

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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December 2013

Tevet 5774

SHABBAT TIMES

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

13 & 14 December – 11 Tevet

🕒 Vayechi
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:30

20 & 21 December – 18 Tevet

🕒 Shemot
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:34

27 & 28 December – 25 Tevet

🕒 Va'era
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:37

3 & 4 January – 3 Shevat

🕒 Bo
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:39

10 & 11 January – 10 Shevat

🕒 Beshalach
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:39

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It is with an immense feeling of sadness and admiration, not to mention a hint of embarrassment for the past, that we say farewell to President Nelson Mandela. I am gobsmacked by the impact Madiba had not only on South Africans, which is totally understandable, but on the world at large.

The memorial service held at Oxford was historical. It was befitting to hold such an auspicious service at our Shul, not only because of its size and history but also because of the legacy of Rabbi Bernhard who spoke out against Apartheid. It is befitting because the same pulpit that he used to motivate for freedom and a just society we now used to commemorate the life of an incredible icon who

represents this freedom and who created a just society. It has come full circle, your prayers were answered Rabbi Bernhard, sheceiach and thank you for your foresight and insight and for not being scared to lead. We wish you good health and many more years in gezunt.

The Chief Rabbi spoke exceptionally well to a packed shul, and overflow. Sheceiach to him for organising the service, and to everyone who braved the cold and rain to be there.

I agree with what Rabbi Goldstein said regarding Madiba's great qualities of hope and forgiveness but I think what set Madiba apart from all other leaders, and why the world looked up to him and respected him so much was his sincerity. He fought the struggle with sincerity, he negotiated the transformation with sincerity and he led the country with sincerity. He spoke out against other leaders and countries with sincerity and most of all he loved this country and its people with sincerity. At no time did he show self-interest whether about his own political career or financial wellbeing. I believe this is the character trait which sets him apart and boy can our leaders across the board, as well as those throughout the world, learn a lot from him.....

Have a wonderful December and if you are travelling, travel safe and come back safe.

Brian Levy

RABBI'S MESSAGE

I always have a problem with the end of Chanukah. For eight days we increase in light, starting with one candle and adding another each night until all eight candles are burning. Then the festival comes to an end and the Menorah remains dim.

This year Chanukah ended when the sun set on Thursday 5 December. Within hours a great Light was taken from South Africa as Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela returned his soul to his Maker.

I remember hearing that when it comes to Jewish Festivals, one should never say, "another Yom Tov has passed." Rather one must say, "another Yom Tov has been added to my life." For with each passing Chag, we are transformed and elevated and we do not descend to the level we were previously, we continue to build from the new plateau we have just reached. So really, the lights of Chanukah have not gone, even if we can no longer see them. They have illuminated us and contributed to each of our lives, which can never be the same again.

In his address to the Jewish community at our packed-to-capacity (and more) Oxford Shul, former President Thabo Mbeki asked why the entire country prayed so hard and desperately tried to hold on to the life of a man who was elderly and ailing and who would inevitably die. His answer was that it was the legacy of the man, his teachings and what he stood for that we did not want to lose.

Let us not say, a great man has lived and has passed on. Let us say that a unique legacy has been brought to this country, one that has changed it forever. One that must be held on to and preserved forever, for the future prosperity of South Africa depends on it.

The world is divided between those who fight for human rights and those who stress the obligations we have towards one another. Under normal circumstances there is little difference between the two approaches. One can say that my neighbour has the right to a home, or that I am obliged to let him live there and may not evict him. The end result is the same: he will have a roof over his head.

We are not living under normal circumstances. We have, less than a generation ago, emerged from a dark place. After what South Africa has been through, a culture of rights can become very dangerous.

Our Torah teaches us that we must love the stranger and never oppress him. Why? Because we were strangers in the Land of Egypt. You suffered as a slave. Now make sure that you are fair to others and do not oppress or subjugate those that are weaker than you.

There are those who have suffered and feel entitled as a result. I have been through so much, now the whole world owes me! There are others who have been through hardship and feel obliged to make sure such pain is never inflicted upon others. Madiba proved to us in the last twenty years or so that he belongs to the latter group.

A culture of entitlement, in this country, could have (and still can) destroy society. The leadership and personal example of Nelson Mandela ensured that we all focused on what we had to do to build South Africa, not on what South Africa owed us. May his legacy indeed endure.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I don't often think about the houses behind the big walls that I drive past every day. I do the same route, sometimes more than once a day, and so I noticed when a piece of the wall broke. It didn't look like much inside: an overgrown garden, with lots of trees. I still didn't give it too much attention. One morning the whole wall down was down. I was so surprised to see a big, big, old empty house. Somehow I had never imagined a home there. Then one day a bulldozer arrived, and each time I passed, a bit more of that grand old house had been broken down. All that was there was a big pile of rubble which is being carted away bit by bit each day.

It has left me strangely sad, and a bit uneasy. I have spent a lot of time wondering about the people who used to live there. Their home, their memories, how much love and laughter happened within those walls? How much effort and joy was used to plan and build that house that has now been reduced to rubble.

This Friday (13/12) we are observing the first of the fasts commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash. I always have difficulty understanding why we have to fast... and now I figured it out. I didn't really know or pay attention to what was behind the walls. I never really stopped to think what truly went on there. I have just "driven past" over and over.

I imagine that a new and more glorious home will be built now, and I wish the owners much happiness there. And when I fast this Friday I will have a better appreciation of what we Jews have lost and greater hope and desire for the rebuilding of the 3rd Beit Hamikdash.

Have an easy fast
And a good month.

Rivky

OXFORD IN THE NEWS

Mbeki addresses members of South African Jewish community at Johannesburg shul.

(excerpted from the Jerusalem Post, 8/12)

Former South African president Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Nelson Mandela as the second black president of post-apartheid South Africa, spoke on Sunday evening at a memorial for Mandela at the Oxford Synagogue in Johannesburg.

"As we celebrate the life of Mandela, we focus on what needs to be done, we need to see what he stood for," Mbeki said. "We as a country might be able together to say we have a common roadmap as to what we do." ...

Speaking at the synagogue, Mbeki challenged his audience to celebrate Mandela's life but also to measure up to the quality of his leadership, Zeifert said.

Members of the Jewish community who were close to the late anti-apartheid activist and statesman attended the memorial service, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies announced in a statement.

Mandela had a special relationship with the Oxford Synagogue. In 1995, he attended a ceremony there to honor assassinated prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Rabbi Norman Bernhard, the long serving rabbi of the Oxford Synagogue who retired in 2000, co-founded a movement in 1985 called "Jews for Social Justice," calling for social action against apartheid. ...

South Africa's Jews remembered Mandela, the country's first democratically elected president, as a close friend, one with deep ties to prominent community figures and a partner in the decades-long effort to end apartheid.

A STORY

ALWAYS WEAR JEWISH GARB PROUDLY

By Avraham Berkowitz
(chabad.org)

It was September 2007 and I was in Monte Carlo for a friend's wedding.

We prayed that Saturday morning at the local synagogue and later walked to the nearby Hotel de Paris. Entering the lobby, I was surprised at the large security presence. I soon learned that the legendary former South African president Nelson Mandela was a guest in the hotel. As it happened, he was sitting in one of the stately public rooms on the lobby floor as I passed by.

I instinctively wanted to meet the iconic statesman. The slim chance of gaining access to meet Mandela did not stop me from asking the security guard at the door if I could please step in to bless the former president. Just then, a second member of the security detail approached and asked what I wanted. The first bodyguard explained that I was a rabbi who wanted to bless Madiba on the holy Sabbath. They agreed to let me go over to greet him.

As I approached the former president, he looked up and beamed. I was dressed in the full Chabad Shabbat attire, the flowing black frock and black fedora, and since I had just left the synagogue my white and black tallit was draped over my shoulders.

After we had been introduced, Madiba invited me to sit near him. He asked me to please bless him and mentioned how touched he was that I had blessed him on the Sabbath. President Mandela also told me how much he cherished it when 'his rabbi,' Chief Rabbi Cyril

Harris, would bless him back home.

Looking across at the great man, who had suffered for decades, fought for freedom, and pulled a splintered nation together, I felt compelled to ask one question. Had he ever compared his story to that of the biblical Joseph?

Without pause, Madiba replied that he felt a strong affinity with Joseph. Joseph had been imprisoned for life, yet he found strength in his positive outlook and had finally emerged to lead a nation. With twinkling eyes, Mandela laughed out loud: "But I spent many more years in prison than Joseph did!"

I then asked him, "Is it in honour of Joseph's coat of many colors that you wear your trademark colourful "Madiba shirts"?

"No," he replied, "I wear these shirts to represent my people and their struggle and to represent the beautiful diverse cultures and traditions of Africa." He tenderly touched the African continent embroidered on his custom-made silk black shirt.

We chatted easily and he shared the story behind the Madiba shirts. On the first Shabbat after he had been elected president, back in May 1994, he visited South Africa's largest synagogue, the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation in Cape Town. "His rabbi," Chief Rabbi Harris had invited him to attend morning services.

Mandela recounted how he had addressed the packed crowd and had "appealed to the local Jewish community to implore their South African family members who had emigrated to return home to help rebuild a new democratic South Africa." He also reassured the local Jewish community not to be afraid of a Government of

National Unity and promised that "together we will succeed."

He then recalled, "When I returned to the motorcade, my driver handed me a gift from a woman who had attended synagogue that morning. It was a beautiful black shirt, with a colorful design of golden fish across it. I chose to wear that shirt to the opening of parliament of our new democratic government."

"After I had worn that shirt, this same woman (South African designer Desre Buirski) would continue to send me shirts. We become good friends, and she designed hundreds of shirts for me. These shirts help me carry my message all over the world."

He smiled and added, "And all because I went to synagogue on a Saturday morning."

I stood up and thanked him for the generosity of his time and the honour of meeting him. Before I walked off, Mr. Mandela complimented the traditional look of my Chassidic dress. "I am happy to see you dressed this way; you should always be proud to wear the clothing of the Jewish faith as a mark of honour," he said.

As I shook his hand, he told me, "Remember young rabbi, when you dress in your royal garb, you represent what the Bible stands for: How all humans are G d's children, created in the image of G d, regardless of ethnicity, colour or faith."

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00
<small>13/12 (Fast of 10 Tevet): 7:00 02/01 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00</small>	

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	5:45
<small>20/12, 27/12 & 03/01: 6:00</small>	
Shabbat from 21/12	6:15 6:30

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Chaim Meir & Yael Tessler, Devorah Nates and Rose Selesnik on the birth of a son, grandson and great grandson in Israel.
- Jared & Kerry Landsman, Rene Gamsu and Rose Selesnik on the birth of a daughter, granddaughter and great granddaughter

ENGAGEMENTS

- Phillip and Rilla Jacobson on the engagement of their grandson, Aharon Markovitz, to Tamsi Welcher

WEDDINGS

- Clive & Michelle Wolpert on the marriage of their

granddaughter, Stephanie Rapp, to Jason Daleski on 5th December

BIRTHDAYS

- Lily Elsbach on her 80th birthday on 1st December
- Martin Flekser on this 65th birthday on 8th December
- Amy Feinstein on her 55th birthday on 16th December
- Barry Speigel 60th birthday on 17th December
- Jillian Kaplan on her 75th birthday on 22nd December
- Shoshana Kaplan on her 65th on 25th December

ANNIVERSARIES

- Gerald & Shoshana Kaplan on their 40th anniversary on 11th December
- Michael & Rezah Young on their 45th anniversary on 16th December
- Clive and Margot Cohen on their 45th anniversary on 29th December

REFUAH SHLEMAH

We wish a Speedy Recovery to:



- Lily Elsbach
- Willie Spark
- Hazel Benard

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Lily Sarembock on the death of her husband Joseph in the USA in September

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

Wishing you a healthy summer!

If you going away, travel safely and return safely. Remember to find a Shul at your destination (call the office if you need help with that).

If you are staying in Johannesburg, remember that Oxford remains open (and has a minyan) right through the holidays, Shabbat and weekdays—please support us.

