

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER December 2024/January 2025

Kislev/Tevet 5785

### SHABBAT TIMES

⇄ Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting  
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)  
For service times see page 4

06 & 07 December – 6 Kislev  
⇄ Vayetzai  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:26

13 & 14 December – 13 Kislev  
⇄ Vayishlach  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:31

20 & 21 December – 20 Kislev  
⇄ Vayeshev  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:35

27 & 28 December – 27 Kislev  
⇄ Miketz (*Chanukah*)  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

3 & 4 January – 4 Tevet  
⇄ Vayigash  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:44

10 & 11 January – 11 Tevet  
⇄ Vayechi  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:44

17 & 18 January – 18 Tevet  
⇄ Shemot  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:43

24 & 25 January – 27 Tevet  
⇄ Va'era  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:40

31 January & 1 February – 3 Adar  
⇄ Bo  
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:37

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

We started praying for rain this week. Since Wednesday evening, we added the words “give rain and dew for blessing” in the ninth brocha of our thrice daily Amidah. This addition begins some two months after the autumn equinox—around 4 December—as

this is when winter sets in along with the rainy season.

This side of the world, it was of course the spring equinox, and we are in the thick of summer 60 days later. This actually gives rise to a huge debate in Jewish Law as to whether this prayer should be said in sync with the Northern Hemisphere or if communities down under should follow their own schedule. The point is of course moot here in the Highveld, with summer rains a feature of our climate.

We have not needed our Siddur to remember to pray for rain here in Gauteng. With the temperature reaching mid to upper thirties this whole week (and little relief on the horizon) we hope, all day, for some refreshing rain to arrive. The forecast every morning promises us a chance of thundershowers, but by the end of the day the total precipitation has been zero mm.

We know that rain is a huge blessing. Water is an essential resource, and life depends on its presence. That we must pray for it is, in itself, a huge blessing. This keeps us connected

and dependent on Hashem for the precious liquid, which is a good thing.

Deuteronomy discusses the respective merits of irrigation of the land in Egypt and Israel. In Egypt it never rains yet agriculture thrives in the fertile Nile River, which bursts its banks annually, watering the fields. In the blessed Holy Land, we depend on rains from Heaven. Why is this deemed a blessing? Precisely because our dependence creates a bond between the Divine and human, reminding us at all times of our reliance on Hashem. To the Egyptians, however, Hashem seems to be saying, “I don’t want your prayers, I do not want a relationship with you. Here is your water, flowing to irrigate your land from some 6000 km to the South.”

So pray for rain we will, formally from our Siddur and spontaneously from our hearts, as we seek relief from the heat wave. We are grateful for the privilege to beseech G-d for our needs and will be grateful further when He responds with the blessed drops.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

**FROM THE REBBETZIN**

My cousin is visiting from Israel. She and I love to be in each other's company. We love to reminisce and also to discuss how similar we are despite not having grown up together and despite not living near each other. These similarities range from liking the same foods (bread and avocado) to liking or disliking the same people (not for publication) and similar interests.

The other night we were once again discussing "Bacher DNA". She commented that there are two traits firmly written into her genes: she cannot say no and she is a super procrastinator.

Well, the second one, I got full on. You just need to look at my weekly cellphone usage report to see how much time I spend procrastinating (wasting time). Some days, after I make a list of all the things I need to do, I find myself playing a game, listening to a podcast or watching a clip of a kill in the Kruger Park. I even avoid doing things I need to, like marking and reports, by getting busy with other tasks. Is it not strange how I will decide to polish the silver or put in a load of laundry, thus justifying my procrastination?

But now I have finished my marking and reports for 2024. I am officially on summer holiday. So, watch this space to see how I manage to procrastinate all of the tasks I have planned to accomplish in the holidays.

Have a good summer.

*Rivky*

**OPINION*****What Hamas Can Learn from Hanukkah***

*By Jeff Jacoby (aish.com)*

**The promise of Hanukkah and of Jewish history is that Hamas will ultimately fail and fade into oblivion.**

A few years ago, with good intentions but woeful misjudgement, the Catholic News Service tweeted out a greeting for the Jewish festival of lights.

"Hanukkah began at sundown," it read. "Happy Hanukkah to those who celebrate!" Accompanying the tweet was a photograph of the Arch of Titus in Rome, which celebrates the defeat of Judea and the sack of the Temple in Jerusalem by Roman legions in 70 CE. A relief on the arch shows soldiers triumphantly holding aloft artifacts plundered from the Temple, most prominently its great golden menorah.

The news service quickly realized its blunder. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Temple during a much earlier conflict — the Maccabean revolt against the religious tyranny of the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE — so an image of the Temple's later devastation was wholly inappropriate. The tweet was deleted and the news service apologized.

Yet in retrospect the Arch of Titus does symbolize a key message of Hanukkah, one intensely relevant amid today's rising tide of antisemitism and hostility toward Israel: However genocidal and powerful their enemies, the Jews and the Jewish faith have endured. Under Antiochus IV, the Seleucids (also called Syrian-Greeks) were determined to replace Judaism with the pagan

culture of Hellenism; under the Roman emperors Vespasian and Titus, Jewish ties to the Jewish homeland were to be crushed forever. Two millennia later, those emperors are dust and their grandeur lies in ruins. But the Jews and their religion still live, and their bond with the land of Israel is as indissoluble as ever.

Hanukkah arrives this year amid a terrible eruption of Jew-hatred. The horrific pogrom of Oct. 7, when Hamas terrorists murdered, tortured, raped, and kidnapped some 1,400 residents of southern Israel, was the bloodiest massacre of Jews since the end of the Holocaust. The reaction in much of the world, and especially in many bastions of elite culture and higher education, has been an unprecedented wave of antisemitic vituperation, intimidation, menace, and glee. The director of the FBI testified on Oct. 31 that antisemitism in the United States was reaching "historic levels," and the crisis has only worsened since then. In many US communities, on college campuses, and overseas, Jews feel threatened to a degree unprecedented in generations.

In a Capitol Hill hearing room Tuesday, there was a particularly chilling indication of how normalized antisemitism is becoming.

The presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania were repeatedly asked whether "calling for the genocide of Jews" would violate the policies of their schools. None would answer yes. The significance of their equivocation was captured by Representative Kevin Kiley, a California Republican.

"I don't think you're a person of any kind of prejudice yourself," he said to Harvard president Claudine Gay. "But you clearly seem to believe that the forces of antisemitism are a constituency that needs to be catered to."

Throughout history, the "forces of antisemitism" have expressed themselves in three different ways: They have targeted the religion of the Jews, the physical existence of Jews, or the national state of the Jews. In America and the West today, they focus their enmity on Israel, the world's only Jewish country. By contrast, the revolt of the Maccabees against the Seleucid emperor Antiochus 22 centuries ago — the events commemorated at Hanukkah — was a response to explicitly religious persecution.

Antiochus had proclaimed himself the manifestation of the Greek God Zeus and demanded that his subjects make him the highest focus of their worship. But in Judea, faithful Jews balked. Loyal to their Torah and their one God, they rejected Hellenism, with its network of pagan gods and its cult of the body. In response, Antiochus embarked on a campaign to destroy Judaism. He forbade Jewish services in the Temple. He punished observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, and the study of Torah — mainstays of Jewish religious life — with death. He declared the Temple to be a shrine to Olympian Zeus and ordered Jewish leaders to defile the holy place by sacrificing swine.

In his acclaimed history of Jerusalem, the historian Simon Sebag Montefiore conveys the savagery of the repression. "Those practicing the Sabbath were burned alive or suffered a gruesome Greek import:

crucifixion. An old man perished rather than eat pork; women who circumcised their children were thrown with their babies off the walls of Jerusalem. The Torah was torn to shreds and burned publicly; everyone found with a copy was put to death."

This was the first instance in Jewish history of religious antisemitism. Its aim was neither to exterminate the Jews nor to drive them from their land. It was to replace their monotheism with the idols and gods of Hellenistic paganism. In 167 BCE, a rebellion to reclaim Jewish religious autonomy began when an elderly priest named Mattathias refused a Syrian order to sacrifice to an idol. When a Hellenized Jew stepped forward to do so, Mattathias killed the man and dismantled the altar. Then he and his sons — led by Judah Maccabeus, a nickname meaning "the Hammer" — organized a guerrilla war against the empire. Eventually the Temple was reclaimed and restored. Ever since, Jews have celebrated the festival of Hanukkah to mark the victory over religious persecution.

In later centuries, there would be many instances of such persecution. Jews in Europe were slaughtered by Crusaders en route to the Holy Land, viciously demonized by Martin Luther when he launched the Reformation, humiliated by Mohammed's followers when they conquered the Middle East, and smeared by Charles Coughlin, an antisemitic American priest and radio celebrity in the 1930s.

Whether the antisemites chanting "intifada, intifada" on US campuses or ripping down pictures of kidnapped Israelis realize it or not, Hamas hates

and kills Jews first and foremost out of hatred for their religion. The name Hamas is an Arab acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement," and the organization's founding covenant explicitly and repeatedly proclaims the destruction of Israel to be a religious obligation. It proclaims itself a "wing" of the Muslim Brotherhood and stresses that its "program is Islam," from which "it draws its ideas, ways of thinking, and understanding of the universe, life, and man." Hamas teaches its adherents that they serve Allah by killing Jews, which helps explain why the most gruesome barbarities of Oct. 7 were accompanied by shouts of "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is most great).

Yet the promise of Hanukkah and of Jewish history is that Hamas will ultimately fail and fade into oblivion. Those who seek to destroy the Jews have been responsible for oceans of suffering and death. But none of them has outlasted the Jewish people. The Seleucids today are virtually forgotten. The Arch of Titus is an antiquity for tourists to gawk at. Hamas, too, will disappear in time.

And long after it is gone, Jewish families will continue to kindle the Hanukkah menorah, celebrating the Festival of Lights at the darkest time of the year.

*This op-ed originally appeared in The Boston Globe on 11 December 2023*

<b>SERVICE TIMES</b>	
<b>SHACHARIT (A.M.)</b>	
Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00
<b>MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)</b>	
Friday	5:45

**MAZALTOV**



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Jillian Kaplan on her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December

- David Jacobs on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December
- Mary Schneider on her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January
- Caroline Myerson on her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January

- Martin Moritz on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January

**REFUAH SHLEIMA**

We wish a speedy recovery to:

- Rilla Jacobson

**CHANUKAH CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE**

🕯 Wednesday, 25 December - Light one candle at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯 Thursday, 26 December - Light two candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯 Friday, 27 December - Light three 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, 28 December – After Shabbat ends at 7:37 p.m., make Havdalah first, then light four candles.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Sunday, 29 December - Light five candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Monday 30 December - Light six candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Tuesday 31 December - Light seven candles at 7:30 p.m.

🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯 Wednesday 1 January - 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.*

