

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2024

Cheshvan 5785

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SHABBAT TIMES

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

15 & 16 November – 15 Cheshvan
🔊 Vayera
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:09

22 & 23 November – 22 Cheshvan
🔊 Chayei Sarah
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:15

29 & 30 November – 29 Cheshvan
🔊 Toldot
🕯 6:15 – 🕯 7:21

6 & 7 December – 6 Kislev
🔊 Vayishlach
🕯 6:16 – 🕯 7:26

RABBI'S MESSAGE

This is my favourite Cheshvan story, so you are likely to have heard it from me previously. Yes, Tishrei is such an inspirational month, but then...?

Rabbi Shalom Ber of Lubavitch was travelling through Italy. While waiting at a train station he observed a brand-new powerful locomotive being prepared for a journey. There was much activity around the mighty machine—people running to and fro, shouting instructions, shovelling coals, planning and executing. After much preparation the engine was ready to go. With waving flags, and the sound of a whistle, the stationmaster

instructed the driver to leave the station. The horn blew, a huge puff of steam was let out, and the locomotive slowly made its way down the tracks... leaving behind the entire train. Nobody had remembered to couple the wagons!

Upon his return to Russia, Rabbi Shalom Ber told the story to the Chassidim. The moral was obvious.

We have just experienced Tishrei—lots of noise, bells and whistles, frenetic activity. Feasting and fasting, praying and swaying, standing still and dancing in circles. Sounding a Shofar, building a Sukkah, shaking a Lulav & Etrog.

One cannot help but be inspired by the awesomeness of it all, especially when a lot of this took place in a sanctuary as majestic as Oxford.

Then there was the grand finale, truly unforgettable. On Simchat Torah, a group of young men from Chassidim Shul in Orchards made the long trek to make our Yomtov special. They managed to get everyone present in shul that evening to join in the circle and dance with the Torah scrolls.

So there is the locomotive, ready to pull out of the station, fully stoked with energy and power.

Behind it are waiting eleven wagons, all connected to each other: Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet... down to Elul. It is the function of the locomotive to drive the entire train out of the station.

But have we remembered to hitch the lead wagon, Cheshvan, to the engine that is meant to propel the whole year to follow?

So inspired we have been. But do we now watch as Tishrei leaves the station, with eleven abandoned months left stranded, unaffected by all the whistling bells, the puffing smoke and the hive of activity?

So this is the challenge of Cheshvan. There are no chagim, special Jewish observances... it is just day after day of the 'normal' life of a Yid.

It is a month to reflect, to harvest and to take inspiration and turn it into action.

Have a safe ride.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I have officially grown up. I made a spontaneous decision to join my husband on a very special trip overseas. Usually, I need months to consider whether or not this is a good time to go, to think about what I need to take, to plan, to shop, to check passports and everything else one needs for travel. This time I did all the thinking in 24 hours and decided to go 24 hours later.

What a special four days we had in New York. We got to see a lot of our children and grandchildren (קצ"ה) and of course, my in-laws. There were the two very new babies as well as the big ones. And the bonus, to be at the bris, the official reason for the timing of the trip.

I was pretty sure it would be a name for my father. But until it was actually said out loud, my emotions all bubbled around on the edges. I only felt the hugeness of it when the name was called out.

King Shlomo proclaims, "Dor holech vedor bo—one generation goes and another generation comes." Such an honour to get a big name like this. Big, big shoes to fill, to walk in the footsteps of his great grandfather. But what an honour it will be for me to watch and see what he does, what he makes of this name. The old and the new, coming together.

May this little Avraham Koppel walk in my father's footsteps and also create his own special footprints as he brings together the past and the future.

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 words 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?

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 Methusaleh'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.)	
Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00
MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)	
Friday	5:45

MAZALTOV



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Brenda Brick on her 88th birthday on the 11th of November
- Susan Woolf on her 75th birthday on the 14th of November

BIRTHS

- Marion Rapp on the birth of a great grandson

- Betzalel & Miri Chaikin and to Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a daughter and granddaughter in New York
- Gertie Feinstein on the birth of a great grandson in Toronto
- Philip & Rilla Jacobson and Jeanette Markovitz on the birth of a great granddaughter, born to Levi and Tamar Markovitz in Israel
- Shmuly & Chanala Hurwitz and Rabbi Yossi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a son and grandson in New York

BAR MITZVAHS

- Neil and Caroline Myerson on the Bar-Mitzvah of their son, Jack

ENGAGEMENT

- Robert & Julie Soicher and Louis & Sybil Gecelter on the engagement of their son and grandson, Jesse, to Leora Hodes



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