

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2025

Cheshvan/Kislev 5786

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SHABBAT TIMES

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

21 & 22 November – 2 Kislev

🕒 Toldot

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:14

28 & 29 November – 9 Kislev

🕒 Vayeitzei

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:20

5 & 6 December – 16 Kislev

🕒 Vayishlach

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:25

12 & 13 December – 23 Kislev

🕒 Vayeishev

🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:30

RABBI'S MESSAGE

In a certain small-town synagogue, a new face started to appear every Friday night. The young man, in his early twenties, arrived duly every week at 6:00 sharp, still wearing his safety helmet, and rode his bike right into the sanctuary. At first everyone kept quiet, not wishing to offend the new congregant, but eventually the rabbi decided to broach the subject tactfully. "We're very happy to see you here," he said, "but why is it necessary to bring your motorcycle *into* the

Shul?" "Rabbi," said the youngster, "when I bought the bike, the salesman, he told me, 'You don't bring her in for a regular service, the guarantee lapses!'"

When we take possession of a vehicle, we are aware that there are manufacturer's instructions that we have to follow, to ensure that the car will give us long and good years of faithful service. We quickly learn which fluids must be placed where, what kind of fuel to put in the tank, the correct tyre pressure.

Why is it, then, that when we take possession of our lives, our *neshomos*, we are not nearly as punctilious in following the Manufacturer's Instructions? The Owner's Manual is easily available, but somehow we think that we know, intuitively, what is best for us. Why spend time studying it?

Few of us would ever dream of putting diesel in

a petrol engine because it is cheaper. Yet how many unfortunately cite the high cost of kosher meat as their reason for not observing those laws? Nobody would dream of taking an ordinary sedan down through rocky off-road mountain passes. Are we as discriminating in the places we shlep our own *neshomo*?

Abuse of a motorcar does not lead to immediate engine failure. Likewise, spiritual abuse of our souls does not bring immediate repercussions. It may take years, or even generations. But the results can be devastating.

This is the time of year when attendance at Shul tends to drop off, after the marathon of the High Holidays. Why don't **you** come in for a regular service?

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

Here in South Africa, we take our holidays very seriously. People plan their December vacation as early as the January before. By November, even though we're still at school, we feel done. We're counting down the days until the official end. I'm already panicking about going back to school in January—it feels too close already.

My mother always used to say how the years seem to go so much faster these days. I could never understand that. It seemed so long from Pesach to Rosh Hashanah. Now, as soon as Sukkot is over, you need to start thinking about Pesach. It really feels like the 2025 school year just began, but it's quickly coming to an end.

One of the trendy words of the moment is mindfulness. It must have been invented by someone who felt just like this—like a year just flew by without us realizing. In Torah, we have always been taught the idea of being mindful. I remember the first time I understood this a little was when my father told me to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*—a self-assessment of my past year—on the day of my birthday. Really, we're also supposed to do that each year before Rosh Hashanah, each month before Rosh Chodesh, each week before

Shabbos, and in fact every night before we go to sleep.

This keeps us mindful. It makes us realize the passing of time and value it. It helps us not to allow time to pass us by without using it in the best way possible. So now, it's time to look back at this past academic year and plan for the next one. May we all be blessed to use our time well.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

Bring them Home

*By Rabbi Shrager Simmons
(aish.com)*

Israel's struggle to recover the bodies of its fallen is more than a military effort — it's a moral and spiritual imperative rooted in faith and family.

Even amid the nation's joy at the return of 20 living hostages from Gaza, closure remains elusive as Israel faces the mission to bring home for burial the bodies of those still held in Gaza.

This week, that mission took painful form as the bodies of Omer Neutra and Itay Chen, two American-Israeli soldiers killed in their tanks on October 7, were finally laid to rest, alongside Hadar Goldin, whose remains were held by Hamas for eleven long years.

These funerals, with an outpouring of grief and solidarity, became national moments of unity — reminders that every

soldier, every soul, is family. Yet the struggle continues. Hamas still withholds the bodies of three Israelis and one Thai citizen, exploiting their memory as a grotesque bargaining chip in its cruel psychological war.

Why does retrieving the bodies and burying them in Israel matter so much to the Jewish people — religiously, emotionally, and collectively? The answer reveals four essential lessons about life itself:

1. Sanctity of the Body

The body is more than just a physical shell; it is a partner for the Divine soul — a holy vessel through which we fulfill our mission in this world. Without the body, the soul cannot fulfill its earthly purpose.

Even after death, the body retains holiness and is to be cared for with dignity. This is why Jewish law insists on dignity of the deceased — prohibiting cremation, delay in burial, or public display.

Upon death, the soul goes through a process of separation from the body, returning to its destined place in the spiritual world. Burial allows the soul to disengage from the physical realm and find peace in the spiritual one.

The biblical axiom — “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” — mandates that the body return gently to the earth, entrusted back to its Source, completing a sacred cycle.

Yet until proper burial, the soul remains in a state of suspension – hanging between two worlds, unable to fully rest. To leave a body unburied is to leave a soul's journey incomplete.

2. Burial in the Land of Israel

As related in this week's Torah portion (Genesis ch. 23), when Sarah died, Abraham purchased a family burial plot in Hebron. Ever since, Jews have longed to be buried in the Land of Israel. The biblical Jacob, nearing death in Egypt, obtained a promise from his son Joseph to bring his body back to Israel for burial (Genesis 47:29).

Prof. Simcha Goldin, Hadar's father, said at the funeral, "At the moment of redemption from slavery in Egypt, Moses brings Joseph's remains to be buried in Israel. He does so because of the promise made generations ago."

Generations since echo that value. Till today, when Jews are buried abroad, it is customary to sprinkle a bit of soil from Israel into the grave – an unbroken link to our eternal homeland.

For Omer Neutra and Itay Chen, burial in Israel has a special layer of meaning. Having left the comfort of America to defend the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, they now rest in its soil.

Upon the recovery of Omer Neutra's body, his father Ronen quoted the biblical prophecy: "There is hope for your future, God

says, and the children shall return to their land" (Jeremiah 31:17).

3. Emotional Healing

Burying the dead is called *chesed shel emet* – "true kindness" – because it can never be repaid. Yet beyond a kindness to the deceased, burial provides psychological and emotional restoration for the living.

When a loved one's body is held captive, the mind cannot fully accept the finality of death. Unable to fully mourn and heal, families remain in a perpetual nightmare.

In the words of Itay's father, Ruby Chen, during those two years of waiting the family was held emotionally captive in Gaza – "trapped, our grief eternally suspended, our emotional wounds bleeding, our mourning stuck in limbo."

Moving forward, the gravesite provides a vital physical anchor – a place to cry, to remember, and to weave the deceased's memory into life's ongoing narrative.

4. The Jewish People Are One Family

The Jewish people are one family, connected to the pain of everyone yearning to bury their loved one. The return of bodies from Gaza is a spiritual mission that restores equilibrium to Israel's collective conscience – a declaration that every life counts and every story is honored.

This covenant of mutual responsibility is rooted in the ancient pledge, "*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh*" – all Jews are responsible for one another. This gives rise to a national promise that "no one is left behind" – not in the field, and not in memory.

In a world that often treats life as disposable, Israel's insistence on bringing home its dead is also a *Kiddush Hashem* – a sanctification of God's name – demonstrating to the world the preciousness of life.

Hadar Goldin, an accomplished artist and budding Talmudic scholar, wrote:

"In the course of our daily lives, we focus primarily on the outside world and feel the impact of our surroundings, but we seldom glimpse into our own soul... If I choose to pursue fleeting pleasures and passing thrills, I miss the opportunity to discover the source of continuous joy: my own soul."

As long as even one Jewish martyr remains unburied, our mission is incomplete. Those who gave their lives on October 7 are cherished national symbols. May their memory be blessed.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

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

KABBALAT SHABBAT (P.M.)

Friday	6:00
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MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty
Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Clive Wolpert on his 90th birthday on the 1st of November.
- Peter Sklair on his 65th birthday on the 6th of November.
- David Jacobson on his 60th birthday on the 18th of November.
- Leah Lurie on her 85th birthday on the 21st of November.
- Clive Gilbert on his 80th birthday on the 29th of November.

- Marion Rapp on her 84th birthday on the 27th of November.

ENGAGEMENTS

- Mazal Tov to Marion Rapp on the engagement of her grandson David Rapp to Rivka Alpert.
- Mazal Tov to Phillip & Rilla Jacobson on the engagement of their granddaughter Batsheva Fox to Ephy Wolff in New York.
- Mazal Tov to Martin and Sylvia Lewison on the engagement of their son, Adam, to Miri Jaffe in England.

MARRIAGES

- Mazal Tov to Robert & Julie Soicher and to Louis & Sybil Gecelter on the

marriage of their son and grandson, Jessie Soicher, to Leora Hodes on the 18th of September.

- Mazal Tov to Brenda Brick on the marriage of her grandson Ryan Brick to Jessica Chimes on the 21st of September.
- Mazal Tov to Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the marriage of their granddaughter Elki Sarchi to Yoel Goldmeier in London on the 26th of October.

BEREAVEMENTS

- We wish long life to Gillian Saks on the death of her husband, Earle.
- We wish long life to Susan Harris on the death of her sister, Jenny Harris.