

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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May 2017

Iyar 5777

SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting

🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2 & 3

12 & 13 May – 17 Iyar

🕒 Emor

🕒 5:13 – 🕒 6:03

19 & 20 May – 24 Iyar

🕒 Behar Bechukotai

🕒 5:09 – 🕒 6:00

26 & 27 May – 2 Sivan

🕒 Bamidbar

🕒 5:07 – 🕒 5:58

2 & 3 June – 9 Sivan

🕒 Nasso

🕒 5:05 – 🕒 5:57

9 & 10 June – 16 Sivan

🕒 Beha'alotcha

🕒 5:05 – 🕒 5:57

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Once there was a drought, and the people came to Rabbi Shimon to ask him to pray... he began [to recite the verse]: "How good and how pleasant it is to sit together as brothers" and it started to rain. (Zohar)

Was Rabbi Shimon performing some kind of black magic? Do these words from Psalms pierce the heavens and burst rain clouds? How did this miracle occur?

Rabbi Shimon knew that the best channel to bring down G-d's blessing is unity and brotherly love. Rain is the ultimate blessing. To bring down Hashem's brocha we need to

strengthen our concern and affection for one another. Rabbi Shimon recited this verse as an allusion to this precept, and thus as a conduit for Hashem's rains to descend.

Lag B'omer (this year on Sunday 14 May) is the anniversary of the death of Rabbi Shimon (also known as 'Rashbi' which stands for Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai). Before his passing he specifically instructed his disciples to observe his Yartzeit as a celebration rather than a day of mourning. He explained to them that a Yartzeit solemnises the culmination of a lifetime of accomplishments—in the case of a Tzadik, indeed, an occasion to rejoice.

To understand how best we can celebrate Rabbi Shimon's life, we take another leaf from the book of his chronicles. Rabbi Shimon, as is well known, spent fourteen years in a cave hiding from the Roman authorities. The Talmud tells us that when he came out of hiding, the first question he asked was, "is there anything which needs to be fixed here?" He was shown a field which contained some unmarked graves; because a Kohen cannot walk in a cemetery, Kohanim had to walk all around the field since they did not know which areas to

avoid. Rabbi Shimon immediately proceeded to identify and mark out the graves, clearing a path that Kohanim could now use

Rabbi Shimon had been away from home for a considerable period. Yet he did not first enquire about his house, his wealth, his old friends or townspeople. His very first concern upon coming out was to find out if he could contribute to society in some way, having been unable to do so for almost a decade and a half.

This is the way of Rabbi Shimon. Lag B'omer serves as a reminder to us that the channel to Hashem's blessing, material or spiritual, is to show genuine concern for the welfare of others. If we show we care, He shows He cares.

During these days of the Omer, we mourn the loss of thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students who died, in the words of the Talmud, "because they did not show respect towards one another." Day 33 ("Lag") should act as an inspiration to all of us—during the entire period of the Omer, and beyond—to always act with care and concern towards each other.

May Hashem shower only brocha on our heads.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Here in South Africa we were only minimally disturbed when Whatsapp did not work for a few hours. That is because it happened during our night and mostly, we were sleeping. In other places people were panicked. Few realized that it was a computer problem and could not understand why they were being ignored or why their friends or family were not reading or replying to their messages. A few hours later Whatsapp was back. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief: life-as-we-know-it restored.

Here in South Africa we often have services down: electricity, phone lines and even water. Imagine our home, Chof Hamoed Pesach: ten people living there, carrying buckets of water from the swimming pool to flush toilets and bottled water for brushing teeth, washing hands and cooking. Then it was back. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief: life-as-we-know-it restored once again.

This time I tried to spend a few minutes thinking about the privileged lives we lead. The few hours without the services that we consider basic made me think of all the people (so many in our own country) for whom these are not regular or basic parts of their lives. Ashreinu! How lucky we are. Let us take a few moments to say thank you for all those things we mostly take for granted, every day

Have a good month

Rivky

DVAR TORAH***Living in the Future***

By Yanki Tauber (chabad.org)

“Living in the future.” For those of us who collect oxymorons, this one is an especially delightful specimen. It’s not as obvious as your run-of-the-mill “deafening silence” oxy, but one that unravels only under careful sophistry. If you haven’t already figured it out, allow me the pleasure: If one indeed lives in the future, it’s not the future anymore, is it? And if the person of whom we’re speaking only thinks he’s living in the future, than he’s not really living there, is he?

This week, however, Jews all over the world will celebrate the life of a man who quite literally lived in the future. Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer count, is the day of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the second generation after the Temple’s destruction, about 1,900 years ago. Rabbi Shimon is the author of the Zohar (the most basic book of Kabbalah), Mechilta (a central midrashic work), and of hundreds of laws and teachings cited in the Talmud. He played a fundamental role in the history of the Torah’s transmission through the centuries, in both its “revealed” (i.e., talmudical-halachic) face as well as its esoteric (mystical-kabbalistic) soul.

If there is one thing that characterizes Rabbi

Shimon bar Yochai’s life, it is that he inhabited a reality that, for most of us, still lies in the future: the reality of Moshiach, the messianic world of redemption, harmony and perfection. It is said of Rabbi Shimon that, for him, the Holy Temple was never destroyed, the people of Israel had never entered the state of galut (physical exile and spiritual alienation), and the world had attained the divine perfection of the Age of Moshiach.

The Midrash tells a story:

Once there was a disciple of Rabbi Shimon’s who left the Holy Land and returned a wealthy man. The other disciples saw this and were envious and also wanted to leave. Rabbi Shimon knew of this. He took them to a valley facing Meron and said: “Valley! Valley! Become filled with gold coins!” The valley started flowing with gold coins before them.

Said Rabbi Shimon to his disciples: “If it is gold that you desire, here is gold; take it for yourselves. But know that whoever takes now is taking his portion of the World to Come. For the reward of Torah is only in the World to Come.” (Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 52:3)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains the deeper significance of this story:

The Torah is G-d’s blueprint for creation, and the channel via which all

of creation's vitality and sustenance flows from Above. So everything in our world, from the loftiest spiritual blessings to the mundane wealth that comes in the form of gold coins, is facilitated by the Torah. But our world is an alma d'shikra, a place of concealment and deception. Things reach us but their source remains hidden; we see the result but have, at best, only a distorted perception of its cause. In our reality, it is possible that while Torah is the source of all the gold in the universe, one whose life is devoted to Torah may apparently suffer poverty, while one who abandons Torah may apparently acquire riches.

That is our world. The future world of Moshiach, however, is a world of truth. A world in which the hand is visible within the glove, the cause is evident in the effect, and the source of everything is revealed without distortion. In the World to Come, it is plainly visible that even physical gold flows from the headwaters of Torah.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai inhabited that future reality. His disciples, however, still lived in the present world.

Rabbi Shimon's disciples were disturbed when the reality they experienced was at odds with the truth as they knew it. It troubled them that a colleague who forsook the study of Torah became wealthy, while they, who pursued it day and night, suffered

poverty—despite the fact that they knew that Torah is the conduit of all worldly blessings.

So Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai granted them a glimpse of the World to Come. He showed them the world that he inhabited every moment of his life. And if they could not inhabit and access it themselves, at least they would behold it.

Each year on Lag BaOmer, we are drawn into the orbit of Rabbi Shimon's futuristic world.

Here is another story that the Rebbe would often repeat to illustrate this point. The great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria ("The Holy Ari," 1534–1572) had a disciple by the name of Rabbi Avraham HaLevi. This disciple had a custom to recite the Nacheim prayer every day. Nacheim is a prayer that speaks of the destruction of the Holy Temple and the resultant galut, and beseeches G-d to comfort His grieving nation, rebuild the Temple and restore His revealed presence amongst us. Nacheim is recited once a year—as part of the afternoon prayers on the Ninth of Av, the day on which the Temple was destroyed. Rabbi Abraham, however, so keenly felt the pain of the destruction and the exile that he recited this once-a-year prayer every day.

Since Rabbi Abraham recited Nacheim every day of the year, he also recited it on Lag BaOmer.

This got him into trouble. One day, Rabbi Isaac summoned his disciple and said to him: "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai appeared to me and instructed me: 'Say to this man: Why do you recite Nacheim on the day of my joy?'"

The chassidic masters explain that on the day of a person's passing, "all his deeds, teachings and accomplishments" attain their ultimate state of fulfillment and realization. Thus—explains the Rebbe—Rabbi Abraham was rebuked for mourning the galut on Lag BaOmer. On this, the culminating day of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's life, the day on which Rabbi Shimon's influence predominates, it is within our power to share Rabbi Shimon's reality of a redeemed and perfected world.

And what of my delightful little oxymoron?

Yet the Talmud insists that "in the place that a person's mind resides, that is where he is." So "living in the future" need not be a contradiction in terms after all—if that's where you are.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday and Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
26/05 (Rosh Chodesh):	7:00
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	5:15
Friday	5:20
Shabbat	5:00

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Annette Wolk on the birth of a great-grandson in Australia.
- Jarred & Kerry Landsman and Rene Gamsu on the birth of a son and grandson.

BIRTHDAYS

- Aileen Shifren on her 70th birthday on 3rd May

- Debbie Gordon on her 40th birthday on 4th May
- Hadassah Kobrin on her 95th birthday on 7th May
- Judith Moritz on her 70th birthday on 20th May
- David Hirschowitz on his 55th birthday on 30th May

ANNIVERSARIES

- Harry & Marion Sweidan on their 40th anniversary on 17th May

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Basil Wolk



- John Brick
- Zelwyn Goldsmith
- Barry Speigel

BEREAVEMENTS

Our condolences to the following who have suffered bereavements recently:



- Myrna Kaplan on the death of her granddaughter, Romy Grunthal.
- Caron Koonin on the death of her father.



**SHAVUOT IS ON WEDNESDAY 31 MAY
AND THURSDAY 1 JUNE**

TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE READ ON WEDNESDAY MORNING
YIZKOR IS ON THURSDAY MORNING

**Book now for our communal Yom Tov Dinner
on Tuesday night 30th May
by calling our office at 011-646-6020**

Cost per person: R 180.00 (Children 12 & under R 100.00)

*The Dinner will include a Tikkun Leil Shavuot Study Programme
An evening not to be missed!*