

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

5786

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May 2026

Sivan 5786

## SHABBAT TIMES

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

15 & 16 May – 29 Iyar

🔊 Bamidbar

🕯 5:11 – 🕯 6:02

22 & 23 May – 7 Sivan

🔊 Shavuot

🕯 5:08 – 🕯 5:59

29 & 30 May – 14 Sivan

🔊 Naso

🕯 5:06 – 🕯 5:58

5 & 6 June – 21 Sivan

🔊 Behaalotecha

🕯 5:05 – 🕯 5:57

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

I think of my late aunt Sheva this time of year. Her birthday is on Shavuot, and she hosted a huge dairy lunch every year on the occasion. Her table literally groaned under the piles of delicacies she prepared: cheese blintzes and milchik kugels, pastas and lasagnas. For dessert there was her legendary cheesecake, the recipe a secret she would not share.

To be clear, there is nothing lacking in my wife's Shavuot menu. She always excels in the kitchen, and her dairy lunches over the festival are absolutely legendary. What she cannot recreate is the nostalgic feeling of my aunt's Yomtov table from my younger years, embellished in my memory by the passing of time.

The custom of eating milk products dates back many centuries. There are literally dozens of reasons given for its origin. All of them relate to the main theme of the festival: the Divine Gift of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Essentially, the custom reminds us of the sweetness of Torah.

While the other festivals on our calendar each have their own distinctive mitzvah, there is none specific to Shavuot. On Pesach we eat matzah, on Rosh Hashana we blow the shofar, and on Sukkot we build a sukkah. On Shavuot, we eat cheesecake? Not quite. The celebration of the holiday is centred on the Torah. We spend time studying it. Many have the custom of staying up throughout the first night of the chag, delving into holy texts. We also dedicate ourselves to making it the focus of our lives in the year ahead. All of that is very abstract. As a physical observance, we are left with the enjoyment of delectable milky foods.

An all-night vigil is especially hard in the Southern Hemisphere, as it is winter. It feels as though dawn will never arrive, and the temperature is invariably icy. Eating blintzes and cheesecake is a much

easier, and far more pleasant, experience.

Personally, I love all those dairy foods. I probably should not admit this here in carnivorous South Africa, but I enjoy them more than a heavy meaty meal. It is just one of the reasons why Shavuot is my personal favourite.

My aunt Sheva sadly passed away many years ago, much too young. It would be dramatic to say that her cheesecake recipe went down to the grave with her, but that would not be true. Somehow, my wife did manage to copy it down, yet she has never actually made it, thereby respecting her wishes and memory.

Every Shavuot, I remember her fondly as I recall those superb family gatherings around the Yomtov table.

The taste of cheesecake, as delectable as it may be, is only fleeting. It lingers in our mouths for a while, then dissipates and is gone. The sweetness of Torah is forever. As the saying goes, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." To us, the Torah is the main thing—what keeps us going and what keeps us connected to Hashem.

Chag Shavuot Sameach.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

**FROM THE REBBETZIN**

I've just finished my weekly Zoom "infusion." Every week, my daughters and daughters-in-law—along with whichever children are home and awake—gather around their phones or computers, and we learn together. We began this five years ago in my mother's merit, and it has since become a truly special part of my week.

Of course, we do learn. But truthfully, we spend even more time chattering, catching up, seeing one another, and simply connecting.

These days, people often speak negatively about the impact of technology—how it has damaged relationships, how people spend too much time on their phones and computers, and not enough time truly listening or connecting with one another.

But for me, technology—phones in particular—has been a lifeline.

Through it, I stay close to my family. They send pictures and messages. I get to watch them walk, talk, and play. We learn together, laugh and cry together, worry, advise, and share our lives with one another.

When I read my weekly report of how many hours I've spent each day on WhatsApp, I find myself smiling. To me, those hours represent something deeply meaningful: connection.

B"H!

Have a good month

*Rivky*

**DVAR TORAH****MEDITATION ON AN EMBRACE**

*by Tzvi Freeman (chabad.org)*

**Marriage at Mount Sinai**

The Exodus was a romance, Mount Sinai was a marriage—a marriage of the Children of Israel and the G-d who rescued them from Egypt, of a created being and its Creator, of earth and heaven, body and soul, being and not-being.

Marriage is a story in three parts, each part an eternal moment.

First, two must fall in love.

Not a rational love—no, that won't do. They must be nuts for one another. Obsessed. They must feel they cannot live without one another, as though their very existence depends on their closeness to one another. They must feel that they are truly one, even as they are apart.

But they are not yet one.

There must be a covenant. A covenant that excludes all others, that says "only you and I exist in this space." He says to her, "You are sanctified to me"—you are separate from all others, distinct and unique.

That covenant is an intertwining of souls, bound by love, and not

easily untied, because it is meant to last forever. But still they are not yet one.

The love is not enough, for each feels a different love. The covenant is not enough, because they remain two beings. They must rise and enter a space that can hold the two of them as one, a space in which there is no other, because there is no otherness, there is only One.

And that is the chuppah. Here they are one.

From now on, every moment of the rest of their lives together, they will continue to make two into one, in a constant union of love, covenant and embrace.

**All of You**

The chuppah of the Jewish people was Mount Sinai. The chuppah for each one of us is a mitzvah. Any mitzvah. Because every mitzvah of the Torah carries you into a space beyond all things, a space where there is no otherness, only the One.

Every mitzvah is an embrace, a kiss, and a union of spirits.

An embrace, because as an embrace grasps you from all sides, so the mitzvahs of Torah embrace every facet of your being. Not your heart alone, not your mind alone, but your every limb, your every sinew, and all the kishkes within you.

Give a few dollars to a homeless veteran so he can spend the night in warm and decent quarters. Your hand gave the dollars. Your entire being worked hard to earn it. You could have bought something else for yourself with that money. So now, all of you is tied up in this mitzvah. Divine light embraces your entire being.

The same occurs when you prepare a royal Shabbat meal. Carpool your kids to a Jewish school. Wrap yourself in a tallit—all of you. Bind the leather straps of tefillin on your arm and head. Munch your matzah on Passover. Feel the hunger of Yom Kippur. Immerse in the joy of learning Torah.

Each is a caress and a hug, each grasping another part of you, until every limb of your body and every facet of your life is held tightly in His embrace, pulling you close in oneness from head to toe, enveloping all your being.

### **Divine Kiss, Mystic Union**

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is better than wine.” So begins King Solomon’s Song of Songs, a parable of the love between us and our G-d.

What is a kiss? It is when love can no longer be expressed in words of

love—because there are no words for such love. It is when lips no longer speak as one speaks to another—because there is no other. And so two lips become one.

“When you read and speak words of Torah,” the Midrash tells, “G-d reads and speaks every word along with you.” So that every word of Torah is a kiss. Our lips and His in union.

They are His words, the words He speaks to Himself, the words that speak of what he desires from heaven and earth, of His deepest desire.

They are the words of halacha—of what we are meant to do, of how His desire is to be expressed in this world.

Yet they are our words, the words given to us, in our mouths to expand, explain and apply. And they remain His words. Because in them we and Him are one in soul and spirit, as two minds think as one, experience as one, desire as one, in that intimate union of a kiss.

And there is a union of souls.

In the discovery of the wisdom of His Torah as your mind becomes absorbed in a divine way of thinking, and in the heartfelt focus of that prayer, in the tears that drip down your cheek as you return to Him, in the

joy of a mitzvah that bursts out in spontaneous song, there your soul calls to the Soul of All Life, and the two are drawn together to merge as one in perfect union.

### **We Are His, He Is Ours**

That is why a Jew doesn’t just do a mitzvah. A Jew says, “Blessed are You, G-d, our G-d, Majesty of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His mitzvot...”

Just as a man says to his beloved beneath the chuppah, “Behold, you are sanctified to me with this ring...”

Rabbi Schneur Zalman walked out from his study and heard his wife teaching other women. He heard two words. She said, “Mine says...”—referring to him, her husband, who became hers through marriage.

He leaned against the doorpost in a deep trance, uttering, “With one mitzvah, I became hers. With how many mitzvahs, have I become His!”

At Mount Sinai, we became His, and He became ours.

## **SERVICE TIMES**

### **SHACHARIT (A.M.)**

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

### **MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)**

Friday	6:00
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**MAZALTOV**



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**MARRIAGE**

- Neil and Caroline Myerson on the wedding of their daughter, Rebecca, to

Daniel Class on 29<sup>th</sup> March in Cape Town.

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Eric Abrahamson on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May
- Sharon Margo on her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May
- Estelle Katz on her 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May

- Hymie Feinberg on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May

**BIRTHS**

- Jeanette Markovitz on the birth of a great granddaughter in Miami and a great-grandson in Israel.

# SHAVUOT

Friday 22 May & Shabbat 23 May



**EVENING SERVICES**

Thursday & Friday – 6:00 p.m.



**FRIDAY MORNING**

- Service begins – 9:30 a.m.
- Reading of the Ten Commandments – 10:45 a.m.
- Kiddush



**SHABBAT MORNING**

- Service begins – 9:30 a.m.
- Yizkor – 11:00 a.m.
- Dairy Lunch

**LUNCH GUEST SPEAKER**

*Chava Manjoo*

*“My Journey”*

*Everyone is warmly welcome. ♥*