

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2019

Cheshvan 5780

### SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting

🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)

*For service times see page 3*

8 & 9 November – 11 Cheshvan

🔊 Lech Lecha

🕯 6:11 – 🕯 7:03

15 & 16 November – 18 Cheshvan

🔊 Vayeira

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:09

22 & 23 November – 25 Cheshvan

🔊 Chayei Sarah

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:14

29 & 30 November – 2 Kislev

🔊 Toldot

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:20

6 & 7 December – 9 Kislev

🔊 Vayeitzei

🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:25

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

What a build-up! Weeks of preparation, planning, strategizing. Standing very still, then running around, sometimes in circles. Praying for a positive outcome, celebrating, singing in unison... and starting all over again just a few days later... ultimately achieving victory. Everyone on a high. But will the euphoria last or sooner rather than later, dissipate?

Am I referring to the Rugby World Cup? Of course I am. South Africa is celebrating her spectacular victory over England in the final a few days ago. And cause for rejoicing there is. Not just because the men in green and gold showed mastery on a field and then stood proudly holding the Lloyd Ellis Cup aloft. Because the Cup that was held high was reflected in the mood of the population of the entire

country, proudly holding their heads up, jubilant over the national team's performance.

Or am I referring to Team Oxford, over the past High Holiday season. Elul for preparation, introspection, ridding ourselves of negative character traits and looking for areas in which to improve. Then the work "on the field" when we gathered in our hundreds in the sanctuary to pray to Hashem, as we knew we were being judged by Him, less for our past performance and more for the manner in which we intended to conduct ourselves in the year ahead. Completing the Yom Kippur service with a shout of "Gut Yom Tov" and celebrating the certainty of a positive judgment with a festive meal. Then Sukkot, holding up our Lulav and Etrog high and shaking it in every direction, the way the victor in a court case down below would clutch his judgment as he exists the courtroom. Dancing as a congregation and celebrating our togetherness—truly feeling the sense of community and common purpose. A high, both in the spiritual and emotional sense.

And now? Will both of these highs be sustained? Or will we soon come crashing down?

Let us walk away forever changed, strengthened and improved from these experiences on both fields. May Hashem help us to sustain the spiritual level we have achieved in the past month and a half and continue to grow. May Hashem bless this beautiful country with unity, peace and growth. Amen.

*Rabbi Yossi Chaikin*

### FROM THE REBBETZIN

To bee or not to bee – that is the question.

The residents in our little complex are presently in an uproar. A hive of bees have made their home in the garden. Apparently they have been there longer than we have. They buzz around all day and only recently have been noticed and have become the bone of contention in the neighbourhood.

There are those who feel strongly that bees are dangerous and that the hive must be removed and then there are those who feel equally strongly that we need bees in the world and they must be left alone, to do their work and pollinate the flowers and trees.

I have spent a lot of time pondering the situation, watching the heated emotions of the different people, trying to come to my own conclusion. Isn't it ironic how us humans behave?

These bees should be a lesson to us in unity and collaboration. We should be looking at them and learning how everyone has a purpose and a job. How everyone is needed and mostly how, working together, we can produce sweetness! Yet we are looking at the very same creatures and only learning from them how to use a sting and hurt others.

I remain confused. More about the humans than about the bees.

Have a good month

*Rivky*

**DVAR TORAH****THE BITTER MONTH**

by Rabbi Ari Goldwag  
(aish.com)

**Cheshvan is when darkness reigns, yet growth begins deep beneath the surface.**

The current Hebrew month, Cheshvan, is classically referred to as Marcheshvan. The first two letters spell the word mar. In Hebrew, this word means “bitter,” which some homiletically connect to the fact that there are no special occasions that occur in this month. Even Av, the month when we mourn the destruction of the two Holy Temples, is not referred to as “bitter,” because the sad days of the year offer us an opportunity for introspection, to contemplate where we have gone wrong. Thus, both the festive days and the negative days can be used to connect to spirituality. A month that is bereft of any significant days, even sad days, is more bitter than anything, because there are no moments that arise to give us pause.

It is significant to note that the original name of this month was not Marcheshvan. This Babylonian name was

adopted when the Jews went through the 70-year exile between the first and second temples. The original Hebrew name for the month was Bul, which denotes the idea of “drying up,” as the leaves begin to decay with the approach of Autumn.

Clearly, the month of Marcheshvan, or Bul, as its name suggests, is a month of darkness and decay. Indeed, the biblical Book of Kings cites Bul as the month when King Solomon completed the construction of the first Temple – though the dedication did not take place until a year later, in the Hebrew month of Tishrei. What is the deeper significance of this, and what can we learn from it?

### Two Key Events

If we search further, we find two other events that occurred in the month of Cheshvan. The first was the flood in the times of Noah. The flood began on the 17th of Cheshvan, and the waters receded by the following year on the 27th of Cheshvan, allowing Noah and the other inhabitants of the ark to disembark. Interestingly, one explanation of the name Bul is that it stems from this month as the beginning of the rainy season in Israel; it is thus

connected to the word mabul, flood – an overabundance of rain.

It is significant to note that the flood was originally intended to begin on the 11th of Cheshvan. However, Methuselah passed away, and thus the flood was delayed in deference to the seven-day period of mourning that followed his death.

The second important event that occurred in Cheshvan seems unrelated at first glance. This was the death of Jacob's wife Rachel, as well as the birth of Benjamin, which occurred on the 11th of Cheshvan. It was precisely the same day as Methuselah's death, the very day that flood had originally been slated to begin. As there are no coincidences in the Torah, we must ask: What is the connection between these two events, and what do they reveal about the essence of the month of Cheshvan?

In thinking about what the matriarch Rachel and her son Benjamin stand for, respectively, we can see that Rachel represents the Jewish people in exile, and Benjamin represents the completed state of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Rachel spent her entire life outside of Israel,

and passed away just as Jacob and his family entered the holy land. As our Sages tell us, her spirit accompanied the Jewish people as they went into Babylonian exile, and it is she who cries for her children in exile until the final redemption comes.

In contrast, Benjamin is the last son of Jacob, the twelfth of the tribes, whose birth marks the completion of the people of Israel. He is also the only son of Jacob that is born in Israel, and thus represents the Jewish people's perfected state in the land of Israel. This is further underscored, as the Ramchal explains, by the fact that Saul, the first king of the Jewish people, came from the tribe of Benjamin. Furthermore, the miracle of Purim, which immediately preceded the return of the Jews to Israel and the building of the Second Temple, was brought about through the vehicle of Mordechai and Esther, who came from the tribe of Benjamin.

### Deep Hibernation

Exploring further, we see that the very death of Rachel resulted in the birth of Benjamin. This would correspond to the idea that the exile itself is that which births the redemption. The descent into darkness

creates the potential for the future light.

This theme can be seen in the flood, as well. Although the world in its previous state came to an end, at the same time, there was a new beginning which was being sown in the person of Noah. The very passing of Methusaleh opened the curtain for Noah to assume leadership of the next generation. The death of the previous order gave rise to a new potential for growth.

Now we can explain the essence of the month of Cheshvan, as brought to light by the events that occurred in this month. Cheshvan is a time that is "bitter," for there seems to be no opportunities for growth and spiritual connection. It is a time of deterioration, as the leaves wither and the world enters a state of deep hibernation. And yet, it is also a time when the rains begin, when the potential for future growth is being sown. It is a time when spiritual darkness reigns, yet when spiritual growth begins deep beneath the surface. It is the moment when Rachel passes on, when all seems bleak, when the darkness of exile closes in; and it is the moment of the birth of Benjamin, the seed of the

Jewish people's perfected state, which is sown in that very darkness.

Cheshvan begins the extended time span between the last festival, Sukkot, and the next, Passover. In the meantime, the spiritual seeds planted during the Jewish month of Tishrei begin to take root – to be watered and to grow, finally appearing and bearing fruit in Nissan of next year.

The message of Cheshvan is that despite the darkness, and even because of the darkness, there is future growth that awaits us. We have the opportunity to nurture that right at this moment. It is now that we gather the seeds from the holidays of the month of Tishrei, plant them, and carefully water them through the winter months. With God's help, we will soon marvel at the beautiful spring bounty that we merit to cultivate.

### SERVICE TIMES

#### SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays	8:00
Monday to Friday	7:15
28/11 & 29/11 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00	
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

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

Sunday to Thursday	6:15
Friday	5:45
Shabbat	6:00
from 30/11	6:15

**MAZALTOV**

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BIRTHS**

- Doris Samson on the birth of a great grandson, Yeshaya, in Gateshead

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Brenda Brick on her 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup> November.

- Willie Wittert on his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup> November.
- Sandra Sher on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 12<sup>th</sup> November.
- Myrna Davidovitz on her 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> November.
- Janette Vlodaver on her 81<sup>st</sup> birthday on the 21<sup>st</sup> November.
- Stan Schroder on his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 30<sup>th</sup> November.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

- Martin & Judith Moritz on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November.
- Hymie & Judith Feinberg on their 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary on the 30<sup>th</sup> November.

**REFUAH SHLEIMA**

We wish a speedy recovery to:

- Phillip Shifren
- Freda Wolff
- Naomi Schmidt



**The Shabbat Project**  
KEEPING IT TOGETHER

**15/16 NOVEMBER**

**OXFORD IS**

**KEEPING IT**

**TOGETHER**

JOIN US FOR LUNCH AT THE SHUL ON SHABBAT 16 NOVEMBER, AFTER THE SERVICE