

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April 2021  
Iyar 5781

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### SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting  
🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)  
For service times see page 3

16 & 17 April – 5 Iyar

🕒 Tazria & Metzora  
🕒 5:32 – 🕒 6:21

23 & 24 April – 12 Iyar

🕒 Acharei Mot & Kedoshim  
🕒 5:26 – 🕒 6:15

30 April/1 May – 19 Iyar  
Emor

🕒 5:20 – 🕒 6:10

7 & 8 May – 26 Iyar

🕒 Behar & Bechukotai  
🕒 5:16 – 🕒 6:06

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

These days we are counting. Almost obsessively. The number of new COVID-19 cases registered in the past 24 hours. The percentage of positive results relative to the total number of tests. The proportion of cases vs total population. South Africa's ranking in comparison with other countries of the world. The "R" factor. And the newest, all-too-low figure, the total number vaccinated in our country so far.

These days we are counting. Every night, in this period of the Omer linking Pesach and Shavuot, we enumerate the

number of days elapsed as we progress from one commemoration to another. This cements the bond between the two most significant events that gave birth to our nation, the Exodus from Egypt and the Gift of Torah at Sinai.

What does counting accomplish? If it is just a passive occupation, clearly nothing at all. The commandment regarding the reckoning of the Omer states, "וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם"—"You shall count for yourselves" (Leviticus 23,15). The word "לָכֶם" (for yourselves) implies that it has to be an exercise in taking ownership of these days, making them truly count by utilising each to the utmost. The seven weeks linking the two Festivals are an opportunity for character refinement, building up to re-experiencing the Covenant at Sinai as an improved individual.

The Hebrew word for "you shall count"—"וּסְפַרְתֶּם"—is etymologically related to the word "סֶפִיר" meaning light and bright (as in a sapphire gemstone). We are told not merely to count days as they pass us

by but rather to polish and shine up those days, making each special. Then it becomes a worthwhile and productive exercise.

[וּסְפַרְתֶּם is also related to the word סִפּוּר (story)—see Dvar Torah section.]

We have each got our own source of what we believe to be the most credible and reliable source of Corona numbers. But simply poring over the stats is of little benefit to ourselves, or anyone else. We can, however, actively make these bleak days brighter. Firstly by adhering to the health guidelines and experts' advice, even at great personal sacrifice, for everyone's good. Then by working on character refinement: tolerance towards others, reaching out to those around us who are in need of practical help or just emotional support.

Please G-d, very soon, the vaccination numbers in South Africa begin to rise exponentially and we know of only good health. But until then and also beyond then, let us all make time truly count.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

## FROM THE REBBETZIN

The trouble with housework is that it is never done. Just as you have finished putting away the last piece of laundry, someone inevitably drops something else into the laundry bin. When the last of the dishes is washed and packed away, someone has a drink and leaves their glass in the sink. The whole house is swept and mopped clean and the wind blows the garden inside. So the work is never done. And thank G-d for that. Because as long as there is mess happening there is life happening.

When one of my children was in nursery school, as a Mothers' Day gift, he brought home a framed picture of his hand prints. It came together with a note that suggested I keep this picture for a day when I miss having his hand prints all over my house. This Pesach was that day.

As far as physical labour, this was probably the easiest Pesach I have had since I first started making Pesach. No mess, no massive cooking sprees. We mostly used disposable dishes so there was minimal washing up. With the new acquisition of a steam mop, even cleaning the floors was easier.

But how I needed the picture of Micholi's hand prints! I missed the noise and the mess. I missed the family and friends. I longed for a full table, groaning with food. I really am praying for a return to a life filled with human company, to a house filled with mess and noise. May it be soon. Have a good month

*Rivky*

## DVAR TORAH

### ***The Commandment of Counting***

*By 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 G-d 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 G-dliness 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 G-d'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 G-d, the sefirot of our spiritual souls.

### The Seven Aspects of G-dliness

Let us now examine the bonds with G-d that make us human — the seven expressive aspects of G-dliness.

#### (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 G-d'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 G-d'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 "splendor," but as a verb means both "to confess" and "to thank." As humans we can be moved by splendor 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 G-d, 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 G-d.

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

It refers to our ability to bring G-d'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.

### SERVICE TIMES

*All services are by prior booking. Please call the office.*

#### SHACHARIT (A.M.)

<b>Sunday &amp; Public Holidays</b>	8:00
<b>Monday to Friday</b>	7:15
<i>12 &amp; 13/4: 7:00 (Rosh Chodesh)</i>	
<b>Shabbat &amp; Festivals</b>	9:30

#### MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

<b>Sunday to Thursday</b>	5:45
<b>from 19/04</b>	5:30
<b>Friday</b>	5:45
<b>from 23/04</b>	5:30
<b>Shabbat</b>	5:30
<b>from 24/04</b>	5:15

**MAZALTOV**

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BIRTHS**

- Esme Utian on the birth of a great granddaughter in Cape Town.
- Shmuly & Chanala Hurwitz and Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a son and grandson in New York.

- Sonia Genn on the birth of a great granddaughter.

- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great granddaughter in Jerusalem, a great granddaughter in New York and a great grandson in New York.

- Gary & Melanie Epstein on the birth of a grandson.

**BAT MITZVAH**

- Naomi Schmidt on the Bat Mitzvah of her great granddaughter, Cameron Diamond.

**ENGAGEMENT**

- Naomi Schmidt on the engagement of her granddaughter, Lisa Schmidt to David Norwich.

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Auriel Wittert on her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 19<sup>th</sup> April.
- Robert Soicher on his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 28<sup>th</sup> April.

**REFUAH SHLEIMA**

We wish a Speedy recovery to:



- Willie Wittert
- Doreen Kapeluschnik



## PURCHASE A LEAF ON OUR “SIMCHA TREE”

to mark a happy event in your family  
Cost of each leaf is R 540.00 - For details please contact the office



## OXFORD'S HALL OF REMEMBRANCE

*The plaques in the Hall of Remembrance record the names and the date of death of departed loved ones. The lights on the plaques are lit on the Yartzeit and also whenever Yizkor is recited. A special Hazkara memorial prayer is also recited during Yizkor.*

*Cost of a plaque is R720 for the first plaque ordered, R540 for subsequent plaques*