

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

December 2015/January 2016

Tevet/Shevat 5776

SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting

🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)

For service times see page 3

18 & 19 December – 7 Tevet

🔊 Vayigash

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:33

25 & 26 December – 14 Tevet

🔊 Vayechi

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:36

1 & 2 January – 21 Tevet

🔊 Shemot

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:38

8 & 9 January – 28 Tevet

🔊 Vaeira

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

15 & 16 January – 6 Shevat

🔊 Bo

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

22 & 23 January – 13 Shevat

🔊 Beshalach

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

29 & 30 January – 20 Shevat

🔊 Yitro

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:34

5 & 6 February – 27 Shevat

🔊 Beshalach

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:30

RABBI'S MESSAGE

In one of my first rabbi's messages in this monthly newsletter, which I wrote exactly 15 years ago, I commented on a recent OSSAC dinner I had attended. For those of you unfamiliar with OSSAC, this was an organisation started by the late Rabbi NM Bernard, some 30 years ago. Oxford Synagogue's Social Action Committee bravely

and boldly went about teaching basic numeracy and literacy skills to domestic workers in the area. I was extremely proud for our Shul to be associated with one of the few social initiatives by the Jewish communities that had started in those dark 80's. Over the years I did everything I could to make sure this noble initiative continued under our auspices, even in the now New South Africa.

Over the years, OSSAC, now renamed Oxford Synagogue Skills for Adults Committee, taught people to read and write, to count and add, and also stretched to other important skills such as cooking, sewing and computer literacy. Every December, I attended the graduation ceremony, a dinner or tea to honour the learners and the volunteer teachers for their dedication and hard work.

A few days ago I attended the end of year ceremony once again. This one was bittersweet. It was the final graduating class; OSSAC has now closed its doors. The reason for this is simply that there is no longer any need for the organisation. The core skills that were being offered are now readily available to a generation growing up under a new dispensation, by way of free and compulsory education for all. In the

generation growing up, literacy and numeracy, as well as mastery of basic computer skills are all taught to everyone. For years now, OSSAC's classes were dwindling in numbers, down to the most recent English class of two learners (one from Tibet and the other from the DRC).

It was sad to see OSSAC's doors close because for years we, as a community, were extremely proud of our sponsorship of and association with the organisation. But it was also happy because it was a huge sense of "mission accomplished" that we said good-bye and good luck to the graduates of 2015. The battle for social equality, spearheaded by this organisation along many others in those dark days, had been won.

Many thanks to the numerous people who made OSSAC possible over the years: Rebbetzin Ann Harris, who threw herself into the organisation shortly after her arrival in South Africa; the many chairpersons and committee members who served on it board, and in particular Beryl Unterhalter and Sheila Kemp who held the helm in the final years; the Oxford community, for its continued support.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

There are few things that are more annoying than the whining of a mosquito in the middle of the night. No doubt, everyone can recall being woken up by the high pitched buzz. In fact, one of my early childhood memories is of a night in a chalet outside the Kruger Park, crying because of the profuse amount of mosquitos in the room.

Well, last night was a repeat performance. This morning I am trying to find out how a grown adult lady can be brought to near hysteria by a tiny, tiny little buzzing gogga!

I tried various ways of dealing with this.

I bought a plug-in Peaceful Sleep unit.

I sprayed myself with Citronella oil.

I covered every part of myself with a sheet.

I tried catching it, squashing it (not on our freshly painted walls!)

I even tried ignoring it. Trying to convince myself that the worst that could happen is that it would bite me – and what are a few mosquito bites anyway?

But, it whined... I scratched. It buzzed... and I got more hysterical. Finally, at 3am, I got out of bed, had a cool shower, took a magazine and guess what... I fell asleep.

This morning I am left wondering what all that fuss was about. Isn't that how it is with so many of life's annoyances? Little things that make us crazy, bring us to tears, make us feel almost desperate. If we could just step back, look at everything from the outside. Calmly. How many times we would be left wondering what the fuss was all about?

Have a good month

Rivky

DVAR TORAH***PARTYING WITH THE KING*****The 10th of Tevet**

*by Hana-Bashe Himelstein
(www.chabad.org)*

Anyone who's ever made a party knows that the most essential ingredient is planning. Every year before Thanksgiving, the three board members of my government agency vote on when the office will hold its annual holiday bash. They allot a certain amount of money from the budget to cover paper goods and platters, and a list makes its way around the office for each of us to write what we will bring to supplement the party. On the day of the party, work basically stops after noon. Someone cranks up some tunes, and a few "outsiders" are invited to stop by—folks from other government agencies and private contractors with whom we do business throughout the year. The result is a fun and (somewhat) meaningful holiday experience.

I'll probably take a half-day and just go home. There are just 11 of us in this agency; I am one of three Jews, and the only Orthodox one. By and large, all 11 of us get along just fine. We do our jobs, and things move forward as they should. I have no complaints whatsoever about my bosses, co-workers, workload, commute or anything. This is a great job; I'm happy (and fortunate) to have it—and I know it!

My Orthodoxy has attracted attention only twice, and neither experience was negative. The first time involved hair-covering issues when I first started. One of the non-Jewish men in my office didn't understand why I wore a wig to work on some days, hats to work on others, and occasionally a scarf or snood. (My Catholic boss appeased him with, "It's what she does!")

The other time was at the office X-mas party.

For last year's "holiday" party, I offered to contribute something kosher, seasonally appropriate and a little bit different from what they're used to. So I shlepped my electric food-warmer, fresh sour cream and applesauce, and about 15 pounds of homemade latkes that my husband had prepared to share with my new coworkers. I covered my desk with a Chanukah tablecloth, opened a package of new Chanukah paper plates and hung up assorted Chanukah decorations that my family has collected over the years. My paltry Chanukah display paled beside the office's overflowing trays of deli and cheeses, chicken wings with ranch dressing, barbecued ribs and meatballs. Pete's wife sent a huge tray of homemade fudge, Mexican almond cookies and homemade candy. Others brought in homemade dips and baked goods. It all looked great, smelled great, and, well, it was all off-limits.

But I'm proud that I keep kosher, and I was more than happy to share my little Chanukah feast with my new friends. They were gracious and polite, and we all had a good time. The latkes nearly disappeared, and one of the cleaning ladies was happy to take home the leftovers. Afterwards, I was actually looking forward to the next party, and during the year, my husband and I occasionally discussed what we could do to "kick it up a notch." We believe that it's important to share the beauty of Judaism with everyone, and this is perhaps the most appropriate way to do that in an office setting.

This year, the date for the holiday party was chosen once, changed, and then changed again. The final decision: Wednesday, Dec. 19. Just another day to most, "hump day" to some. On the Jewish calendar, however, it coincides (this article was written in 2007—Ed.) with Asarah B'Tevet, the 10th of Tevet, a minor fast day, which is also the day that the Chief Rabbis of Israel designated as yom ha-kaddish haklali—the day on which traditional prayers for the dead are recited for people whose yahrzeit (death anniversary) is unknown. Many rabbis have designated it as a day of remembrance for the Holocaust.

It was on the 10th of Tevet that the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (reigned 3319–3363 on the Jewish calendar) took over the holy city of Jerusalem, surrounded

it with forts and wore down its inhabitants by forcing a famine. This was the beginning of a long chain of calamities that finally ended with the destruction of the Holy Temple.

What this means, of course, is that I won't be schlepping the food-warmer or the latkes or anything else to work on that day. In fact, I'll probably take a half-day and just go home. Most folks might think that this is because fasting is about grieving and mourning, but that's not the case here. This fast is about repentance. Teshuvah. Why repentance? Simply put, Nebuchadnezzar was permitted to succeed in overthrowing the holiest place on earth because we didn't deserve better. It's a heavy thought to process, and one worth considering, especially in light of the ongoing turmoil in Israel today. But teshuvah doesn't have to be a drag. In fact, some find the process uplifting, approaching it with an attitude of "This time, I'm going to get it right!"

I spent some time debating how I should properly spend this fast day. I considered just hanging out at my desk throughout the party, watching my coworkers and the others enjoy their holiday fare. I can schmooze with the best of them, so what's the harm? And I wouldn't eat their food anyway, right?

As attorneys often say in courtroom dramas, "Asked and answered, Your Honor." Many (millions) before me

have made this inquiry. The Gemara tells us that "the people who fast but engage in pointless activities are grasping what is of secondary importance and missing what is essential." I reluctantly admit that while parties are fun, and office parties can be a valuable networking tool, in the grand scheme of things, they probably fall into the category of "pointless activities," and my day might be better spent doing something more essential, like praying.

So I'll be spending the office party in private contemplation with the King. I'll fast, I'll pray, I'll contemplate teshuvah. And with a little planning, I will have a most meaningful "holiday" experience.

Hana-Bashe Himmelstein is a legal secretary and freelance writer in addition to being a wife, mother, daughter and friend. Originally from the Washington, D.C. area, she currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

The fast of 10th Tevet is on Tuesday, 22nd December (3:53 a.m. – 7:17 p.m.)

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
<small>Tuesday 22/12 (Fast 10 Tevet): 7:00 Monday 11/01 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00</small>	
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	6:00
from 08/01	5:45
Shabbat	6:30

MAZALTOV**BIRTHS**

- Anthony & Janine Levin and Hymie & Denise Levin on the birth of a son and grandson.
- Shmuel & Shoshy Chaikin and Rabbi and Rivky on the birth of both a daughter and granddaughter

BIRTHDAYS

- Terrence Davis on his 70th birthday on 8 December.

- Stanley Smidt on his 70th birthday on 1 January.
- Sharon Goldblatt on her 70th birthday on 14 January.
- Julie Soicher on her 50th birthday on 29 January.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Roy and Joan Sable on their 60th anniversary on 14 December.
- Ralph and Lynette Zulamn on their 50th anniversary on 19 December.
- Walter and Sharon Goldblatt on their 50th anniversary on 27 December.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a
Speedy
Recovery to



- Rose Selesnik
- Solly Jossel
- Maureen Ringo

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences
to the following
who have
suffered
bereavements recently:



- The family of Lola Futerman.



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to mark a happy event in your family
Cost of each leaf is R 360.00 - For details please contact the office

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at the Shul on the occasion of a personal or family Simcha,
to commemorate a Yartzeit, birthday or anniversary.

For details and bookings contact Belinda at the Shul 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 R540 for the first plaque ordered, R360 for subsequent plaques

