

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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May 2016

Iyar 5776

SHABBAT TIMES

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

20 & 21 May – 13 Iyar

🔊 Emor

🕯 5:09 – 🕯 5:59

27 & 28 May – 20 Iyar

🔊 Behar

🕯 5:06 – 🕯 5:57

3 & 4 June – 27 Iyar

🔊 Bechukotai

🕯 5:05 – 🕯 5:57

10 & 11 June – 5 Sivan

🔊 Bamidbar

🕯 5:05 – 🕯 5:57

RABBI'S MESSAGE

When I worked at a Jewish Primary School in Cape Town, I used the story of Rabbi Akiva to welcome new students to Grade One each year. I would tell them about the forty-year-old illiterate shepherd who noticed that water, consistently dripping on the same spot, had made a hole in a boulder. He remembered the metaphor linking Torah to water, and reasoned to himself, "My head is not as hard as stone... surely Torah can make its mark there..."

New Grade Ones are not yet used to listening in silence, so I was always prepared for numerous disruptions during my narrative. But I have never forgotten one particular interruption. One year, I was bringing the story to a close by telling them that their heads were surely not rock solid, and that slowly but surely they would

learn Torah as well. At that exact point a little boy stood up and shouted out: "My mother says that *my* head is as hard as a rock!"

If we could start our lives all over there are probably some changes we would make. Most of those changes would be in the way we spent our younger years. But at this stage, we often reflect, we are too old and too set in our ways to change or to learn. If only we had paid attention in school/cheder etc... studied how to... gotten used to... at an earlier age.

Learning may become more difficult as the years wear on, and lifestyle changes more challenging, but it is never impossible. Consider Rabbi Akiva who left to study Torah, at his wife's urging, and returned fourteen years later, the proud master of twenty-four thousand pupils. Rabbi Akiva remains to this day one of the giants of the Talmudic era.

We observe thirty-three days of mourning, during these current weeks of the counting of the Omer, in commemoration of a plague that devastated Rabbi Akiva's students—a fitting tribute to the great Talmudic Scholar. As a personal tribute to the man who was not afraid to begin Alef-Bet at the age of forty, why not attempt something you have been neglecting until now, thinking it is too late. After all, *your* head is *not* as hard as a rock!

Have a great month.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

When I look around me, I am so often inspired by the people. I see those who daven with full hearts and those who make comments of incredible faith despite their challenges. There are those who dig deep into their pockets to give Tzeddakah and those who take time from their lives to visit the sick or to work for the community. There are those who always have a friendly and positive greeting and those who make the effort to send a message or to make a phone call.

A lot of times, I suffer from imposter-syndrome. I wonder how to live up to the example set by those around me and especially how to live up to the title 'Rebbetzin' or teacher.

Then comes Pesach. The eight days of Pesach take up a lot of the year. It creeps into every part of our lives. We take Pesach into consideration when we choose homes, when we make travel plans and budgets. We put aside our favourite things to use for Pesach and we make Pesach plans well in advance.

Everyone has their own set of rules and

customs that add to their way of keeping Pesach. The foods we eat, the songs we sing and the games we play. What I find so fascinating about Pesach is the discipline we show.

For eight days we don't eat bread. For eight days we are careful not to touch or eat anything that our customs dictate is prohibited.

Every year, as I go through Pesach, I realise again how strong our relationship with G-d truly is. How many times have we gone on diet ... only to break it a few hours later. Yet, Pesach we keep – just because G-d said so. When it comes to our relationship with G-d, there is no such thing as imposter-syndrome. We each have a strong and loyal relationship. We measure our bond with our own private measuring tape, and we needs times like Pesach to remind us how strong and healthy our commitments really are.

Have a good month

Rivky

SERVICE TIMES SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
07/06 (Rosh Chodesh): 07:00 12/06 & 13/06 (Shavuot): 9:00	
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Friday	5:15
Shabbat	5:00

DVAR TORAH

IF THE MILK CAN'T BE UNSPILLED, WHY NOT CRY?

by Naftali Silberberg (chabad.org)

Pesach Sheni, "the Second Passover," is observed on the fourteenth of Iyar.

The origin of this semi-holiday is quite fascinating. On the first anniversary of the Exodus, while all the Jews were occupied with preparing their lambs for the annual Paschal offering, Moses was approached by a small group of Jews who were ritually impure and thus excluded from offering, or partaking of, the Paschal lamb. They weren't satisfied with their "exemption" from this Passover mitzvah. "Why should we be deprived?" they exclaimed. "We, too, want to experience the spiritual freedom gained by participating in the Paschal service!"

Moses agreed to convey their grievance to the Almighty, and incredibly, the heartfelt wishes of this small group caused G-d to add a mitzvah to the Torah. G-d instructed that from that year and onwards, all those who weren't capable of offering the Paschal Lamb in its proper time on the fourteenth of Nissan, due to impurity or distance from the Temple, should offer the Paschal lamb exactly one month later, on the fourteenth of Iyar.

Jewish holidays are not commemorations of historical events; rather, they are spiritual reenactments. No two holidays are alike—every holiday features a distinct spiritual energy, offering us the opportunity to gain inspiration and the necessary spiritual powers in a specific area of our service of G-d. On Passover we receive the strength to liberate ourselves from our natural enslavement to our impulses and destructive habits; on Shavuot we tap into the core of the Torah, recommitting ourselves to connecting with G-d through its

study; and on Sukkot we fill the reservoirs of our hearts with true joy. We stock up on these unique spiritual powers, enough to last us for an entire year, until the holiday returns once again. The mitzvot unique to each holiday are tools which enable us to tap into the spiritual energies present at that time.

Immediately after Passover we are taught an important lesson, a lesson which applies to all the following holidays, too. Passover is the first holiday of the year, as the "holiday calendar" commences on the first of Nissan. Immediately after this holiday we are taught an important lesson, a lesson which applies to all the following holidays too. Indeed, there is a biblically mandated designated time for Passover, but a person who for one reason or another has missed out and did not take advantage of the benefits which the holiday has to offer can have a personal Passover whenever he sincerely yearns for divine assistance in gaining personal redemption.

According to Kabbalah, the months of Nissan and Iyar are diametrical opposites. Nissan is a month pervaded by divine kindness: the month when G-d redeemed—and redeems—even those who are unworthy of redemption. Iyar, on the other hand, is a month of discipline and self-improvement: the month when we count the Omer and are involved in personal refinement in order to earn the right to receive the Torah in the following month. Yet, the penitent Jew has the ability to experience a Nissan redemptive holiday even during the month of Iyar!

The lesson of Pesach Sheni is that it is never too late. Never think, "Everyone else has already left Egypt weeks ago, and is well on their way toward receiving the Torah—and I haven't even begun my spiritual journey! I'm impure!" Don't despair; you too can make the Passover leap and join

everyone else in their state of Redemption, worthy of receiving the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot.

It's no use crying over spilled milk, because G-d has an infinite supply of milk which can be accessed anytime—provided that we have a sincere thirst, and express to Him this feeling.

Pesach Sheni is on Sunday 22 May

THE KABBALAH OF THE BOW AND ARROW

by Yanki Tauber (chabad.org)

An outside observer of human life would probably describe it something like this: They wake up in the morning, spend 16 to 18 hours using objects to manipulate other objects, and go to sleep.

On the whole, this is how we conduct our lives. When something faces us, we grab hold of something else -- a telephone, a wallet, a gun -- with which to deal with the situation.

But there comes a point at which the phone is just a piece of plastic, there's nothing to shoot at, and no matter how much money is expended, it doesn't get any better. The external resources on which we've come to rely are suddenly ineffectual, and the only place to turn is inward, to ourselves.

Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer Count that connects Passover to Shavuot, is the birthday of Jewish mysticism.

For many generations, the inner soul of Torah -- also known as the "Kabbalah" -- was transmitted from teacher to disciple in the form of cryptic maxims, in private, and only to a very few individuals in each generation. These teachings chart the sublime expanses of the divine reality, the processes of creation, G-d's relationship to our existence and the inner recesses of the human soul. The tremendous power they contain, and their

extreme subtlety, makes them extremely vulnerable to corruption. Thus, for many years it was forbidden to reveal these teachings.

The first to disseminate the teachings of Kabbalah to a wider group of disciples was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century CE. The most significant revelation came about on the day of Rabbi Shimon's passing, on which he expounded for many hours on the most intimate secrets of the divine wisdom. That day was Lag BaOmer.

Centuries were to pass before the great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (the "Holy Ari", 1534-1572) would proclaim, "In these times, we are allowed and duty-bound to reveal this wisdom," and Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) and his disciples were to make them accessible to all via the teachings of Chassidism. But Lag BaOmer remains the day on which "Jewish mysticism" made its first emergence from the womb of secrecy and exclusivity. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai instructed his disciples to celebrate this day as a joyous festival -- and so it is marked in every Jewish community to this day.

One of the ways in which we celebrate Lag BaOmer is by taking children out to parks and fields to play with bows and arrows. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the bow-and-arrow symbolizes the power of inwardness -- the power unleashed by the mystic soul of Torah.

The first weapons devised by man were designed for hand-to-hand combat. But a person's enemy or prey is not always an arm's-length away, or even within sight. Soon the warrior and hunter felt the need for a weapon that could reach a target a great distance away, or which lies invisible and protected behind barriers of every sort.

With a bow and arrow, the tension in an arched bough of wood is exploited to propel a missile for great distances and slash through barriers. The inventor of this device first had to grasp the paradox that the deadly arrow must be pulled back toward one's own heart in order to strike the heart of the opponent, and that the more it is drawn toward oneself, the more distant an adversary it can reach.

The external body of Torah is our tool for meeting the obvious challenges of life. Do not kill or steal, it instructs us; feed the hungry, hallow your relationships with the sanctity of marriage, rest on Shabbat, eat only kosher foods -- for thus you will preserve the order that G-d instituted in His world and develop it in accordance with the purpose towards which He created it.

But not everything is as up front as the explicit do's and don'ts of the Torah. Beyond them lie the ambiguities of intent and motive, the subtleties of love and awe, the interplay of ego and commitment; the taint of evil that shadows the most holy of endeavors, and the sparks of goodness that lie buried within the darkest reaches of creation. How are we to approach these challenges, so distant from our sensory reach and so elusive of our mind's comprehension?

This is where the mystical dimension of Torah comes in. It guides us in a retreat to our own essence, to the very core of our soul. It illuminates the selfless heart of the self, the spark of G-dliness within us that is one with its Creator and His creation. From there we unleash the power to deal with the most distant and obscure adversary; from there we catapult our redeeming influence to the most forsaken corners of G-d's world.

Pesach Sheni is on Thursday, 26th May

MAZALTOV**BIRTH**

- Tzvi & Tanya Gudelsky on the birth of a son.
- Blima Nudelman on the birth of a great granddaughter in the USA

BARMITZVAH

- Ethne Lipschitz on the Barmitzvah of her grandson Kovi in Israel.

ENGAGEMENTS

- Blima Nudelman on the engagement of her granddaughter Alisa Pelzner in the USA

BIRTHDAYS

- Eric Abrahamson on his 80th birthday on 1 May.
- Sharon Margo on her 65th birthday on 5 May.
- Mrs Hadassah Kobrin on her 94th birthday on 7 May.
- Freda Wolff on her 85th birthday on 10 May.
- Ann Benard on her 50th birthday on 16 May.
- Hymie Feinberg on his 80th birthday on 17 May.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Justice Lewis and Mrs Maureen Goldblatt on their 50th wedding anniversary on 29 May.

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Mavis Shill on the death of her husband, Louis



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to mark a happy event in your family
Cost of each leaf is R 360.00 - For details please contact the office

SPONSOR A BROCHA

at the Shul on the occasion of a personal or family Simcha, to commemorate a Yartzeit, birthday or anniversary.

For details and bookings contact Lee at the Shul office

**OXFORD'S HALL OF REMEMBRANCE**

The plaques in the Hall of Remembrance record the names and the date of death of departed loved ones. The lights on the plaques are lit on the Yartzeit and also whenever Yizkor is recited. A special Hazkara memorial prayer is also recited during Yizkor.

Cost of a plaque is R540 for the first plaque ordered, R360 for subsequent plaques.

