

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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February 2015

Shevat/Adar 5775

### SHABBAT TIMES

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

13 & 14 February – 25 Shevat  
🕒 Mishpatim (*Shekalim*)  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:24

20 & 21 February – 2 Adar  
🕒 Terumah  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:18

27 & 28 February – 9 Adar  
🕒 Tetzaveh (*Zachor*)  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:11

6 & 7 March – 16 Adar  
🕒 Ki Tisa  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:04

### CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As you may know my family and I have moved to Glenhazel to be closer to the school my kids attend. We've spent just a few Shabbosim away from Oxford and we are missing it already.

Welcome to 2015 and back to Johannesburg if you've been away. I hope everyone had a good break. I stayed in Johannesburg and despite the weather, it has been a pleasure having been here over this period. Driving through town has been pure bliss! Welcome back to the Rabbi and his family who went to America for Shmuli's wedding (mazaltov) and then the Rabbi continued on to Israel

with a school tour. I am pleased you survived! Welcome back to Tzvi and Tanya as well.

Now for some impressive stats! The five Oxford matriculants (that I am aware of and if I have missed anyone out I apologise) collectively achieved 30 distinctions! Well done and mazaltov to the Epstein, Jankelow, Soicher, Jacobs and Chaikin families on this phenomenal achievement. We wish you every success as you set sail toward your bright futures and never forget the anchor in your lives that is your yiddishkeit, community and shul, wherever that may be.

Further good news is that our water usage has dropped by more than 2/3rds. We are now faced with the challenge of discussing this with Johannesburg Water. Thanks once again to Stan Yankelson who has spent untold hours helping to sort this out.

Wishing you all a wonderful year ahead filled with nachas, simchas and good health.

Regards

Brian

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

I thought I would be terrified in Israel. My last visit there had ended with my colleagues and I witnessing a terrorist attack out of our Jerusalem hotel window. I was there with a group of South African Rabbonim on the day a tractor was ramming into cars and pedestrians in the midst of rush hour traffic.

I had not been to the Holy Land since then. In the weeks leading up to my trip there had been a number of stabbings in the capital. I was definitely not scared to the point that I wanted to cancel my visit but I expected that I would feel uneasy my entire time there.

The moment I stepped off the plane, a month ago, I immediately felt at home and at peace. Living in South Africa, we all know the feeling of constantly being on our guard, looking out both sides of the car every time we stop at a traffic light and avoiding late night driving. Walking the streets at midnight, we would never dream. And here I was, feeling totally safe roaming the streets of our Holy Cities, even in the early hours of the morning.

It was the first time in many years that I was on an organised tour of the country and during the few days I was there, along with the 30+ 17

year olds I took with me, we literally traversed the country from North to South and from East to West. Three times a day--Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv--we had to ask the same question, "Which way is Jerusalem?" (In today's technological age, the answer is as close as the smartphone in your pocket.)

Living in the Diaspora, we know that we face the site of the Holy Temple to pray. In South Africa, that's North. It reminds us that our prayers ascend via the holiest of all sites and of our deep and inseparable connection with Jerusalem.

Travelling across the Holy Land, the direction changed from day to day. In Safed it was South; at Massada, North; in Tel Aviv we had to face East. There were enough of us to make our own minyan, not always at designated places of worship and we had to be mindful at all times to align ourselves correctly.

We can be Jews anywhere; we can daven and practice our yiddishekit anywhere. We can feel safest as Jews when we can feel and hear the beat of the heart of the Jewish Nation, in our Holy Capital.

Can't wait to go back!

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

#### SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays 8:00

Monday to Friday 7:15

19/02 & 20/2 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00

04/02 (Fast of Esther) 7:00

05/02 (Purim) 6:45

Shabbat & Festivals 9:00

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

Sunday to Thursday 6:15

Friday 5:45

Shabbat 6:15

### FROM THE REBBETZIN

Another one has spread her wings and left home. Having matriculated at the end of last year, Chanala has chosen to spend these months in New York, studying at a girls' yeshiva and being in close proximity to most of her siblings and their families.

As I expected

Our house is that much quieter and each of us is missing her presence hugely.

What I didn't expect, is how long it has taken for her to settle. TG she is a happy, lively, outgoing personality and has looked forward to being independent and living in a city that is constantly busy. So, she and I have really been taken by surprise at how intensely she misses home.

Parenting is such a strange profession. While, of course, I only want her to be settled and happy, had she settled in without a backward glance I probably would have been quite sad.

(I remember still how I felt when my first child walked into school and left me outside, crying)

Our job description, it seems, is to nurture and provide a solid stepping stone so that our children can move forward and excel, and, when they miss us, it's a reassurance that they valued and appreciated the first part of their lives. So we watch with gratitude as she takes her next step forward.

PG with hatzlocha.

*Rivky*

### DVAR TORAH

#### PURIM & SERENDIPITY

*Rabbi Benjamin Blech (www.aish.com)*

It's a question I've often been asked. Many times people turn to me as a Rabbi and in all sincerity ask "How can I find G-d?"

I tell them it really isn't all that difficult. All they have to do is turn serendipity into Purim and they'll realize the answer.

Permit me to explain.

Serendipity is a fascinating word that a British lexicon company recently voted one of the 10 hardest words in English to translate. Dictionaries define it as "a fortuitous happenstance" or "a pleasant surprise." Wikipedia tells us "The notion of serendipity is a common occurrence throughout the history of scientific innovation such as Alexander Fleming's accidental discovery of penicillin in 1928, and the invention of the microwave oven by Percy Spencer in 1945, to name but a few."

In our personal lives, serendipity refers to those moments that simply don't make sense from a statistical perspective. We desperately need to speak to someone we haven't seen in a decade, have no idea how to contact him and out of the blue he suddenly calls on a totally different matter. We are in a panic because there's some information we have to know and amazingly discover it's in the very book we just happened to pick up by accident. And then there's my friend who was distraught because he missed a plane connection and found himself on

the next flight seated next to a remarkable woman who it became clear to him soon enough was his soul mate.

The word serendipity merely describes these “fortuitous happenstances;” it does not explain. How is it that the impossible happens so often, that the inexplicable plays such a frequent and prominent role in our lives?

The answer is the key to Purim, and its message enables us to find spiritual meaning in the seemingly irrational events of our lives.

The Book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention G-d once. It is a story filled with coincidences, implausible turns of events, improbable incidents which follow one upon another in a crescendo of ever more unlikely happenings which together bring about the downfall of the enemy of the Jewish people intent on genocide.

Mordechai and Esther would appear to be the hero and heroine of this almost unbelievable tale. Yet we know that it was G-d who engineered it from on high and to whom the Jewish people continue to offer praise for this remarkable miracle.

Where was G-d? He masked His presence in the guise of serendipity – which to this day is commemorated by Jews around the world through the significant custom of masquerading on Purim.

Purim is the holiday where G-d's presence can be detected if we are sensitive enough to the Divine clues as He leads us through our daily lives. It is the holiday which the sages of the Talmud tell us is the only one destined to last throughout our history, even though all the other holidays commemorate far greater obvious and open miracles. Why is that? Because G-d prefers for us to find Him rather than to vividly impose the reality of His existence upon us.

Serendipity is G-d whispering to us; it is His still small voice that

beckons us to be aware of His presence.

Every one of us has inexplicable “Purim moments” that bring G-d into our awareness in order to make sense of the strange happenings that befall us.

#### **G-d's Whisper to Me**

One of the most memorable experiences of my life demonstrated this truth to me. On a trip to Eastern Europe to visit the places where my ancestors lived, as well as the concentration camps where much of my family perished, I spent one Sabbath morning in a synagogue in Warsaw where I was fortunate to be one of the seven called up for an aliyah.

It is the custom for the people given an Aliyah to publicly make a pledge of a donation for the synagogue. As I concluded my blessings, I was emotionally overcome by the realization of where I was and how many great Jewish leaders must have preceded me standing at this very spot, and I felt the need to make a generous contribution. But I hesitated because I didn't want to appear like a rich American tourist who is shaming all the other honorees whose contributions were limited by their poverty.

As a compromise, I decided that a pledge of \$36 would be just about right – enough to be meaningful as a gift and not exorbitant as an expression of ego. No sooner was the pledge announced than there was an audible gasp from the congregants. It seems that \$36 was quite a fortune in the currency of Polish zlotys. The president quickly came over to me, asked where I was staying, and if it would be all right for a committee to come to my hotel immediately after the Sabbath to collect this generous donation. Of course I agreed, and within five minutes after the Sabbath ended, a committee of three appeared in the lobby and asked me to make good on my pledge. I happily gave them the money and felt very pleased that I had the merit of

being able to perform a good deed, a mitzvah.

My wife and I then wondered what there was to do to while away a few hours on a Saturday night in Warsaw. The concierge told us there was a casino on the premises and that was about the only activity available to us.

New to gambling, I stopped at the very first slot machine and, on a lark, deposited one coin. What followed was indescribable. Lights flashed, gongs went off, people around the room stopped what they were doing to see what had happened. I stood amazed as money kept pouring out of the machine. It seems that I hit the jackpot, and I quickly kept filling bucket after bucket with my winnings. I immediately decided that I must have used up my share of good luck for that night, and I went to cash in my winnings.

The cashier put all the coins through her counting machine and finally came up with a total. The sum she told me was staggering, and for a moment I thought I was almost a millionaire. What I had forgotten was that the amount she told me was in Polish currency, zlotys. Anxiously, I asked her, “What does that come to in American dollars?”

After some quick calculating, she replied, “Oh, about 36 American dollars.”

For years I had preached that whatever we give eventually comes back to us. But this time G-d made it so abundantly clear that my contribution was rewarded by its exact equivalent.

G-d wanted me to know with certainty His ongoing presence in the very place where the descendants of Haman sought to destroy His people. To do that, He left a clue that was unmistakable. And that is what He continues to do in so many different ways if we are wise enough to understand them. Because we don't really have to struggle to find G-d. He is as anxious to find us – if not more – and strengthen our relationship with Him.

**MAZALTOV**

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**MARRIAGES**

- Mazeltov to Clive and Rhona Gilbert on the marriage of their son, Anthony, to Danielle Marciano in England.

**BIRTHS**

- Mazeltov to Allan and Sandra Sher on the birth of a grandson.
- Mazeltov to Phillip and Aileen Shifren on the birth of a grandson in USA.

- Mazeltov to Justin and Maxine Abratt on the birth of a granddaughter in Israel.

**ENGAGEMENTS**

- Mazeltov to Barry Speigel on his engagement to Fiona Tuchten.

**MARRIAGES**

- Mazeltov to Warren Saks and Justine Kampel on their forthcoming marriage on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

**REFUAH SHLEMAH**

We wish a Speedy Recovery to:

- Gillien Saks
- Bernard Binkin
- Maureen Ringo

**BEREAVEMENTS**

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Marlene Sher on the death of her brother, Louis Balkin.
- Mike Gendel on the death of his father, Philip.
- Bernard Goldberg on the death of his wife, Joyce.
- Janine Shavell on the death of her mother, Audrey.
- David Milne on the death of his mother, Ruth.

**FAST OF ESTHER****WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH**

Fast begins: 4:53 a.m. -- Fast ends: 6:54 p.m. --- Shacharit: 7:00 a.m. -- Mincha: 6:00 p.m.  
Megilah reading: 7:00 p.m.

**PURIM****THURSDAY 5 MARCH**

Shacharit: 6:45 a.m.; Megilah Reading: 7:30 a.m. (approximately).

Second Megilah Reading 5:00 p.m., at West Street Shul

*followed by our joint*

**PURIM SEUDAH**

along with West Street Shul, at West Street

**Entertainment for all ages**

*Booking required 011-646-6020 or info@oxfordshul.com – R150 (R75 12 & under)*