

January 2022 – Tu B'Shvat 5782

www.bromleyshul.org.uk

Celebrating at BRS during Chanukah

Chanukah might seem like a distant memory now but at the time it was a chance for all parts of the community from the Gan to the Social Centre to get together for candle-lightings and other events, at shul, online and in people's homes all round the shul's catchment area.



The Gan's Sue in her coat of many colours

Why did Megan have this impressive head of hair reduced by 14 inches?



Also in this issue...

What do you think these enthusiastic members might be describing?

"Fabulous. The highlight of my week."

"... a part of my family's week spent with our zoom family..."

"Inclusive."

More on these two stories on p. 7. More Chanukah photos on pp. 4-5



Mazal tov to Sonia Hyams and her Hooray Cheder team on having organised such a special Chanukah Fair this year.

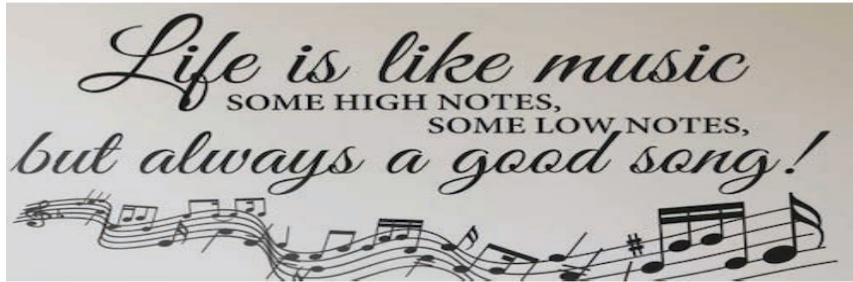


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View from the Chair



I have been a student rabbi David-Yehuda and I wonder whether you can guess what it is by the end of this piece.

What has been happening in the last few months.....Oh! Calcutta or Chicago, how many flights, holidays, meetings with friends have been cancelled as we ride the rollercoaster of living life through a pandemic. Despite this, nothing could spoil the joy and light that Chanukah brought us. The cheder PTA, led by Sonia Hyams and her team, put on a great Chanukah Fair which raised money but more importantly our spirits. It was great to see the Brick Lane bagel stall return with Brian and Lesley Freeman. Just seeing them and all the regular and new stalls brought so much happiness. As Chanukah was so early this year the Chanukah Fair was preceded by Mitzvah Day, at which BRS collected the most items of food out of all Reform communities in the UK. Well done BRS and thank you to Oliver and Matilda for boxing it all up for delivery to the local food bank. During Chanukah we had candle lightings online and in members' homes, and even at Tom's allotment.

Shabbat services have been so beautifully led by our student rabbi David-Yehuda and our lay readers. A Chorus Line of choir singers is always on hand to uplift us with their voices. We have had Rabbi Nathan Godleman join us and in 2022 we will also have Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild and Rabbi Larry Becker.

Senior Rabbi of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, will join us to lead the service for Shabbat on 15 January. Please look out in your regular e-light for details.

Wicked covid continues to impact on life and many of us might be feeling Les Miserables. The Caring Community, led by Tracy Frankel, is a lifeline, so if you ever need to talk to someone just get in touch. You don't need to be a Blood Brother (or sister) as BRS is a community, a family. I would like to take this chance to thank Tracy for everything she does for us with her Caring Community team. This is despite painful knee surgery and a very busy family and work life. Tracy, you are a mensch and if I could I would be a Fiddler on the Roof playing your praise.

As things currently seem to be changing at such short notice please check your e-light for changes to services, cheder or events. The security team at BRS is constantly monitoring the situation and government guidelines. Early in the new year we will again review our covid risk assessment. We encourage everyone to go and get their vaccinations and boosters.

A date for your diary is the AGM on Wednesday, 23 March. If you have ever thought about joining the Board this is your opportunity. If you want to find out more please just contact me. Now we have our meetings via zoom (10 a year) it is much more accessible and no more



schlepping to shul during winter nights or when it is raining Cats and dogs.

If you can guess the challenge I was given on writing this piece, then email me the total number of examples in this View from the Chair and I will make sure you get a prize!

Michelle Brooks Evans
chair@bromleyshul.org.uk

Our member Mandy Wax is leading one event that you really must put in your diaries. **The Arts Project** will showcase a series of creative workshops and endeavours that will take place over the coming eight months. They will include photography, creative writing, music and cookery and bring our community together. By virtue of its being a BRS project, the theme will strongly involve our Jewish identity. The culmination of this project will be a one day event in the Synagogue on **Sunday 10 July**.

BRS AGM 2022
Wednesday 23 March
*Look out for details in
forthcoming e-Lights
and in the post
or
ask Michelle
(email address above)*

How closely are study and action connected?



As we enter the heart of the Winter season I am prompted to recall an unusual story about *Hillel* the Elder who is said to have lived roughly 2000 years ago. *The Babylonian Talmud* - our great corpus of Jewish thought and stories - tells us of his improvised and modest life; how he earned barely enough money to feed his family and that which he had left he spent on the entrance fee to the *Beit Midrash* (House of Learning). One frosty and freezing Friday, so the story goes, *Hillel* was unable to procure work and so lacked the money to feed his family or gain entry to the *Beit Midrash*. Rejected yet still desperate to study he climbed onto the snowy roof of the building, positioned himself atop a window. From there, he diligently listened to his teachers', *Shmaya* and *Avtalion*, words of *Torah*. The two studied from dusk until dawn, unaware of *Hillel's* presence atop their heads. At daybreak *Shmaya* turned to *Avtalion* and queried why, when the sun was up, the *Beit Midrash* was still shrouded in darkness. Peering up at the roof and window they noticed the outline of a person. Climbing up to investigate they found *Hillel* covered in four and half feet of snow. Immediately they brought him down into the *Beit*

Midrash, bathed him, placed him in front of the a fire, and said, "This man deserves to have the Shabbat laws violated on his behalf" (bYoma 35b)

We can draw many conclusions from this story:

1. That Jewish laws and traditions, even those we consider particularly sacred, can be bent or broken in order to preserve life.
2. That human beings require more than just physical sustenance in order to survive and thrive.
3. That no person should be turned away from our communities due to a lack of money.

However, I think it is the behaviour of *Shmaya* and *Avtalion* that surprises me the most; why were they not more concerned for the wellbeing of *Hillel*, and proactive in searching for him, the night before? We can infer from the story that *Hillel* was a dedicated student, present each Friday night and never missing a study session. Were *Shmaya* and *Avtalion* so engaged with their studies that they failed to notice *Hillel's* absence? Were they too wrapped up in their own lives that they were unaware of *Hillel's* financial difficulties? Did it not occur to them to go outside and enquire about their student's welfare? In our morning prayers we read a list of ethical behaviours with a view to internalising them into ethical actions. We always conclude this study passage with the reminder that, "the study of *Torah* leads to them all".

The story of *Hillel* the Elder, *Shmaya* and *Avtalion* remind us that study and action are not always as directly connected as we might think (or hope). The tale challenges us to study proactively, with a view toward implementing that study in our everyday lives -- and to not get so caught up in our learning that we forget to implement its lessons.

As we continue through the winter months, I hope you are able to find numerous sources of physical and spiritual nourishment as well as being attuned to others who might be struggling.

Student Rabbi David-Yehuda ('DY') Stern

INTER-SYNAGOGUE QUESTION TIME

**Tuesday 22 March,
7.30 to 9.15 pm.**

The event will follow the BBC Question Time pattern but with the twist that all four panel members will be rabbis, Rabbis Jeremy Gordon (New London Masorti), Rene Pfertzel (Kingston Liberal), Adrian Schell (Wimbledon Reform) and Kath Vardy (North West Surrey Reform), who have accepted the invitation to participate with enthusiasm. This may be **live at Wimbledon Synagogue or online** or a mixture of both.

That information and the identity of the question master will be notified in due course.

Meanwhile we are invited to save the date for an evening of stimulating discussion.

VIEW FROM BEHIND THE SCREEN

Business as usual at BRS

A senior warden's work is never done, and in recent years our senior warden's job has expanded to include overseeing technical provision and filling rotas with readers - never mind ensuring that our Shabbat and festival services continue to contain the high standard of intellectual, spiritual and ritual elements that BRS congregants expect and deserve.

Stephanie Alberti reflects on the past year from the senior warden's seat:

It's been a funny old (secular!) year. Throughout the 12 months of 2021, BRS' Religion and Ritual Committee continued to assemble on line monthly and strove to maintain the synagogue's spiritual business as "usual" between meetings. None of you, dear readers, will be surprised that we, in common with everyone else, found it a challenging year but we were spurred on by the enthusiasm of our congregation and the steady, maybe growing, attendance at services.

Throughout 2021, we were able to mark every Shabbat and festival as a community in timely fashion. Not always, in fact perhaps rarely, as we might have wished but at first fully on-line, streaming from the homes of our (isolated) service leaders and then, more recently, back in the sanctuary, where we tried to use the lessons of lock-down to provide an enhanced experience of our services to everyone attending, whether in person or from home.

"Have we met your requirements?"

"What has your experience of services been like?"

"What do you hope for in the coming year?"

Whether it is the ongoing risks of Covid, the restrictions imposed to ensure safe attendance, the cold winter weather (those of you who attended our safely ventilated sanctuary on Shabbatot in November and December will know that it was at times *very* cold!), or the hassle of travelling, we have seen an ongoing demand for remote participation. It is for you to tell us how successful you think we have been in meeting that requirement and what your experience of services has been like – and what you would like to see happen as we move into 2022.

Ambition, upgrades, intimacy and drama

When we started streaming services from our sanctuary, well before Covid reared its ugly little spikes, we had a single fixed camera at the back of the room giving a view of the bimah. The intimacy of the Zoomed-and-streamed services during lock-down made us ambitious to do more and our upgraded system enables us to bring the service leaders closer, while also allowing us to see the drama of the Torah service in a wider view. Ambitious plans to have a full congregation physically present for our High Holy Days had to be replaced with a much more limited attendance

in person, but we had magnificent music from the expanded choir. Covid saw Rabbi Mati zooming from the succah but we celebrated Simchat Torah with our *Kallat Torah and Chatan Bereshit*, at least, in the sanctuary. Our Shabbat services have returned, in the main, to the sanctuary, albeit with lots of precautions against spreading infection.

New audio equipment gave us confidence

As we gained confidence in the audio equipment, we were able to return to having the choir sing together with the physically-present congregation from the floor during Shabbat services.

Different leaders with a range of perspectives

When Rabbi Mati left us, our services continued unabated, led by our student rabbi David Yehuda Stern; guest rabbis from as far afield as Amsterdam, Moscow and, yes, even distant parts of South London, and lay members of our congregation. While we eagerly await the re-establishment of a rabbi at BRS, we have benefited from the different perspectives people bring to our *minhag*. A particular highlight was the service led by the teachers of the Gan and Cheder - this brought people to the *bimah* who might not have thought it their natural home – and what a lovely service they led us in! Even when Shabbat coincided with major national holidays, we continued our services without faltering – and had good attendance on-line.

Continued on facing page

VIEW FROM BEHIND THE SCREEN

Opportunity for celebration

The coming year has lots of opportunity for celebration. We look forward to up-coming b'nei mitzvah – the young people are the hope for our future and we want to celebrate their religious coming-of-age in style.

The new models of service delivery give opportunity for more people to be involved. It can however be challenging to ensure that all roles are filled. Participation in services can be at all sorts of levels and everyone has something special to offer. The Committee is keen to hear from all in the community about what they would like – and looks forward to working with you all to develop our services further in 2022!

To tell the Religion and Ritual Committee what you want, or comment on what has been provided so far, you can contact Stephanie via the office or at rrc@bromleyshul.org.uk



As Stephanie mentioned, the children are our future, and at the Gan every Sunday they learn about our traditions (above) and practise them for themselves (above right), while never forgetting the importance of food!

The BRS Klezmer Group, led by Joe Parks, was the star Chanukah Fair attraction, joining Judaica, cards, tombola, cupcakes, earrings, bagels and many others.



IN OUR COMMUNITY

Social and Personal

Births



Lucy Mathews-Hodges with her new-born daughter Mila-Annabel

A hearty mazal tov to **Dianne Mathews** on becoming a great grandmother to Mila Annabel, born in Singapore on 6 December to her granddaughter, Lucy Mathews-Hodges and Terry Hodges. Lucy is the daughter of the late Malcolm Mathews and Heather (now Weekes), who lives in New Zealand. So, warmest congratulations to all of the far-flung family!

A hearty mazal tov, also, to **Stephen and Monica Weil** on the arrival of their third grandchild, a son, Elliot, born to their son Daniel and his wife Victoria in Bath in July.



Elliot Weil, with his grandparents Monica and Stephen

Mazal tov to **Dot Gee**, proud grandmother to Sarah Valentina, a sister for Alan Henry, who was born to her son Gerald and his fiancée Dina on 16 December.

Death:

We are very sad to announce the death of our member, **Davina Powell**, who died suddenly on Shabbat 5 December, at the age of 87 years, and send sincere condolences to her daughter, Naomi Marston, her son-in-law Brian and her beloved grandsons Zach and Jacob.

Bereavements:

Sincere condolences to **Gloria Norman** and her brother Alastaire Hayman on the sad loss of their sister, Felicity Hayman, on 15 November, and to **Heidi Small** and her family on the loss of her Uncle Sandy, Sanford Sidney Paris (né Pinkus), who died on 26 December.

May the memories of Davina, Felicity and Sandy be for a blessing.

Bar Mitzvah:

A hearty mazal tov to **Samuel Hyams** and his family on the occasion of his bar mitzvah on 8 January (Shabbat Bo).

Welcome to New Members:

Mr. Harvey Valins of Mayfield (East Sussex), husband of Carol, and **Mr. John Citron** of Sevenoaks, husband of Flora and father of Rosemary, Eliza and Benjamin.

New Homes:

Damian Egan and Yossi Felberman, **Barbara Saalfeld-Edwards** and **Bernie Victor** have all moved house recently. We wish them every happiness in their new homes.

Get well soon

to all who are ill or undergoing treatment. Please contact Tracy (see next page) if you think the shul can help in any way.

Social Centre News

The Social Centre has been meeting regularly since its first Afternoon Tea on 28 July. Attendances have varied from six members and helpers to a record 22 on 8 December.

Maureen Pearlstone writes:

“There we were, undaunted by the prospect of Omicron or the warning about Plan B, gathering together for our annual Chanukah party at the Social Centre. Of course, we stayed masked and were all Covid-free. We were entertained by a CD of Israeli songs and music while we either just chatted or played our usual Rummikub.

“Barbara Kurtz and her helpers treated us to a great fish and latke lunch, which even included some sparkling grape juice. A light-hearted Chanukah quiz had been devised just to make sure we stayed alert after the lunch. Many thanks for the party to Barbara and her great team of helpers and we look forward to the next meeting of our Social Centre in January 2022.”

We hope to continue our twice-monthly meetings in 2022, Covid and weather permitting. The dates are: Wednesdays, 12 and 26 January; 9 and 23 February, 9 and 23 March and 13 and 27 April. Confirmation and details of meetings nearer the time.

Barbara Kurtz

Knit, Natter & Stitch Group

The Group has been meeting monthly at Barbara's home with a small (but select) number of us enjoying coffee and chat and bringing along our completed knitted items. We contributed to a record number of “shoebboxes” being sent off to Eastern Europe –

IN OUR COMMUNITY

2407 - and we like to imagine our hats and scarves being put to good use as winter arrives there. We also sent a good number of hats to a group of street pastors in Maidstone, who will use them to hand out to the homeless there. Having a hat to give makes it easier to approach those in need.

Sam Barnett has given us two more projects to work on as we move into 2022. More hats are being knitted, this time for the homeless in Croydon and baby blankets for new and needy mums. Sadly we can't see our efforts being welcomed once again at hospitals in the near future, but we live in hope! We are always happy to have new projects, so please contact me (a.bkurtz@talktalk.net) if you know of any particular charities who have need of knitted items. With my personal thanks to all our knitters and a Happy New Year to everyone.

Barbara Kurtz

Caring Community

Tracy Frankel writes:

As we reach 2022, it seems as if the world as we knew it is all but gone and, for what seems like such a long time, we have experienced so many challenges and hardships during this pandemic. Remember that you are not alone. Your Caring Community are here for you. No matter how big or small your need may be, we will do our best to assist you with the incredible network of support we have in the BRS community.

We are thinking of you and praying that you and your loved ones stay safe and well.

Please do get in touch - even if it's just for a chat. Contact me on 07944 424 347 or 6frankels@gmail.com

As if Tracy isn't busy enough looking after all of us, she is proud mum to, among others, Megan. Why so proud now, particularly? Read on...

A little princess... in the nicest possible way

We are so proud of Megan for growing her hair for the past two and a half years in order to be able to donate 14 inches of hair to The Little Princess Trust, which provides real-hair wigs, free of charge, to children who have lost their own hair through cancer treatment and other conditions.



To make her donation even more meaningful, Megan has created a Go Fund Me page and she would be so grateful for any donations that she can pass on to The Little Princess Trust. You can find out more and help increase Megan's contribution at:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/265km-help-me-raise-money-for-the-little-princess-trust?>

Final word on Chanukah



Even our single first-night candles made a bright display when added together.

A regular date, familiar faces, a bit of friendly rivalry... What're these BRS members on about?

"... Since March 2020 we have come together and, despite the distance and what's happening in the world, for that short period we are just together welcoming in Shabbat."

"Last year during lockdown, BRS began to light Shabbat candles on Zoom. I joined because my family and I were isolated and grieving. Seeing my cousin Bob Symonds and others online, to share this weekly ritual, just felt right. What I discovered was community, despite us not being together around a dinner table in person. Life as a work-from-home Banker, running a home and teaching Gan on the weekends gets stressful, and by Friday, I feel quite drained. So, when Alexa reminds me at 18:45, I wrap up work, get my challah, candles and Kiddush wine ready, and launch Zoom to join my BRS friends. I encourage everyone to join. The ritual lasts about 15 minutes, and it's a quick catch up that keeps us all connected. I promise that Michelle, Marilyn, Judi, Barbara and Adrian would welcome you just as they welcomed me a year ago. Come join us any Friday evening at 7pm at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/578441665>"

The above comments and those on the front page are from a few of the "regulars" at our **Friday night gatherings on Zoom to welcome Shabbat**. Although they last just a few minutes and "all" we do is light candles, say blessings over wine and bread and sing a song, it's surprising how much news we exchange and how uplifting it can be after either a stressful week at home or work or a long period feeling cut off from the community. It's such an easy way to keep in touch... and see the range of challot everyone has found or made that week. See you soon!

So, it's Tu B'Shvat. *What's that all about?*

The name of this festival is actually its date: "Tu" is a pronunciation of the Hebrew

letters for the number 15, and it falls in the Hebrew month of Shevat. **This year, that is on 16/17 January.**

**BROMLEY REFORM SYNAGOGUE 28 Highland Road, BR1 4AD
020-8460 5460 : www.bromleyshul.org.uk**

Office: 9.30 am to 12.30 pm Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
Email admin@bromleyshul.org.uk

Tradition

Traditionally, Tu Bishvat was not a Jewish festival. Rather, it marked an important date for Jewish farmers in ancient times. The Torah states, "When you enter the land [of Israel] and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten" (Leviticus 19:23). The fruit of the fourth year was to be offered to the priests in the Temple as a gift of gratitude for the bounty of the land, and the fifth-year fruit—and all subsequent fruit—was finally for the farmer. This law, however, raised the question of how farmers were to mark the "birthday" of a tree. The Rabbis therefore established the 15th of the month of Shevat as a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted.

Fruit trees were awarded special status in the Torah because of their importance in sustaining life and as a symbol of God's divine favour. Even during times of war, God warns the Israelites, "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees... Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed" (Deut 20:19-20).

Seeds of Life

In medieval times, kabbalists (Jewish mystics) gave Tu Bishvat greater spiritual significance. Seeing it as a vehicle for mystical ideas, they imbued Tu Bishvat with new religious significance as well as creating elaborate new symbolic rituals. According to Lurianic Kabbalah (which is a form of mysticism studied by the students of Isaac Luria), all physical forms—including human beings—hide within them a spark of the Divine Presence. This is similar to some kinds of fruits or nuts, which hide within them seeds of new life and potential growth. In Jewish mysticism, human actions can release these sparks and help increase God's presence in the world. On Tu Bishvat, the kabbalists would eat certain fruits associated with the land of Israel as a symbolic way of releasing these divine sparks.

Environmental Concerns

In modern times, Tu Bishvat has become a symbol of both **Zionist attachment to the land of Israel as well as an example of Jewish sensitivity to the environment.** Early Zionist settlers to Israel began planting new trees not only to restore the ecology of ancient Israel but as a symbol of renewed growth of the Jewish people returning to their ancestral homeland. While relatively few Jews continue to observe the kabbalistic Tu Bishvat seder, many American and European Jews observe Tu Bishvat by contributing money to the Jewish National Fund, an organization devoted to reforesting Israel.

What do WE do?

For environmentalists, Tu Bishvat is an ancient and authentic Jewish "Earth Day" that educates Jews about the Jewish tradition's advocacy of responsible stewardship of God's creation as manifested in ecological activism. Among them, contemporary versions of the Tu Bishvat seder, emphasizing environmentalist concerns, are gaining popularity. In recent decades, we in Bromley have planted trees in local parks and in our own grounds. We have also held Tu B'Shvat seders, when, like the kabbalists, we have eaten and drunk Israeli fruit and wine or grape juice and cheder students have discussed the properties of the fruit and the trees they come from. We hope to resume these traditions soon.