

Asinine Tendencies

“Issachar is a sturdy ass, crouching among the pastures. But when he saw that rest was good, and the country pleasant, He bent his back to the burden, and became a toiling serf”
(49:14-15)

An acquaintance of mine who has a farm in Pennsylvania’s Amish district wrote that donkeys tend to be, in many ways, “wilder” in spirit than other farm animals. You’d better keep your distance from behind a donkey, he learned, for they are much more likely than horses and other animals to give a rear kick out of nowhere, You stay to their side or in front, although watch out for their bite, as well!. The Torah’s prototypical word for “wild [פרא],” used to describe Ishmael, originally referred to the “wild ass.” At heart, and even in their DNA, our domesticated donkeys are still akin to their wild relatives. Donkeys and mules are also legendary for their stubbornness. Therefore you must cajole a donkey to get him to do your bidding; you have to first gain his trust. If a donkey doesn’t want to move, there’s not much you can do about it!” Donkeys are perhaps unfairly reputed for so-called “stupidity,” when this may rather indicate the opposite - intelligence. A donkey’s “asinine” decisions come about through his insistence that only he will determine what is good for himself, not his so-called master. This can work for the good when the human master acts like an ass, such as Balaam’s poor decision to go along with Balak despite repeated warnings from God. Only his donkey’s stubborn independence, despite repeated beatings by her master, saved Balaam’s life. Indeed, people who know donkeys often say they aren’t so much stubborn as cautious and have this intelligent knack for self-preservation. They are naturally suspicious and wary. The careful, sure-footed donkey stops to think things through for herself and comes to her own conclusions. This description indeed fits the Balaam story to a tee.

Yet the ass family became quintessential beats of burden, and among the earliest. They preceded the camel in domestication by thousands of years, and remained much more common for everyday use than their larger, sleeker relative, the horse. The donkey can also take dry, hot conditions and live on frugal feed. The speedy horse stands tall and proud, casting care to the wind as it charges ahead, whereas the humble donkey is known for its bent back and slow pace. Donkeys can be ridden, but are more used as pack and draft animals with the master alongside.

The Tribe of Issachar held fertile territory in the eastern Jezreel valley and lower Galilee. The tribe is mentioned in Judges in the Song of Deborah, but even before the fall of Samaria, the Galilee became subject to Aramean and then Assyrian rule, cutting off the Galilean tribes. They may have tried to preserve their tribal independence of action from their more southerly brethren. Now, an animal may crouch, ready to spring to the attack. But it may also huddle out of fear, and this can easily turn into an excuse for “lounging around,” especially when the land is fertile and food plentiful. The same Hebrew word [רביק] is used for the lounging of passive sheep in their pastures. Timidity combined with self-satisfaction in enjoying their fertile land would lead to Issachar’s subjugation, Jacob is saying. And subjugation leads to the conquerer’s corvee, ultimately being reduced first to serfdom and then to abject slavery and removal from the land. Once one gets used to inaction out of paralyzing fear, it becomes an excuse for laziness. All these are lessons to be learned from Jacob’s sage guidance and forewarning to Issachar.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayhi

December 17-18, 2021

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 4:12 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:15 pm

Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | 2021-22 season
sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Levy | Led by teen leaders and Mrs. Lisa Rohde

Rabbi Swap Lecture | Rabbi Shaul Robinson | following services

“The Younger Child in the Book of Genesis - Is Weakness Moral?”

Outdoor Kiddush | following the lecture | *Sponsored by the Solomon family in honor of Rabbi Robinson*

NO Shabbat Afternoon Class this week.

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 4:10 pm

Shabbat Ends | 4:57 pm

Virtual Habdala Service | Rev. Z. Edinger | 5:15 pm

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday & Friday (Legal Holiday): 8:05 am | Monday-Thursday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Monday & Wednesday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 4:15 pm

*Reminder: **MASKS REQUIRED FOR ALL INDOORS.** If you choose not to wear a mask when permissible, you represent & warrant that you’re fully vaccinated. If requested, you must wear a well-fitted mask wherever & whenever required.*

If you’re eligible for the vaccine booster, we encourage it, and if your child is eligible to be vaccinated, we encourage that too. Once you’ve been boosted/vaccinated, please send vaccination proof to info@shearithisrael.org.

THIS SHABBAT MORNING

We Welcome Rabbi Shaul Robinson of Lincoln Square Synagogue for this installment of our Rabbi Swap Shabbat Series!

Rabbi Robinson will speak following services on the topic of:
"The Younger Child in the Book of Genesis - Is Weakness Moral?"

THIS WEDNESDAY

BLOOD DONORS URGENTLY NEEDED!

Caring Connection Presents

Esther Goldfarb Memorial Blood Drive Wednesday, December 22 | 10:00 am-4:00 pm *Masks, ID, and vaccination proof required*

Finish off the year by giving the gift of life at *Caring Connection's* blood drive.

Schedule your donation at shearithisrael.org/blood-drive2021.

Check-in volunteers needed:

This drive will be open to vaccinated participants only, so we'll need volunteers to check for proof of vaccination. Contact rosenberg@shearithisrael.org if interested.

MAKE YOUR YEAR-END GIFT TODAY

Now is the time to support Shearith Israel, our societies, and special funds (e.g. rabbi's discretionary fund, Sisterhood, Hebra, etc.) with an end of year gift. These gifts are a crucial part of our budget and enable Shearith Israel to maintain the high standard to which we are all accustomed.

Refer to our emails for instructions on how to submit your gift and to select any and all funds you wish to support.

If you have any outstanding balances, now is also a good time to take care of those.

Members, remember that you can pre-pay your 2022-2023 dues now at this year's rates - until January 15, 2022.

MASKING UPDATE

In compliance with NYS Governor Hochul's order which took effect this week, **Shearith Israel continues to require masks for all indoor activities**, regardless of vaccination status.

KIDDUSH

Sponsor a Hot Outdoor Kiddush!

Enjoying our new outdoor kiddush? We could use a couple of sponsors each week to help maintain the warmth of our community!

To sponsor, visit shearithisrael.org/outdoor-kiddush.

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday Night, January 8, 2022

The Sisterhood Presents:

The History of Jewish Comedy

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome new members, **Hanna Pincas-Kalman & Michael Kalman**, with their children **Adam** (12), **Daniel** (10), and **Liam** (6), to our growing Shearith Israel family.

Hazak u'Barukh to trustee **Avery Neumark**, upon receiving the title Haver, conferred to him by three distinguished rabbis.

Thank you to this week's Choir Contributor: **Annette Gourgey**, in memory of Louise & Albert Gourgey.

Condolences to **Jeffrey Lang**, upon the passing of his father, Dr. Samuel Lang.