am now the Jewish representative on the IFMK Executive. A recent really enjoyable meeting was the March one, when Methodist minister and University of Bedfordshire Chaplain Rev. Cassandra Howes led us in a workshop for the creation of an interfaith prayer for Milton Keynes' 50th Anniversary. Fellow community member Lou Tribus and I

worked together with our Muslim friend Fazle Khundkar to create quite a powerful tribute to our wonderful city! Other people's ideas will of course be incorporated into the end result, but hopefully I will eventually be able to share the final version in this column.

In February, Lou and I also attended an Open Day at the Zainabiya Mosque in Granby. It was a very enjoyable day which included presentations by children from the Religion School and young adults, displays on Islam, refreshments and lots of networking. It made me think that perhaps we could do the same at the synagogue, because whenever people of other faiths come to the synagogue they are so interested in our faith, traditions, and religious artefacts. Such a day could include a play or presentations of work by the Cheder children, a performance by the Choir, a demonstration of the scrolls and/or a talk on Jewish history as well as the usual sharing of food and conversation. What do you think? If this sounds like a good idea to you, please email me and we can start to talk about the planning of it. I always find that an additional benefit of sharing our building, faith and practices with people of other faiths renews my own interest in Judaism, so maybe such a project is just what we all need to revive our enthusiasm for the community?

Meanwhile, if you're interested in taking part in the One Voice meetings or events, please email me at the same address given above. And watch this space for details of a very special One Voice event coming up in July.

Forthcoming Movement for Reform Judaism Events

Online Learning: joins together sessions taught online with small chevrotah (group) learning in person. The topic is Jewish Ethics and will explore these questions through examination of a range of Jewish and non-Jewish, classical and modern texts, delving into issues around responsibility and accountability, inclusivity and boundaries, managing our own needs and values with that of others, communication, crisis and crafting positive relationships. The course begins on **Tuesday 9th May** and bookings are open.

L'Chaim: our very latest module is ready! If you haven't been part of L'Chaim but would like to, Rabbi Laura would be delighted to bring you up to speed before the launch of Social Justice at **Menorah on 3rd May, 7-10pm.**



Shirei Chagigah, our very own music conference, will be taking place on **6-9th July**. It isn't only for those who love to sing; it is for everyone who wants to experience something new, different or recharge your spiritual batteries. One of the most important things about it is not only creating a fantastic Reform community for the 4 days but it is about the

take home value in everything you learn with a focus on 'how you can do this at home.'

Northern Chagigah this year is the **3-5th November** and is taking place at the Hawkhill in Easingwold. Our theme is around the changing seasons and how we mark time through our festivals. As always there will be an exciting RSY-Netzer programme for the children as well as a crèche for the under 5s.

For information on all events check out www.reformjudaism.org.uk and click on events.

Condolences

To David and Sarah and Ian and Simone and their families on the death of Irene Bernarde, following a period of illness.

MKDRS Community Seder April 11th 2017

This year the Council have decided that, as we are only a small handful of volunteers, the community second night Seder, for Pesach, will be open only to members, associates and country members and their families.

Prices are as follows:
 Adult: £14 (vegetarian or fish) per person
 OAP: £12 per person
 Under16: £8 per person

If you would like to attend, please let Sarah Friedman, Treasurer know by 31st March at the very latest.

Diary

March 2017

Sun 12th 10.00am PURIM SERVICE AND CELEBRATION led by Stanley Cohen, Cheder teachers and children (craft activities from from 10.00; service starts at 10.30)

Thu 16th 12.00-2.00pm WOMEN'S READING GROUP

Sat 25th 10.30am SHABBAT SERVICE led by Martin Neville

Sun 26th 10.00am CHEDER MOCK SEDER

April 2017

Wed 5th 10.00am -3.30pm SEWING AND CRAFT DAY

Fri 7th 7.30pm EREV SHABBAT SERVICE led by Henry Fried

Mon 10th FIRST NIGHT PESACH

Tue 11th 6.30pm for 7.30pm SECOND NIGHT PESACH / COMMUNITY SEDER led by Richard Assenheim (see page 8 for more details)

Sun 16th 11.00am STONE SETTING FOR MARIE MAY at Whalley Drive

Sun 16th 7.30pm EREV SEVENTH DAY PESACH SERVICE led by Stanley Cohen

Thu 20th 12.00-2.00pm WOMEN'S READING GROUP

Sun 23rd 10.00am CHEDER

Sat 29th 10.30am SHABBAT SERVICE led by Student Rabbi Peter Luyendijk

Sun 30th 10.00am CHEDER

May 2017

Wed 3th 10.00am -3.30pm SEWING AND CRAFT DAY

Fri 5th 7.30pm KABBALAT SHABBAT/ CHAVURAH SUPPER led by David Jacobs. Please bring vegetarian food to share.

Sat 13th 10.30am SHABBAT SERVICE led by Student Rabbi Iris Ferreira

Sun 11th 10.00am CHEDER

Thu 18th 12.00-2.00pm WOMEN'S READING GROUP

Sat 27th 10.30am SHABBAT SERVICE led by Student Rabbi Gwendolen Burton. Study and snack.



May 2017 (cont)

Tue 30th 7.30pm EREV SHAVUOT
SERVICE led by
Martin Neville

June 2017

Fri 2nd 7.30pm EREV SHABBAT
SERVICE led by
Richard Assenheim

Sun 4th 3.00pm ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING

Wed 7th 10.00am SEWING AND
-3.30pm CRAFT DAY

Sat 10th 10.30am SHABBAT
MORNING SERVICE
led by Henry Fried

Sun 11th 10.00am CHEDER

Thu 15th 12.00–
2.00pm WOMEN’S READING
GROUP

Sat 24th 10.30am SHABBAT MORNING
SERVICE led by Stanley
Cohen

Sun 25th 10.00am CHEDER

Sun 25th 12.30pm CHEDER PLANNING
MEETING

Sun 25th 2.00pm RITUAL COMMITTEE
MEETING