

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER December 2017 & January 2018

Tevet & Shevat 5778

SHABBAT TIMES

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

15 & 16 December – 28 Kislev

🔊 Miketz

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:31

22 & 23 December – 5 Tevet

🔊 Vayigash

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:35

29 & 30 December – 12 Tevet

🔊 Vayechi

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:38

5 & 6 January – 19 Tevet

🔊 Shemot

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

12 & 13 January – 26 Tevet

🔊 Vaeira

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

19 & 20 January – 4 Shevat

🔊 Bo

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:38

26 & 27 January – 11 Shevat

🔊 Beshalach

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:36

2 & 3 February – 18 Shevat

🔊 Yitro

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:32

RABBI'S MESSAGE

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Last night I came back to an empty home, having just dropped our son Betzalel at the airport for a flight to the USA. He has just matriculated and has now left home to study at a yeshiva in the USA. Since my wife and younger daughter are both currently in America as well, visiting our family there, I

literally came home to an empty nest.

Fortunately, this is only for a couple of days, and the house will feel full again. Well not full, but fuller...

How does it feel when a child leaves home? Over the past 15 years, we have done this a number of times and it does not get easier. Especially as the precedent has been that once out, they are unlikely to return to settle in South Africa.

Does this mean our family is getting smaller? As my father-in-law likes to say, while our family is getting smaller our tribe is just getting bigger.

For each of our children, leaving home was to study, either at a yeshiva, for the males, or at a girls' seminary. In doing so they were being true to the values we had worked so hard to inculcate during their childhood and adolescence. So the pain of the separation was tempered by the joy of naches.

In time, each of our children has (or will PG) met their respective bashert and together they build their own family—families that TG continue to be true to those same values we hold so dear.

We are so fortunate to be living in an age when that naches can be experienced in real time thanks to modern technology. Instant

messaging, voice notes and video calls help to bridge the physical distance.

In one sense our family dynamics have experienced subtractions. But the additions, both in personal growth and in numbers, have compensated for that.

Minus equals plus.

On behalf of Oxford Shul I want to thank Betzalel for everything he has done over the past few years—his love for the shul and its congregants, his dedication to the minyanim and to all our activities. He has fulfilled the roles of assistant chazzan and assistant rabbi when he had to step up to the plate. He will be missed by all and the community wishes him hatzlocha on this stage in his life.

This is the month of goodbyes, as we bid farewell to our choirmaster, Bryan Isakow, who is relocating to Seattle, Washington to further his career. Bryan and his wife Jessica both grew up at Oxford Shul, attending first children services, then youth services. Bryan started on the Bimah as a chorister, eventually taking over baton to lead the choir. We likewise wish him hatzlocha on this big move. We are currently working on finding a suitable replacement for the new year.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I write this note to you while I am spending (the operative word with the rand dollar exchange so bad) a precious few days going from couch to couch and enjoying some of my children and grandchildren. (Missing the Australian ones more than ever.) I find myself whispering Psalm 100 (A Song of Thanksgiving) over and over. It isn't random that I arrived in America on the American holiday of Thanksgiving; it was a good introduction to my visit. Not to take a single aspect of all these blessings for granted.

We humans instinctively want to minimise the enormity of the kindness Hashem does. The kinder we think He is the more we feel indebted to Him. So we try to pretend that what we have is normal, regular, run of the mill, so that we won't feel like we owe Him anything.

But we are Jews, who are called yehudim, people who acknowledge. We are the ones who begin every day with the words "Modeh Ani" I thank you.

And so when I am surrounded by these blessings that have been bestowed on us I know that there is nothing small or ordinary and I say thank you over and over and over again.

May we all always be saying thank you.

Have a good month and a happy summer.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH*Pure Oil*

by Chaya Shuchat (chabad.org)

It looked the same, smelled the same, tasted the same. There was nothing in that little jar of oil to distinguish it from any other pure grade, virgin olive oil. The only distinct thing about it was the seal of the high priest, signifying that it was ritually pure. But the Jews insisted on using only the ritually pure oil, and no other, to light the menorah in the Holy Temple, thus precipitating the renowned miracle of Chanukah.

"Ritually pure." What, exactly, is that? What properties does a ritually pure sample of olive oil have that the others don't? What laboratory tests can be performed to measure degrees of ritual purity? There are none. Ritual purity is a state that has no parallel in the physical universe; it exists solely in the world of the spirit.

The Jewish tenacity in adhering to their rigorous rules of purity and impurity drove the rationalistic Greeks berserk. This was why, when plundering the Holy Temple, they defiled every jar of oil that they could get their hands on. The obstinacy of the Jews enraged them. Why did the Jews insist on living in a reality that no one else could see, one that was unverifiable by empirical evidence? Bring a proof, bring evidence that the "pure" olive oil was indeed more refined or superior

than the "defiled" oil, and we'll accept your religious ritual. But the Jews did not and could not offer any earthly evidence that this oil was any different than other oil. All they had was their faithfulness to a standard that existed purely in the realm of spirit.

Mind you, the Greeks were not strangers to the world of the spirit. They had their own finely developed culture with drama, art, philosophy and religion, rivaling anything in modern times. But their aesthetic had a certain logic to it; it appealed to human instincts. The Jews followed rules that did not conform to any human system of thought. They unapologetically declared their allegiance to a Master who was above human logic and understanding.

Not much has changed in the 2000 years of Jewish existence since the Chanukah story. As an observant Jewish woman, I often field questions about my lifestyle from curious, usually friendly outsiders. I don't mind these questions at all; in fact, I enjoy the challenges they present to me. But in the questions I hear echoes of the ancient Greeks. "What's the point of covering your hair with a wig, if it's just as attractive as your own hair?" "The kosher laws may have made sense before modern refrigeration and sanitation. But in today's world, what makes kosher meat different than non-kosher?" "I understand Shabbat is a special day of the week. But is turning on a light that big of a deal?"

I do the best I can to answer these questions truthfully and intelligently. But before I can formulate an answer for someone else, I must turn to myself first and ask, why? Why, indeed, do I follow these laws? What compels me to observe Shabbat, eat only kosher, or maintain the intricate laws of family purity? As I question myself, I realize that all the beautiful, eloquent explanations I find do not really express the core reason for why I keep the commandments. Not that those answers are not truthful; they are all absolutely sincere. Shabbat is truly a magnificent experience, a day that nurtures me and gives me strength to cope with the week to come. Keeping kosher helps me be more mindful of the act of eating, and elevates all my physical functions to a higher plane. Observing the laws of modesty enhances my relationship with my husband and brings us closer together. But none of these reasons really explain why I keep these laws. What is my real motivation, the “why” behind my observance?

It’s a sentiment that is not very easy to articulate, especially to a slightly mocking stranger. It sounds almost uncouth, too raw and unsophisticated to declare that I observe Jewish laws because I am a Jew, and G-d commanded me to do so. As a 21st-century Jew, I am still battling an inner foe, a modern incarnation of the ancient Greek who derides open displays of faith. That

inner Greek is comfortable with rational, cultural or psychological explanations for the commandments. Observance based on faith sounds scary and out of touch with modern-day reality.

But that’s the whole point—as Jews we’ve never been in touch with everyone else’s reality, modern or otherwise. Being Jewish means having a connection with a reality that’s out of view of the physical senses: a reality in which the difference between pure and impure, kosher and non-kosher, Shabbat and weekday, is self-evident and intuitive. The miracle of Chanukah that we commemorate each year is a celebration of that essential connection we have with that which is beyond reason.

As I said, it’s not easy for me to express my faith in words. Words are for communicating thoughts, concepts, philosophies. Words are what we use to bridge the gap, when my reality is different from yours. But the faith that is in me, my soul-bond with G-d, is the same as in you. Mitzvot are not a philosophy; they are our life, our essence. That’s why mitzvot can’t really be explained. They need to be felt, experienced, through tangible physical acts. Like laying tefillin. Or placing a coin in a charity box.

Or lighting a candle. That’s another “why” question that Chanukah often invokes. It’s such a warm little holiday, a nice alternative to all the

commercialized glitz out there. We can celebrate at home, share latkes and jelly donuts, play a few rounds of dreidel and sing Maoz Tzur. But why all the publicity? Why the huge menorahs and celebrations? Why does Jewish law stipulate that we must light the menorah by either the window or the door, at a time of night when passersby are likely to see it? The answer is really the culmination of all of those “why” questions: because it’s not enough to hold my faith hidden deep in my heart like a treasure. It can’t just remain “up there,” in the spiritual realm. It needs to be expressed and articulated; it must find a home within the physical, commonplace world.

We kindle the Chanukah lights in public to make a proud statement to everyone, curious strangers and mocking Greeks alike: We are the Jewish nation, and we are here to stay. These lights will pierce through all worldly darkness, and will never be extinguished.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00
<i>18/12, 19/12, 17/01 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00 a.m.</i>	

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	5:45
15/12, 21/12 & 29/12	6:00
Shabbat	6:15
from 23/12	6:30

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Rabbi & Rivki Chaikin and Mendel & Tzippy Chaikin on the birth of a son and grandson.
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the birth of twin great grand daughters in Johannesburg.
- Blima Nudelman on the birth of a great granddaughter in the USA.
- Annette Wolk on the birth of a great grandson in Melbourne.

- Enid Melamet on the birth of a great granddaughter in Israel.

BARMITZVAH

- Russel Wolpe on the Barmitzvah of his grandson.

MARRIAGE

- Anthony & Louise Stein on the marriage of their daughter Niki to Brad Stein.
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the marriage of their grandson Menachem Mendel Fox to Brachi Vogel.

BIRTHDAYS

- Solly Burgin on his 91st birthday on 10th December.
- Colin Meyerowitz on his 80th birthday on 25th December.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Harold & Caroline Myerson on their 20th anniversary on 11th January.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:



- Wilfred Ringo
- Hazel Benard

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- We wish long life to Lynne-Anne Moch on the death of her mother, Miriam.

CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE

Tuesday, 12 December - Light candles at 7:20 p.m.

Wednesday, 13 December - Light candles at 7:20 p.m.

Thursday, 14 December - Light candles at 7:20 p.m.

Friday, 15 December - Light the Chanukah candles first (after 5:32 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 7:55 p.m.

Saturday, 16 December - Light candles only after Shabbat is out (7:31 p.m.) and after Havdalah

Sunday, 17 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Monday, 18 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Tuesday, 19 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

*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.*