

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May & June 2024

Iyar & Sivan 5784

SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2 & 3

24 & 25 May – 17 Iyar

🔊 Behar

🕯 5:07 – 🕯 5:58

31 May & 1 June – 24 Iyar

🔊 Bechukotai

🕯 5:07 – 🕯 5:57

7 & 8 June – 2 Sivan

🔊 Bamidbar

🕯 5:05 – 🕯 6:00

14 & 15 June – 9 Sivan

🔊 Naso

🕯 5:06 – 🕯 6:01

21 & 22 June – 16 Sivan

🔊 Beha'alotcha

🕯 5:07 – 🕯 6:02

28 & 29 June – 23 Sivan

🔊 Shlach

🕯 5:09 – 🕯 6:04

RABBI'S MESSAGE

This month's newsletter is late... Very late. I usually like to get it out in the first week of the month. We are now closer to the end of the month! I can explain. A lot has happened in the past couple of months. A sad family bereavement was followed by Pesach and the invasion of our home (thank G-d) by children and grandchildren. So I have pretty much been chasing my own tail and not managing to tick off the to-do lists.

Fact remains, no newsletter. Excuses or no excuses. Finally I give myself a deadline. I will not go to

sleep until done. Then it dawns on me that today, 14 Iyar, is the holiday of "it's never too late..." It is called Pesach Sheni (Second Passover), and is an opportunity for those who missed the pilgrimage on Pesach I to make up for this one month later. It is the date that teaches us that we should never give up and can make up for the mistakes of the past, that we are always being given second chances. That we can press the reset button and start over. So quite a fortuitous day to do something I should have several weeks ago!

We are also a week away from the opportunity for our country to get a second chance. To say that 1994 went awry is an understatement. We all had high hopes and were disappointed by poor leadership, corruption and state capture, as we spent hours every day in the dark. We can succumb to a cycle of despair, sitting around with friends and bemoaning the state of our government, economy, roads, etc.

A few days ago the SA Jewish Board of Deputies released the first episode of a series of podcasts entitled "Smiling in the Dark." The idea is to present the many positives that our country has to offer and to inject hope in our community. I was

their first interviewee, and you can watch my conversation with Howard Feldman on the Board's YouTube channel (search YouTube for my name and "Smiling in the Dark").

Preparing for this interview was a powerful exercise for me. I had to put on my rose-tinted lenses and look for the beauty and good all around us. It gave me hope and I am pleased to have the opportunity of sharing my own positivity with our wonderful community. The recording session was fun and uplifting and I drove home feeling light and optimistic.

29th May is our country's second chance. Let us not waste the opportunity. The plethora of parties on the ballot is simply daunting. The permutations of potential coalition agreements that are likely to follow is likewise mind-boggling. Virtually everyone knows who they do not want to lead our country but not all are sure who to actually vote for. But choosing to sit this out one is definitely not the right move. There is a week to go and time to speak to friends, to inform ourselves and make a decision.

Time to press the reset button on South Africa. Our Beloved Country deserves to stop crying.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Apparently, moving home is very high up on the personal stress level, akin to G-d forbid losing a loved one.

I was surprised to realize today that I'm super stressed by the move of our school. We are so excited, very grateful and looking so forward to moving into our brand new school building. We have been in this falling-down building waiting for this new school literally for years now and next week, PG, our dream comes true.

I need to point out that I should be having no stress at all. I'm not responsible for even one iota of the move. I'm not making a single decision. I simply have to show up and enjoy the new building next Monday PG. So I've been wondering what is stressing me as I watch the workers take garbage to the dump, take pictures off the walls, and watch as they separate the things that will be taken with us and those that will be left behind.

Some years ago I saw a house on 11th Ave. It was up in the morning when I left and rubble when I came home. It made me feel so sad. This house planned and built brick by brick, lived in and loved by its owners, full of memories, full of laughter and tears and love and sadness was now reduced to rubble. I never lived there. I didn't know the

people who did. And never saw the inside of the house but I still felt sad.

We are told that when Mashiach comes we, who have been waiting for so long, will look back and wish we could have even one more hour of the exile. All of this seems so strange, most especially because we will be going forward, moving on to better things. A beautiful state-of-the-art school! Modern cluster homes! A perfect world!

We mustn't forget what we have right now, we mustn't forget how we have grown and achieved. Even if it wasn't in perfect conditions. We must not forget the love, the good memories, the kindnesses we have experienced. We mustn't forget that this has been the springboard for the good we're about to enjoy.

May we all always go forward, achieve more, be happier, progress. And not forget what happened and helped us to get to where we are.

Have a good month

Rivky

SERVICE TIMES	
SHACHARIT (A.M.)	
Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30
MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)	
Friday	5:20

DVAR TORAH***The Commandment of Counting***

By Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller (aish.com)

Counting the Omer teaches us mindfulness, and opens our hearts to the power of stories.

The commandment to count the omer is one of the more curious prescriptions of the Torah. We are told to count the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot even though, of course, the number of days never changes. Therefore, it is very much an effort in which the process is in and of itself a value.

The word for "number" in Hebrew is *mispar*. Its root is closely related to the word for "story" — *sipur*. What is the relationship between the two?

A collection of events becomes a story — as opposed to a random anthology of events — when there is a beginning in which the characters are introduced, a middle in which conflict takes place, and an end in which there is resolution.

Our lives flow by so quickly that we frequently lose awareness of the awesome power of our own stories. The metamorphosis of today into tomorrow is subtle enough for us to lose consciousness of beginnings and ends.

The commandment to count teaches us mindfulness. It re-opens

our hearts to hearing stories. And what story is being told?

There are two stories intertwined.

One is the story of a transformation of a people who at Passover become physically free into a people who at Shavuot become spiritually free as well.

The day we left Egypt was one in which we rejected the Egyptian definition of what our lives can hold. We were free to be who we wanted to be. But we didn't yet know our own story. It is only when we received the Torah that we found the channels that could give our souls expression.

It was then that we learned the mechanics of meeting challenges that are genuine and enduring. Our story began to evolve.

Barley and Wheat

The rituals that define this time of year reflect this change. The sacrifice that was offered on Passover was made out of barley. In ancient times, barley was used as fodder for animals. The sacrifice that was offered on Shavuot was made of wheat. Wheat is often used as an allegory for the human capacity for using our intelligence. While an animal can eat a fruit or a leaf, it requires human intelligence and creativity to make bread.

What this symbolizes is the transformation of the Jewish people from one

who are defined primarily through the strivings and yearnings for the sort of freedom that we share in common with the animals to becoming truly evolved humans. It is indeed quite a story.

What makes us truly human? The mystic literature discusses the bonds that we share with G-d as being the humanizing factor. These bonds are called sefirot, a name which, as is obvious, also has the same root as number and story.

This common root conveys the fact that our beginning, middle and end are ultimately measured and finite, but nonetheless touched by the infinite spark of G-dliness within us.

The earliest mention of this mystic concept is presented in the Kabbalistic work called Sefer Yetzirah, literally the "Book of Formation," which is attributed to Abraham. There are over a thousand commentaries on Sefer Yetzirah, yet it remains nonetheless one of the most esoteric of the Jewish works on G-d's nature.

In the 1500s, Rabbi Yitzhak Luria — a mystic from Egypt who settled in Safed and who is known widely by the acrostic of his name as the Ari (literally "the Lion") — elucidated the most enigmatic sections of Kabbalah to a select group of disciples with unsurpassed clarity.

Subsequently, the mystic teachings of Judaism became far more accessible than they had ever been in the past.

One of the most central of his teachings is the significance of gaining awareness of the bond that we share with G-d, the sefirot of our spiritual souls.

The Seven Aspects of G-dliness

Let us now examine the bonds with G-d that make us human — the seven expressive aspects of G-dliness.

(1) Chesed, "kindness"

While the drives of the body are towards oneself, those of the soul are directed outwards towards others. We love those to whom we give because they validate our spirituality. We see our highest self-reflected in them.

(2) Gevurah, "strength" or "empowerment"

Specifically this refers to empowering one's soul to overcome the obstacles that stand before it. We have the capacity to live for the sake of our goals, and to make sacrifices to attain it. The ultimate goal of every Jew is to be a source of light. In order to do this, we must submit our egos and desires to the scrutiny of G-d's Torah.

(3) Tiferet, "beauty"

Beauty is created through harmony and contrast — that is when we make a "match." When we

become people of truth, our words, thoughts, and deeds match. Only humans can lie. The reason for this is that only humans have the possibility of creating themselves in a certain sense. To use the words of the Maharal of Prague, "we give birth to ourselves." When we lie we succumb to our animalistic desire for comfort and ease. When we tell the truth, we reconnect to G-d's transcendental reality and chose to be authentic as humans.

(4) Netzach, "infinity"

Anyone who has ever resisted the desire for immediate gratification has touched this quality. It is the source of hope and aspiration towards growth.

(5) Hod, "gratitude"

In Hebrew, hod is a noun which literally means "splendor," but as a verb means both "to confess" and "to thank." As humans we can be moved by splendor whether its source is spiritual or physical. Our ability to be truly sensitive in this sense is what inspires us to express gratitude. We often resist allowing ourselves to be grateful because of the fragility of our self-esteem. When we begin the day with the words Modeh Ani, "I thank you," we express gratitude towards G-d, and simultaneously see ourselves as creations that are worthy of life.

(6) Yesod, "foundation"

This refers to our ability to bond. It is called "foundation" because it is the very foundation of all interactions. What we ultimately seek in relationships is goodness. Inevitably if we had to choose one trait in a perspective spouse, it would be a spiritual one. For some of us it would be compassion, for others honesty or sensitivity. If we see our own goodness mirrored back to us, we love the person even more. What this tells us is that what we are seeking is in the final analysis, spiritual bonding. We are searching for the face of G-d.

(7) The final attribute is malchut, "kingship"

It refers to our ability to bring G-d's kingdom into being in the greater world and into our own hearts. The way we do this is through the recognition that our missions are of infinite significance; at the same time we retain the humility that comes as a result of knowing what a tiny piece of infinity we can individually call our own.

The seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot have the spiritually potency to give us the ability to let our stories unfold. We can make every day count, and emerge more human than we ever could have imagined.

MAZAL TOV



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Peta Kaplan on her 70th birthday on the 6th of May
- Melanie Epstein on her 60th birthday on the 21st of May
- Lewis Goldblatt on his 88th birthday on the 30th of May

BARMITZVAH

- Steven and Maggie Schneid and Jules and Arlene Schneid on the Barmitzvah of their son and grandson, Ethan

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a speedy recovery to:

- Peter Sklair



HAPPY SHAVUOT

SHAVUOT BEGINS TUESDAY
EVENING 11 JUNE

READING OF TEN
COMMANDMENTS
WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE

YIZKOR THURSDAY 13 JUNE