

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER May 2023 Iyar/Sivan 5783

SHABBAT TIMES

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

12 & 13 May – 22 Iyar
🕊 Behar & Bechukotai
🕯 5:13 – 🕯 6:03

19 & 20 May – 29 Iyar
🕊 Bamidbar
🕯 5:09 – 🕯 6:00

26 & 27 May – 7 Sivan
2nd day Shavuot
🕯 5:07 – 🕯 5:58

2 & 3 June – 14 Sivan
🕊 Nasso
🕯 5:05 – 🕯 5:57

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Shortly after I started at Oxford Shul (that's back in 2000), I began to publish a monthly newsletter. I felt it was a crucial way to keep the community together and connected. At great effort and cost, this newsletter was printed and circulated via mail or hand delivery to each of the congregation's homes. To me it was an important way to get a foot in the door of every Oxfordian. Particularly (how can I put this delicately?) for those who did not attend as frequently as I had hoped

and who I could thus reach in that way.

Back then, email was not yet used widely and the ideal way to get a document into a home was via snail mail. Even as more of the congregation switched to the electronic form of communication, I continued with the effort of the hard copy version. As we all know too well, emails can easily end up in spam, or be hastily deleted. An actual piece of paper is more likely to read and by more members of the family.

I finally need to concede defeat. Month after month, we have been finding it impossible to purchase stamps, with most post offices without stock. The Houghton Post Office, where the Shul has held Box 87406 for decades while I received my personal communications at Box 3156, closed about a year ago. There was no communication regarding the relocation of the boxes. One day, about six weeks ago, I decided I had to locate them. First

stop was Rosebank, as this is where the sign on the window at Killarney Mall directed us. Turns out that branch was closing the following day, but they kindly informed us that the boxes were now in Melrose Arch. 87406 was located and our old key worked—it contained a total of two (2) envelopes. Still looking for 3156!

I will continue to publish this newsletter, but we will no longer be sending it out by post. This is thus the last posted copy. For Killarney and Riviera residents, hand delivery will continue, as well as for those who attend shul in person. We will obviously continue to send it out via electronic mail—please ensure that you are on the mailing list for this. You are also welcome to collect a printed copy from the shul office, which is open every Friday morning.

The SAPO is dead.
Long live email!

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

The noise when we opened our hotel windows was deafening. But we loved it. It was the sea literally roaring. It made us feel tranquil; it filled our hearts and our souls. We kept the door and windows open as much as possible.

The sounds of generators on our street is less noise, but far more annoying. We come inside, close our doors and windows, waiting for load shedding to end and generators to go off.

The sound of our grandchildren talking and playing together is high volume, but delightful to our ears. We enjoyed every minute while they were here and now it is the silence that is deafening. The sound of our family singing together makes our hearts sing along, while it makes other people's teeth stand on edge.

I have finally understood that sound should not be measured by volume, but rather by "like".

And I am listening out for the sounds I like... Focus on the sounds you like too.

Have a happy month.

Rivky

SERVICE TIMES
SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Monday & Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Tuesday	5:15
Friday	5:20

DVAR TORAH**FEEL-GOOD JUDAISM**

By Rabbi YY Jacobson (aish.com)

Receiving the Torah requires the courage to bid farewell to our pre-conceived notions and to subjugate our ego to radical transcendence.

Why was the Torah given in a barren and infertile desert, not in a civilized terrain nor on soil conducive to human living and nature's blessing?

One of the errors that a Jew living in the modern era is likely to make is that Judaism makes no existentially profound demands on its believers. Judaism is a feel-good religion, and its objective is to make one feel comfortable about one's self. Many people prefer a Judaism that won't shake up their comfort-zones.

"My goal is to study and practice a Judaism that does not interfere with my conveniences," a man once told me. "I have my lifestyle, philosophy, schedule, habits, and social patterns; as long as Judaism can fit into this, I will make room for it and enjoy it too."

But if Judaism is here to just make us feel good, why do we really need it? Why not just figure out what works best for our lives and pursue that? Therapy, yoga, exercise, suburban living, meditation, nutrition, sports, the arts, music, etc. If Judaism is merely here to nurture my pre-defined identity and satisfy my

ingrained appetites, why bother with it all together?

A Tale of Two Images

And can the feel-good Judaism inspire a future? Can such a type of Judaism take root in the hearts of the youth? Can it appeal to the idealistic dimension of the human soul, searching to touch the Divine?

But suppose that Judaism was real – the authentic blueprint for life from the living God – then the question should not be, "How do I find a Judaism that does not disturb me too much," but rather – "What does Judaism really say about my calling? What does Judaism believe about life, death and everything in between? What does Torah have to say about the most important question and dilemmas facing the human mind and heart?" The question isn't how I can mold Judaism in my image, but how I can mold myself in the image of Torah?

If Torah is true, I need to have the courage to take a hard, deep look at my preconceived notions, thoughts and behavior patterns, ready to discover truth that may challenge me.

This is why Torah was given in the barren desert, in uncivilized wilderness, where it had no predefined culture to contend with and to be compared with. Only in the physical and artistic silence of the desert can we open ourselves to a radical search for truth. Only in a desert, can we walk into something with our whole being, ready to find anything.

If Torah would have been given in a city or amidst a beautifully natural terrain, it would have, by definition, conformed to the culture prevailing in those particular areas. In the great river lowlands where civilization began (the Tigris-Euphrates rivers and the Nile), the eye is captivated by the shifting scenes of nature; in cities, the eye is overtaken by the works of man – art and architecture. In such environments, the Israelites would only be able to absorb a religion that would fit into their psyches, patterns, and sensibilities, like all the Pagan religions of the time. The Jews could never attune themselves to the word of a God who transcends nature.

Sinai challenged the Jewish people to reexamine life and history from its very nucleus; to see the world not from the human perspective, but from the perspective of God who cannot be confined in human modalities. A revolution of this magnitude cannot take place in a populated environment, not even in an environment where life blossoms and nature flourishes. Only in the emptiness and desolateness of the wilderness is the ego subordinate to the search for truth. Only in the silence of the desert, can a person bid farewell to all of his or her paradigms and allow his soul to absorb radical transcendence.

A Rash People

This explains an enigmatic episode which occurred at Sinai.

The Torah relates that when Moses presented the covenant before the Israelites, they responded, "We will do and we will listen" (Exodus 24:7). This expression has always been a source of wonderment and surprise to rabbis and a refutation of the anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews as calculating and self-protective. "We will do and we will listen" implies a commitment to observe the covenant even before the Jews heard its details and understood its ramifications.

The Talmud (Shabbas 88b) tells a story about a Sadducee who once saw one of the great Talmudic sages, Rava, so engrossed in learning that he did not attend a wound in his own hand. The Sadducee exclaimed, "You rash people! You put your mouths ahead of your ears [by saying "we will do and we will listen"], and you still persist in your recklessness. First, you should have heard out [the covenant details]. If it is within your capacity, then accept it. If not, you should have rejected it!"

His argument was logical. Imagine somebody offers you to invest a large sum of money in a developing company. To respond, "Sure, here is the money, and then afterward I will listen to the details," is ridiculous. If you don't know what the company is all about, why subject your money to possible loss? And yet, in this case, the Jews declared that they were ready embrace a life-altering

covenant, even before they heard all the details and knew what Judaism was all about! Why? How?

Rava answered the Sadducee with these words: "We walked [into it] with our whole being."

What Rava meant was this: By definition, a relationship with God cannot be created on our terms; it must be on His terms. If there is something called Truth, if there is something called Reality, we cannot define it; it must define us. We cannot accept it on condition that it suits our senses and expectations. On the contrary, we must realign our condition to it. Once the Jewish people knew that God was communicating with them, they did not want to fit religion into their imagination; they had no pre-conditions for a relationship with truth. It was in the desert that the Jews can declare, "We will do and we will listen."

To receive Torah anew on Shavuot, we must have the courage to walk into a desert; we must strip ourselves from any pre-defined self-identity. We need to be ready to hear the sound beneath the sounds we are accustomed to. Torah is not merely a cute and endearing document filled with rituals to satisfy nostalgia or tradition. Torah demands that we open ourselves up with our whole being and declare, "We shall do and we shall listen!"

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Ygal Mencer on the birth of a grandson in Tel Aviv
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great grandson in Johannesburg

BAR-MITZVAH

- Philip and Rilla Jacobson on the Bar-Mitzvah of their eldest great grandson in Israel

BIRTHDAYS

- Peta Kaplan on the occasion of her 70th birthday on the 6th May.
- Freda Wolff on the occasion of her 92nd birthday on the 10th May.
- Melanie Epstein on the occasion of her 60th birthday on the 21st May.
- Lewis Goldblatt on the occasion of his 88th birthday on the 30th May.

ENGAGEMENT

- June Berger on the engagement of her grandson, Daniel Reich, to Ita-Leah Zibbel of Crown Heights, New York.

BEREAVEMENTS

We wish long life to:

- Stan Smidt on the death of his mother, Liliane.
- Caroline Mphelo on the death of her husband, Petrus.

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



FIRST DAY SHAVUOT – Friday 26 May
 Shacharit 9:30 a.m.; Ten Commandments 10:30
 Dairy brocha to follow service

SECOND DAY SHAVUOT – Shabbat 27 May
 Shacharit 9:30 a.m.; Yizkor 10:45 a.m.

חג שמח