

The Priestly Blessing
Z. Edinger

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites... (Num. 6: 22-27)

In Israel and the Sephardic diaspora the Priestly Blessing is recited daily, and has been since ancient times. However in our congregation, and in most Ashkenazic congregations (outside of Israel) the Priestly Blessing is only chanted on festivals.

Many reasons have been given to explain why or how the Priestly Blessing stopped being recited daily in Ashkenaz. The most common explanation indicates that Priests must be in a state of happiness in order to bless the nation, since we are not usually in a state of happiness (other than times of rejoicing, as on the holidays) the Priests ceased reciting it daily. Another possibility is that in Ashkenaz it was believed that Priests had to be in a state of ritual purity in order to bless the people. Since most days Priests would not be in this state of purity, the daily blessing ceased. Only on the holidays, when people were accustomed to go to the mikveh (ritual bath) did the Priests continue to recite the priestly blessing. In truth, none of the explanations given are strongly compelling, indicating that we do not really know why this biblical commandment was so severely limited in Ashkenaz.

In our congregation, as well as in most Spanish and Portuguese communities, the Birkat Kohanim is only recited on holidays. This is decidedly Ashkenazic and requires explanation. The most likely explanation is that the S&P community was made up mainly by re-Judaizing Portuguese conversos, among this community there were either very few kohanim, or, very few Kohanim who were fit or knowledgeable enough to recite this blessing. As a result the community had to rely on their Ashkenazic neighbors for the Priestly Blessing.

Interestingly, the custom in Amsterdam is to recite the priestly blessing every Shabbat (in recent years this has been also been adopted in Philadelphia.) This custom has an unusual origin. The original custom in Amsterdam was only to recite the birkat kohanim on Holidays, as in London and New York. However, in the year 1666, news of the coming of the Messiah (Sabbatai Tsebi) spread quickly throughout Europe. In preparation for the coming of the Messiah, the community in Amsterdam began to recite the Priestly Blessing every Shabbat! When Sabbatai Tsebi converted to Islam and was revealed as a fraud, the community argued whether or not to return to their original custom. It was decided, however, that because the Priestly blessing is in fact a biblical commandment, once the community had become accustomed to reciting it on Sabbaths, there was no reason to cease this mitzvah. Despite its Sabbatean origins, the Priestly blessing is recited on Shabbat in Amsterdam to this day.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to our visitors from The Tivkva Fund who are joining us this Shabbat.

Condolences to Naomi Cohen on the passing of her brother, Dr. Eli Rosenthal.

We Welcome the Following Individuals to the Shearith Israel Family:

Susan Lobel

Joseph Sokol



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

May 29-30, 2015

Shabbat Naso

Hertz Pentateuch: p. 586; Haftarah p. 602
Kaplan Living Torah: p. 676; Haftarah p. 1184

CANDLE LIGHTING | 8:00 pm

MINHAH | 6:45 pm

ZEMIROT | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

SHAHARIT (NISHMAT) | 9:00 am | Rabbi Soloveichik delivers a lecture entitled: "Put Abigail Adams on the \$20 Bill: an Argument from our Haftarah"

MEANING AND MELODY | 10:00 am | Rabbi Morris

TOT SHABBAT | Ages 0-4 | 10:00 am | Levy Auditorium

YOUTH GROUPS | Ages 5-12 | 10:00 am | Children's Library

JR. CONGREGATION Ages 5-12 | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

***The last Assigned Jr. Congregation of the year will be on June 13**

KIDDUSH | Levy Auditorium

PARASHAT HASHABUAH: THE PARTS THEY SKIP IN HIGH SCHOOL | Rabbi Hidary | 6:55 pm | For high school students | Held at the Hidarys' home, 1 W 85th St Apartment 6A

SEUDAH SHELISHIT & PIRKEI ABOT SHIUR

Rabbi Soloveichik | 6:55 pm | *Sponsored by Dr. Morris and Linda Shamah in memory of Linda's father, Yitzhak ben Moshe Dweck HaCohen*

MINHAH/ARBIT | 7:55 pm

KETER SHEM TOB | Rabbi Hidary | Main Sanctuary

HABDALAH | 9:01 pm

*Sign up for parts with Rabbi Morris (smorris@shearithisrael.org) and for Torah reading with Lisa Rohde (lrohde-csi@yahoo.com).

Summer Shabbat Schedule

Starting Saturday, June 27, Shabbat morning services held in
Levy Auditorium.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

Alhambra Sephardic Music Ensemble Concert Thursday, June 4 | 8:00 pm | Levy Auditorium

The Shearith Israel League is organizing an evening of Judeo-Spanish songs from Spain, Turkey (Salonica, Istanbul), Egypt, the Greek Isles, Jerusalem and the Balkans. Isabelle Ganz, mezzo soprano, will direct a group of singers and performers on the oud, dumbek and other traditional instruments. Refreshments will be served.

No charge. Learn more at sileague.org

From Slave to Merchant Princess: The Remarkable Journey of Sarah Brandon Moses

Tuesday, June 9 | 8:00 pm | *Sponsored by the Haberman Family*

Dr Laura A. Leibman, professor of English and Humanities at Reed college and author of *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life*, winner of the 2012 National Jewish Book Award, shares her most recent research into slavery in early American Jewish life and how it impacted the personal lives of our community's early families.

Shearith Israel Book Club

Wednesday, June 10 | 8:00 pm

Held in a private home | Esther Hidary

Join us for the last meeting of the year. We will discuss "The UnAmericans" by Molly Antopol. RSVP to ehidary@gmail.com.

End of the Year Picnic

Saturday, June 13 | Following Shabbat Services

Join us for our annual Family Shabbat Picnic Lunch in Central Park. Bring a sheet to sit on, appropriate clothing, and we'll provide the food. There will be activities with "Roll Joel" for the children, Liz and Shanade will play with the toddlers and there will be a class for the parents. As long as the sun is shining, we'll be outside otherwise, we'll bring the party indoors. RSVP at shearithisrael.org/picnic.

Pay Tribute to Rabbi Ira Rohde for 25 Years of Devoted Service as our Hazzan

Saturday, June 20 | Following Morning Services

Join us for a special tribute to Rabbi Rohde and a kiddush luncheon in his honor. To view and join our growing list of sponsors go to shearithisrael.org/irarohde25

Celebrate Our 2015 Graduates Saturday, June 20 | Following Morning Services

Let's spread the good news and celebrate the success and accomplishments of all our graduates from pre-school to PhDs! In addition to feteing our guest of honor, Rabbi Ira Rohde, we will also recognize our 2015 graduates. Go online to ensure your graduate is listed on our scroll of honor (for free!) and consider honoring your graduate by co-sponsoring (\$180) or contributing (\$36). For listings and sponsorships, visit shearithisrael.org/graduation.

Weekday Toddler Summer 'Camp'

June 23rd - August 20th

Tuesdays and Thursday | 9:30-11:30 am

For children aged 16-33 months.

Includes outdoor play and a wading pool. Adult caregiver presence is required. Register online at shearithisrael.org/content/summer-toddler-program-2015

WEEKDAY JUDAIC EDUCATION

View all our spring classes at shearithisrael.org/education

Sunday

- ◇ Sephardic Responsa on Contemporary Issues | Rabbi Hidary | 8:40 am
[Last Class 6/14](#)
- ◇ Saadia Gaon's Emunot ve'Deot on Revelation and Commandments | Sijmon den Hollander | 9:30 am
[Last Class 6/14](#)

Monday

- ◇ YL Monday Night Learning * | 7:00 pm
- ◇ Hebruta Program* | 7:15 pm
- ◇ Living Jewish | Rabbi Morris | 7:30 pm

Spring semester sponsored by Josh Eisen and Bruce Roberts and Joy Saleh Roberts

- ◇ Rambam Rules for Young Professionals | Rabbi Morris | 8:30 pm

**In partnership with JICNY*

Tuesday

- ◇ Shulhan Arukh | Rabbi Hidary | 7:45 am
[Last Class 6/23](#)
- ◇ History of the Sephardim, the Spanish & Portuguese Jews | Rabbi Morris | 7:15pm - 7:45 pm
[Last Class 6/2](#)

Wednesday

- ◇ Parashat Hashabua | Esther Hidary | 10:00 am
[Last class 6/9](#)

Our next public tour is:
Tuesday, June 9 at 11:00 am

Parnas Office Hours

Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you.

Please schedule a visit at
parnas@shearithisrael.org.