

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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February 2017

Shevat 5777

SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting

🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2

10 & 11 February – 15 Shevat

🕒 Beshalach

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:27

17 & 18 February – 22 Shevat

🕒 Yitro

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:21

24 & 25 February – 29 Shevat

🕒 Mishpatim (*Shekalim*)

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:14

3 & 4 March – 6 Adar

🕒 Terumah

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:07

10 & 11 March – 13 Adar

🕒 Tetzaveh (*Zachor*)

🕒 6:12 – 🕒 7:00

RABBI'S MESSAGE

SMALL SHUL vs BIG SHUL

I tend to decide my community's relationship with me by the way they greet me. If I meet a worshipper and they wish me "Good Shabbos" even on a Monday morning, they clearly associate the rabbi with the Sabbath, which is fair enough. However, if on a January day, I am greeted with a fumbled and awkward, "Happy new year and well over the fast," I am not quite as happy.

If you want to know how I really love to be greeted, it is on a weekday afternoon with the words, "Hi Rabbi, I'll see you at Mincha this evening."

What really saddens me is the following scenario: I am standing in the lobby of an apartment block waiting for the lift to arrive and a fellow Jew

notices me, turns very somber and in a hushed tone whispers, "who died in the building?"

Our Torah is called "Torat Chaim" (the Torah of Life). I see it my function to teach the congregation how to apply the principle of "Etz Chaim hi lamachazikin ba" (it is a Tree of Life for those who hold onto it), the famous words we recite each time we take the Holy Scrolls out of the Ark.

A few days ago I received a phone call from a congregant wishing to discuss with me why he felt we should not have Friday night services in the small shul, as we have in the last few months. The discussion was a most valuable one and I would in fact value and welcome more input from the community on this subject as I am aware that there are strong views both for and against.

This individual explained that he felt cramped and claustrophobic in the smaller sanctuary, that the seats were uncomfortable and that some were actually in disrepair. All of those points were acknowledged and noted.

But in the conversation, I was told the following, "Rabbi, I just really don't like the little shul. It makes me think of death... This is where people come to say Kaddish."

This last statement really made me think very hard. I had never thought of our minor sanctuary in that way. On the contrary, I always think of it as a place of vibrancy and life. This is where people come, every day of the week, to

gather and give praise to the One Above for life.

I am extremely proud that Oxford Shul, despite its declining numbers and ageing community succeeds in getting ten men together virtually every morning and evening, seven days a week. And the reason for this gathering is not to enable those who need to say Kaddish to do so. In fact at the present moment, in our community, there are are Thank G-d no mourners who are obligated to honour their departed loved ones in that way.

We have a minyan every day because this is what a synagogue does, because that is what Jews do. While Hashem may reject our individual petitions, he never rejects the pleas of the many. Hence the power of Tefila Betzibur (communal prayer) which far exceeds what each of us could do in our own homes.

One of my functions as rabbi is no doubt to be there for the community in times of sadness, to conduct the funeral and the shiva prayers and to comfort the family in need. But it is just part of the job. Most importantly I am there to guide in life, to teach, give sermons and shiurim, to counsel and be there in times of happiness as well.

And our religion is Torat Chaim, there to be studied, applied and followed through all stages of life, not only to be remembered in time of need.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

R228... and I only came to the shops to buy eggs. Guess what! I forgot the eggs. I do not think I am senile. I do not think I am suffering from memory loss. I just think I was distracted. While I made the trip especially for the eggs I filled my head with finding a parking space, planning my lunch menu, remembering that I needed laundry soap and things to put into school lunch tomorrow. Life, in other words. And I forgot the real reason for my shopping trip.

So often life is simply distracting. We know in our heads what our real priorities are. We could list them: family, friends, yiddishkeit. But so often we get caught up in the little, unimportant details and forget the priorities.

How often do we come to shul to daven but make the quality of the brocha our main priority? Serve a beautiful meal to our guests but do not have the time to give attention to a miserable child? Choose a beautiful gift for an acquaintance but forget to buy an anniversary present? And so the list continues.

This month I am going to try not to let life distract me. I am going to join the newest trend: working at being mindful.

Have a good month

Rivky

SERVICE TIMES**SHACHARIT (A.M.)**

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
<i>27/02 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00</i>	
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	5:45
Shabbat	6:30
from 18/2	6:15
from 04/03	6:00

DVAR TORAH**Four Amazing Trees**

By Sara Debbie Gutfreund (aish.com)

Spiritual lessons from trees, for Tu B'Shvat

It was 110 degrees the morning we climbed the steep cliff near the Dead Sea. My husband and I thought we had enough water. But the air was so heavy with heat, I felt it push down upon my shoulders. Soon I was at the bottom of my water pack. Dizzy and exhausted, we could not risk sitting down on the exposed, simmering sand. And then I saw what looked like a mirage – a small, scraggly tree poking out of the edge of the mountain.

We scrambled up to it and touched it to make sure it was real. There was just enough shade for the two of us to sit beneath it and catch our breath. As we sat under the low, crackling branches, I wondered how this tree could grow here. How did it survive the blazing sun and the desert winds? Where did it get its water from?

I thought about that lonely desert tree as Tu B'Shvat, the new year for the trees, draws near. I wondered what I could learn from that tree and discovered four insights from four amazing trees.

Giant Sequoia

The Giant Sequoia is a redwood tree located in Sequoia National Park in California and is 2,700 years old. It is 275 feet tall and measures more than a hundred feet around its base. When we look at this tree's majestic height, we can access our own innate desire for spiritual greatness. This tree teaches us to reach higher than we did yesterday.

Quaking Aspen: Pando

This tree is also called the Trembling Giant, and it is a

huge colony of a single, quaking aspen tree spread out over more than 100 acres in Utah. Every tree in the area emerges from a single organism, and they all share a giant underground root system. Pando, as a group, weighs 6,615 tons making it the heaviest organism on earth.

Like the Quaking Aspen, mankind stems from One Source and root system. We can learn to see each other through this lens of unity by studying the Pando. We are all from a single, divine spark and deep beneath the surface of humanity, we depend on a collective root system to survive.

The Pirangi Cashew Tree

This tree, near Natal, Brazil, is a 177 year old cashew tree that covers almost two acres of land. When this tree's branches touch the ground, it automatically puts down roots and keeps growing, unlike any other cashew tree. From this tree we learn that there are hundreds of ways to grow, and that we have the potential to reach outwards, laying down roots wherever we go.

The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life in the Bahrain desert is located hundreds of miles from any other tree and survives its harsh environment by spreading its roots down hundreds of feet to aquifers. It is believed to be over 400 years old, and it is one of the loneliest trees in the world. From this tree we learn that we can survive difficult conditions and loneliness as long as we are connected to the life giving waters of the Torah that we can access even in the barest of deserts.

The Tree of Life exhibits another trait, in common with our scraggly, tiny tree on the edge of the Dead Sea cliff – being antifragile. Antifragile is an expression coined by

bestselling author Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. Most of us would say that the opposite of fragile is something that is strong or unbreakable. However, that is just the absence of fragility. The true opposite of fragile is antifragile – something that thrives because of stress.

The lonely tree in the desert grew strong and survived because it was forced to develop a deep enough root system to reach the water hundreds of feet below the ground. The seeds of all trees are inherently antifragile; they grow only by breaking apart their outer shells.

We can make the mistake of believing that we are fragile beings since our bodies are so vulnerable. But even our physical bodies only grow when they are stressed to a certain limit. Short high intensity workouts accomplish more than longer, moderate workouts. Our muscles need to be pushed to their limit to really grow.

The same is true in developing our spiritual muscles. Our souls want to reach the heights of the Giant Sequoia, yearning to grow like the Pirangi Cashew Tree, but they need to be challenged and stretched. They are antifragile; they grow stronger when pushed to break through their shell and go outside their comfort zone.

In the winter when the trees are bereft of their leaves and the ground is still frozen, we celebrate the new year for the trees. Don't focus on the fragile, swaying branches above the ground. Instead think about the real, antifragile growth taking place under the surface. This is the growth that parallels our own ability to break through obstacles in our lives as we become stronger, challenge by challenge.

Branches (or: People Are Not Cars)

By Tzvi Freeman (chabad.org)

Some folks think of people much as we think of cars on a highway: each with its own origin and destination, relating to one other only to negotiate lane changes and left-hand turns. For cars, closeness is danger, loneliness is freedom.

People are not cars. Cars are dead. People live. Living beings need one another, nurture one another, share destinies and reach them together. When you're alive, closeness is warmth, loneliness is suffocating.

People belong to families. Families make up communities. Communities make up the many colorful peoples of the world. And all those peoples make up a single, magnificent body with a single soul called humankind.

Some chop this body into seven billion fragments and roll it back into a single mush. They want each person to do his or her own thing and relate equally to every other individual on the planet. They don't see the point of distinct peoples. They feel such distinctions just get in the way.

But we are like leaves extending from twigs branching out from larger twigs on branches of larger branches, until we reach the trunk and roots of us all. Each of us has our place on this tree of life, each its source of nurture—and on this the tree relies for its very survival.

None of us walks alone. Each carries the experiences of ancestors wherever he or she roams, along with their troubles, their traumas, their victories, their hopes and their aspirations. Our thoughts grow out from their thoughts, our destinies are shaped by their goals. At the highest peak we ever get to,

there they are, holding our hand, pushing us upward, providing the shoulders on which to stand. And we share those shoulders, that consciousness, that heritage with all the brothers and sisters of our people.

That's why your own people are so important: If you want to find peace with any other person in the world, you've got to start with your own brothers and sisters. Until then, you haven't yet found peace within your own self. And only when you've found peace within yourself can you help us find peace for the entire world.

Every Jew is a brother or sister of a great family of many thousands of years. Where a Jew walks, there walk sages and martyrs, heroes and heroines, legends and miracles, all the way back to Abraham and Sarah, the first two Jews who challenged the whole world with their ideals. There walk the tears, the blood and the chutzpah of millennia, the legacy of those who lived, yearned and died for a world to come, a world the way it was meant to be.

Their destiny is our destiny. In us they are fulfilled. In all of us and every one of us, and all of us together. For we are all one.

When one Jew does an act of kindness, all our hands extend with his or hers. If one Jew should fall, all of us stumble. If one suffers, we all feel pain. When one rejoices, we are all uplifted. In our oneness we will find our destiny, and our destiny is to be one. For we are a single body, breathing with a single set of lungs, pulsating with a single heart, drawing from a single well of consciousness.

We are one. Let it be with love.

Tu B'Shvat is on Shabbat 11 February.

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Rilla & Philip Jacobson on the birth of a great grand-daughter in Jerusalem.

MARRIAGES

- Ivan and Jo-An Epstein on the marriage of their daughter Saige to Michael Davar on 2nd February.

BIRTHDAYS

- Madeleine Fane on her 70th birthday on the 23rd January.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Shaun & Charlene Wingrin on their 10th anniversary on the 4th February.
- Michael & Valerie Bloom on their 45th anniversary on the 8th February.
- David & Sharon Hirschowitz on their 30th anniversary on the 24th February.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy Recovery to



- Arnold Rapp
- Barry Spiegel
- Hazel Benard
- Enid Melamet

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Wilfred Ringo on the death of his sister, Ettie Sack



PURCHASE A LEAF ON OUR “SIMCHA TREE”

On the occasion of Tu Bishvat to mark a happy event in your family
Cost of each leaf is R 360.00 - For details please contact the office

SPONSOR A BROCHA

at the Shul on the occasion of a personal or family Simcha, to commemorate a Yartzeit, birthday or anniversary.

For details and bookings contact Lily at the Shul office

**OXFORD'S HALL OF REMEMBRANCE**

The plaques in the Hall of Remembrance record the names and the date of death of departed loved ones. The lights on the plaques are lit on the Yartzeit and also whenever Yizkor is recited. A special Hazkara memorial prayer is also recited during Yizkor.

Cost of a plaque is R540 for the first plaque ordered, R360 for subsequent plaques

