

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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March 2012

Adar 5772

### SHABBAT TIMES

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

2 & 3 March – 9 Adar

🕒 Tetzaveh (*Zachor*)

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:08

9 & 10 March – 16 Adar

🕒 Ki Tissa

🕒 6:12 – 🕒 7:00

16 & 17 March – 23 Adar

🕒 Vayakhel & Pikudei (*Parah*)

🕒 6:05 – 🕒 6:53

23 & 24 March – 1 Nissan

🕒 Vayikra (*Hachodesh*)

🕒 5:57 – 🕒 6:45

30 & 31 March – 8 Nissan

🕒 Tzav (*Shabbat Hagadol*)

🕒 5:50 – 🕒 6:38

### CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It's been quite a busy month at Oxford, from special occasion brochas to our Italian-themed dinner.

First was the birthday brocha which was very well received and a lot of fun. The next brocha was in honour of doctors and dentists coinciding with Parshat Mishpatim, which has reference to the medical profession.

Many people asked why no one from the medical profession spoke at the brocha. The reasons are as follows. I felt that the dentists would have had everyone smiling with biting wit and the gynaes that were there would have given over a good delivery. The surgeon would have cut to the point quickly and the physicians would have given an in-depth investigation into whatever matter they were going to speak on. The GPs would have told you to have some

more kichel and herring (Jewish Panado) and come back the following day for the talk. The ICU guy would have been a bit too intensive and critical and the haematologist would make everyone stand intermittently to prevent clots. Therefore I felt that the only person remaining, who could have done justice, would have been the anaesthetist who would have competed quite well with what the Rabbi could have delivered except for the fact that, as an anaesthetist, he is only licensed to put one person to sleep at a time... and he was unfortunately away for the weekend.

The Italian Friday night service and dinner was really fun. Tzvi and the choir davened to Italian tunes and the Rabbi gave an interesting look at the start of the Roman Empire which turns out to have dated back to Eisav (the forefather of the Romans). The dinner was catered by Stan and Pete with Italian cuisine which was enjoyed, while listening to a few solos by Tzvi followed by a game of Italian translations... good thing we live in SA man! The turnout was great (well over a hundred people) and everyone had a great time. We look forward to seeing you at our next event which turns out to be Purim.

For Purim we're having a braai following the Megilla reading on Wednesday night the 7th. We've really tried (successfully) to keep the cost down so please join us.

We are starting a new project on the 10th March (Saturday morning at 11). It's a lecture series covering various aspects pertaining to small (and not so small) kids, which parents will

find interesting. This first lecture will be given by Deborah Jacobson who is an expert on nutrition. She'll be talking on "fussy eaters". Reminds me of the saying "these little kids are so cute you could just eat them up and then when they grow up you wish you had!"

Mazaltov to the Rabbi and Rivky on the birth of their first grandson in Melbourne. We wish them much nachas and simchas.

Have a great month of Adar.

Brian Levy

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

"The Jews had light, happiness, gladness and glory" (Esther 8,16)

This verse is not describing South Africa, sometime (hopefully in the not too distant future) when power failures are history. It refers to the Jews of Shushan and the rest of the Persian Empire, when news began to spread that Haman had been eliminated and his decree against the Jews was in the process of being overturned.

We have never been able to appreciate light the way we have, here in South Africa, in the past couple of months. We always took it for granted: you walk into a room; it is dark; flick the switch; the room is filled with a beautiful glow

These days, we have learnt, it is not a given. We will be sitting with our family eating dinner. Without warning, suddenly we are plunged in darkness. We begin to scramble for alternative sources of illumination. The cheap, imported, plug-in

Chinese emergency lamps have long stopped working, ill-designed to cope with frequent and repeated charges and discharges. Cadac lamps and candles are lit, as we make new plans for the evening. The kettle had not been put on to boil yet, so no tea tonight. The urgent report that had to be ready for the next morning will simply not be; the batteries in the laptop will not last long enough. No checking email or watching television either. The rest of the evening is spent in a state of gloom and mild depression.

After a couple of hours, just as unexpectedly, the power is back on again. "Oh!" everybody cries out. Light fills the home; with it comes happiness and joy.

The Talmud (Megilah 16b) comments on the verse "the Jews had light" by saying "Light refers to Torah."

There is a sub-plot to the story of Purim. Visibly it is an anti-Semitic Haman who decrees extermination against the Jews to serve a personal agenda and King Achashverosh who sleeps away in a drunken stupor, allowing his viceroy to run the country without interference. At the same time, we have a Jewish people who are in a spiritual darkness, who have forgotten about the light of the Torah and its teachings. When Haman says to Achashverosh, about the Jews, "there is ('אֵין) one nation" the Talmud explains that he was also alluding to the fact that they were asleep ('אֵין) in their observance of Mitzvot.

Hence while the king below was sleeping, the King of Kings above was also in a slumber, allowing Haman's plot to take its natural course.

The turning point, says the Talmud, was when Mordechai and Esther seized the moment and galvanized the entire Jewish community of Shushan to repentance. After three days of fasting and pleading, sleep eluded the king. It was not only

Achashverosh who was suffering from insomnia; the King above also woke up in response to the prayers and the pleas of the desperate Jews.

Once again, the light of Torah illuminated their lives. In fact their return to Torah and their acceptance of Mitzvot was in certain respects greater than the commitment they had made at Sinai. Basking in the glow of Torah, the Jews were once again worthy of salvation. The demise of Haman and of his followers was now inevitable.

For centuries, we have lived by the light of Torah. From time to time, we suffer from a form of self-imposed load-shedding, as we throw off the 'yoke of the Torah and the Mitzvot' and find ourselves in spiritual darkness. We then begin to grope in the dark for alternative sources of energy, candles and matches, but nothing can equal the beauty and the glorious glow of the real thing.

Eventually, we come to see the light and allow the Torah to illuminate our lives once again. "Oh!" we say, as we are filled with gladness and joy.

Each Saturday night, when we make Havdalah after Shabbat to begin a new week, we also say a Bracha over light. At that time, we quote this famous verse from the Megilat Esther, "The Jews had light, happiness, gladness and glory" and we add the words "so may it be for us..." Amen.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

## DVAR TORAH

### PURIM REVEALED

*by Naphtali Winter*

<http://www.innernet.org.il>

Of all the different festivals which make up the Jewish year, Purim is the most joyous, marked by merriment and even abandon. Even Jewish law, often seen by the ignorant as overly restrictive, demands that a Jew make merry on Purim. He must eat a special Purim meal and is commanded to drink more than his fill. Purim is the one day of the year when it is considered praiseworthy to get tipsy, though one is still cautioned not to lose complete control of one's senses. This seemingly un-Jewish method of celebration is not an excuse for drunkenness, but rather an expression of joy and happiness, which leads to love of one's fellow Jew.

Haman, when convincing King Achashverosh of the necessity to destroy the Jews, argues that "there is a certain people, scattered and dispersed..." Because they are scattered and dispersed, they are vulnerable. Therefore, Purim stresses the unity of the Jewish People and their love for one another. For this reason, too, one of the mitzvot of the day is to send gifts to one's friend and to the poor. All are included in the general atmosphere of brotherly love. This friendliness and rejoicing are meant to contradict Haman's claim, for the Jewish People's unity has been its strength throughout the centuries of exile and dispersion.

There are other aspects of Purim. Purim is the most secular of the festivals, marked as it is by food, drink and masquerades. It is one of the two important festivals instituted by the Rabbis, the other being Chanukah. Yet there is a marked difference in the way these two festivals are celebrated. Whereas Chanukah is marked by the

#### SHACHARIT (A.M.)

<b>Sunday and Public Holidays</b>	8:00
<b>Monday to Friday</b>	7:15
<b>Shabbat &amp; Festivals</b>	9:00
<i>07/03 (Fast of Esther): 7:00</i>	
<i>08/03 (Purim): 6:45</i>	

#### MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

<b>Sunday to Thursday</b>	6:15
<b>from 18/03</b>	6:00
<b>Friday</b>	5:45
<b>Shabbat</b>	6:00
<b>from 24/03</b>	5:45

lighting of candles — itself an expression of spiritual values — and the recital of thanksgiving psalms (Hallel), the celebration of Purim is purely material.

The reason for this difference lies in the origin of the two festivals. Chanukah marks the victory of the spiritual. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE) attempted to uproot not the Jews but the Jewish religion. Hellenistic Jews were assured of equality and integration in his kingdom. The revolt was fired by the religious "fanatics" and proved a fight for survival of the Jewish spirit against all-pervading Hellenism.

Purim, on the other hand, which commemorates the miracle of purely physical survival, is marked by the celebration of the material.

But there is a deeper meaning to the festival of Purim. The story, as related in Megillas Esther, is a series of natural events. There is nothing miraculous in the tale. Each episode, although at times dramatic, is nevertheless not unusual in itself. It is a story of cause and effect. It is only when taken as a whole that a different impression emerges.

In spite of all their importance, the actors are not really the ones who decide the issue. On the surface it is King Achashverosh whose decisions, word and will, are all-pervading in the Megillah. Nothing happens that does not have the king's express permission. Even when he consults his advisors, it is the king's word which is final.

Yet this all-powerful king, who holds in his hands the life and death of his subjects, seems completely bereft of initiative. Every decision he makes is at the behest or entreaty of others. As the Rabbis point out, he kills his wife Vashti on the advice of his courtier, and kills his courtier on the denunciation of his wife. He signs away the lives of his Jewish subjects at the

suggestion of Haman, and the lives of his non-Jewish subjects at the entreaties of Esther. Although Achashverosh — and Haman, for that matter — are all-powerful, they are nevertheless puppets in the general design.

As in the other books of the Bible, here, too, the reader is told the facts but left to draw his own conclusions — which, in Megillas Esther, are obvious. Although the danger hanging over the Jews is real, and imminent, they are saved by repentance and prayer. And this salvation is effected in quite a natural way. There are no "miracles" such as the splitting of the sea or fire from Heaven. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the Divine Providence is no less dramatic or obvious.

The apparently unconnected events related in Megillas Esther are suddenly perceived to be totally relevant and necessary to the story. The fall of Queen Vashti, which had no connection at all with the king's Jewish subjects, was the cause of the rise of Esther. Mordechai's discovery of the plot against the king's life, completely unconnected with anything else, proved to be the beginning of Haman's downfall, even before he had risen to power. The seeds for the Jewish People's salvation had been sown long before the threat to its existence had come into being.

The Megillah teaches us that Divine Providence does not necessarily work by open miracles, but rather through natural events. These are frequently not understood as miracles. Only in retrospect does the meaning and purpose become clear. This, the Rabbis explained, is the meaning of Moses' request, "Show me now Your ways," and G-d's answer, "You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:18, 23). Man cannot understand beforehand; only afterwards will G-d's purpose become clear. This is the

message that Megillas Esther drives home. This is perhaps also one of the reasons why G-d's Name is not mentioned in the Megillah — for His ways are hidden from man, to whom everything is a matter of natural cause and effect.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) tells a parable of a king whose son sinned against him. The king thereupon drove his son out; but because he nevertheless loved him dearly, he ordered his servants to watch over him. As the son was in disfavor with the king, they were to do this unobtrusively, so that he would not notice. One day, the king's son was attacked by a lion. One of the king's servants suddenly appeared and saved the prince. The latter thought this to be pure chance. Another time he was attacked by robbers, and again one of the king's servants appeared and saved him. Then the prince realized that his father was still looking after him.

This aspect of Purim, that Divine Providence watches over the Jewish People in hidden but natural ways, has been expressed by the Rabbis in the Talmud. They point out that the Torah hints at the miracle of Purim when it states: "And I will surely hide My face on that day" (Deut. 31:18). In this verse, the Torah uses the Hebrew words "Master astir," whose sound and letters are very similar to "Esther." The Vilna Gaon explains that although the Jewish People are in exile and Divine Providence is therefore hidden, it is nevertheless still fully functioning.

Therefore, since Divine Providence took the hidden form of natural events in the salvation of Purim, we, too, celebrate the festival by "natural" means — by food and drink. But in fact, it is a rejoicing of the spirit, in the knowledge that Divine Providence has not forsaken the Jewish People, in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

**MAZAL TOV**

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BIRTHS**

- Willie Spark on the birth of a great grandson
- Rabbi and Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a grandson

**MARRIAGES**

- Maurice and Sharon Pokroy on the forthcoming marriage of their daughter, Bev to David Ezekiel on 11<sup>th</sup> March
- Amy Gamsu and Grant Price on their forthcoming marriage on 19<sup>th</sup> March
- Rene Gamsu and Rose Selesnik on the forthcoming marriage of Amy Gamsu and Grant Price

- Michael and Tracy Salomon on the marriage of their daughter, Danielle to Brad Wainer

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Zalman Orlanski on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> March
- Frank Gonsenhaus on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 5<sup>th</sup> March
- Kitty Goldstone on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 29<sup>th</sup> March

**ANNIVERSARIES**

- Looky and Freda Braude on their 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 4<sup>th</sup> March
- Michael and Diana Don on their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 11<sup>th</sup> March
- Clive and Rhona Gilbert on their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 19<sup>th</sup> March
- Raymond and Hilary Isakow on their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 21<sup>st</sup> March

**REFUAH SHLEMAH**

We wish a Speedy Recovery to:

- Freda Bloch
- David Genn
- Aubrey Angel

**BEREAVEMENTS**

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- David Jacobs on the death of his mother, Maureen
- Norma Utian on the death of her husband, Hessel

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



## WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH FAST OF ESTHER

- ⚡ Fast begins: 4:55 a.m.
- ⚡ Shacharit: 7:00 a.m.
- ⚡ Mincha & Maariv: 6:00 p.m.
- ⚡ Megila Reading: 6:45 p.m.
- ⚡ Fast ends: 6:50 p.m.
- ⚡ Purim Braai to follow - R95 adults, R50 children 12 & under (please book asap)

## THURSDAY 8 MARCH PURIM

- ⚡ Shacharit: 6:45 a.m.
- ⚡ Megila Reading: 7:30 a.m.
- ⚡ Second Megila Reading: 11:15 a.m.
- ⚡ Remember to give gifts to the poor (Matanot La'evyonim), send food parcels to each other (Mishloach Manot) and eat a festive meal (Seudat Purim)
- ⚡ Mincha/ Maariv: 6:15 p.m.