

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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June 2025

Sivan 5785

SHABBAT TIMES

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

13 & 14 June – 18 Sivan

🕯 Beha'alotecha

🕯 5:05 – 🕯 5:57

20 & 21 June – 25 Sivan

🕯 Shlach

🕯 5:06 – 🕯 5:59

27 & 28 June – 2 Tammuz

🕯 Korach

🕯 5:06 – 🕯 5:57

4 & 5 July – 9 Tammuz

🕯 Chukat

🕯 5:11 – 🕯 6:03

11 & 12 July – 6 Tammuz

🕯 Balak

🕯 5:14 – 🕯 6:06

RABBI'S MESSAGE

So, winter has arrived exactly on time. Shavuot came and went and the weather turned. On cue came the first real cold front of the season, accompanied by arctic, piercing winds (and to the chagrin of many in Johannesburg, no snow!).

In winter, we all become obsessive about keeping warm. Nobody enjoys feeling cold, and we do everything we can to stay comfortable.

There are basically two ways to do this:

By dressing warmly, we can heat just ourselves.

The other option is to switch on a heater or to

make a fire, heating the whole room in the process.

If you are the one paying the electricity bill, you will be tempted to use the first method. Out of concern for all members of the household and occasional visitors however—it might be more sensible to heat up the entire room.

The heat of Yiddishkeit must likewise be maintained. We live in a world that is cold, because its value system is not supportive of a life lived according to Torah. We are subjected to a storm of alien notions that threaten to destroy our foundation, to uproot our Tree of Life—the Torah—and to smash our window to the world, the teachings of our Fathers. We need to keep the temperature up in order to protect ourselves.

There are obviously two options. We can worry about the preservation of self. We can make sure that our beliefs are solid, that our own observance of the precepts is sufficient, that our personal knowledge of Yiddishkeit is adequate. That is the equivalent of putting on another layer of clothing.

The other way is to heat up the whole house. It is the

more costly way, and it requires more effort. It is easier to be concerned with oneself than to care about a community. But the latter is the Jewish way.

When the waters of the Flood threatened to come down from the Heavens and wreak havoc on the world, Noah built an Ark and saved his skin, and that of his immediate family. He did not attempt, in a meaningful way, to influence, and thus rescue, the entire world. He remains known as the Tzadik in Pels (Tzadik in a fur) who, when cold, dresses himself warmer.

In the days of Abraham a deluge of fire and brimstone threatened to engulf the valley of Sodom. Abraham, who had spent his years in Canaan trying to teach as many people as he could about the One G-d, viewed this as a personal failing. He pleaded with Hashem to save them. There had to be a way to make the Sodomites see the truth.

Abraham is the one who is called the Father of the Jewish Nation.

Have a great month and keep warm—physically and spiritually.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I've noticed that whenever we see a baby, our first comment is most often, Wow, he looks exactly like... I've been wondering what this is about—the need to identify this child.

I remember (with horror) the nurse telling me, moments after I gave birth to our first child, while she was still a squashed newborn, “my goodness, she looks exactly like you!”

BH we have been blessed with a good number of grandchildren, all living far away. As soon as we get the first picture, we start guessing. “Looks just like the mom.” “No, exactly like the dad.” The Chaikin genes are strong, and a lot of them look like our side of the family. We love them perfectly, even when they don't. Yet, there is a warm feeling when we do recognise their faces.

I have also been teaching now for a long time and noticing how the upcoming generations look so similar to the ones before. This all has made me think.

Is it because a new generation makes us feel that we have made some kind of permanence in the world? The realization that long after we are no longer here, we will have still left a mark on this world. This isn't only about our physical children. It's about all the good things we do, all the kindness and all the happiness we have caused, which give us a feeling of purpose in our lives.

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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PROFILE**A Visible Jew**

By Steve Tsentsersensky (aish.com)

In a world telling Jews to disappear, after October 7th I chose to be seen.

I'm getting a lot of stares.

I'm in Marseille, France in the autumn of 2024, in the beautiful Vieux Port area. Boats bob in the marina, the sun shines. Nothing about me should conjure the looks I'm getting. I'm wearing some slacks, Adidas shoes and a black t-shirt.

It's a family vacation and my dad gives a nudge, “Do you see how many people are staring at you?”

The glares were palpable.

Resting against my black shirt, standing out brightly in the sunlight, is a silver Star of David.

That's the object of their attention.

Their scorn.

Such is life now. To wonder if you should tuck the necklace or wear it proudly.

Hide or be seen.

Embrace your Judaism or reject it.

A Pastrami Jew

On October 6th, 2023, I didn't wear a Magen David around my neck.

Quite the opposite, I'd been adrift from Judaism. I was living and working remotely from Croatia, a country with a Jewish population of around 2,000 people.

My identity was closer to citizen of the world than it was Jewish.

Being Jewish never factored into my life in ways that I understood or appreciated.

Not for lack of trying from my folks.

I went to a Jewish kindergarten.

I went to Hebrew school on Sundays and vaguely recall being in a teary Cleveland

synagogue after Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated.

I went to a Jewish day camp and eventually Jewish sleepaway camp in the summers.

I had a Bar Mitzvah.

But it all felt performative.

I didn't feel a connection and, frankly, I wanted no connection.

I visited Israel in my mid-20s. I was moved but remained spiritually aimless, away from the Jewish community.

I didn't seek it.

I didn't long for it.

I didn't feel a need.

I was always loyal to the food though.

What were we without our matzah balls, pastrami and gefilte fish?

A 3,500-year-old nation, reduced to a deli menu.

And nothing in that relationship bothered me.

I kept up with what was happening with family in Israel throughout the years and that was the extent of it.

I hadn't set foot in a synagogue as anything other than a tourist since age 13.

In other words, I've been culturally Jewish – at best – for the entirety of my life.

Then the world changed.

After October 7

There was a fundamental shift in the immediate aftermath of October 7th. You could taste it in the air, feel it in your bones.

And it was a decision point for many highly secular Jews outside of Israel. People like me.

The far easier move was to fade into the background.

Avoid engaging. Avoid being The Jew, let alone a Jew.

Why bother with this stuff if I hadn't before in any meaningful way?

Just ignore the vilification of the world's sole Jewish state and the global surge in antisemitism and carry on.

Stay quiet. Stay unseen. Easy.

But was it really easier to abandon a shared history of over three millennia?

The very idea of existing as a Jew up to this point in time required a culmination of miracles in your family's choices.

If you're Jewish today, it meant surviving mass violence, attempts at forced conversion, constant displacement, frequent persecution, pogroms and genocides – and choosing to remain Jewish nonetheless, knowing that what's past is often prologue.

Imagine the odds.

There wasn't a decision to be made at all in my mind.

The world reminded me I was a Jew and I happily accepted the invitation to reconnect.

And the thing is, Judaism did factor into my life.

Sometimes quietly, unconsciously, like in our signature humor, the importance of family and our time together, and in my instinct to seek out Jewish history wherever I traveled.

Or by simply arguing. We love a good argument. We love thinking. Learning.

And sometimes it wasn't so subtle. The very ideals baked into Western civilization – justice, ethics, compassion, the pursuit of truth – are echoes of Jewish thought. The moral foundations that form how I see the world are profoundly Jewish.

Judaism can be no less avoided than one can avoid air.

So, after being in Zagreb for years, I reached out to the local Rabbi and asked to come chat.

Despite having a tiny community of less than 2,000, Croatia is home to the oldest in-use Sephardic synagogue in the world.

We talked for an hour and he invited me to a Saturday service.

This is a modern Orthodox congregation, by the way. As a comically secular Jew, I felt essentially non-Jewish by comparison, but they cared little about that and welcomed me.

I sat in the pews of this small, tastefully adorned Zagreb synagogue, functionally clueless yet enveloped in the rhythmic chants of a religion that dates back over 3,500 years.

The Rabbi handed me a prayer book opened to the page they were on and I read along in English.

Or maybe I didn't, I had no idea where we were, standing and sitting at their cue, but I was comfortably wrapped up in the warmth of the moment.

And that was enough.

The lot of us broke bread after and I felt connected to a piece of me that was buried but evidently not forgotten.

And it was nice.

What Happens When We're Seen

Judaism has subsequently become a source of immense pride. Our lineage as one of the few peoples to survive as long as we have – who've outlived empires – is something to be celebrated, not hidden.

There's another benefit to being openly Jewish and wearing it as a badge of honor – it empowers others.

It brings light and joy to others. A little bit of chesed, kindness. Another Jewish value.

I bought a Cleveland Browns hoodie (one of the choices my family made was moving to Cleveland...so I'm eternally a Browns fan) with the text in Hebrew and I intentionally wear it whenever I travel.

It's technically gibberish to Hebrew speakers outside the U.S but it has started a conversation every single time. Every. Single. Time. At every airport and no matter wherever else I am.

People approach with a smile, telling me they're Jewish, sharing

their stories and their appreciation in seeing a reminder. Such a small gesture producing such an outsized effect.

A woman in Grand Central Station confided that she was afraid to wear anything that called any attention to her Judaism whatsoever, but seeing someone walk around with Hebrew emblazoned on their chest, in one of the busiest parts of NYC, made her realize she could.

That she should.

If the goal of antisemitism is to make Jews cower and abandon our identity, the irony is that it does more to bind us than divide us. It strengthens us more than it weakens.

As Rabbi Raphael Shore wrote recently in *Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Jew*, "The Jewish People cannot escape antisemitism by trying to be like everyone else: Jew-hatred singles them out every time...antisemitism serves as a reminder of their Jewish identity and ensures the Jews survive."

You never know who you're inspiring with the radical act of being openly Jewish.

The simple act of being you.

Because we are all we have. Always has been that way, always will be.

I used to think my Jewishness was incidental, something inherited, like a middle name I didn't choose and didn't use.

But it's not.

It's a living connection to people who came before me and chose to remain who they were, even when it was hard.

And my middle name is Benjamin. Just a wee bit Jewish.

To be Jewish now – openly, proudly – is to honor that chain. To honor the traditions.

So I always wear the Magen David out now, not because it's easy, but because it's mine. Because it's ours.

Who cares if they stare.

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Andrea Aaron on her 86th birthday on the 23rd of June.
- Gertie Feinstein on her 94th birthday on the 17th of June.
- Jeanette Markowitz on her 94th birthday on the 26th of June.

- Gertie Feinstein on her 94th birthday on the 17th of June.
- Peter Sklair on his 65th birthday on the 11th of June.
- Norma Wolpe on her 90th birthday on the 27th of June.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Gary & Melanie Epstein on their 40th anniversary on the 23rd of June

BIRTHS

- Mazaltov to Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a grandson, born

to Chaim & Chaya in New York

- Mazaltov to Doris Samson on the birth of a great grandson, born to Yehoshua & Chevi Brunschwig in Jerusalem

BEREAVEMENTS

- We wish long life to Stephen Szewach and to Peter Szewach on the death of their mother, Myra.
- We wish long life to Malisse Mielke, Harry Genn and Charles Genn on the death of their mother, Sonia Genn.



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