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THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
November 2026
Cheshvan/Kislev 5787

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SHABBAT TIMES

🕎 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting
🕍 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 4

13 & 14 November – 4 Kislev 🕎 Toldot 🕯 6:15 – 🕍 7:07
20 & 21 November – 11 Kislev 🕎 Vayetzei 🕯 6:15 – 🕍 7:13
27 & 28 November – 18 Kislev 🕎 Vayishlach 🕯 6:15 – 🕍 7:19
4 & 5 December – 25 Kislev 🕎 Vayeshev *(Chanukah)* 🕯 6:15 – 🕍 7:24

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Election season has given us plenty to talk about, both in Israel and here in South Africa. We follow the results, compare the numbers and try to work out who will be in charge. You would think that the party with the most votes would get to govern. But, as we have learnt, it is not quite that simple.

Welcome to the world of coalitions. A party with relatively few seats can hold the balance of power, while the largest party may find itself on the opposition benches. Coming first does not necessarily mean winning.

At a Miracle Drive dinner I attended a couple of years ago, guest speaker Gayton McKenzie spoke about his visit to Israel in July 2023. He said he had gone there to learn how to govern in a coalition. Whatever else divides our two countries, this is certainly something we have in common!

Watching all this unfold brings to mind a passage in the Talmud. Rav Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, became gravely ill. When he recovered, his father asked what he had seen.

"I saw an upside-down world," he replied. "Those above were below, and those below were above."

His father answered: "My son, you saw a clear world." (Pesachim 50a)

We call this world *alma deshikra*, a world of falsehood, and the next *olam haemet*, the world of truth. Here, appearances can mislead us. We see position, wealth, popularity and influence, and assume that these tell us how important someone is. There, a person's true worth is plain to see.

The Midrash uses similar language when describing King Saul's encounter with the prophet Samuel after Samuel's death. During his lifetime, Samuel had told the king that his kingdom would pass to someone better than him, without naming his successor. Now he openly identified David. When Saul challenged him, Samuel explained that he had previously feared for his life. Then he had lived in a "world of falsehood"; now he was in the "world of truth", where he could speak without fear. (Vayikra Rabbah 26:7)

Even a king's power looks different from that perspective. What seems so important here loses its significance there. And perhaps that should make us pause before accepting this world's assessment of success. We devote so much attention to who is on top that we can forget to ask what ought to put a person there. The Torah gives us values by which to judge. The world around us does not always share them.

We tend to think of democracy as the best system of government. Perhaps it is. But I still struggle with the idea that a party can receive considerably more votes than its rivals, yet see someone else take the top job. There may be perfectly sound parliamentary arithmetic behind it. To me, it still feels unfair. It can all seem rather upside down. But then, so is everything else in this world.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I went to vote. It worked! All I voted for was water, electricity and refuse collection. When we got home the truck was there collecting the refuse, the water was back (and a bit later in the day the electricity came back)!

But the horror of the day: my husband, who gave me a ride to and from the voting station, dropped me outside our house and drove away. I realized that I had left my cell phone in the car.

My initial reaction was pure panic. I knew that my husband was going to be away for about three hours and I would be without any means of communication for that whole time. Added to this, there was also no electricity. I thought I should just get into bed and go to sleep. I imagined every scenario where I would need to contact or be contacted. I was working myself into a frenzy. I also could not distract myself by reading news or playing games.

Then I breathed deeply. Told myself it is what it is - no choices - and began to do jobs around the house. I had a very productive morning.

I have been trying to figure out what lesson I learnt from those few hours.

That I am totally dependent on my phone? - I know (didn't need this time to teach me that.)

That I could be productive, albeit doing different jobs in different ways? Maybe...

But the biggest lesson for me is that things don't always go according to the script, and I need to breathe deeply. Go with the flow. Accept my lack of ability to control everything, all the time. And it will all work out.

Have a good month.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

FlyDubai: G-d's Miracle or Man's Heroism?

By Lori Palatnik (aish.com)

Brave passengers and crew saved Flydubai Flight 1073. Does that mean it wasn't a miracle?

The elation over the safe return of the 180 Israeli passengers aboard the Flydubai flight was still "in the air" when the backlash began. People were offended that so many were calling it a miracle.

During a live interview on Fox News, a former Prime Minister of Israel said that the safe outcome of the threatened Flydubai flight was "not a miracle, it was an act of heroism by the passengers and of the Emirati crew."

On social media, people echoed the same sentiment. How, they asked, could anyone call this a miracle when so many courageous human beings had worked so hard to prevent a tragedy?

And they had.

The heroes of that flight were extraordinary:

The captain's resilience: Despite being severely stabbed and bleeding heavily, Captain Machchhar summoned the strength to unlock the cockpit door.

Immediate passenger intervention: Passengers, including Yaniv Hayoun, an Israeli plumber who put the attacker in a chokehold, physically breached the cockpit, fought off the attacker and dragged him out.

Medical intervention: An onboard dentist, Dr. Shota Musayev, worked to stem the captain's arterial bleeding and helped keep him alive.

Trained backup: Off-duty Flydubai crew members who happened to be traveling as passengers stepped in to stabilize the aircraft and make an emergency landing in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.

The aircraft itself: Aviation experts noted how extraordinary it was that the plane survived its severe plunge without catastrophic structural failure.

Critics argue that calling this a miracle diminishes the literal blood, courage, skill and resourcefulness of the people who saved the flight.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

What Exactly Is a Miracle?

We all know the story of the splitting of the sea. But do we remember that the sea did not split immediately?

According to the Midrash, Nachshon ben Aminadav walked into the water, continuing forward until the water reached his neck. Only then did the sea split.

He risked his life, trusting that G-d would intervene.

But is that allowed?

Can I blindfold myself, walk across a freeway and say, "I'm counting on G-d to perform a miracle"?

Of course not.

So why is Nachshon praised?

Because he wasn't counting on a miracle for himself. He was willing to risk himself for the sake of the entire Jewish people.

He did everything a human being could do. And then G-d did the rest.

When We Take the Credit

We just went through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In our prayers, we repeatedly recall the miracles of G-d taking us out of Egypt.

Every Friday night, in Kiddush over wine, we do the same.

Hey — it's not Passover. Why do we keep talking about the Exodus?

Because human beings have a remarkable tendency: When something goes wrong, we blame G-d. When something goes right, we take the credit.

The Torah warned us about this thousands of years ago. Moses tells the Jewish people that after they enter the Land, build homes, prosper and accumulate wealth, they may become tempted to say: "My strength and the might of my hand have made me this wealth."

And immediately comes the correction: "But you shall remember the L-rd your G-d, for He is the One who gives you the strength to make wealth."

The Torah isn't denying our strength. It's reminding us where our strength comes from.

"I Prayed and Touched G-d"

Interviews with some of the passengers on the Flydubai flight are filled with accounts of prayer.

People recited the Shema — the declaration of faith that traditionally accompanies us at the moment of death.

One young passenger said, "I prayed and touched G-d."

The heroes of Flydubai Flight 1073 are real. Their bravery was beyond, beyond. They ran into the proverbial sea.

They fought, they bled, they used their training and their ingenuity, and they saved lives.

And with all of the other factors that came together — factors we could chalk up to "coincidence," "luck," "nature," or simply our own "strength and might" — we were granted a miracle.

But What About the Wind?

Just before the sea split, the Torah tells us that there was a great wind. What is this — the Weather Channel?

When I was a young girl in Hebrew school, I was taught the "real" explanations for the miracles in the Torah.

The Plague of Darkness? Perhaps a total eclipse. The splitting of the sea? Maybe it was a low tide. We can always find another explanation.

And that is part of having free will. We are free to say: It wasn't Divine. It was nature, science, coincidence.

It was us.

Human beings indeed acted heroically. But acknowledging their heroism does not require us to exclude G-d. Both are true.

We Have to Do Our Part

After all the inner spiritual work of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we immediately begin building the sukkah.

The walls of the sukkah remind us of the Clouds of Glory that protected the Jewish people in the desert. We were protected — but we also had to do our part. We had to build, act, and move forward.

We need the humility to understand that our strength, courage, intelligence and ability are themselves gifts.

The passengers on that flight were heroes. Their actions should be celebrated; their courage should be honored.

And perhaps we can honor them even more deeply by recognizing that their extraordinary human strength does not make a miracle unnecessary. It may be exactly what a miracle looks like.

May we continue to rise here, each and every day, doing everything within our power — and merit the miracles from Above.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

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

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Friday	6:00

MAZALTOV

מזל טוב!

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Mazaltov to Philip & Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great granddaughter to Mendel and Menucha Marrus in Johannesburg.

MARRIAGES

- Mazaltov to Adrian and Lauren Gore on the marriage of their son Jake to Ariella Klitzner in Cape Town.
- Mazaltov to Ina Orlianski on the marriage of her son Jonathan to Danae Salinas in Israel

BIRTHDAYS

- Clive Cohen on his 80th birthday on 4th November.
- Marion Rapp on her 85th birthday on 27th November.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a speedy recovery to:

- Stan Abkiewicz.

BEREAVEMENTS

- We wish long life to Stan Yankelson on the death of his brother, Mervyn, in Austin, Texas.
- We wish long life to Gil Lang on the death of his brother Lawrence.
- We wish long life to Jules Schneid, Karen Lieberman and Steven Schneid on the death of their wife and mother, Arlene Schneid.

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



PURCHASE A LEAF ON OUR
"SIMCHA TREE"

to mark a happy event in your family
Cost of each leaf is R 360.00 - For details please contact the office



OXFORD'S HALL OF REMEMBRANCE

The plaques in the Hall of Remembrance record the names and the date of death of departed loved ones. The lights on the plaques are lit on the Yartzeit. A special Hazkara memorial prayer is also recited during Yizkor.

Cost of a plaque is R720 for the first plaque ordered, R540 for subsequent plaques