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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

December 2025/January 2026

Kislev/Tevet 5786

SHABBAT TIMES

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

12 & 13 December – 23 Kislev
🕒 Vayeishev
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:30

19 & 20 December – 30 Kislev
🕒 Mikeitz (Chanukah)
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:34

26 & 27 December – 7 Tevet
🕒 Vayigash
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:37

02 & 03 January – 14 Tevet
🕒 Vayechi
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:39

09 & 10 January – 21 Tevet
🕒 Shemot
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:39

16 & 17 January – 28 Tevet
🕒 Va'eira
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:39

23 & 24 January – 6 Shevat
🕒 Bo
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:37

30 & 31 January – 13 Shevat
🕒 Bo
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:33

RABBI'S MESSAGE

"In the darkest place, I succeeded in seeing the light." These were the words of Segev Kalfon. He would know about darkness, after 738 days in Hamas tunnels. For it is in the dark that light can best be appreciated, as King Solomon famously describes (Ecclesiastes 2) "the superiority of light over darkness."

Chanukah, the Festival of Light, will thus take on special meaning in the current world, enveloped by darkness. We are living through an era when truth

is eclipsed by lies, when hatred overtakes love, when warped values prevail over morality. We shall spend eight days looking for light, spreading this light and adding light to the world.

Our national history is tragically filled with periods of blackness. Yet we have discovered that it is precisely during those times that we have grown and strengthened. Beginning with the very first exile, back in Pharaoh's Egypt, "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out." This is the pattern that has repeated itself again and again over the centuries. It is during the dark times that our resilience and grit, our perseverance and tenacity, our ability to adapt and overcome all shone through brightly.

When we light our Chanukah candles during the eight days of the festival, we recite a blessing thanking Hashem who "has performed miracles for us, in those days, at this time." The literal meaning of this blessing is that the miracles happened many hundreds of years ago, at this time of the year.

But the words take on a deeper meaning, with the addition of a silent yet implied conjunction. "He performed miracles for us, in those days [and] at this time." Miracles are not just part of our past, they are very much in our present. Usually, we are unaware of wonders as they unfold, disguised as they are in the natural order of things. They only become evident with hindsight. These past two years, we have all felt like we were living through history. True, there was pain and loss, destruction and chaos.

October 7th still looms huge. But through this thick smoke, we witnessed the open hand of Hashem. There was the obliteration of Hamas and Hezbollah, regime changes in Lebanon and Syria, the virtual collapse of Iran and its nuclear ambitions. Ongoing bombardment from all sides, mostly intercepted, resulting in few casualties. Internal terror attacks, repeatedly thwarted through intelligence and the security forces' acumen.

In times past, we reflected on the heroes of our history. This year, on this festival of deliverance, we can think of our contemporary heroes. All inhabitants of the Holy Land, who continue to lead "normal" lives under positively abnormal conditions. Particularly those who have served in the IDF, both young men and women currently in uniform as part of the national service as well as many not-so-young citizens who have had to give up their civilian lives to clock up hundreds of days of reserve duty, often leaving wives with young children at home.

On each of the nights of Chanukah, as I light my candles in successive numbers, I will think of modern-day heroes who experienced the darkest of all darkness and were still able to see the light.

On the first night, it will be the light of **Segev**, who had a recurring dream that he would stand on the stage during his liberation "ceremony" and shout out "Shema Yisrael." Thankfully he was spared the ordeal of those travesties and absolute violations of human rights and dignity.

On the second night, I will visualize the light of **Matan Angrest** (738 days in captivity), who managed to obtain Tefillin and a Siddur from his captors and prayed three times daily.

On night three, my inspiration will be **Rom Braslavski** (738 days), kept starving and continually tortured, who was promised improved conditions and increased food if he converted to Islam and had the strength to resist and refuse.

On the fourth night of Chanukah, my light will be **Bar Kuperstein** (738), who pledged Tzedakah from the money in his wallet back home, as a merit for his liberation.

When I light the fifth candle, I will think of **Eitan Horn** (738), who fasted for the first time ever this past Yom Kippur.

On night number six, the courage of **Agam Berger** (482) will light up my home, as I remember that she refused to work on Shabbat (she was expected to cook for her captors) or to eat non-Kosher.

On the seventh night, I will think of **Eli Sharabi** (491), author of the best-seller "Hostage", an account of his torment, who describes himself as non-religious prior to his abduction, but started to recite the Shema every single day.

On the final night, when all eight candle holders will be filled with light, I will think of **Omer Shemtov** (505) making Kiddush every Friday night, then sitting in physical darkness for 24 hours, refusing to use his torch in the obscurity of the tunnels, yet basking in full spiritual light the entire Shabbat.

The correct time to light the Chanukah candles is when it is dark outside, for this is when the light of the candles is needed and when it will be most noticed. For it is in the darkest places that we must succeed in finding the light.

Chanukah Sameach.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

This article first appeared in the Chanukah edition of the SA Jewish Report

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Right now, I'm panicked about how soon the first day of school is!

For those of you wondering, yes—we did just break up three days ago. And for those wondering even more, I am blessed with a job I love.

But holidays... not having to get up at the crack of dawn (though I still do), not having to be dressed and out of the house in a rush, and having no set routine—that makes me happy. The streets are already quiet (or maybe that's just my imagination), the cars on the road seem to be driving more slowly, and I'm loving it.

The honest truth is that I love routine. I enjoy being busy and feel so much better and more accomplished when my days are full. As Shlomo HaMelech teaches us, there is a time for everything—and thank G-d, now is my holiday time.

I have a long list of things I plan to do during this time. In all honesty, I know most of the list won't get done—I'm much too busy doing nothing!

I know that true Torah values teach us to use our time effectively and appreciate every moment, so holidays could feel like a guilty pleasure. The Rambam tells us that when a person sleeps at night so that they can serve Hashem better the next day, that sleep is considered a mitzvah. So, please G-d, this holiday time will help refresh and replenish my energies, so that when January comes, I will start my work with renewed inspiration—and all my "nothings" will also be counted as part of my work.

For those of you going away, travel safely and have a good time. For those staying in Johannesburg, enjoy the quieter and slower pace.

Have a happy Chanukah and a good month!

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

Why Hanukkah

Rabbi Benjamin Blech (aish.com)

Why the miracle of the Hanukkah oil is so important to Jews

We all know that when the Jews rededicated the temple there was only enough oil to last for one day and miraculously it lasted for eight. But what makes that worthy of a holiday?

The real reason for the Hanukkah holiday isn't that we saved a week's worth of oil but that God reminded us once again of the very first message he shared with Moses at the burning bush.

Moses was tending his sheep and suddenly saw a bush on fire. Strangely enough, it defied the laws of nature and was not being consumed. God sent a message to reassure Moses at that moment and to also serve as prophecy for the Jewish people to the end of days. Just like that bush was not consumed, the Jews too will defy the laws of history and will never perish.

When Arnold Toynbee completed his classic 10-volume analysis of the rise and fall of human civilizations, *The Study of History*, he was troubled by one seeming refutation of his universal rules governing the inexorable decline of every people on earth. Only the Jews survived in defiance of Toynbee's carefully reasoned analysis. So Toynbee proclaimed the Jews nothing more than "a vestigial remnant," a people destined to shortly expire. But somehow in spite of all those brutal attempts to destroy the children of Israel, Jews have demonstrated the ongoing miracle of the burning bush.

Jewish history defies explanation. Jewish survival is nothing short of a miracle. And it is a miracle which God assured Moses will repeat itself until the end of days.

That is why at a time when world leaders at the United Nations continue to pass their obscene resolutions against Israel and anti-

Semitism once again sprouts its ugly head among supposedly civilized nations, we rejoice at the Hanukkah lights which reassure us of our eternal survival.

Why Jews shouldn't turn Hanukkah into a Jewish Christmas

It's true that Hanukkah and Christmas are usually celebrated around the same time. As a matter of fact, the day of the month is identical – Christmas is the 25th of December and Hanukkah is the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev. Many Jews who live in Christian countries have made Hanukkah the most observed Jewish holiday because we don't want our poor kids to feel deprived while everybody else is getting presents. And, just like Christmas, Hanukkah also has suffered by becoming over commercialized.

But we should never forget that Hanukkah historically came before Christmas by almost two centuries. The Hanukkah story begins with the confrontation between the culture of the Greeks and the spiritual identity of the Jews. Hellenism worshiped the holiness of beauty; Judaism worshiped the beauty of holiness. The Greeks were masters of art; they idolized the body; they excelled in sports; their gymnasiums served as models for the Olympic Games. Hellenism glorified the physical.

The Jews had a mission: to maintain the primacy of the spiritual.

In the second century before the common era, the battle raged in Israel for the hearts and souls of the Jews. And the sad truth is that many Jews succumbed to the seductive lure of the Greek lifestyle. They followed the philosophy of the Epicureans who taught that pleasure is the chief goal of life: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." These Jews called themselves Hellenists. Traditional Jews referred to them as Apikorus, a variant of the word for Epicurean, still used to this very day to label someone a heretic.

Ironically, the whole point of the Jewish victory was defeating the

threat of assimilation, overcoming the powerful lure of the religious practices of their pagan neighbors. Hanukkah became the holiday beautifully symbolized by the uniqueness of oil. All other liquids easily blend with different liquids. Oil is unique. Try to mix it with water and it separates and rises to the top.

Jews and Christians need to respect each other – but not to imitate each other. And for Jews to observe Hanukkah and Christmas together is to negate the very message of the holiday's spiritual meaning.

Why Muslims should all know the Hanukkah story

Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was born in Mecca in the year 570. He gained few early followers and experienced hostility from Meccan polytheists. To escape ongoing persecution, he sent some of his disciples to Abyssinia in 615, before he and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina (then known as Yathrib) later in 622.

This event, the Hijra, marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Neither he nor his followers or for that matter his religion existed at the time of the Hanukkah story – a story which makes clear the historic attachment of the Jews to Israel, to Jerusalem and to the temple going back two millennia.

Perhaps Muslims, more than any other faith community, ought to be reminded of the Jewish connection to the holy land, to Jerusalem its capital, and to the site on which the temple, in which the miracle of the oil took place long ago stood. Perhaps the United Nations as well should familiarize themselves with the Jewish link to Israel before condemning us as new "settlers from afar" whose rights dare not be considered above those whose mosque represents a religion first created in the seventh century.

Why Jews light the Hanukkah menorah on the window sill facing the street

There is one last thing about the holiday of Hanukkah that makes it unique.

Hanukkah doesn't simply ask us to fulfill its rituals; it demands that we publicize them. In fact there is a special Hebrew term for that concept. It's called *pirsummey nissa* – publicizing the miracle. For that reason, when possible we light the menorah outdoors to make sure that passersby can see it. And in wintry climates we put the menorah by a window facing the street so that all those who walk by will know that there are Jews celebrating the holiday inside.

Why the special emphasis for just this mitzvah? The answer is part of the story as well. In the time of the Maccabees there were Jews who were ready to abandon their faith because they were ashamed of their identity, embarrassed by their religion which made them so noticeably different.

What could be sadder than the lack of Jewish pride? What could be more tragic than anti-Semitism instigated by Jews themselves – ashamed of those very values which made God choose us as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"?

Albert Einstein once famously said "I deeply regret that I was born a Jew – because that made it impossible for me to ever choose to become a Jew."

Hanukkah is the holiday when, for the first time in our history, we overcame the challenge of assimilation with the sense of pride of the Maccabees. It is a holiday which commemorates the truth of the menorah: we are the ones who spread the light of spirituality, of goodness, of morality and of truth to the world.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Friday	6:00
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MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Terrence Davis on his 80th birthday on the 8th of December.
- Carol Strimling on her 75th birthday on the 15th of December.
- Neil Myerson on his 55th birthday on the 17th of December.
- Jillian Kaplan on her 87th birthday on the 22nd of December.

- Rose Oskowitz on her 75th birthday on the 24th of December.
- Mary Schneider on her 86th birthday on the 3rd of January.
- Caroline Myerson on her 50th birthday on the 7th of January.
- Martin Moritz on his 80th birthday on the 15th of January.
- Veronica Brenner on her 84th birthday on the 16th of January.

BIRTHS

- Mazal Tov to Phillip & Rilla Jacobson and Jeanette Markowitz on the birth of their great granddaughter in Israel.
- Mazal Tov to Doris Samson on the birth of her great

grandson born to Miriam and Binyomin Samson in Manchester.

- Mazaltov to Gary and Melanie Epstein on the birth of their granddaughter.

MARRIAGES

- Mazal Tov to Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the wedding of their granddaughter Shevi Sarchi to Ben Breuer on the 24th of November.
- Mazal Tov to James & Amanda Teeger on the wedding of their son Daniel to Rachel Berkowitz on the 27th of December.
- Mazal Tov to Phillip & Rilla Jacobson on the wedding of their granddaughter Basheva Fox to Ephraim Woolf on the 4th of December.

CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE

🕯 Sunday, 14 December - Light one candle at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯 Monday, 15 December - Light two candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯 Tuesday, 16 December - Light three candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯 Wednesday, 17 December – Light four candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Thursday, 18 December - Light five candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Friday, 19 December - Light six Chanukah candles first (after 5:40 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, 20 December – After Shabbat ends at 7:34 p.m., make Havdalah first, then light seven candles.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Sunday 21 December - Light eight candles at 7:30 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.

