

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April 2013

Iyar 5773

SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯️ Candle Lighting
🕯️ Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2

12 & 13 April – 3 Iyar

🔊 Tazria & Metzora

🕯️ 5:37 – 🕯️ 6:25

19 & 20 April – 10 Iyar

🔊 Acharei & Kedoshim

🕯️ 5:30 – 🕯️ 6:19

26 & 27 April – 17 Iyar

🔊 Emor

🕯️ 5:24 – 🕯️ 6:13

3 & 4 May – 24 Iyar

🔊 Behar

🕯️ 5:19 – 🕯️ 6:08

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear fellow Oxfordians

My family and I were privileged to spend Pesach at Hunter's Rest. Besides for not having to worry about their Shul and services there, it was a real treat to be able to walk down to the dining room for meals (kosher and pesachdic nogal).

My hat goes off to the organisers and caterers... it was fantastic. I hope you all had a good and meaningful Pesach too.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rivky for taking on and hosting the communal seder. We unfortunately didn't have

enough people to have it catered and held in the Simon Kuper. PG next year we'll do it again.

We are now well into the sefira period and only five weeks away from Shavuot. We will once again be having our annual Shavuot dinner, this time with a pleasant surprise PG, so keep your eye out for more info and don't make any other arrangements for first night Shavuot (Tuesday 14 May).

Also upcoming shortly after Shavuot is another Choir Festival. Last year was so successful and enjoyable that we've decided to do it again. More info on that in the coming weeks as well.

It's farewell to Charlie, who has become an integral part of Oxford. He is taking a sabbatical to pursue a new avenue in his life, one which promises to be both fascinating and exciting. In wishing him everything of the best, to say thank you and to bid him farewell, please join us on 20th April for a brocha in his honour.

Wishing you everything of the best in Iyar.

Brian Levy

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Sometimes it's all about timing... Many would call it coincidence. We call it Divine Providence.

In the course of our Pesach cleaning I discovered that some items of value had gone missing from our home. Let's just say that the cost of the loss was not insignificant and that potentially, this could have spoilt our Yom Tov.

But at that precise instant, our doorbell rang. It was a driver, delivering a Yom Tov present. Eager for a little cheer, I immediately ripped open the gift wrap, to discover what was undoubtedly the most perfect item to receive at that moment: a magnificent, personalized plaque engraved with the famous "Blessing for a Home" ("Birkat Habayit").

Alongside the traditional Hamsa (the raised hand that wards off the evil eye and brings blessing) the following words appeared: Let no sadness come through this gate; Let no trouble come to this dwelling; Let no fear come through this door; Let no conflict be in this place; Let this home be filled with the blessing and peace.

In a second, everything was placed in perspective. I looked into the dining room, with the table already beautifully set for the Seder. Down the passage, I could hear the children's banter: those whom we are blessed to still have living with us here at home and the others who (also blessedly) had come home for Pesach—laughing and talking away happily.

Instead of calculating the projected value of the financial loss and speculating on the odds of recovering any of it from our insurers, with no evidence of forced entry, I looked at my wife, as we read those beautiful words to each other and smiled. And then we both, mentally, started to count our blessings. Boruch Hashem!

The late chossid Reb Mendel Futerfas spent many years in the Russian gulags. He used to always say, "If you have lost money, you have actually lost nothing; if you have lost your health, you have lost something; if you have lost your faith, you have lost everything."

Thank G-d, we had lost nothing at all. We had an amazing Yom Tov, totally unmarred by any of this.

Thank you Hashem for all Your blessings. May You continue to shine upon us and to protect us and our home, as well as all of you, yours and your homes.

[And should any of you have good advice on dealing with loss adjusters, let me know please...]

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

We were 'lucky' this week... we did not have to say good bye to any babies returning home after Pesach.

Well, depending on how your family is spread out you are either very confused or nodding in agreement. For families where everyone is still home or all living nearby, Pesach is most often thought of as a time of hard labour. For those of us with family spread all over the universe, Pesach is often a time of the 'ingathering of the exiles.'

We were blessed this year to have three of our sons visiting us for yom tov and we have recharged a little.

This week the planes returning to Israel and America have been packed to capacity, as everyone here says goodbye and the visiting family members return to their yeshivas, jobs and lives overseas. Our house feels empty; the beds remain made; we need half the groceries and we miss them.

We did not have to bid farewell to the married children or to any of the grandchildren. They did not come this year—and boy did we miss them.

But we won't dread the hard work or the stress of the coming yom tovs—we will look forward, hoping for more special guests!

Have a good month.

Rivky

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00
<i>10/05 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00</i>	

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	5:45
<i>from 14/04</i>	5:30
<i>from 05/05</i>	5:15
Friday	5:30
<i>from 10/05</i>	5:20
Shabbat	5:15
<i>from 04/05</i>	5:00

DVAR TORAH

THE COMMANDMENT OF COUNTING

Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller
(aish.com)

The commandment to count the omer is one of the more curious prescriptions of the Torah. We are told to count the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot even though, of course, the number of days never changes. Therefore, it is very much an effort in which the process is in and of itself a value.

The word for "number" in Hebrew is mispar. Its root is closely related to the word for "story" — sipur. What is the relationship between the two?

A collection of events becomes a story — as opposed to a random anthology of events — when there is a beginning in which the characters are introduced, a middle in which conflict takes place, and an end in which there is resolution.

Our lives flow by so quickly that we frequently lose awareness of the awesome power of our own stories. The metamorphosis of today into tomorrow is subtle enough for us to lose consciousness of beginnings and ends.

The commandment to count teaches us mindfulness. It re-opens our hearts to hearing stories. And what story is being told?

There are two stories intertwined.

One is the story of a transformation of a people who at Passover become physically free into a people who at Shavuot become spiritually free as well.

The day we left Egypt was one in which we rejected the Egyptian definition of what our lives can hold. We were free to be who we wanted to be. But we didn't yet know our own story. It is only when we received the Torah that we found the channels that could give our souls expression.

It was then that we learned the mechanics of meeting challenges that are genuine and enduring. Our story began to evolve.

Barley and Wheat

The rituals that define this time of year reflect this change. The sacrifice that was offered on Passover was made out of barley. In ancient times, barley was used as fodder for animals. The sacrifice that was offered on Shavuot was made of wheat. Wheat is often used as an allegory for the human capacity for using our intelligence. While an animal can eat a fruit or a leaf, it requires human intelligence and creativity to make bread.

What this symbolizes is the transformation of the Jewish people from one who are defined primarily through the strivings and yearnings for the sort of freedom that we share in common with the animals to becoming truly evolved humans. It is indeed quite a story.

What makes us truly human? The mystic literature discusses the bonds that we share with God as being the humanizing factor. These bonds are called sefirot, a name which, as is obvious, also has the same root as number and story.

This common root conveys the fact that our beginning, middle and end are ultimately measured and finite, but nonetheless touched by the infinite spark of Godliness within us.

The earliest mention of this mystic concept is presented in the Kabbalistic work called Sefer Yetzirah, literally the "Book of Formation," which is attributed to Abraham. There are over a thousand commentaries on Sefer Yetzirah, yet it remains nonetheless one of the most esoteric of the Jewish works on God's nature.

In the 1500s, Rabbi Yitzhak Luria — a mystic from Egypt who settled in Safed and who is known widely by the acrostic of his name as the Ari (literally "the Lion") — elucidated the most enigmatic sections of Kabbalah

to a select group of disciples with unsurpassed clarity. Subsequently, the mystic teachings of Judaism became far more accessible than they had ever been in the past.

One of the most central of his teachings is the significance of gaining awareness of the bond that we share with God, the sefirot of our spiritual souls.

The Seven Aspects of Godliness

Let us now examine the bonds with God that make us human — the seven expressive aspects of Godliness.

(1) Chesed, "kindness"

While the drives of the body are towards oneself, those of the soul are directed outwards towards others. We love those to whom we give because they validate our spirituality. We see our highest self-reflected in them.

(2) Gevurah, "strength" or "empowerment"

Specifically this refers to empowering one's soul to overcome the obstacles that stand before it. We have the capacity to live for the sake of our goals, and to make sacrifices to attain it. The ultimate goal of every Jew is to be a source of light. In order to do this, we must submit our egos and desires to the scrutiny of God's Torah.

(3) Tiferet, "beauty"

Beauty is created through harmony and contrast — that is when we make a "match." When we become people of truth, our words, thoughts, and deeds match. Only humans can lie. The reason for this is that only humans have the possibility of creating themselves in a certain sense. To use the words of the Maharal of Prague, "we give birth to ourselves." When we lie we succumb to our animalistic desire for comfort and ease. When we tell the truth, we reconnect to God's transcendental reality and chose to be authentic as humans.

(4) Netzach, "infinity"

Anyone who has ever resisted the desire for immediate

gratification has touched this quality. It is the source of hope and aspiration towards growth.

(5) Hod, "gratitude"

In Hebrew, hod is a noun which literally means "splendour," but as a verb means both "to confess" and "to thank." As humans we can be moved by splendour whether its source is spiritual or physical. Our ability to be truly sensitive in this sense is what inspires us to express gratitude. We often resist allowing ourselves to be grateful because of the fragility of our self-esteem. When we begin the day with the words Modeh Ani, "I thank you," we express gratitude towards God, and simultaneously see our selves as creations that are worthy of life.

(6) Yesod, "foundation"

This refers to our ability to bond. It is called "foundation" because it is the very foundation of all interactions. What we ultimately seek in relationships is goodness. Inevitably if we had to choose one trait in a perspective spouse, it would be a spiritual one. For some of us it would be compassion, for others honesty or sensitivity. If we see our own goodness mirrored back to us, we love the person even more. What this tells us is that what we are seeking is in the final analysis, spiritual bonding. We are searching for the face of God.

(7) The final attribute is malchut, "kingship"

It refers to our ability to bring God's kingdom into being in the greater world and into our own hearts. The way we do this is through the recognition that our missions are of infinite significance; at the same time we retain the humility that comes as a result of knowing what a tiny piece of infinity we can individually call our own.

The seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot have the spiritually potency to give us the ability to let our stories unfold. We can make every day count, and emerge more human than we ever could have imagined.

MAZAL TOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Maon & Hayley Jacobson on the birth of a son
- Shaun & Charlene Wingrin and Ralph & Lynette Zulman on the birth of a son and grandson
- Friedel & Marina Bakman and Vladimir & Fruma Bakman on the birth of a daughter and granddaughter
- Harold and Melanie Mograbi on the birth of a grandson

BAR/BATMITZVAH

- Ollie and Dahlia Gordon on the barmitzvah of their grandson in Australia on 6th April

MARRIAGES

- Ronnie and Susan Woolf on the marriage of their son, Shaun, to Gina Rick on 7th April
- Doris Samson on the marriage of her granddaughter, Leah Samson to Chaim Moskowsky on 9th April
- Connie Meyerowitz on the marriage of her granddaughter, Joy Meyerowitz to Rafi Etzion on 27th April

BIRTHDAYS

- Sarah Copelowitz on her 98th birthday on 29th March
- Ollie Gordon on his 80th birthday on 4th April
- Frank Wilks on his 65th birthday on 5th April
- Paula Cohen on her 75th birthday on 7th April
- Judith Feinberg on her 75th birthday on 9th April
- Solly Smith on his 91st birthday on 12th April

ANNIVERSARIES

- Anthony & Danielle Fobel on their 15th anniversary on 26th April

REFUAH SHLEMAH

We wish a Speedy Recovery to:



- Maureen Meyerson

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Richard and David Goldstone on the death of their mother, Kitty
- Heather Bank on the death of her father, Arnold Sachs

May Hashem comfort them and their families among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and grant them long life.

**SHAVUOT**

Begins Tuesday evening 14 May

Bookings for Communal Dinner opening soon...

ANNUAL CHOIR FESTIVAL

Saturday night, 25 May

Tickets going on sale soon...

WATCH THIS SPACE