

MOONLIGHT

The UK's Quarterly e-Newsletter for Jewish Women

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Welcome to the first e-Newsletter of Moonlight, the Rosh Hodesh Group serving the women of Wembley, Kenton and Kingsbury United Synagogues, Wembley Spanish & Portuguese and Neve Shalom Sephardi Congregations.

Moonlight holds 3-4 Rosh Hodesh Celebrations a year. There are participatory evenings with Moonlighters from all five communities taking part in readings, music and dance activities, with guest speakers and themed events. In addition to the Rosh Hodesh Celebrations, each community runs its own women's programmes.

The Moonlight e-newsletter is your newsletter. It will feature articles by guest writers, reports on Moonlight Activities and forthcoming events. To do this we need help from you. We are looking for Moonlighters to review books on Jewish and Secular topics; budding writers or poets who would like to contribute to the e-newsletter; and, volunteers who would like to be involved in putting the newsletter together. If you would like to be involved please contact at annavdb30@hotmail.com or 8904 7407

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GREETINGS FROM LADY J

In response to your kind invitation to send my greetings for the first publication of Moonlight may I wish it and all its contributors, present and future, a hearty Mazel Tov.

I have just read all the contributions and I am very impressed. I find every article, every one I would like to emphasize, of a very high level both in presentation and originality in thought. The project and its unique presentation makes it

indeed very attractive reading. I have learned something new, a point I have never thought of and have learned much from it. It is a wonderful phenomenon of our times that there is so much learning all around us.

We are going through an extraordinary difficult period in world history and therefore Moonlight is a much needed and appreciated journal, which must be here to stay. It is my prayer that it may be for years and years to come a shining guide, which will help to renew

the role of our People to be a light unto the Nations. I am sure you will enjoy reading Moonlight as much as I have done. Enjoy, enjoy.
Shalom
Lady 'J'

ROSH HODESH 5764: UNDERSTANDING ROSH HODESH

By Doreen Samuels
The source of the ancient tradition for celebrating Rosh Hodesh as a holiday for women comes from the contrasting episodes, in

Shemot of donations of jewellery for the Golden Calf and the Mishkan (Tabernacles).

Rashi and subsequent commentators all agree that, whereas the women the women did not want to give their jewellery to make the Calf, believing both that Moshe would return, and that it was bad thing to do, proved their loyalty and devotion to G-d by rushing to give their jewellery to the Mishkan.

That they were rewarded is clear from the Talmud (Babylonian, Megillah 22b, and Jerusalem, Ta'anit 1:6).

Women of old were accustomed to refrain from work on Rosh Hodesh and to observe the day as a minor festival. We know from the Tanach that King Saul used to hold a feast on Rosh Hodesh. Later authorities added that one of the mitzvot of the day was to collect Tzedakah (Charity); others suggested that, following the theme of renewal, it was an appropriate day for a Shecheyanu to be said over a new fruit or article of clothing. It became the custom in some communities to light a candle on Rosh Hodesh as a reminder of the torch relays that proclaimed the New Moon throughout Israel.

Other commentators acknowledge the suitability of Rosh Hodesh as a women's festival due to the obvious link between

the monthly cycles of women and the moon.

The ancient custom of women particularly celebrating Rosh Hodesh for themselves fell into disuse at some indeterminate time, but we still celebrate communally and personally in our prayers – Hallel, Kriat Hatorah and Musaph, as well as adding Ya'aleh Veyavoh into the Amidah and Birkhat Hamazon.

Some families have a special meal, or buy treats for family members, particularly children.

Reclaiming the Festival

In the USA, the reclamation of Rosh Hodesh as a festival for women began some thirty years ago, in the early 1970s.

In England, I believe the first modern celebration was held by Jean Shindler some fifteen years ago. Dozens of women, from each end of the religious spectrum, and every point inbetween, crowded into her home to hear the legendary Alice Shalvi speak and to initiate our own rituals.

Local groups sprang up, usually from within a community – Orthodox, Masorti, Reform or Liberal, or a student group – but the original group seemed to be the only one which managed to encompass women from all these diverse religious groupings. Sadly, it faded away several years ago, but it has left its legacy in

many groups around the country, in the Jewish Women's Network and in Women's Tefillah Groups – which is another story!

Customs and celebrations include:

- Saying Shehecheyanu over new fruit or clothes
- Lighting a candle – some groups light a candle floating in water, the better to represent the moon floating in the sky or reflected in earthly water
- Giving Tzedakah
- Learning Torah
- Singing part of Hallel
- Other learning e.g. Readings of poetry or articles about Jews in other lands; learning about a particular month and its festivals or customs.
- Eating a special meal (after all we are Jewish!), or special moon shaped foods, such as fruit, biscuits and chocolates in round shapes or crescents
- Shacharit services
- Bat Mitzvah celebrations

Based on 'This Month Is For You' by Arlene Argus in @The Jewish Woman – New Perspectives' edited by Elizabeth Koltun, Schocken Books, 1976

**ROSH HODESH
ADAR 5764:**

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Introduction

How many of us remember our Grandmothers through the warmth and the aroma of our kitchens. How quickly the scent of Jewish cooking can transport us back to those days of our childhood spent with our Bubbas and Savtas as they baked Challot for Shabbat or their honey cakes for a sweet year. They taught us our yiddishkeit with a mixing spoon.

Our mothers valued education. Their way to teach us was not just by example but by educating us. They strove to empower us, to break the glass ceiling. They wanted us not just to be Jewish women but to be Jewish women who could follow and achieve their dreams.

Our daughters have taught us not to be afraid of our faith and that our true liberation is to be found through celebrating our Judaism. They have found the way, through the love of learning, to reclaim our heritage.

Reminiscences

The following are some of the reminiscences of those who attended the meeting on Rosh Hodesh Adar.

Helen Reisman – February 2004

I grew up in a 'three generation' family. My maternal grandmother

held court in the front room of our small terraced house in Croydon, entertaining her friends with cups of tea and Bonds biscuits, with Magen Davids on them. Her voice echoes through my life to this day.

My mother was the youngest of her 10 children, and on almost no money, managed to feed and clothe her family, and have fruit and cake on the table for the huge number of visitors who invaded our home 'to see Booba' at any time and on any Bank Holiday, they fancied. She gave away her supper on numerous occasions, and made Seder in one room whilst serving tea to those who were spending their YomTov with family, but wanted to wish us all a good one.

My mother didn't have a mother-in-law. My father's parents perished in the Holocaust. When I married I found that my new mother-in-law, and my mother had been at school together, at Jews' Free School, and to this day they are like school girls when they get together, remembering long past friends.

I learnt to be a mother-in-law from a good friend just a little ahead of mein the stakes 'wear beige and keep shtum' she said, and you'll be fine. Both my daughters in law live in Israel, and we see each other only now and again. But learning from my relationship with my mother, hers with her

mother, and seeing from others how easily things can go wrong, I try and handle the situation with care.

My mother comes to me on Friday mornings, and acts as the 'very elderly au pair girl' She prepares the vegetables, chops the eggs and onions, and (her worst job!) peels apples for apple puree, which she loves! When I'm with my girls, I do what they tell me to do....'what's next?' I say just like my Mother says to me on Friday mornings. We seem to have found a way to help each other, without getting under each others' feet. Ziggy says it's easy at a distance, but family is a minefield, and feeling gently in the sand to defuse the bombs before they go off seems to be the sensible way.

Long may it continue.

Margaret Sinclair – February 2004

I have two daughters. Debra is in Israel and is married to an Israeli and has three little girls I've always had a reasonably good relationship with her but that ironically enough I thought that it had got better since she had got married and gone to live in Israel. I thought that when she was living here I tended to fuss over her too much and probably took away some of her initiative. When she went to Israel and particularly when she got married and had children she really had to stand on her own two

feet and become independent. This then gave her much more confidence and also changed our relationship I would say definitely for the better.

Now the relationship is on a much more equal footing - I give her advice (not that she always takes!) but I also ask her for advice and I often take it.

We talk on the 'phone for hours about little things (thank G-d for cheap 'phone calls!)- we almost never discuss the situation as she feels that she hears enough about that in Israel of that there and she wants to get away from it when she speaks to us. Of course we try and go as often as possible to Israel and of course we babysit and try and help as much as possible to give Debra and our son-in-law Dudu a break.

Emma lives in Woodside Park – at one point she said why don't you move to Woodside Park (I think she was thinking about babysitting!) and then there was a pause and she said but don't move too near! We often also natter on the 'phone for ages. I have a very similar relationship to her as the one I have with Debra -she will give me advice and visa versa. Although she is a Doctor she always says that she wants to be a daughter not a Doctor when she's with her family.

Both my daughters find I'm rather embarrassing to go shopping with – I always

like asking sales people where things are and they both hiss at me 'whatever you do don't ask'!

When I told my mother that I was giving a talk and asked her if she'd like to come her face lit up and she was really excited and said without hesitation that she'd love to come. I was really touched because she lives in Holland Park and it's a long way to come especially as she isn't very mobile. I would say that this epitomizes the relationship I have with my Mother – whatever I do I always find that she is totally supportive.

When Walter and I first went out we had a lovely evening apart from the fact that Walter lost the car and we had to go to the local police station and get them to find it. I went home and told my Mother I wasn't going to go out with Walter again because of this – 'give him one more chance she pleaded!'

Now three children, two son-in-laws, one daughter-in-law and seven and three quarter grandchildren nearly 41 years later I'm really glad I took your advice – thanks Mum!

Sonia Sassoon - February 2004

I have had two mothers: My birth mother, Rita and my adoptive mother, Lola (if you don't count my foster mother, May).

I was born in 1942 to a 17 year old Jewish girl. After fostering me to an English family in Kent for over a

year, she met a Canadian non-Jew and wanted to marry him, but couldn't take me with her to Canada. She needed her father's consent to the marriage, as she was under-age, and the bargain was that in return for his consent she would agree to give me to a Jewish couple for adoption. Thus my future was decided. At the age of 20 months I went to a middle-aged GP and his wife, who had suffered the agonies of infertility for many years. They devoted their lives to giving me a loving home and a traditional Jewish upbringing, for which I shall ever be thankful.

Over the years I have thought often about my roots, and also about the role of my mothers in shaping both my secular and religious life. Indeed, on originally considering this "Celebration" in March of this year to share with the Rosh Hodesh group, I realised that it was Lola's Yahrzeit on the day of our meeting. It seemed so apt to be able to pay tribute to her.

After I had been married some years and completed my own family I felt able to trace Rita, living in Canada, now with six other children, and was able to meet up with her and some of the family. Rita died a year ago, and I was left with a dilemma as to how to mourn her. When Lola died in 1989, there was no question – I would sit shiva, grieve in traditional fashion, and

indeed from the heart, and pay my respects to the woman who had given her life to me (in spite of a hurtful and thoughtless comment of a "friend" who told me that I did not need to do this, as I was adopted!!) But what ritual would I follow to commemorate the woman who had given me life and my right to be a Jew? I consulted Dayan Toledano who explained that I could bless her Jewish soul by lighting a *yahrzeit* candle for the week of mourning, and say the mourner's *Kaddish* on *Shabbat*, without sitting *shiva*.

I thank Rita that I was born a Jewish daughter, and Lola that she continued this process and that I grew up to be a Jewish mother.

Sheila Rivka Myers - May 2004

I was privileged to be named after my maternal great-grandmother, Rifka who came to England from Russia by boat with a pair of silver candlesticks and not much else. She met her husband on the boat and quickly became entrenched in a new life. A natural business woman who, although worked incredibly long hours, amassed a wealth and lived very well, enabling her to give my grandmother a very good life considering the hard times they lived through. I have a sadness never to have met her as all my life my mother's family had told how like her I am, in her ways and character.

I can proudly say that all the women in my family have always got on well and there is a special warmth in my paternal family which I think comes from my Booba's struggle when she came to England from Poland at the age of 17. My reminiscences of her are her immense heart and *heimsche* kindness, watching her make *lockshen* (yes, make it by hand!) and the huge pickle and herring barrels in her scullery. She cooked huge quantities of food for her 3 children which scared me as I was not used to seeing such vast amounts of food. There was a corner shop at the end of the road where my father's family lived in Tottenham - a sight not seen these days, where my father or aunt used to take me to buy sweets! I cherish these memories with fondness as they were an integral part of my growing up.

My mother's mother used to make me lunch every Friday and after leaving school early for *Shabbat* I would run down the road to her house, in *Willesden* and be greeted by the powerful smell of roast chicken, *tzimmes* and potatoes. This was followed by a treat of plain chocolate which I was told I must not tell my mother about! My grandfather retired very young and was always on hand to give me attention and he taught me loads of things I doubt that I would have otherwise learnt. He used to ring me at 6.00 p.m.

every evening to give me a continuing bedtime story, each of which lasted a week, and all were ad-libbed.

My best reminiscences are of my late mother as we were close friends and laughed a lot. She would spend ages styling my naturally curly hair, covering it in ribbons. As I grew older, every Sunday we had a fry-up for lunch and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves not bothering at all about calories. I fondly remember the struggle she had to teach me how to play 'patience' and board games and how not to wake my cat when it was asleep.

I happily look back on my childhood with these and many, many more delicious memories which I can conjure up when I want to go 'back in time' and reflect.

Rita Koten – May 2004

My grandmother lived with my mother's sister in *Hillingdon* so we didn't see much of her.

However, I do recall her visiting us at about the time I was at *College* doing a *Secretarial* course. I was learning shorthand and touch typing when she asked me to write a letter for her. She and her two sisters had fallen out with their three brothers some years earlier. Now my grandmother wanted to make up with them before it was too late. She asked me to write a letter for her to her brothers. She dictated her letter, which I took down in shorthand

and typed on my sister's portable typewriter. As my grandmother had never had the opportunity to learn to write in English – she had come to England from Poland when she was 13 and went straight to work – she signed her letters with an X. She died a couple of years later so I was glad that I was able to help her make up with her brothers before.

It is 35 years since my dear Mother died. As time goes by I find myself quoting her many sayings, so, in a way, she is still with me. And when I look in the mirror, I see her face. I have always strived to do the things for my children which she did for us.

She was brought up in the east end of London and lived a city-style life. However, during the War we all moved out to Hillingdon, which at that time was more rural and she made friends with a couple who taught her the basics of country living and she became a country woman, keeping chickens, and growing vegetables. During the rationing years, we always had fresh eggs and fresh vegetables. She also grew beautiful flowers and created an archway of roses in the front garden. She definitely had green fingers.

She lost her father when she was 13 and left school to work as a seamstress. Her hand sewing work was so good that she became the Sample Hand, making up blouses to be taken

around to shops to get orders. However, our mother was determined that her daughters did not have to work in a 'sweat shop' as she had and made sure we all trained to work in offices. She said that the girls in the office did not have to work so hard and were always brought boxes of chocolates by the reps!

My mother loved music. She gave us all the opportunity to learn to play the piano – something she never had. She bought us an old piano to practise on but I was the only one who kept it up. Eventually she and my father bought me a better piano which I still have. When people came to visit she always asked me to play.

*Anna van den Bergh,
February 2004*

My Grandmother was ahead of her time, she ran a successful business, by her late 70s she was running two. She was also a political activist. One of the original members of CND she was campaigning for nuclear disarmament before I was born. She finally retired aged 80 to go to Greenham Common and protest against the American Cruise missiles based there.

My mother is politically aware probably more so than my grandmother ever was, but she was also the mother of four ailing children, each with a more interesting complaint than the last. Her energies were spent keeping each

of us alive and supporting my father. As an only child her real desire was for a family, perhaps one not quite as well known in medical circles, but her overriding ambition was to be a wife and mother. That to my Grandmother was a sell out of the emancipation dream. Her hopes fell on me.

I started quite well, volunteering at community projects in deprived areas, setting up a Women's Project in a Development town. Then I smashed the dream, I found religion. I joined what she thought of as the establishment, I became a Rebbetzin though more of a Rebel if truth be told.

My daughter was brought up with a radical great granny, an intellectual, loving grandmother and a "Rebelzen" mother. She has followed in the matriarchal tradition and found her own way. She has found her way to balance her faith and her dreams. She embraces life and her Judaism with joy, finding the good in all she does and all those she meets. She overcomes the obstacles life faces before her and gains strength from her adversity.

Finally in my 50s I have found a path to follow. I want to be like my daughter when I finally grow up!

MOONLIGHT **Diary of Activities**

20 June: Encounter –
Kenton Synagogue.
Tickets £15 in advance
only; closing date 11 June.
For more information: Call
0800 393 812;
encounter@jencounter.fereserve.co.uk
or visit
www.encounterconference.org

Keynote Speaker: Dr Lisa Aiken
Lisa Aiken is not only an experienced psychologist but also a noted speaker and author with an international reputation. She is the author of such titles as *To Be A Jewish Woman*; *The Hidden Beauty of the Shema* and *Guide for the Romantically Perplexed*. Her books have received huge popular acclaim and are distributed world wide. Having recently made aliyah her keynote address will explore “A Jewish response to terrorism whilst later in the day she will be speaking about - “Soul Journeys” – What happens to the soul before, during and after this lifetime.

- *Dr Aiken will be the guest writer in “Moonlight’s” Yamim Noraim edition*

20-21 June LSJS Rimom Conference
£20 per day (£15 before 14th June); Concessions available; Lunch included. Limited places so please book early.
The London School of Jewish Studies
Schaller House, 44a Albert Road, London NW4 2SJ
Tel: 020 8203 6427 Fax:

020 8203 6420 Email:
info@lsjs.ac.uk

Keynote speakers: Dr Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg and Simi Peters

Other speakers include graduates of the Susi Bradfield programme: Dina Brawer, Jo Bruce, Felicia Epstein, Flora Frank, Silke Goldberg, Debbie Last, Sandy Littman, Shula Medalie, Debbie Meyer, Mimi Meyer, Karine Morris, Roisy Nevies, Na’amah Roselaar, Sarah Robinson, Gila Sacks, Pam Shatzkes, Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz, Suzanne Weiniger

21 June Phoebe Welcome Leon Wizo Supper Speaker from Estee Lauder, who tells about her many years working for the company and at the same time takes off and re-applies her makeup without the use of a mirror. An entertaining evening out for ladies, with a lovely buffet supper. Venue: Harrow and Wembley Progressive Synagogue Hall. Tickets £12 from Helen Reisman 8904 4138

27 June – Jewish Women’s Showcase
Those Moonlighters who saw Marion Hermes perform at the Rosh Hodesh Adar Celebration were so delighted by her performance that we have made a block booking. A woman’s evening of laughter and song for women by women. The Showcase will take place

on 27 June, 7.30pm at the Logan Hall in Euston. Please contact Anna van den Bergh at annavdb30@hotmail.com or 8904 7407 for further information.

Shabbat Shiur and Shmooze Summer Programme
Join a group of women to learn and laugh together in true Jewish fashion on those long lazy Shabbat afternoons. Programme will be held in private homes in the area - please contact Sheila Myers at rifka32@hotmail.com for further information.