

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

December 2012

Kislev / Tevet 5773

SHABBAT TIMES

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

7 & 8 December – 24 Kislev

🔊 Vayeshev

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:26

14 & 15 December – 2 Tevet

🔊 Miketz (*Chanukah*)

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:31

21 & 22 December – 9 Tevet

🔊 Vayigash

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:35

28 & 29 December – 16 Tevet

🔊 Vayechi

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

4 & 5 January – 23 Tevet

🔊 Shemot

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As we enter into the final sprint towards the end of 2012, we can reflect on a year that has been a mixed bag of ups and downs, excitement, anticipation, disappointment, concern and worry, relief and growth on a personal level, Oxford level, South African level and Israel/World level.

The world is definitely becoming, has become, a crazy place not to mention its weather! What message do we give the kids? Do we teach them to fret and worry or do we teach them to be positive and face the future with eager excitement?

The past few Parshiot detail our ancestors' travails. Our forefathers and mothers knew what they had to do and faced their challenges head

on with faith that what happens is for a purpose. Our heritage teaches *Gam zu Letova*, whatever happens, happens for the best, even if it's not immediately obvious. They did however not go into their future with blind faith. They still sent messengers to look out for danger, pretended their wives were sisters to avoid possible confrontation and so on.

The lesson from our ancestors is to take this approach and teach our kids, and perhaps ourselves, to take on the future with positive enthusiasm, anticipation and excitement while treading with determined caution, remembering *Gam zu LeTova*.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Avi Gudelsky who has been our Youth Director for the past few months. Within this time he has made huge impact on the kids. Avi is taking a well deserved break and going to America. He may or may not be coming back and we wish him everything of the best and certainly hope that he does return to Oxford. *Gam zu Letova*. Thanks very much Avi!

If you are going away or planning on staying and enjoying Johannesburg in December, take care and be safe.

Warm, and enthusiastic,
regards

Brian Levy

RABBI'S MESSAGE

I've lived in the Southern Hemisphere since 1986. Since I am (relatively) still a young man, that is actually most of my life. There is one thing I absolutely cannot get used to and that is Chanukah in summer. To me, it just does not feel right. Chanukah evokes memories of my father rushing home to light the candles at the right time, always a challenge with sunset around 4 p.m. Then a long evening spent enjoying the glow of the flames, wrapped in warm jerseys and enjoying piping hot festival dishes.

(Alright, if the weather continues the way it has, who knows, I might get my wish of Chanukah in winter here in Jo'burg. I am definitely not dreaming of a White Chanukah—I've had my share this year with a snowstorm in Johannesburg in July and another unseasonably early one in New York a month ago.)

Does Chanukah have to be in winter? Of course not! It's pure nostalgia. South Africans obviously have totally different childhood memories of this holiday: the beach, the sunshine, braais and cool, refreshing drinks...

So why do we always look back at the past so nostalgically? Why do we

Speak of the good old days? Were they really all that much better than the present?

I've been giving this some thought. I think memory is selective. With the passage of time, negative experiences are forgotten; happy events are remembered. Our Sages teach us that it is a Divine gift that, with time, we forget the acute anguish caused by the loss of a dear one—otherwise the world would be paralyzed by mourning. Clearly women must forget (most of) the pain of childbirth since there are many families with more than one child.

As we look back, we tend to make the past all rosy. Today's struggles are real; yesterday's a distant memory. But the joys linger...

I remember listening to a couple who were talking about their early married years and how they struggled financially because they had bought a home and had to pay most of their salaries over to the bond. There was a warm glow on their faces reserved for discussions about the 'good old days.' Have you ever seen someone talk about the current bills they are unable to settle, their bank overdraft or their maxed credit cards with a smile on their face?

Just a couple of weeks ago Rivky and I spent a nostalgia Shabbos in Constantia in the Cape, in the Shul I served for 12 years, more than a decade ago. As can be expected, there was a lot of talk and reminiscing about those days... and needless to say,

it was all good. (I don't really have any vivid recollections of anything bad happening back in what feels like another life, but again, that's the way memory works!)

Judaism wants us to live in the now. Yes, we remember the past, but we do not live in it. All of next week, we will light candles nightly to remember and to celebrate a military and spiritual victory that occurred thousands of years ago. Each night we will preface the lighting with the words *בימים ההם בזמן הזה*—in those days: in this time. Though the events of Chanukah occurred centuries ago, we have to make sure to make the message of the holiday relevant and timely to today and to tomorrow.

Yiddishkeit is not a "in those days" religion. It's not about nostalgia and remembering. It's about inspiring our today "in this time" with eternal values.

But oy, I do think back lovingly to those cold and dark nights, huddled around the Menorah watching the snow fall through the windows while enjoying my mother's *heise zudike latkes*...

Happy Chanukah.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

| SHACHARIT (A.M.) | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Sunday and Public Holidays | 8:00 |
| Monday to Friday | 7:15 |
| Shabbat & Festivals | 9:00 |
| 14/12 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00 | |
| MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.) | |
| Sunday to Thursday | 6:15 |
| Friday | 5:45 |
| from 14/12 | 6:00 |
| Shabbat | 6:15 |
| from 15/12 | 6:30 |

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I love this time of year: the frenzy of getting everything done in a short time so that you have nothing to do for a while after that!

I make lists of all the jobs that need to be accomplished: mark exams, write reports, organise books for next year, etc. As each job is ticked off I can begin to taste the holidays already.

Each time I meet someone who isn't anticipating December with such eagerness I am surprised. There are people who don't have school children, and can schedule their holidays differently. There are young moms who are not so excited about entertaining their children 24/7 for the next few weeks. There are people who can't afford a holiday this year. There are those who have had a difficult year and don't see their difficulties taking a holiday!

It is so easy to get wrapped up in my own life and imagine that everyone else is doing and feeling the same way that I am.

I think one of the biggest demands Yiddishkeit makes of us is Ahavat Yisrael. Looking around to see what is happening in other people's lives, not as a yenta but in order to be a good friend.

Have a happy Chanukah and a happy month.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

CHANUKAH AGAIN

*By Sholomo Yaffee
(www.chabd.org)*

There is something special about Chanukah: the core dynamics of this holiday have been repeated time and time again throughout Jewish history.

Chanukah primarily marks the willingness of Jews to put their lives on the line for the sake of preserving their Jewishness—that is, to remain loyal to the Torah G-d has given us as the blueprint of our mission in life.

The military victory came and went, and was incomplete at any rate—within a short generation or two the fledgling Maccabee-ruled state had already lost its independence, coming under the hegemony of the Romans.

What Chanukah celebrates most of all is that we did not allow anyone to dictate our relationship to G-d. We are prepared to give up everything for this cause—even our physical lives.

Indeed, throughout the ages Jews have succeeded in maintaining their beliefs against numerous attempts to forcibly change them, often at great cost to themselves.

But is Chanukah still relevant today? For the first time in our recent history (i.e., the last 2000 years or so), the vast

majority of Jews live in countries where they can practice their Judaism freely and without oppression.

Is the lesson of Chanukah no longer necessary? Do we no longer have a need to live its story and reinforce its message?

The truth is, in our present state we need Chanukah more than ever.

Chanukah continues to inspire us to persevere and overcome great obstacles to living our Judaism. The locus of this struggle has merely shifted from external challenges posed by human enemies to the internal challenges evoked by our own human natures.

We need to overcome the indolence and apathy bred of security from harm and effortless access to all the necessities of life. These are good things, but they cause us to forget how fragile, tenuous and therefore precious life is. We then easily overlook how much we truly need the ongoing flow of Divine energy that vitalizes us at every moment, and the ultimate purpose for which G-d bestows us with that constant flow of life.

When we have to struggle for physical or spiritual existence, we constantly need to remind ourselves of the reason we work so hard to preserve it. We need to constantly ask ourselves, “Why am I struggling so much for this life? what is its value and purpose?” But under less challenging circumstances, we ask ourselves this

question of core purpose a lot less often. Ironically, when we are not threatened, and we can express our Judaism freely, we often fail to evoke that intense commitment.

Chanukah challenges us to look within ourselves and find heroism and determination. Not the overt, raw, physical courage needed to overcome oppression and religious coercion as in the past, but more subtle though no less intense expressions of spiritual courage:

We find the willingness to overcome taking life for granted.

We find the moral strength to defy the self-indulgent, complacent nature of our secure existence.

We demand of ourselves that we rebel against static self-satisfaction.

We insist on extracting meaning, purpose and holiness out of every moment of life that G-d blesses us with.

May all of us and our families have our lives illuminated by this Chanukah.



MAZAL TOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Millicent Sacks on the birth of a great granddaughter
- Wayne and Leigh Sussman and Sam and Jill Nudelman on the birth of a son and grandson

BAR/BATMITZVAHS

- Ethne Lipschitz on the barmitzvah of her grandson, Ori Halpert, in Israel on 28th December

BIRTHDAYS

- Solomon Kay on his 94th birthday on 10th December

- Frank Salomon on his 70th birthday on 10th December
- Rose Selesnik on her 90th birthday on 16th December
- Colin Meyerowitz on his 75th birthday on 25th December

ANNIVERSARIES

- Arthur and Avrielle Metzger on their 45th anniversary on 3rd December
- Lance and Lisa Cohen on their 10th anniversary on 11th December

REFUAH SHLEMAH

We wish a Speedy Recovery to:

- Sandra Sher
- Israel Gordon
- Maureen Myerson
- Dawn Nates

**BEREAVEMENTS**

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Mark and Stephen Meltzer on the death of their mother, Jessie
- Zelda Friedland on the death of her mother, Doreen Harris
- Debbie Gordon on the death of her father
- Calmon Sarachik on the death of his wife, Sonia
- Amir Livneh on the death of his grandfather

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

CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE

Saturday, 8 December - Light candle after Shabbat is out (7:26 p.m. and after Hadvalah)

Sunday, 9 December - Light candles at 7:30 p.m.

Monday 10 December - Light candles at 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday 11 December - Light candles at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday 12 December - Light candles at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, 13 December - Light candles at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, 14 December - Light the Chanukah candles first (after 5:30 p.m.), then the Shabbat candles. Make sure the Chanukah candles are long enough (or sufficient oil is used) so that they will burn until at least 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, 15 December - Light candles after Shabbat is out (7:31 p.m. and after Hadvalah)

Always place the candles on the right of the Chanukiyah. When lighting, kindle from left to right (the newest candle first)

All times are for the Johannesburg area only. Please inquire about local times if you are elsewhere.



HAPPY CHANUKAH!