

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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July 2025

Tammuz 5785

SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2

18 & 19 July – 23 Tammuz

🔊 Pinchas

🕯 5:17 – 🕯 6:09

25 & 26 July – 1 Av

🔊 Matot-Massei

🕯 5:20 – 🕯 6:12

1 & 2 August – 8 Av

🔊 Devarim

🕯 5:24 – 🕯 6:15

8 & 9 August – 14 Av

🔊 Va'etchanan

🕯 5:27 – 🕯 6:18

RABBI'S MESSAGE

The tragic death of a 21-year-old Israeli soldier in Gaza last week—son of longtime family friends—came as a huge shock. Like most, I've been following the war closely over the past 640 days. But this was the first time it truly hit home. The news brought it straight to our doorstep, and with it, a wave of pain, helplessness, and reflection.

It's against this backdrop that we now enter the *Three Weeks*—the annual period of mourning for the destruction of the two Holy Temples and the long exile we've been living in ever since.

It feels unnatural. A Jew is supposed to be *besimcha*, especially a

Chassid. We are meant to live with joy, to serve Hashem with positivity and passion. And yet now, the calendar itself directs us into a time of sadness and introspection.

Do we even need the reminder this year?

The signs of *Galut*—exile—are all around us. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East. The horrific reality that 50 hostages are still in captivity. Rising antisemitism rearing its head on campuses and in city streets across the globe. For once, we don't have to search for the brokenness. It is front and centre.

But the *Three Weeks* are not about despair. They are about *awareness*.

About *mourning*, yes—but also about *longing*.

This period calls on us to look beyond the world we know and envision something greater. It's a time to actively yearn for Redemption—for a world where G-dliness is visible, where peace is real, and where the Third Temple stands in Jerusalem as a centre of harmony, purpose, and light.

The Rebbe encouraged us to learn about the Beit HaMikdash during this time.

To study its structure and function. To imagine what it looked like and what took place inside it. Because by filling our minds and hearts with images of Redemption, we begin to truly want it. And what we genuinely yearn for—we draw closer.

There is also a personal message. The Talmud teaches that the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*—gratuitous hatred. The antidote? *Ahavat chinam*—gratuitous love. Loving others even when there's no reason. Being kind even when it's not convenient. Forgiving before being asked. Helping when there's nothing to gain. Smiling simply because it's good.

This kind of love rebuilds what hatred destroyed.

Let us use these Three Weeks as a time of honest reflection, but also powerful hope. Let us mourn, yes—but let us also *yearn*. And let that yearning shape the way we speak, act, and live.

May our small steps lead to a giant leap. May we merit to hear the ultimate good news soon. And may this be the last time we observe these days as a time of mourning.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Today is the funeral of our friends' son. He was one of the five boys killed in the ambush in Gaza. He was young. He should have been playing Padel, not fighting a war.

We keep repeating how much we care for every family, for every life lost. And we do. But when it is someone we know, it feels that much closer.

As I went through the day yesterday, I reminded myself that four other doors were also knocked on and given the horrific news that their son, brother, or husband is not coming home. I wondered what they were doing when the knock came. Making coffee or toast for breakfast? Getting children ready for school? Shopping online? Or possibly whispering a chapter of Tehillim, praying for everyone's safety...

Here in Johannesburg, we are able to live in a bit of a bubble. We say our Tehillim, we sigh, and we do think of and worry about the people of Eretz Yisroel. Every now and again, we are reminded how much we need to feel. We need to daven even more—plead and beg Hashem to end this horror.

May He do so quickly, already.

Have a good month.

Rivky

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

Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

KABBALAT SHABBAT (P.M.)

Friday	6:00
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DVAR TORAH***Crying over the Temple***

*By Rabbi Menachem Lehrfield
(aish.com)*

Why continue mourning over the destruction of a building that happened so long ago?

For nearly two thousand years, the Jewish People have mourned the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. At every Jewish wedding, at the moment of intense joy when the ceremony concludes, we break a glass to remember this loss. Jews pray daily for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its crowning jewel, the Temple. Each year during the summer, Jews observe a three-week period of mourning, culminating in the saddest day of the Jewish year, Tisha B'Av, the Ninth of Av, when we fast and mourn the destruction of both Temples.

This begs a simple question: Why can't we just get over it? Why don't we just move on? Why continue mourning over the destruction of a building that happened so long ago?

The root of this question lies in a misunderstanding of the Temple's significance to Jewish life and the profound power of mourning.

Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, obm, the great Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, gave a profound analogy to grasp the depth of this loss. Imagine a blind person who, never having the ability to see, believes he's not missing anything. He has never seen a sunset, looked into the eyes of his wife, or seen the smile on his child's face, yet he is

convinced he lacks nothing. If offered a procedure that would grant him the gift of sight, he would decline it since he doesn't think he is missing anything.

The true tragedy is not his blindness; it's his complete lack of awareness of what he is actually missing.

Similarly, we have become so accustomed to a world without the Temple that we do not fully realize what we are missing. This lack of awareness is a tragedy in itself. If we would appreciate the enormity of the loss, we would long for its rebuilding and the subsequent redemption.

I Don't Know Why I Should Cry

A poignant story from the recapturing of the Western Wall in 1967 illustrates this concept. As the Kotel came into Jewish hands for the first time since 1948, the moment was filled with significance and emotion. David, a non-religious soldier, began to cry uncontrollably. His friend who grew up on the same kibbutz asked, "Why are you crying? You and I grew up secular; this Wall means nothing to us."

David responded, "I'm crying because I don't know why I should cry."

Perhaps his tears also reflected a deep, albeit unconscious, sense of loss for something he couldn't fully comprehend.

The grief we feel is not just about a lost building; it reflects a profound longing for the spiritual completeness and unity that the Temple once embodied.

The Temple served as a connection between the spiritual and the physical, the nexus point where heaven and earth kissed. It was where the Jewish people gathered to feel closer to God and each other, reinforcing their collective identity and faith. The daily services, the lighting of the menorah, and the offerings were not just rituals but acts that unified the nation in their shared devotion and values.

The destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE were catastrophic events that shattered this spiritual and national unity. The loss was not only physical but also deeply spiritual, symbolizing the severing of a direct line to the divine and a disintegration of communal cohesion.

A Chaotic World

Our mourning today is a yearning for the ideal state of being that the Temple represented. We are not crying over something from thousands of years ago, but rather we are grieving for the catastrophic consequences of its destruction that continues to impact the world today.

No matter what benchmark you use, our world today is deeply troubled. One looks around and wonders, how did we get here? The beginning of the unraveling that brings us to our current reality is the loss of the Temple.

In our daily prayers, we express a longing for the restoration of the Temple, envisioning a time when peace, justice, and divine presence will be fully realized in our world. This mourning is

a recognition of the current imperfections in our lives and the world around us, and a hope for a future where these gaps will be filled, when meaning and moral clarity will be apparent to all.

When one suffers loss, there is a tendency to try and stifle the pain and move on. Well-meaning friends try and help distract us and tell us to 'get over it' and remind us that 'time heals all wounds.' But time does not heal all wounds.

Judaism encourages us to develop a growth mindset, not just in our happiest times but also in our sorrow and grief. A fixed mindset sees loss and failure as permanent conditions. In contrast, a growth mindset sees failures as opportunities to learn and grow, to realize the enormity of our loss, and use that realization to change the ending of our story.

There are no bad emotions, sadness is difficult but it isn't bad. We need sadness to help us change the status quo and appreciate joy.

When a loved one passes away, we don't just move on or pretend the person didn't leave us. We don't stifle the pain; we embrace it through the practice of sitting shiva, spending a week confronting the loss and remembering our loved one. This way, we can process the pain and embrace our new reality. By concentrating on our loss, as difficult as it may be, we recognize and remember who this person was and realize the profound loss that we may have taken for granted.

Similarly, we don't just move on from the loss of the Temple. We actively mourn

our loss so that we can appreciate what we lost and what we need to do to get back there.

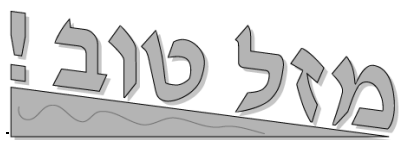
This reflection of our collective loss led to the Jewish people's response to our exile and the Temple's destruction. Despite the loss, Judaism did not collapse but instead adapted, finding new ways to maintain spiritual and communal life through synagogues, study, and prayer.

A Better Today

Tisha B'Av is a day for deep reflection on the causes of the Temples' destruction. Our sages teach that the primary cause was baseless hatred and communal discord. This reflection encourages a mindset that seeks to learn from past mistakes.

By commemorating the Temple's destruction, we remind ourselves of the importance of striving for a better future while finding meaning and connection in the present. The Temple's memory encourages us to build bridges within our communities, foster spiritual growth, and maintain hope, even in times of adversity.

Our mourning for the Temple is not merely a remembrance of the past but a call to strive for a better today and a brighter tomorrow. By reflecting on the themes of unity, resilience, and hope that the Temple embodies, we can find inspiration to address the challenges of modern life and work towards a more connected and harmonious world.

MAZAL TOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Anthony Fobel on his 60th birthday on the 5th of July.
- Glenda Schneider on her 82nd birthday on the 13th of July.
- Donald Krausz on his 95th birthday on the 17th of July.

ENGAGEMENT

- Mazal Tov to Ina Orlianski on the engagement of her son, Jonathan, to Danae Salinas

9 LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE HOLY TEMPLES IN JERUSALEM**1. Dual Purpose**

While the Temple was both a place of spiritual enlightenment and animal sacrifice, there is a dispute as to what its primary purpose was. According to Maimonides, it was most basically defined as “a house for G-d that is prepared for the offering of sacrifices.” According to Nachmanides, “The main object . . . is realized in the ark, as G-d says to Moses, ‘I will commune with you there, speaking to you from above the ark’s cover . . .’” In other words, the main purpose of the Temple was a dwelling place for the Divine Presence.

2. From a Jebusite

King David purchased the site of the Holy Temples, Mount Moriah, from a Jebusite named Aravnah during a terrible plague that ravaged the Israelites after David conducted a census of the people. Following G-d’s command, David built an altar and brought a sacrifice on Aravnah’s threshing floor, and the plague stopped.

3. One, Two, Three . . .

- a. The portable Tabernacle, built by Moses, which accompanied the people of Israel through their 42 desert encampments and was set up in various places in the Land of Israel, including Shiloh.
- b. The First Holy Temple, built by King Solomon on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, which lasted for 410 years before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 423 BCE.
- c. The Second Holy Temple, built in the same spot as the first one by Ezra, Nehemiah and the returnees from the Babylonian exile. It was renovated extensively by King Herod in the year 19 BCE, and destroyed by the Romans in the year 69 CE.

4. High Court

The Holy Temple in Jerusalem contained a special hall called the Lishkat Hagazit (the “Hall of Hewn Stone”), which served as the seat of the Sanhedrin, the nation’s highest court of 71 jurists. It was specially constructed partly on sacred ground and partly on the less-holy area of the Temple Mount complex, since sitting is not permitted in the most sacred place. It was there that the most important issues of Jewish law and tradition were deliberated, debated and decided.

5. Twice as Nice

The Holy Temples contained two altars. The large copper altar in the courtyard was used for the many animal sacrifices that were brought. The golden altar inside the Temple was used only for incense, brought twice a day by the priests.

6. Wash It Away

A stream of fresh water ran through the Temple courtyard. On the afternoon before Passover, when every family would bring a sacrificial lamb to eat at their Seder, the floor of the Temple courtyard would become so filthy that the stream would be dammed up, flooding the courtyard. When the blockage was removed, the entire courtyard would be left clean and fresh.

7. On Guard

The Temple Mount was constantly guarded by cadres of priests and Levites in 24 locations. “Even though there is no fear of enemies or thieves,” Maimonides explains, “the guarding is only for honor, since an unguarded palace cannot be compared [in prestige] to one with guards.” If a guard would fall asleep, the overseer of the guards (called the Man of the Temple Mount) had permission to rap him with his stick, or even singe the edge of his cloak.

8. Still Sacred

Even though the Temple has lain in ruins for nearly 2,000 years, the Temple Mount is still sacred, for G-d’s Presence has not left. In fact, tradition tells us that the Ark of the Covenant is still there, in a specially built vault deep under the Temple Mount.

9. Back to the Books

Even though we can’t actually build the Third Holy Temple until Moshiach arrives, G-d told the Prophet Ezekiel that “the study of the Torah’s [design of the Holy Temple] can be equated to its construction. Go tell them to study the form of the Temple. As a reward for their study and their occupation with it, I will consider it as if they actually built it.”