

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September 2019

Elul 5779

SHABBAT TIMES

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

6 & 7 September – 7 Elul

🔊 Shoftim

🕯 5:39 – 🕯 6:29

13 & 14 September – 14 Elul

🔊 Ki Teitzi

🕯 5:42 – 🕯 6:32

20 & 21 September – 21 Elul

🔊 Ki Tavo

🕯 5:45 – 🕯 6:34

27 & 28 September – 28 Elul

🔊 Nitzavim

🕯 5:48 – 🕯 6:37

4 & 5 October – 6 Tishrei

🔊 Vayealech (*Shabbat Shuva*)

🕯 5:51 – 🕯 6:41

RABBI'S MESSAGE

So Yom Tov is coming... Everyone has a different trigger to remind them of the imminence of Rosh Hashanah (followed so closely by Yom Kippur, Sukkot, etc.). I have it on good authority that the majority of readers of this publication read my wife's article before mine. So you know what her trigger is.

Every year, around this time, South Africa's rabbis gather for a 2-3 day national conference. I have just come back from this year's, which took place in Cape Town. It is always very inspiring to spend those few days, removed from the day-to-day grind and discussing trends and issues in

our country. This year was no exception, with a record number of rabbonim attending. Aside from the formal sessions, the conversations around the tables at meals and the discussions in the corridors were what created a spirit of unity and of common purpose which I do not believe exists in other countries of the world.

This conference is arranged under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Rabbi. As current chairman of the SA Rabbinical Association, an independent body but obviously one that has common interests with the above office, I had a higher and more active role than in previous years. Nonetheless it was an opportunity to recharge the batteries and to come back refreshed.

So indeed, it is this annual conference that, for me, is the sign that the month of Tishrei is almost here. I return each time with major themes and issues, which are facing our country and the world and suggestions on how to deal with these in the High Holiday sermons.

So now, I'm over the bump. Back home to count the days down and make sure that I will be spiritually, emotionally and physically ready for yom tov.

Every morning, at the end of shul I am blowing the Shofar, a strident reminder to

utilise the remaining few days of the year productively. To engage in soul-searching, in extra prayer, charity and recitation of Psalms. To look back on the year that is coming to a close and to examine my deeds, and to make good or apologise where I may have caused hurt. And to be mindful throughout that the spiritual angle of Elul must always remain the primary focus.

This is a stressful time for many of us and the only way to cope is by making extensive use of to-do lists, and then to assign individual tasks their time slots. People to call, places to go, letters to write, etc. etc. Once broken down into smaller tasks, "Yom Tov" is no longer this huge monster lurking and threatening to cause panic.

And then there are the logistical preparations, lots of stuff that has to be done, but which may never become the main preoccupation.

I wish you all an easy, stressless and successful month of Elul in preparation, each of you in your own way, for the High Holidays.

Wishing you Ketiva Vachatima Tova, a blessed and prosperous year ahead.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

My amaryllis is getting ready for Yom Tov and I am wondering if I am.

Some years ago a friend gifted me an amaryllis. She told me that an amaryllis is like a friend; you may see nothing of it the whole year, but it will not let you down, time after time after time.

I am not a good gardener. I generally manage to kill my plants one after the other, even though I love plants. (Maybe I talk to them too much.)

The amaryllis looks almost dead the whole year and then it wakes up and grows, generally producing the most spectacular flowers right around Sukkot. This year the Yom Tov season seems to have sprung up on me. Perhaps because we had such a mild winter, I am still waiting for winter to arrive and here it is spring.

Every day I walk past my pot plants and wonder why I keep this one. It looks empty and dead but I water it pretty often and wait to see if Bev was right or if it will let me down this year. Once again I am smiling. My plant is green and full of leaves. It is most definitely getting ready to sprout, getting ready for Yom Tov.

It gives me faith and inspiration, no matter how I have been this past year. Even if my good resolutions from last Yom Tov were not always obvious and may sometimes have looked almost dead, I "watered" them here and there.

Now it is Erev Yom Tov once again and I am getting ready to face the Yom Tov

season—both the mundane (I bought meat today so that I can start to fill my freezer!) and the spiritual. I am trying to learn a little extra, pray a little harder and do another good deed, so that I will also blossom and flower when this Yom Tov arrives.

Wishing you a Ketiva Vachtima Tova.

Rivky

DVAR TORAH

12 ELUL FACTS EVERY JEW SHOULD KNOW

(chabad.org)

1. Elul is the Final Month on the Calendar

Elul is the 12th month on the Jewish calendar (the 6th month counting from Nissan). It always has 29 days, ending on the same day of the week that it began (Sunday, Monday, Wednesday or Friday), which ensures that the holidays in the subsequent month will fall on the proper days.

2. It's When "The King Is in the Field"

As we approach the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), we prepare for these holidays. In Chassidic tradition, it is said that during this month, "the King (G-d) is in the field," smiling and accessible to all. On the other hand, once the holidays are upon us, G-d is, so to speak, in His palace. The experience during the holidays is that much more powerful and majestic, but now is the time when anyone can approach G-d with requests.

3. It's a Time for Introspection

After the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moses spent this month (and the following 10 days until Yom Kippur) obtaining a second set of tablets, along with G-d's full forgiveness. This time period is therefore an especially potent time for us to come closer to G-d. Dedicate time to cheshbon hanefesh ("soul accounting"), taking stock of your activities, thoughts and conversations of the past year. Where have you improved and where do you still need to improve? Think honestly and deeply, and you'll have a running start when Rosh Hashanah comes around.

4. We Say Selichot This Month

Selichot ("Forgivenesses") are special prayers said on fast days and during this season. The highlight of the Selichot is the recitation of the 13 Attributes of Mercy, the formula that G-d gave Moses for securing divine forgiveness. Sepharadim begin at the start of the month of Elul and finish 40 days later on Yom Kippur. Ashkenazim begin saying Selichot several days before Rosh Hashanah (always on a Saturday night).

5. The Name Elul is Laden With Significance

The month is first referred to as Elul in Nehemia 6:15, where we read that the wall around Jerusalem was completed on the 25th day of the month. (Fun fact: This is also the day when the

creation of the world began, ending 6 days later on 1 Tishrei.)

The four letters of Elul (אלול) are said to be an acronym for אני לדודי ודודי לי, "I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me," expressing the closeness that we experience with G-d during this time. It is also an acronym for [ואשר לא צדה] [לך מקום], "But one who did not stalk [him], but G-d brought [it] about into his hand, I will make a place for you to which he shall flee." The verse is referring to the City of Refuge, where one who had inadvertently killed could find safety, and it encapsulates the refuge that G-d provides us all when we seek to rectify our past misdeeds.

6. This Month's Sign is Virgo

Known in Hebrew as betulah, "maiden" or "virgin," this month's horoscope sign is emblematic of the order of the day: coming close to G-d. During this month, we are empowered to reach deep into ourselves and tap into that which is pure and G-dly, unsullied by the crassness of our surroundings. This is typified by the betulah, who is untainted by sin.

7. We Hear the Shofar Every Day

You may be surprised to learn that it's not only on Rosh Hashanah that we blow the shofar. Every day of the month of Elul (besides for Shabbat and the day before Rosh Hashanah), we blow the shofar after morning

services. The soul-stirring shofar blasts inspire us to come closer to G-d, as we read, "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?"

8. We Wish Each Other a Sweet Year

Words have power. When signing off letters or ending phone calls and conversations, we wish each other a "ketivah vachatimah tovah," to be "written and sealed for good [in the Book of Life]." The 21st century iteration of this practice would probably be to set this as your email signature, your WhatsApp status and your Facebook profile.

9. We Say Psalm 27 Twice a Day

After morning and afternoon (or in some communities, evening) prayers, we recite Psalm 27, which begins with the words "To David: The L-rd is my light and my salvation." The Kabbalist Rabbi Binyamin Benish Cohen wrote in 1706 that one who recites this psalm in a state of holiness, purity and great concentration will have his prayers answered, and that it has the power to nullify divine decrees. We continue this practice until Hoshanah Rabbah, the final day of Sukkot.⁴

10. The Baal Shem Tov Instituted Three More Chapters

The Baal Shem Tov instituted the custom of reciting three additional chapters of Psalms each day, from the 1st of Elul until Yom Kippur (on Yom Kippur the remaining 36 chapters

are recited, thereby completing the entire book of Psalms).

11. Get Your Tefillin and Mezuzahs Checked Now

Elul is a time to increase and improve our mitzvah observance. Many people have the custom to have a scribe inspect their tefillin and mezuzahs during this month to ensure their kosher status. The Rebbe wrote that this practice⁵ is "worthwhile and very appropriate for everyone to publicize."

12. The New Study Season Begins in Elul

Yeshivahs typically divide the academic year into several zemanim, "trimesters." Lasting just until the High Holidays, Elul zeman is the shortest of the trimesters (the others last from between Sukkot to Passover and from after Passover to the summer). Yet, it is extremely significant. This is the time when a student becomes acclimated, acquires chavruta study partners and prepares for a successful year of learning and personal growth.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays 8:00

29/09 (Erev Rosh Hashana): 7:45

Monday to Friday 7:15

23/09, 26/09 (Selichot): 6:45

25/09, 27/09 (Selichot): 7:00

02/10, 03/10, 04/10, 07/10 (Selichot): 6:45

08/10 (Erev Yom Kippur): 7:00

Shabbat & Festivals 9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday 5:45

Friday 5:45

Shabbat 5:15

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

ENGAGEMENT

- Doris Samson on the engagement of her granddaughter, Yocheved Samson to Yehoshua Brunschwig.

BIRTHDAYS

- Barney Gordon on his 97th birthday on the 7th September.
- Percy Bloom on his 90th birthday on the 22nd September.
- Annette Wolk on her 93rd birthday on the 24th September.

ANNIVERSARIES

- John & Brenda Brick on their 62nd anniversary on the 1st September.

- Ronald & Estelle Katz on their 52nd anniversary on the 3rd September.

BEREAVEMENTS

We wish long life to :

- Clive and Mike Strimling on the death of their sister, Elaine Strimling

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

**LOOKING FOR THE WHEREABOUTS OF MORRIS JOFFE**

If anyone remembers Morris Jofee or his sons, please contact Gary Lewis on glewis@iafrica.com.
Morris owned a chain of hardware shops. His sons were lawyers.