

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

✉ P.O. Box 87406, Houghton, 2041

☎ 011-646-6020 ☎ 086-580-2624

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

📘 facebook.com/oxfordshul

August 2026

Av/Elul 5786

SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting
🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 4

7 & 8 August – 25 Av

🕒 Re'eh

🕒 5:26 – 🕒 6:17

14 & 15 August – 2 Elul

🕒 Shoftim

🕒 5:30 – 🕒 6:20

21 & 22 August – 9 Elul

🕒 Ki Teitzei

🕒 5:33 – 🕒 6:23

28 & 29 August – 16 Elul

🕒 Ki Tavo

🕒 5:36 – 🕒 6:26

4 & 5 September – 23 Elul

🕒 Nitzavim & Vayeilech

🕒 5:39 – 🕒 6:28

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Do you remember Rosh Hashanah, just under eleven months ago? The year lay ahead of us, full of promise. This would be **the** year. My time management would be better; I would invest more in interpersonal and family relationships; I would study more Torah; I would deepen my connection with Hashem. Firm resolutions were made, with the commitment that this time around, it would really be different. Looking back...

Just a few days ago, we read from the Torah about the special blessings conferred upon our Holy Land. "... a land upon which Hashem's eyes are set, from the beginning of the year to the end of a year." Note the grammatical

asymmetry here: beginning of **the** year... end of **a** year.

Perhaps the Torah is describing exactly how many of our years unfold. We begin with powerful resolve that this is going to be the year. At the end of the twelve or thirteen months, we look back in embarrassment when we realise that indeed just another year has passed, unworthy of that definite article.

So here is the good news: There are still five weeks to Rosh Hashanah. These include the powerful month of Elul, filled with the redemptive power of Teshuva (often translated as 'repentance' but more accurately and literally meaning 'return'). What we do over this period leading up to the New Year can have an effect on the prior eleven months.

Elul starts on 13 August, but let's get a head start.

Can we try start the new year *ferrible-free*? It may just take a quick message to sort out a minor misunderstanding or may require some root treatment—not pleasant but salutary.

Can we pay up all our debts? There is indeed a custom to make sure that all financial obligations are sorted before the day of judgment. But I am also referring to another form of

indebtedness—commitments we have made towards Hashem or our fellow which remain unfulfilled.

Can we increase our Tzedakah? Whether it is a larger one-off donation or simply the habit of giving a coin each weekday before prayer, every act of generosity benefits both the recipient and the giver. Our rabbis teach us that charity has the power to avert harsh decrees.

Can we check the Mezuzot in our homes? Elul is an auspicious time to do so. These can fade with time, so should have a 'service' every few years. Reach out if you need assistance with this.

Then there is the custom of wishing each other Shana Tova, or even better, using the customary formula of Ketiva Vachatima Tova, meaning that our fate should be inscribed and sealed for the good. You can start this now. We are taught that each time we use this greeting, we create another good advocate for judgment on Rosh Hashanah. I can use that.

The power-month of Elul can change the past. So let's make this **the** month, and then we can hopefully look back at 5786 as **the** year.

Wishing you Ketiva Vachatima Tova.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

This morning I left for work in a really grumpy mood. Waking up to still no electricity meant looking for clothes in a dimly lit room, taking time to manually open and close the gates for the car, and, of course, all that after a lukewarm shower...

Of course I was grumpy!

Mumbling to myself about how outrageous this is. Mumbling about our need for a borehole or a JoJo tank. Mumbling about the potholes and the elections, and off I went.

Then I noticed something quite amazing: the people were friendlier than usual. Moaning to neighbours who we seldom stop to talk to. Venting with random people walking on our street. Sighing with other moms in the school parking lot. Sharing with everyone around how grumpy we were all feeling.

I wonder why it takes a crisis, a discomfort, or a challenge to bring us together and make us friendly.

I am going to try to be friendly always—not just when it is induced by City Power and Joburg Water.

Now that I have made good resolutions, can we please have our electricity restored already?

Have a good month!

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

***Dangerous Advice
Your Rabbi Might Give
You Before Rosh
Hashanah***

By Tzvi Freeman (chabad.org)

Proceed With Caution

There's a lot of bad advice going around this time of year. Dangerous advice. The Internet is full of it. So is your synagogue. Maybe even your favorite rabbi.

Look, they mean well. But they're often completely unaware of the hazards involved. Which makes their advice an even greater threat to your mental and spiritual health.

"Days of Judgment are upon us," they tell you. "Rosh Hashanah. Yom Kippur. It's time to take an account of all you've done wrong in the past year and resolve never to return to your wayward deeds."

Absolutely true. Absolutely crucial. And equally dangerous.

Such advice works wonders for the spiritually advanced. But for the rest of us, without serious precautions, this inventory-taking can be downright toxic. Here's why:

1. Dwelling on the moral misdemeanors of your past and the brute instincts from which they

emerged is guaranteed to lead to depression. Now get this, and get it straight and clear: There's sin, there's evil, there's hell, and then there's depression. At least hell gets you somewhere.

2. Contemplating how and why you chose to act out those urges, you will re-experience the thrill and pleasure you drew from them. Which just makes it all the more likely that you'll do more of the same.

3. Worse yet: You might take this life-review to heart. Then you'll say, "Boy, was I rotten! Boy, was I nasty! I guess I'm just a real rotten, nasty guy and always will be"

That last one is the real killer. Because it defeats your original purpose in engaging in this self-review in the first place. If you're making this review, it's because you already regret your past and want to leave it behind. You want the coming year to be a year of growth and blossoming of all your spiritual potential.

Just by starting that journey, you're forgiven already. He's a forgiving G-d. All it takes is a moment of regret to be forgiven.

But you're looking for more than forgiveness. The point of this review is not the past, not the present, but the future. You need to grow out of your past. You

need to change. Inner change.

And here you're sabotaging all of that. *Because the key to inner change is to change who you think you are.* But if you think you're a louse, you will be a louse.

If you think you're a louse, you will say, "Why would a great, perfect G-d pay attention to the prayers of a louse like me? Why would He want my mitzvahs? Why would He want anything to do with me?"

"Serve G-d with joy." It's not going to work otherwise. Yes, there was a time when people could handle a good portion of bitter herbs and still stay joyful. But, as the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of righteous memory put it, today, we just don't have the strength to deal with bitterness. We need inspiration, motivation and celebration. Bitterness still has its place, but only once you've fully revved up the engine of joy.

In short, your yearly inventory is likely to be not only counterproductive, but a plan for disaster. Unless...

Search and Rescue

Unless you know what you are looking for. And what you are looking for is definitely not your sins. You'll find those—like you'll

find clots of hairy muck while clearing clogged pipes. But they're not the object of your search. You'll only find those so you can chuck them out—immediately.

You are looking for yourself. Your true self. And you can only find that by looking back there, taking a road trip through all the inner places where your true self was lost.

In the lingo of psychology, you're doing a cognitive reframing of your past self, so that you can move forward.

"And you will search for G-d, your G-d, from there, and you will find Him, because you will seek Him with all your heart and all your soul."

That's the first mention of *teshuvah* in the Torah. Teshuvah is too often translated as repentance. That's wrong. Repentance means you're bad and now you've resolved to be good. Teshuvah means returning. Returning to the true, pure self that never changes. Because it is a breath of G-d who does not change.

Search back there, through the mud and the murk of your past. Search past the deeds and the words. Those are but symptoms. You don't heal by treating symptoms.

Search back there, through the blood-boiled

chambers of your heart, past the callous egotism that allowed those things, past the fool who allowed himself to believe he was G-d and therefore could do whatever he pleased and trample over whoever got in the way, past the hard rock walls of a heart that just didn't care.

Search there with all the faith of your heart and soul, saying, "Deep inside here, I know I will find a pure soul. I know that when I did those things, when I acted the way I did, that pure soul was screaming bloody murder. I heard its voice, but I didn't listen. Instead, I heard the voice of a beast, and I let myself believe that was me."

"But I am not a beast. I am not a louse. I am an innocent child. I am a spark of the divine. And I will find that pure soul there within that darkness and I will rescue it from there."

Faith In Yourself

Only once you have faith in yourself can you see yourself objectively. You can admit to your faults, because they are not you.

Only once you have faith in who you really are can you understand why these things don't suit you. Like poor choices from a wild shopping spree, shoes that hurt your feet, pants that never fit, gaudy jewelry and cheap accessories, they

just have to be chucked so you can move on in life.

Searching for yourself is a journey that takes far more faith than any pilgrimage. Just as you have faith in a G-d you cannot see, so you must have faith in your own soul whose voice you cannot hear.

Because G-d has faith in that soul. G-d has faith in you. Faith you cannot fathom.

David, sweet singer of Israel, sang to G-d: "On

Your behalf, my heart says to me, 'Seek my innermost!' G-d, I seek Your innermost." For an entire month before Rosh Hashanah and until Hoshana Rabbah, we repeat those words twice a day in our prayers.

Because that's what your heart is doing during those days. It's beckoning to you, "Check me out. Check me out deeply. Beneath all the schmutz, I am dark but beautiful. I am who you really are, and can truly be."

Search there, rescue yourself from there, and you will be that.

And you will be surprised. Because there you will find that G-d Himself was always breathing within you.

SERVICE TIMES

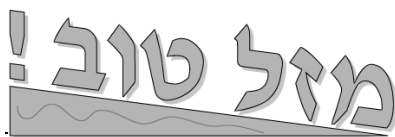
SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

KABBALAT SHABBAT (P.M.)

Friday	6:00
--------	------

MAZALTOV



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Theo Rutstein on his 85th birthday on the 3rd of August.
- Alan Shkudsky on his 65th birthday on the 13th of August.

BIRTHS

- Mendel & Tzippy Chaikin and Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a son and grandson in New York

כתיבה וחתומה טובה

KETIVA VACHATIMA TOVA