

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

March 2025

Adar 5785

## SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting  
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)

14 & 15 March – 15 Adar

🔊 Ki Tisa  
🕯 6:07 – 🕯 6:55

21 & 22 March – 22 Adar

🔊 Vayak'hel (*Parah*)  
🕯 5:59 – 🕯 6:48

28 & 29 March – 29 Adar

🔊 Pekudei (*Hachodesh*)  
🕯 5:52 – 🕯 6:40

4 & 5 April – 7 Nissan

🔊 Vayikra  
🕯 5:44 – 🕯 6:33

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

Growing up, dressing up on Purim was not exactly my thing. Once married, my wife started celebrating the holiday vicariously by arranging costumes for me, joining with me in the fun. So one Purim I arrived in Shul in a striped black and white uniform (this was after I had been appointed Jewish chaplain at Pollsmoor Prison); one year I was Father Chanukah (thanks to an outfit sold real cheap on the side of the road on Boxing Day); on one occasion I was greeted all day with “good yomov pontiff” (not sure what got into her, or me, that year!)

It has taken me decades to finally find an explanation for this custom that really resonates with me and that I am pleased to share, particularly in a year when merriment does not come easy.

The first instance of dressing up recorded in Scripture is, of course, Jacob dressing up as

Esau, at his mother's behest, to receive the blessing Isaac intended for Esau. This was the birth of anti-Semitism, caused by Esau's deep hatred for and anger with his sibling. This deep-rooted resentment was bequeathed down the generations and millennia. There were short furloughs for periods of times, but the Esau vs Jacob rivalry endured—sometimes more covertly and at times raring its ugly head overtly, but always there latently.

Purim was one of those moments. Haman the Agagite, a direct descendent of Amalek, Esau's grandson, rose to power during the benevolent rule of Achashverosh. Jews were fully integrated and assimilated into Persian society. He managed to rise the age-old hatred for his people's nemesis, managing to convince the monarch that his Israelite subjects were nothing but trouble and worthy of extermination. To carry out his final solution, which would eliminate every Jew from the Empire (127 provinces spanning the inhabited world at the time) he riled up the wider population into Jew-hatred, so that they would join him in executing his plan. The Jews' fate seemed hopeless, and despair prevailed.

Mordechai and Esther sprung to action. Through a combination of fasting, prayer and palace intrigue, suddenly the fortunes were reversed. It was the night after Esther's first feast with VIP guests Haman and Achashverosh. The former,

emboldened by this exclusive invitation, decided to get permission from the king to hang Mordechai publicly the very next day (11 months ahead of the intended date by royal edict). Despite the late hour, Achashverosh was awake, tormented by the fact that he had never rewarded Mordechai adequately for saving his life, years earlier, when there was a plot to poison him. Let us just say that things did not turn out as he had planned and that he never had a chance to voice his request. Instead, the king asked him to parade Mordechai on one of the choice royal horses, clothed in garments of royalty. Hero instantly turned to villain. In a reversal of fate, Haman was ordered to help Mordechai dress up in royal clothes—then was forced to walk around the capital city of Shushan proclaiming the king's gratefulness to those whom he wishes to honour.

This was a turning point in the annals of the Jews of the Persian Empire. Instead of the Jews cowering in fear with an elimination decree hanging over their heads, it was now the anti-Semites turning their coats over as Mordechai was declared a national hero and mass conversions to Judaism the vogue.

The moment when their fortune turned was not missed by the Jews of Persia. They could not fail to note the irony that an arch-enemy, descendent of Esau, was now dressing up the descendant of Jacob, leader of

the Jewish People, into costume. For a fleeting moment, Esau was acknowledging the dress-up of Jacob, centuries earlier. He was recognising that his claim for the blessing, his subsequent hatred and the anti-Semitism he implanted in his lineage, were all unfounded. After all Isaac had blessed the right son!

In the words of the Book of Esther, (9) "On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is the month of Adar, when the king's command and decree were to be executed, this very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened as the Jews got their enemies in their power."

So the next day was one of celebration, and proclaimed to be observed in all subsequent years as the holiday of Purim. Mordechai and Esther mandated that on this day we read from the Scroll that recalls this story (Megillah), share gifts of food with each other to increase joy (Mishloach Manot), distribute charity to the needy so they too can celebrate (Matanot Le'evyonim) and sit down to eat a festive celebratory meal (Seudah).

We adopted the custom of costumes to remember when Jacob dressed up and the turning point in the miracle of Purim, when our fate pivoted as Mordechai was dressed up. Back then it was just a short interlude. Sadly many Hamanites and Amalekites have subsequently risen.

This year, more fervently than ever, we pray that, as we don our dress up, Esau's acknowledgment finally becomes permanent and irreversible and that the scourge of Jew-hatred is irrevocably eradicated.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

## FROM THE REBBETZIN

Isn't it funny that when we think of a Yom tov our minds instinctively think of a food. Think Pesach, and we think matza or kneidels. Think Rosh Hashona and we see apples and honey or taiglach. Chanukah makes us see latkes.

Of course, Purim is hamantaschen. One of the many reasons for the hamantasch custom is because Purim is a holiday where G-d is not obviously there. We have to look for Him in the miracle. In fact His name is not even in the Megillah at all. If we want, we can explain the story as a natural event.

It is because of this that it is customary to eat many foods that have "hidden" fillings. Kreplach, and stuffed cabbage were staples at my childhood Purim meals. My grandmother came to our house in the week before Purim to make kreplach. Each one a perfect triangle filled with meat. My mother stood for hours filling each cabbage leaf with meat and spicing the pot with syrup and prunes, cooking it all for many hours. My mother also lovingly covered little hotdogs in pastry and called them frank in blankets, which always made us smile.

I realized today that it isn't only Yomtovs that we associate with specific foods, but people too.

When I think of my mom I immediately think of these foods, and sugar biscuits and Romany creams. Even my Dad (who did not cook) makes me think of gefilta fish, and coleslaw, and coffee chillas. On Friday I bought fish cakes, making me feel near to my good friend Dot who always had some in her freezer when I visited.

These foods help me remember them, recreate their love and presence. No matter how long or short a time has passed.

So on Friday we will eat hamantaschen to remember, to look out for Hashem everywhere.

Have a good month.

*Rivky*

## DVAR TORAH

### PURIM TEACHES US HOW TO RESPOND TO ANTI-SEMITISM.

*By Slovie Jungreis-Wolff (aish.com)*

#### **Bond in unity and stand up as proud Jews.**

As anti-Semitic incidents rise at an alarming rate, I am listening carefully to the message of Purim.

The Jewish people were frightened, faced with threat of annihilation. Haman's hatred hung over the nation like a dark cloud. King Achashverosh told Haman "to do with as you see fit." Letters were sent with permission to "destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews, from young to old, children and women..."

In such dire circumstances who could keep hope alive?

My mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, of blessed memory, described being deported from her home in Szeged, Hungary. She was a little girl when the Nazis awakened her from her sleep. My grandparents were given just a few moments to get ready and then they were thrown into the night. German shepherd dogs were barking. There was shouting and screaming. Terrified, my mother stood in the street holding in her arms her favourite doll for dear life, the only thing she was able to take with her.

The neighbours came and watched silently, gawking.

"You are a dirty Jew. Where you are going you won't need any toys."

My mother noticed her friend, Marta, the daughter of the non-Jewish caretaker of the synagogue. The two girls had

always played together. Marta was standing there with her father. She approached my mother and for a moment my mother thought that at least this little friend was coming to say goodbye.

As Marta came close, she grabbed the doll.

My mother began to cry. "This doll is mine! Give me back my doll!"

"My father said I could take whatever I want. You can't keep anything."

Father and daughter looked at her, laughing. Then Marta's father sneered, "You are a dirty Jew. And you need to learn the facts of life. Where you are going you won't need any toys."

He spat on the ground.

"But you don't have to worry," he added. "Marta will take care of all your things."

My mother was deported to Bergen-Belsen.

How many times was the world ready to bid farewell to the Jews? How often have they vowed to throw us into the sea, to terrorize us, delegitimize our very breath and destroy our children?

My mother's transport was halted in Linz. They were loaded off the cattle cars. Heads were shaved. Amidst the sobbing, my mother found herself herded into a shower. They later realized this was also a gas chamber. My mother felt as if life had come to an end. She no longer felt as if she was a human being. She could not bear to glance at her beautiful mother who was shorn of all her grace and dignity.

At that moment of suffocating darkness, something incredible occurred.

My mother put her hand into her pocket and discovered a crumpled piece of paper inside. She pulled it out and carefully unfolded its fragile ends. It was a page from a prayer book. My grandfather had secretly placed the holy paper inside as a message to his little girl. The words of the Shema filled my mother's heart with hope. The message was clear: No matter what happens, no matter where life takes you, know that you never walk alone. My dear child you are part of the Jewish people. God is watching over you; never lose your faith.

The words of the Shema filled my mother's heart with hope. No matter what happens, you never walk alone.

There are times we search for God's hand and feel despair. We long for clear vision. We cannot understand what is happening. It feels as if the presence of God is concealed. But we must know that beneath all the confusion there is a Divine plan. God is guiding us. We will survive.

This is the message of Purim.

It is Queen Esther, herself, who calls out to us until today.

Esther is alluded to in the Torah with the Hebrew expression "hastir astir"- I, God, will hide My face. There are times of darkness when we feel that God's face is hidden. In the Book of Esther, God's name does not appear. We may not always see or be cognizant of God's hand in our life, but we need to know that His presence is guiding us, to pierce the veil of nature and search for the light behind the clouds.

That terrible night when my mother was woken from her bed and cast off for deportation, Marta and her father likely believed that they were done with the Jews. The Nazis could never have fathomed that one day the Jewish people would walk

through the streets of Jerusalem and wash the stones of the Western Wall with our tears.

That page of the Shema sustained not only my mother, but an entire generation of Jews. We cannot afford to give up on ourselves.

We are still here, continuing to tell our unique story.

Let us never give up hope. Instead, let us embrace the words of Queen In times of trouble, Queen Esther told us what we must do. She asked that we bond in unity, stop hurting one another, and join together in prayer. This is the time strengthen your Jewish pride.

As we contemplate the rising anti-Semitism that is spreading throughout the world, the hatred of the BDS movement and the threats to our land, we must take a moment to think. We have faced cruel enemies before. We have suffered through pogroms, inquisitions, crusades, Holocaust and murderous terror attacks. But we are still here, continuing to tell our unique story.

Let us never give up hope. Instead, let us embrace the words of Queen Esther: "Go, gather all the Jews." Become one. Reach out to someone with kindness. Make a difference in the life of another, even if it's just through a good word or a bright smile. Say a prayer and stand up for the Jewish people.

Together we can turn sorrow to gladness and darkness to light.

<b>SERVICE TIMES</b>	
<b>SHACHARIT (A.M.)</b>	
Monday & Thursday)	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30
<b>MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)</b>	
Friday	5:45

**MAZALTOV**



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BAR MITZVAH**

- Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin and Michoel & Chaya Mushka Chaikin on the Barmitzvah of their grandson and son in Melbourne on 2<sup>nd</sup> March

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Frank Gonsenhauser on his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March.
- Karen Shkudsky on her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March.
- Leah Lange on her 94<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March.
- Edward Pokroy on his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

- Robert and Julie Soicher on their 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March.

**REFUAH SHLEIMA**

We wish a speedy recovery to:

- Phillip Jacobson
- Robert Soicher
- Arlene Schneid
- Jules Schneid



**FAST OF ESTHER**

**THURSDAY 13 MARCH**

Fast begins: 4:59 a.m. – Fast ends: 6:44 p.m.

Shacharit: 7:00 a.m. -- Mincha/Maariv: 5:45 p.m.

**Megilah reading: 6:45 p.m.** -- Refreshments after Megilah reading



**PURIM**

**FRIDAY 14 MARCH**

Shacharit: 7:00 a.m.; **Megilah Reading: 7:30 a.m.** -- Breakfast after the service

**Second Megilah Reading: 10:30 a.m.** -- Brunch after the Megilah reading