

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER February 2021 Shevat/Adar 5781

SHABBAT TIMES

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

5 & 6 February – 24 Shevat

🔊 Yitro

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:30

12 & 13 February – 1 Adar

🔊 Mishpatim (*Shekalim*)

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:24

19 & 20 February – 8 Adar

🔊 Terumah (*Zachor*)

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:18

26 & 27 February – 15 Adar

🔊 Tetzaveh

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:12

5 & 6 March – 22 Adar

🔊 Ki Tisa (*Parah*)

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:05

RABBI'S MESSAGE

"Rabbi, *you* must be so happy now!" "Mazal Tov, Rabbi, we are so pleased for *you*." The messages started streaming in on Monday night, as soon as our President announced that faith-based gatherings in houses of worship could resume once again. Dozens of them, indeed.

Of course I am thrilled. It is absolutely awful being a rabbi without a shul. We continue to minister to our communities, to inspire, guide and comfort. But nothing can replace face-to-face interaction, praying together as a group. And seeing (through the mask) expressions of joy on the occasion of simchas and worried looks when there are stresses—and reacting accordingly.

My colleagues and I saw Purim looming on the calendar (Thursday 25/02 and Friday 26/02) and wondered how we would read the Scroll of Esther for our respective communities. (Unfortunately, one may not fulfil his obligation to hear Megilah via Zoom). We worried about the Torah portion of 'Zachor' chanted in Shul on the Shabbat before the festival, which is also a halachik imperative.

This Monday afternoon, I sat down to write my monthly newsletter column. It came from the heart, crying out frustration, pain and worry. It was unprintable, and remained on my computer, unfinished. There was no way I could share these raw emotions with my community. Fortunately, I did not need to... I deleted the document, happily, at 9:00 p.m. that night.

So thank you very much, yes, I am thrilled. And our first minyan in shul this week was simply awesome.

But I do wonder about the use of the 2nd person *you* in those congratulatory messages. It is not *my* simcha—it is *our* combined simcha. It is not *my* shul that was closed for weeks, it is *our* shul. And it is not *I* who am permitted to pray there, it is *we*.

Let me tell you what would really make me happy: seeing **you** in Shul.

For those of you who have worshipped with us in the past

six months, you have witnessed our scrupulous adherence to the health protocols that have been prescribed, by law and by our health advisors. Screening at the door, sanitising upon entry, meticulous mask wearing and ample physical distance between congregants.

If you are deemed high risk and are staying hunkered down at home, there is no pressure. But if you are up and about, going out to restaurants, coffee with friends, shopping or the movies, you are likely safer at shul!

Lockdown has been the Yetzer Hara's biggest ally. You all know him... even if not by name. It is that voice inside, often depicted as a little red fellow with a fork on the left shoulder, whispering to us when faced with choices. It's not safe... I am exposed enough already... the rabbi told us G-d listens to prayers at home also... we learnt there are other ways, other than Kadish, to honour the souls of the departed... my habits have now changed... shul is no longer part of my routine... I actually enjoy praying at home... He has had a field day for the past year!

You cried with me, apart, when it was decreed Shuls had to close; now come laugh with me, together, as we reopen.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Two weeks ago the sky was blue and the sun was shining down, a beautiful Jo'burg summer. I was sitting outside and working; the wind was picking up. A strange, gloomy wind. Google explained to me that it was a "fallout from the cyclone, Eloise, that was fast approaching Mozambique. For the past 2 weeks, we have had rainy, gloomy, miserable weather.

This is not a novel idea but it continues to fascinate me. A wind blows in Mozambique and affects my life.

The Talmud tells a story of Rabbi Akiva who was once giving a lesson and noticed that his students were not paying attention. He stopped his lesson and told his class, "Sara Imeinu lived 127 perfect years and in that merit her descendent (Queen) Esther was queen over 127 states and thus saved all the Jews in each of them." The students sat up and all began to pay attention, understanding what Rabbi Akiva was telling them: that what we do here and now affects not only us but even people who are born many years later.

Kabbalists explain that when we do a good deed here in South Africa, we create an energy that causes good, sometimes, even on the other side of the ocean. I like to think of myself doing something kind here, and at the very same time, possibly without me being aware, someone in California is inspired to give charity.

So our gloomy skies are a message to me, that what we do here affects not only here but somewhere else too.

Our responsibility to the world around us is to remember that whatever we do makes a difference far and near.

To think this weather comes from a wind kilometres away, which was whipped up by a butterfly, fluttering its wings 1000 km's further!

Have a good month

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

The Face Behind the Mask

by Dina Coopersmith (aish.com)

G-d's guiding hand is sometimes felt gently, and other times more forcefully. But the message is there just the same.

How do we find G-d when His face is hidden?

Purim teaches us how to relate to G-d in a time when seas don't split, when bushes don't burn, when plagues don't befall our enemies.

The story of Purim occurred after the destruction of the First Temple, when the era of prophecy was coming to a close. People no longer saw open miracles. It was a time of concealment.

Where do we find "Esther" in the Torah? In the verse: "And I will hide (astir) my face from them on that day." (Talmud - Chulin 139b)

Rashi: "In the days of Esther there will be hester panim (hiddenness of G-d's face)."

G-D'S GUIDING HAND

Have you ever felt G-d clearly in your life? A time when you felt a force greater than yourself somehow shaping and leading events?

I remember a time when I felt that guiding force. I had just met the man who was to be my husband. But I didn't know it then. To make a long story short, we broke up because our lives seemed to be heading in different directions.

Shortly thereafter, I was called by a total stranger, out of the blue, and offered a job in a position completely outside my

realm of expertise. I took the job simply because it aroused my curiosity.

To this day I don't know why I was called for this interview. But as a result of that job, I met up again with my ex-date. I also ended up changing my choice of career, some of my attitudes, and even one or two character traits. And two years after our initial meeting, I married my husband and embarked on a future with him that would never have been in my script, had my life gone according to my "plan."

We are not in full control even though we often imagine that we are.

Judaism posits that G-d shapes every single event in our lives with direct supervision. Nothing is pure chance. Our circumstances are not coincidences. Everything is directed.

AMALEK, THE NATION OF CHANCE

Others do not share this view.

Amalek was a nation that first battled against Israel on their way out of Egypt.

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you left Egypt, that he chanced upon you on the way. (Deut. 25:17-18)

In the Torah, Amalek is described in Hebrew as a nation who *karcha* ("chanced"). This word comes from the root *mikre*, meaning "happenstance or coincidence." Thus we learn that the belief in chance is Amalek's essence.

How else could they have disregarded all the miracles that the Jews had experienced -- the Ten Plagues and the

Exodus, culminating in the splitting of the Red Sea -- and have still dared to fight against those same Jews?! They must have said: "Mere coincidence!"

Haman, a descendent of Amalek, decided to get rid of the Jewish people of Persia. He cast "lots" (purim in Hebrew) to determine a date in which to kill them. He wanted it to be a random event.

The Jews, on the other hand, use lots to allow for Divine intervention to be revealed. Upon entering the Land of Israel in the days of Joshua, the division of land among the tribes was done by lottery. This allowed G-d's will to express itself without human choices getting involved in such an important endeavor.

When Mordechai sends a message to Queen Esther, telling her about Haman's plan, the text reads *kol asher karahu* -- "everything that happened." As the Midrash explains:

Mordechai called for Hatach and said, "Go tell her (Esther): 'The grandson of karahu, ("chance,") has come upon you!' As it says in the Torah: 'Who chanced upon you on the way.'" (Midrash - Esther Rabah 8:5)

That nation we know from our national past as believing in meaningless and randomness has again reared its ugly head.

PURIM STORY: ANTITHESIS OF CHANCE

Each event in the Megillah is natural and possible, and seems to be orchestrated entirely by human beings and their choices:

1) *A king gets drunk and decides to call for his wife to*

appear before the guests. That could happen.

2) *The wife, Vashti, refuses to appear before the king. The king decides to kill her. Esther is chosen queen. That's possible.*

3) *Haman chooses to kill Mordechai and ask permission from king. Could Be.*

4) *The king has insomnia one night and remembers an old favor he needs to repay to Mordechai. Possible.*

But when ALL of these incidents happen to coincide, when ALL the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle come together in one huge "coincidence," they form nothing short of a miracle.

It may be hidden, but a directing force becomes obvious all the same.

Each event which Haman thought he controlled, turned out to bring about his downfall. His suggestion to kill Vashti, the queen, caused the positioning of Esther as redeemer. His suggestion to use the king's robes and horse -- born of his desire to honor himself by parading around on the king's horse -- became the perfect reward for Mordechai's deed. And the hand-built gallows he intended for Mordechai were those used for his own hanging.

Throughout the Megillah story, G-d directs events and takes advantage of people's free will choices to form a tapestry of purpose and destiny -- the redemption of the Jewish people.

THE ERA OF HIDDENNESS

Throughout the entire story of Purim, the name of G-d isn't mentioned. It is an era of hiddenness of G-d's face (*hester*

panim). But more than ever, it is clear how G-d is running the show. There are simply too many "coincidences." The links fit together too well.

Another point to keep in mind: The Megillah spans a nine-year period. When it is compressed into one book and we read it in half an hour, we see with perspective and hindsight how every painful event was working towards a purposeful end. However, when we're in the midst of a difficult situation, we tend to see only the darkness and confusion.

The particular message of the day, then, is to understand G-d's guiding hand in history and in the mundane affairs of this world.

Olam, "world," comes from the root *ne'elam*, "hidden." G-d's name doesn't appear. But when all is said and done, His presence is recognized everywhere. He is not concealed. He only appears to be. It is up to us to find Him in every event of our lives.

We need only read between the lines.

SERVICE TIMES

Services have now TG resumed. All services are by prior booking. Please call the office.

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays 8:00

Monday to Friday 7:15

12/02: 7:00 (Rosh Chodesh)

25/02: 7:00 (Fast of Esther)

26/2: 6:45 (Purim)

Shabbat & Festivals 9:30

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday 6:15

Friday 6:00

Shabbat 6:30

from 13/02 6:15

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Doris Samson on the birth of a great granddaughter.
- Ariel & Maxine Geffen and to Barry & Fiona Speigel on the birth of a son and grandson.
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great granddaughter in Johannesburg

ENGAGEMENTS

- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the engagement of their grandson Michoel Moshel to Rachel Drubetsky in Melbourne.

BIRTHDAYS

- Marke Markovitz on the occasion of his 91st birthday on the 5th February.
- Lily Sarembok on the occasion of her 93rd birthday on the 28th February.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Stanley & Riva Stein on the occasion of their 55th anniversary on the 8th February.
- Joel & Jennifer Levy on the occasion of their 35th anniversary on the 13th February.
- Justin & Maxine Abratt on the occasion of their 50th anniversary on the 21st February.
- Ivan & Jo-An Epstein on the occasion of their 35th anniversary on the 27th February.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Auriel Wittert
- Hymie Feinberg



- Richard Landau
- Keith Kirschner
- Charles Brenner
- Veronica Brenner

BEREAVEMENTS

We wish long life to

- Carol Hacker on the death of her son Kevin.
- Andrea Aaron on the death of her mother Una Berman.
- Ina Orlanski on the death of her mother Tamara Shreberk.
- Lillian Benard and Sam & Hazel Benard on the death of their mother and daughter Ann.
- Ann, Odette, Jeff and Michael Livshitz on the death of their husband and father, Bokkie

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

