

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February 2022

Adar I 5782

SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting

🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 3

11 & 12 February – 11 Adar I

🕒 Tetzaveh

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:25

18 & 19 February – 18 Adar I

🕒 Ki Tisa

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:20

25 & 26 February – 25 Adar I

🕒 Vayakhel (Shekalim)

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:13

4 & 5 March – 2 Adar II

🕒 Pekudei

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:06

RABBI'S MESSAGE

She got COVID-19. It was unavoidable, with everyone all around affected. And it was a very worrying time. At well over 80 years old, the odds of survival were not good. Not to mention the many co-morbidities. There were weeks of isolation and loneliness and much fear. Would she pull through? And even if she did, would she ever function at the same level? Would she suffer the sequelae of so-called Long Covid?

Thank G-d, Grand Dame Oxford survived. Two years ago, as we all sheltered at home, cowering in fear and being forced to face our own mortality, we also worried for the Shul's well-being. An octogenarian who had been battered by shifting demographics, we wondered

if she would be able to weather this storm. Would this pandemic be the final death knell of this beautiful place of worship?

For months of end she sat alone, with nary a visitor. Health concerns and mandated closures of places of worship made sure of that. Even with restrictions lifted, people trickled back very slowly. But Oxford is strong because Oxfordians are strong. The community continued to exist, albeit in a different form. Emails, WhatsApps, Zooms (and even the old fashioned snail mail, when it worked) helped to keep us all together, united and inspired through the challenges.

The loyalty and generosity of our members was the most gratifying aspect of the entire crisis.

Armed with the antibodies of its bout with the virus, our Shul stands poised to face the years ahead. Yes, our attendance numbers can increase—you can help with this! But Corona proved that there is more to a community than praying together.

I am hopeful for the future because, if the past two years are anything to go by, I have partners along with me on the road to sustaining the Grand Dame. Please G-d, 2020 and 2021 and their challenges are behind us, as we face, together, the challenges of 2022 and well beyond.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I am a rule keeper by nature. I follow instructions as I am told to, whether it is Covid/lockdown rules or cooking rice. So while the rest of South Africa (the world) was protesting lockdown, curfew and even vaccinations I was keeping the rules, no questions asked. Even the rules I didn't understand, even the ones that made no sense to me.

Right now the rules seem to make no sense to me at all: masks on but no isolation if you are sick?!?

There must be some explanation. There must be someone who understands this.

This questioning behavior must be part of my DNA. A few weeks ago we read how the Jews accepted the Torah, Naesah Venishma, we will do it, and we will understand. First step is to do as Hashem tells, next is to try (where possible) to understand.

So not everything Hashem does makes sense to me, not everything He does can I understand, but I trust Him, and so I do my best to follow the rules.

Have a good month.

Rivky

A STORY

Sixty Days of Purim

by Yanki Tauber (*chabad.org*)

This article will be something of a mixed-media piece. It'll start with a "Purim Torah," move on to more serious "Kabbalah" stuff, and conclude with an inspiring Chassidic teaching.

(A "Purim Torah" is what Torah scholars do for fun on Purim: a short exposition that sounds and feels like a typical piece of Talmud, yet is either patently absurd or just skewered enough to be taken seriously on Purim.)

First, the Purim Torah:

Question: We read in the Book of Esther how Haman desired "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, infants and woman, in a single day — on the 13th of the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar" (Esther 3:13). But why was it so important to Haman that his evil decree be carried out "in a single day"? Would such a thing even have been logistically possible? Indeed, Haman initially cast lots to determine which month should be chosen as the

time for the genocide of the Jews. Our sages tell us that when the lot fell on the month of Adar, Haman rejoiced: this was the month in which Moses had died (on Adar 7), surely a month that bodes ill for the Jews. Having hit on an apparently auspicious month for his plans, why did Haman continue with his lot-throwing to pinpoint a particular day?

Answer: Haman was a keen student of Jewish history. He knew that the Jewish calendar is dotted with festivals celebrating the Jewish people's salvation from an enemy who sought to destroy them. What if — Haman worried — their G-d saves them again? If I designate the month of Adar for their destruction, they'll celebrate all month long!

Finale: In this, too, Haman's plan was foiled. When Mordechai and Esther institutionalized the celebration of the Purim miracle, they ordained not only the Purim observances of Adar 14 and 15, but also the commemoration of "the month that was transformed for them from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity" (Esther 9:22). Hence the

Talmudic ruling, "when the month of Adar enters, increase in joy" (Talmud, Taanit 26b).

Now for the Kabbalah:

There are two ways in which the Jewish Calendar, and the nature of Jewish time, can be understood:

a) The "Special Days" Approach: The annual cycle consists of hundreds of days, most of which are of the ordinary, run-of-the-mill variety. Thankfully, these are punctuated by a number of special days — festivals and holy days imbued with special spiritual qualities. We trudge through the ordinary days, inspired and encouraged by the fact that we're never more than a few weeks away from a Passover or Purim, or — at the very least — a Lag BaOmer or a "New Year for Trees."

b) The "Quality of the Month" Approach: Jewish time is comprised not of days but of months, each possessing a distinct spiritual essence. The "special" days of the year are simply days on which the particular month's quality is more pronounced and actualized. Thus, Nissan is the "Month of

Liberation," while Passover (observed on Nissan 15 to 22) is a week-long period in Nissan during which the month's freedom-quality is more accessible. Similarly, Sivan is the month of Wisdom, Shevat is the month of Growth and Fruitfulness, Elul is the month of Compassion, and so on. Each month has days in which the month's quality rises to the surface and manifests itself more than on the month's "ordinary" days; but these are differences of expression rather than of essence — essentially, each day of the month equally possesses the month's unique spiritual properties. This is why many of the festivals and special dates of the Jewish calendar occur on the 15th of the month — the night of the full moon, representing the point at which the month's essence is in its most revealed and luminous state.

Adar is the month of Transformation. Adar transforms sorrow into joy, doubt into supra-knowledge, oblivion into exuberant being. Adar transforms a "scattered people" into a unified nation, and a moment of national weakness (when

the Jewish people participated in Achashverosh's feast in the belief that allegiance to a mortal king will ensure their survival) into the greatest statement of Jewish commitment of all time (when for an entire year every single Jew remained faithful to his/her people and G-d, even as a decree of annihilation hung over the head of every Jew in the world). Adar transforms the most physical of activities — eating and drinking — into an affirmation of our bond with G-d.

So while two days in Adar — the 14th and the 15th of the month — are observed as "Purim," these represent the apex of an entire month of joyous transformation and transformative joy.

Finally, here's the inspiring chassidic thought we promised:

A month on the Jewish calendar includes either 29 or 30 days (reflecting the 29.5-day lunar cycle). But every two or three years — seven times in a 19-year cycle, to be exact — Adar doubles in size: on these "pregnant years," as they're called, there's a 30-day "Adar I" followed by a 29-day "Adar II." In addition, 30th

of Shevat is also the first of Adar I's Rosh Chodesh ("head of the month") days. This makes for a total of 60 "Adar days."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that the number "60" represents the power of transformation. A rule-of-thumb in Torah law is the "nullified by sixty" principle. For example, if a piece of non-kosher food accidentally falls into a pot of kosher food, the undesirable element is "nullified" if the desirable element is sixty times greater than it.

Thus, the Rebbe concludes, in a year blessed with a double, 60-day Adar, all undesirable elements — every and any cause for pain, sadness, discouragement or dejection — are nullified and sublimated by the transformative joy of Adar.

SERVICE TIMES

Please check with the office if you wish to come to shul on a particular day to ensure there will be a service.

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
<i>02/03 & 03/03 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00 a.m.</i>	
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	6:00
Shabbat	6:00

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Martin & Helene Cook, Alan & Karen Shkudsky and Marion Rapp on the birth of a son, grandson and great grandson.
- Blima Nudelman on the birth of a great granddaughter.
- Daniel & Isa Witz and Ina Orlanski on the birth of a daughter and granddaughter.

ENGAGEMENTS

- Raymond & Hilary Isakow on the engagement of their son Jonathan to Ashley Leeb from Melbourne.
- Adrian & Lauren Gore on the engagement of their daughter Rebecca to Gary Ganz.

MARRIAGES

- Naomi Schmidt on the marriage of her granddaughter Lisa Schmidt to David Nerwich in Johannesburg.
- David & Melanie Jacobs on the marriage of their daughter Alexandra to Evan Spark.
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the marriage of their granddaughter Menucha Fox to Mendel Marrus.

BIRTHDAYS

- Lily Sarembok on her 94th birthday on the 28th of February.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Stanley Stein
- Raymond Isakow
- Sonia Genn

**BEREAVEMENTS**

We wish long life to:

- Dora Blumberg on the death of her husband, Nathan.
- The Family of Percy Bloom.
- Odette Livshitz on the death of her mother, Anne.
- Zelma Meinstein on the death of her sister, Rica Meyerowitz.
- Marlene Goldberg on the death of her brother Bernard.
- Denise Gershman & Maurica Winderbaum on the death of their mother, Myrna.
- Roy, Alan, Mark Angel & Robyn Solomon on the death of their mother, Annette.

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

