

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER December/January 2020-2021

Kislev/Tevet/Shevat 5781

### SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting  
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)  
*For service times see page 2*

11 & 12 December – 26 Kislev

🔊 Vayeishev

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:29

18 & 19 December – 4 Tevet

🔊 Miketz

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:34

25 & 26 December – 11 Tevet

🔊 Vayigash

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

1 & 2 January – 18 Tevet

🔊 Vayechi

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

8 & 9 January – 25 Tevet

🔊 Shemot

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

15 & 16 January – 3 Shevat

🔊 Vaeira

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:39

22 & 23 January – 10 Shevat

🔊 Bo

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

29 & 30 January – 17 Shevat

🔊 Beshalach

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:34

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

One of the most memorable Chanukah holidays of my life was spent in the Old City of Jerusalem. Walking through the narrow lanes and alleyways of the Jewish Quarter, just after dark, I was deeply moved by the sight of the little candles shining in the doorways. Special recesses had been carved in the Jerusalem stone of the doorposts, where the

Chanukiyah was placed, protected from the winter winds and rains by a glass covering. This enabled the literal fulfilment of the Talmudic instructions, "Chanukah candles must be placed on the outside of the doors of our home."

There was an interesting architectural anomaly in King Solomon's Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Windows are usually built in order to maximize the penetration of light into a building. As described in the Book of Kings, the windows of the Sanctuary were shaped by design so that light would shine out, rather than in. According to Talmud Menachot, this was meant to convey the message that G-d does not need outside illumination; on the contrary, the spiritual light of the Menorah, with everything it symbolizes, must spill out and brighten the world.

Since March we have each been transforming our homes into sanctuaries. Our personal dwellings have always been hallowed: places of sanctity and purity which serve as mini-homes for G-d. Confined as we have been, for the past eight months, this exercise has intensified.

For months, synagogues were closed for worship and prayer relocated to our flats and houses. Our rabbis, previously preaching from towering pulpits,

arrived right into our living rooms on the screens of iPhones, iPads and iMacs.

Our homes also became beacons of kindness, caring and giving. Physical hospitality was of course severely curtailed by lockdown limitations. But chessed does not happen only in the home, it also emanates from the home. In counterpoint to the numerous stories of corruption, graft and theft that dominated our headlines were thousands of acts of selfless attention to the lonely, the elderly and others needing assistance.

Fortunately, this pandemic is playing out in an age when communication technologies are extremely advanced. This made it so much easier to be connected with the rest of world even without stepping out. Today we can reach out to show care via a telephone call or a WhatsApp message. We can wish each other a Good Shabbos through cute little graphics sent out to broadcasts lists. We can help friends shop online, even if they are not technologically adept. All of these advances became tools for kindness and chessed.

Personally I have seen the inside of many more of my congregants' homes in the course of 2020 than in any single calendar year in more than three decades as a pulpit rabbi. Zoom Torah classes and virtual

services propelled me right into studies, dining rooms, kitchens and family rooms of hundreds of residences. Despite physical distance there was a sense of presence and home-to-home connection that cannot be achieved by gathering in a lecture room at shul or in the rabbi's house.

Our Sages tell us that the world stands on three pillars: Torah, Avodah (prayer) and Gemilut Chassadim (acts of kindness). While we worked, played, prayed and studied in our homes we were busy consolidating the spiritual pillars that are the real foundations holding up a Jewish home.

Here is the powerful message of Chanukah 2020: We have had eight months to strengthen the structure of our personal Home Sanctuary. To renovate it, redecorate it and spruce it up. If it is to be G-d's Temple in a true sense, then its glow must shine out into the outside world, a lighthouse radiating sanctity, serenity and shalom.

The darkness out there may be thick and appear impenetrable. The miracle of Chanukah was the victory of the few over the many. A small light can dispel a lot of obscurity.

We will start with one little candle, in our doorframe or window, solitary but valiantly radiating the warmth and purity from our home to the world out there. That light will increase, night after night, and combine with literally millions of other little Chanukah flames from Jewish homes around the world, to illuminate the entire planet with a giant flash of goodness and purity.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

## FROM THE REBBETZIN

Sometimes, I know exactly what I want to tell you in the Shul newsletter. I wait for the message I get each month, telling me that it is time to submit my article and then I sit down and write. Sometimes, I have to think more deeply until something triggers a thought. I enjoy developing it and sharing it with you. But this time I have been thinking and thinking and now I understand what writer's block is.

I have a list of things I do not want to write about.

It seems that all people can converse about, these days, is COVID, quarantine and super spreaders. Or possibly they have moved on to COVID fatigue and vaccinations. I do not want to write about school holidays and how happy I am to be finished with school for the year. I do not want to write about our beautiful weather. I do not even want to tell you about the peacocks that have moved into the abandoned house next door.

So that leaves me to wish you a very happy Chanukah. May we see our own Chanukah miracle this year. May Hashem watch over and keep us all safe and healthy.

Have a good month

*Rivky*

## SERVICE TIMES

*All services are currently by prior booking only. Phone the office for details and to book.*

### SHACHARIT (A.M.)

<b>Sunday &amp; Public Holidays</b>	8:00
<b>Monday to Friday</b>	7:15
<i>14/01: 7:00 (Rosh Chodesh)</i>	
<b>Shabbat &amp; Festivals</b>	9:30

### MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

<b>Sunday to Thursday</b>	6:15
<b>Friday</b>	6:00
<b>Shabbat</b>	6:15
<b>from 26/12</b>	6:30

## DVAR TORAH

### ***Why Don't We Read a Megillah on Chanukah?***

#### **The Megillah of Antiochus**

*By Tzvi Freeman  
(chabad.org)*

#### **Esther Vs. Antiochus**

Now here's an interesting difference between Chanukah and Purim: Both holidays have a small scroll—called a megillah—that tells their story. Purim has the Megillah of Esther. Chanukah has the Megillah of Antiochus.

On Purim, we are required to read that megillah publicly at night, and again in the day. But on Chanukah, there's no such requirement. Yes, there have been communities that read the Megillah of Antiochus in the synagogue on Chanukah. Indeed, some Yemenite communities still keep this custom. But it's done without a blessing, since all agree that it was never instituted by any rabbinical authority.

Another distinction between these two megillahs: The Talmud tells that Esther requested from the Men of the Great Assembly, which included prophets together with sages, that they "write my story for all generations." And indeed, the Megillah of Esther was inducted into the exclusive set of twenty-four books of Tanach.

The Megillah of Antiochus, on the other hand, is not considered a sacred work. Rav Saadia Gaon, the foremost authority for Jews in the 10th century, held it in high esteem. He wrote that the Hasmoneans, Judah, Shimon, Johanan, Jonathan, and Eliezer, sons of Mattathias, wrote this megillah

about their own experiences, and similar to the book of Daniel, they wrote it in the language of the Chaldeans (Aramaic). He translated it into Arabic along with his translations of other books of Tanach. Nevertheless, it was never inducted into Tanach, as was the Megillah of Esther.

The distinction gets yet sharper when we consider the names of these two megillahs. The Megillah of Esther is named after the heroine of the story. The Megillah of Antiochus is named after the villain!

None of this is coincidental. Something is going on over here that represents a deep distinction between the dynamics of Purim and Chanukah.

The stories of both Purim and Chanukah are about taking a real dark situation and turning it around for the good. But there are two ways of effecting this transformation.

### **Purim, Chanukah, and the Transformation of Darkness**

In the story of Purim, the royal decree to eliminate the Jewish population was transformed into royal support for a Jewish victory over those that desired their elimination. The house of Haman became the house of Mordechai.

In the story of Chanukah, the dictatorship of a foreign, insane megalomaniac who forbade Jewish practice and demanded he be worshipped led to the liberation of the Temple in Jerusalem and a miracle of light.

Yet, while Purim pulls inward, Chanukah radiates light outward.

On Purim, the Megillah of Esther is read in the synagogue. The Purim feast and exchange of foodstuffs, as well as the gifts to the poor, is done principally within the Jewish home.

So it makes sense that the story of Haman and King Achashverosh is also pulled inward, to become a sacred book of Torah named after a righteous Jewish heroine, and read each year by decree of the sages. The telling of the machinations and greed of these villains becomes a mitzvah, just as the house of Haman became the house of Mordechai. Pulled into the Torah and declared a mitzvah, they are transformed.

The miracle of Chanukah, on the other hand, is about shining light outward, and to the outside. The original requirements for the Chanukah menorah stipulate that it be lit only once it is dark. And where? "At the door of your house, on the outside." Why? As the Talmud states, "to publicize the miracle."

Who are we publicizing it to? That becomes obvious from another requirement: Until when can you light it? Until the marketplace is quiet. Until all the stragglers have gone home, including, the Talmud says, the Tarmodai.

Who are the Tarmodai? Merchants from the Syrian city of Tarmod (a.k.a. Tadmur, a.k.a. Palmyra) who were known for staying late in the market at night, collecting leftover wood. They were also known for having rebelled against King Solomon, and for having acted as mercenaries in

the destruction of both Temples.

And it's with these people that we measure the ultimate darkness that Chanukah can reach!

### **Chanukah and the Outside**

Which means: The celebration of Chanukah is meant to reach all those people out there as they are out there. Where Purim deals with the dark characters of this world by transforming them into players in a holy book of Torah, the light of Chanukah reaches into the thick darkness of night, as darkness remains darkness, outside of the holiness of Torah, and shines even there. Nothing is excluded, and nothing is changed.

That's why we absorb the message of Purim by being pulled into the words of a megillah, while the message of Chanukah is broadcast out there by shining the light of a menorah.

Even the megillah for Chanukah remains an outsider. It's named after the enemy, written entirely in Aramaic, and remains in a realm the sages of Israel called "outside writings"—meaning, outside the realm of the sacred works of Tanach. And so, of course, reading it is not a mitzvah—just a permitted act.

What is the point behind all this "outsideness?"

Because this light is the light of divine wisdom, for which there is no "outside." As the Baal Shem Tov taught, "G-dliness is everything. Everything is G-dliness." We just need light to see it there.

And there is no better light for that than Chanukah light.

**MAZALTOV**

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BIRTHS**

- Annette Wolk on the birth of a granddaughter.

**ENGAGEMENTS**

- David & Melanie Jacobs on the engagement of their daughter Alexandra to Evan Spark.

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Terrence Davis on the occasion of his 75th birthday on the 8<sup>th</sup> December.

- Solly Burgin on the occasion of his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 10<sup>th</sup> December.
- Carole Strimling on the occasion of her 70th birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> December.
- Neil Myerson on the occasion of his 50th birthday on the 17<sup>th</sup> December.
- Rose Oskowitz on the occasion of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 24<sup>th</sup> December.
- Stanley Smidt on the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> January.
- Maxine Abratt on the occasion of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 17<sup>th</sup> January.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

- David & Deborah Jankelow on their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the 9<sup>th</sup> December.

**REFUAH SHLEIMA**

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Sharon Margo
- Ann Benard

**BEREAVEMENTS**

We wish long life to

- Rene Levy, Cecil Levy & Brian Levy on the death of their father, Leon.

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



## CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE

Thursday, 10 December - Light candle at 7:20 p.m.

Friday, 11 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 7:50 p.m.

Saturday, 12 December - Light candles only after Shabbat is out (7:29 p.m.) and after Havdalah

Sunday 13 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Monday, 14 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Tuesday, 15 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Wednesday, 16 December - Light candles at 7:25 p.m.

Thursday, 17 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.*