

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

20 North Avenue, Riviera

✉ P.O. Box 87406, Houghton, 2041

☎ 011-646-6020 📠 086-580-2624

🌐 www.oxfordshul.com 📧 info@oxfordshul.com

📘 facebook.com/oxfordshul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

August 2021

Elul 5781

SHABBAT TIMES

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

13 & 14 August – 6 Elul

🕯 Shoftim

🕯 5:29 – 🕯 6:20

20 & 21 August – 13 Elul

🕯 Ki Teitzei

🕯 5:32 – 🕯 6:23

27 & 28 August – 20 Elul

🕯 Ki Tavo

🕯 5:35 – 🕯 6:25

3 & 4 September – 27 Elul

🕯 Nitzavim

🕯 5:38 – 🕯 6:28

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Unremarkable, the report said. I was flabbergasted. Which father wants to hear that the word unremarkable features on their child's report? Even if said child is already in his late twenties... And even if the report is a lumbar spine radiology report... I'm fully aware of the limitations of an X-ray when it comes to diagnosing the cause of chronic back pain. But unremarkable?! My child? What a Chutzpah!

Elul has arrived and with it comes the time for self-examination. So we look back at the year that has passed and assess what went right and what went wrong, what should continue and what must change, where there were weaknesses and where there are opportunities.

If we have to comment on 5781 as a year, unremarkable is definitely not the way we would describe it. Eventful, tumultuous, tragic, unsettling, scary, inexplicable. All the above fit. So definitely remarkable.

But let us stop for a moment. The reckoning of Elul is not for us to give Hashem a report card. From His point of view, indeed, a remarkable year. But Elul is about introspection, looking at what we have done in the course of the year past. Scoring ourselves for our behaviour and our actions and writing up our own tally.

This Elul, we need to stop and ask ourselves an honest question: was our year remarkable or unremarkable? The many Acts of G-d that filled the year were totally beyond our control. But our reaction and our actions were our prerogative.

Did we sit out lockdown at home (some of us ruefully, the less outgoing among us cheerfully), resigned that there was simply nothing we could do and were thus spared from all social and religious responsibility? Was the past year a golden opportunity for Netflix binge watching or for catching up on the tall pile of book club volumes? Was it bliss to go to sleep without setting an alarm for the following morning and to spend the day in

nightclothes?
unremarkable!

Truly

Or did we grab whatever opportunity there was to make the best of a very difficult year? Did we reach out to others to see how they were faring? Show true care and concern for the lonely? Grab every opportunity to volunteer and give of our time? Did we grow emotionally and spiritually? Did our relationships become deeper and more meaningful? Did 5781 bring out the best in us? Truly remarkable.

This Elul is the time to ask ourselves these deeply probing, difficult questions. We need to be absolutely honest with ourselves as we draw up the report card which will be presented to our Father in Heaven at the end of the month, as we face Him in Judgement on Rosh Hashana. Even if we are not scoring an A+ in every subject, if the comment says "showing improvement" it will go a long way to please Him. And we still have a few weeks to make that happen.

But imagine His pain if His child's report simply says, "unremarkable."

To a successful month of Elul and wishing each of us best of luck in preparing a report our Parent in Heaven will be truly proud of.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Welcome Sima Ronya!

I feel so grateful and so blessed. A new baby; a new granddaughter. After a few hours of waiting, Mendel finally called to say, "it's a girl." Baruch Hashem.

I went into immediate panic. Would she get my mother's name or not? On the one hand it seemed so simple. Of course, she would. Mendel and Tzippy loved my Mom and would most likely feel both honoured and privileged to have a little girl, the first one, with her name.

On the other hand, could there possibly be another name they wanted more or a variation of the name that they liked better? Added to this were all the emotions involved. Was I (or anyone else) ready for a baby to have my Mom's name yet?

I spent most of the 48 hours in an agitated state. Too much thinking really is no good for the brain!

Betzalel went to Shul with Mendel for the naming. He Zoomed us in to watch and listen to the shul service. Then, over the loud beating of my heart, I heard Mendel proudly say her name: "Sima Ronya." May she be blessed to grow in Torah, to walk to the Chupah and to do only good deeds.

As Shlomo Hamelech explained, דור הולך ודור בא, one generation goes and another one comes. Bittersweet in the truest sense. My Mom went much too early. But we are taking some comfort in the newest little girl who proudly carries her name. Please G-d she will also proudly have all the other good attributes too. For now, she already sneezes just like my Mom.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

***The Month of Elul:
Corona Style***

*By Rabbi Binyomin Weisz
(aish.com)*

The pandemic has enabled us to encounter our selves with a dose of honesty.

The world for many of us has shrunk.

For those who find themselves in quarantine - or worse - that's pretty clear. But people everywhere are living with sudden limitation in their movement and their social interactions. For once, our homes have become where we live our lives.

It's a strange place, this shrunken world.

People are struggling to find their feet and - with loneliness, boredom and anxiety becoming new norms - it seems that modern life has left us unprepared for existence here.

In the old world even when staying home we felt safely anchored to the big outside; all options were always open. The world had us enchanted with its endless streams of action and distraction. And potential activity gave us the placating illusion of real activity.

Until now.

Suddenly we meet a state of inertia - of alone - that cannot be rationalized

as a 'choice'. We are with ourselves or our immediate families for far longer than we might ever choose. Welcome to life without the options...

And that's not easy!

Being in this new place certainly reveals our strengths, our ability to connect and our resilience. But it also exposes the painful holes in our lives. Habits, confusions and emptiness that regular life elegantly glosses over are now here in undeniable 4-D. Likewise the limitations, flaws and self-deceptions we so often ignore.

Corona has enabled us to encounter our selves.

Every situation and every challenge is there to help us thrive. Let us reflect for a moment on the pivotal place we stand in the Jewish year. We are entering Elul, the Hebrew month designated for inner searching, for returning to what is real. The time we reconnect to God and the spiritual meaning in our lives.

As we enter these special days this is exactly what we need: to focus inward with a dose of honesty.

We find ourselves guided away from the superficial and the incidental, towards focus, towards integration, towards essence.

For many, corona has stripped away travel, sport, entertainment, eating out, retail therapy – the activities that so often pull us away

from self. Away from presence and self-knowledge, from living life with meaning and dedication to higher ideals. Indeed, the virus has shut down exactly the interconnected, external world that powered its spread across the globe. It has taken humanity in the opposite direction: inward.

When borders and businesses close, when travel and tourism become something of the past, countries become populated by their citizens; nations rely on their own resources. Homes have just their families. We find ourselves guided away from the superficial and the incidental towards focus, towards integration.

Towards essence.

In this world I stand alone, as me. With whatever of my life I have succeeded in rooting into reality. All that still exists within me when detached from the world of the external.

And this is the goal of Elul. Elul leads us steadily, day by day, towards Rosh Hashanah. It gives us time to introspect, to clarify what we stand for – and to return to our true selves. So that when we arrive at the grand Coronation of the King we will find ourselves able to reunite with our essence, both as individuals and as a nation.

We will know to place the crown where it truly belongs.

I believe this microscopic virus has achieved something cosmic. It's hard to imagine anything that could trigger such dramatic changes in such a short amount of time. Being careful not to rose-tint the suffering and the worry, it seems that a new opportunity is unfolding for mankind. And yes – for myself too.

The situation calls us to be present with ourselves without running away. Starting with simply experiencing our reality this moment. With appreciating more deeply what we do have – basic gifts like health, four walls and family. And ultimately: facing my strengths and my weaknesses. The things I have planted well and those I have yet to plant.

Because in the quiet of this place I finally hear the voice that was always there – its whisper now amplified with the arrival of Elul:

Who are you and What do you live for?

Twenty years down the line some may look back at these times as dark, sanitizer-imbued wells of loneliness and confusion. Some may remember how they binged on Netflix series till they felt sick or stayed glued to endless contagion bulletins. Others the unease of stagnation. These might be days they prefer not to recall.

There is another way.

We can remember hard days but good days. Days which helped make us the better people we became. Yes, we distanced socially, but inside something came together. It was a time we thought about our wants and about what's really worth valuing. When we found the courage to face the holes in our lives - and decided to plant in those holes something new, held firm by fresh conviction and wiser habits.

We can look back and see how we entered an era of clarity and stepped up to higher purpose. We got to know a deeper self. And that's why, when we finally took off our masks and went back to the big outside, our actions had more focus. Our days somehow had more meaning and our relationships were more real.

We didn't lose ourselves again.

SERVICE TIMES

In person services have resumed but we are gradually building up to having all services every day of the week. Please check with the office if you wish to come to shul on a particular day to ensure there will be a service.

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	5:15
Friday (Maariv only)	6:00
Shabbat	5:00

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Mendel & Tzippy and to Rabbi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a daughter and granddaughter in New York.
- Mazaltov to Blima Nudelman on the birth of a great granddaughter in Israel.

BIRTHDAYS

- Theo Rutstein on the occasion of his 80th birthday on the 3rd August.
- Maisie Ehrlich on the occasion of her 96th birthday on the 14th August.
- Myrna Kaplan on the occasion of her 92nd birthday on the 17th August.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Byran Cohen
- Carole Neuburger
- Mary Schneider



- Leah Lange
- Philip Jacobson
- Percy Bloom
- Flory Mencer

BEREAVEMENTS

We wish long life to

- Bernice Unterhalter on the death of her husband, Simmy.
- Norma Wolpe on the death of her husband, Norman.
- Larna Bronstein on the death of her husband, Isidore.

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

