

## God Fights Actively on Our Side

25 He caused their chariot wheels to wobble, so that they had difficulty driving. "Let us flee from the Israelites," said the Egyptians, "for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!" 26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state. As the Egyptians were retreating, the LORD swept them into the sea...28 The waters flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had chased the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. 29 But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on their right and on their left.

There are a number of unusual words used in this section which may reveal overlooked details in the tale of the "defeat" of the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds; or at least I had overlooked these details. The first Hebrew word of the passage is "ויסר" which I had usually assumed meant that God (or the muddy bottom of the sea, as part of God's miracle) had "taken off" or "removed" the Egyptian chariot wheels. A complete removal of the wheels would have meant that the chariots were then being dragged, which does fit the literal expression that [the army] "drove forward heavily." But the Egyptians actually continued being able to move; indeed, they attempted to flee, according to the text. So the Egyptian chariots weren't completely stuck in the mud without their wheels, it seems. Hence the New JPS version understands this verb as coming from "אסר", a meaning "binding," translating it as [the Lord] "locked" the wheels. Yet another English version understands the root of the verb as "סור" meaning "turn aside" or "to make turn aside." How do wheels "turn aside," or turn from side to side? Well, this version gives the translation that God caused the wheels to "wobble." According to this translation, the Egyptians would have had a little more ability to flee, although with some degree of drag, or "heaviness."

I now tend towards understanding that Egyptians had more ability to flee based upon some other terms which I hadn't noticed previously. Before this I had mostly pictured the Egyptians stuck in the mud with their wheel-less chariots, stationary until the water wave came back. The text does say that the Egyptians fled, but I had never taken that too literally. The text also says that "Egypt said 'Let me flee,'" which I understood to mean they were going to attempt to flee. But I had assumed that they were too stuck in the mud to have actually fled.

However, in verse 27, I was puzzled by the text's use of the term "וינער," which means to "shake off." The term is used for "winnowing" or "shaking off" the chaff from wheat. You can "shake off" or "sweep off" the crumbs from your lap. The typical translations I had previously seen translate this as "hurling" the Egyptians into the engulfing sea, but "hurling" more appropriately fits a term used later, "רמה", meaning "to cast upwards." As I now picture it, the Egyptians had gone pretty far on the dried path in the sea before God decided to smite their chariots. They were all far out from shore, deep in the middle of where the sea had been. Only then did God smite the Egyptians' chariots so they started wobbling. Perhaps they hadn't noticed mud building up on the chariot wheels messing with them at an earlier stage, but in any case wobbling wasn't a problem until later. Then they noticed the wobbling, making them drag as they moved forward. This "wobbling" the Egyptians saw as a sign of God's "fighting for Israel," causing the Egyptians to reverse course and flee. The Egyptians do seem to have made some headway in turning back, although they had not yet reached the shore. To make sure the Egyptians would not be able to escape from God's power, God had Moses stretch forth his staff to bring back the sea waters. The fleeing Egyptians retreating towards the shore were "swept off," back into the sea, like so many breadcrumbs swept off a lap.

The last term I'll examine is the usage of the word "חומה" or "wall," not because I have an alternate translation, but rather because having studied about sieges and fortifications in the Prophets, it now connotes more to me than just a metaphor for a vertical heap. A "wall" among Biblical inhabitants of fortified cities connotes a high degree of military protection. The "right and left" are also terms used in sword warfare. The story more vividly for me portrays God actively fighting for the Israelites, shielding them behind walls and actively sweeping away the enemy, so that not a one remained surviving. (I also prefer the "survived" translation over "remained.") May God similarly fight actively on our side and defend His People always, and may we remember that He invariably will continue to do so.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Beshalah-Shirah

January 14-15, 2022 | Shebat 12-13, 5782

### SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 4:34 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:45 pm

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

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

Outdoor Kiddush | following services

**NO Shabbat Afternoon Class this week.**

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 4:35 pm

Habdala | 5:20 pm

Virtual Habdala | 5:35 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

*We will be warming the Sanctuary up to make it more comfortable during these frosty times, while still maintaining COVID-19 safety protocols.*

### Weekday Service Times

#### Morning Services

Sunday & Monday (MLK Day): 8:05 am

Tuesday-Thursday: 7:05 am

#### Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 4:45 pm

**Reminder: WELL-FITTED MASKS REQUIRED INDOORS. KN95 PREFERRED.**  
*If you choose not to wear a mask outdoors when permitted, you represent & warrant that you're fully vaccinated.*

**Please send UPDATED vaccination card(s) to [info@shearithisrael.org](mailto:info@shearithisrael.org).**  
**Many upcoming activities will require proof of UP-TO-DATE vaccination & boosters.**

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## THIS SUNDAY

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### "The Most Fruitful Prayer In The Liturgy"

*A Tu B'Shebat Lecture and Sample Dishes with Rabbi Ira Rohde*

Sunday, January 16 | 7:30 pm | refer to our emails for the Zoom link

In honor of Tu B'Shebat, join Rabbi Ira Rohde as he examines "The Most Fruitful Prayer in Our Liturgy," the "El Na Otzarekha HaTob Petah MiZebulah"

by Joseph ibn Abitur.

By keeping the memory of the traditional agriculture and crops of the Holy Land alive, we will see how this poem nurtured and preserved a love for the Land. Rabbi Rohde will present recipes and sample dishes made from some of the more unfamiliar of the fruits mentioned.

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## LAST CHANCE

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*Don't Delay - Pre-Pay!*

### Membership Pre-Payment Offer

**DEADLINE: January 15**

Members, remember that you can pre-pay your July 2022-June 2023 dues now at this membership year's rates. Refer to our emails for instructions.

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## WE'RE HIRING YOUTH LEADERS!

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Want to help make Shabbat and Holiday mornings special for kids aged 5 -12, or know someone who does?

**We're hiring youth leaders!**

College students and beyond welcome to apply.

Check out our emails or our Facebook page to view the job description and apply now - or share this opportunity with your friends.

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## KIDDUSH

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### Sponsor a Hot Outdoor Kiddush!

Sponsoring a kiddush is a wonderful way to commemorate a special occasion or honor a loved one. We could use a couple of sponsors each week to help maintain the warmth of our community!

*To sponsor, visit [shearithisrael.org/outdoor-kiddush](https://shearithisrael.org/outdoor-kiddush).*

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## COMING UP

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*RESCHEDULED*

### Youth Trip to the Tenement Museum: *At Home in 1911*

**NEW DATE: Sunday, February 13 | 11:00 am**

**Meets at the Museum: 97 Orchard Street**

**Full vaccination required - bring proof!**

Our youth are invited on a special tour of the recreated 1910s apartment of an Eastern European Jewish family earning a living in the garment trade. Step into their home and experience what daily life was like for an immigrant family in 1911 – balancing work, family, community, and an evolving cultural identity.

*To register, visit [shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782](https://shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782).*

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### Parent-Child Learning - with S'mores!

**Next Session: Saturday Night, February 5**

This session will be led by Seth Haberman, on the topic of:

**"If God Wrote A Comic Book..."**

*For elementary school children and their parents or grandparents*

*To register, visit [shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782](https://shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782).*

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## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Mazal tob to **Yehudit Robinson** & Sam Daitch, upon the birth of a baby boy. Yehudit is a longtime teacher in our community and currently a tutor in our PTTS Hebrew School.

Mazal tob to **Suzanne Stern & Sjimon den Hollander**, upon the bat mitzvah of their granddaughter, Emunah Meisels; the marriage of Ruben den Hollander to Hadas Shaked; and the birth of a grandson, David Sebastiaan Worung.

We mourn the loss of our member **Leon "Muk" Eisenmann**. Condolences to his wife, Vivien, and his children, Esther Eisenmann Lauber and Marc Eisenmann.

Condolences to **Yonina Gomberg**, upon the passing of her grandfather.

Rabbi Feldman was the founding rabbi of The Westville Synagogue of New Haven, Connecticut, where he served for 50 years.

If you are aged 65+ or immunocompromised, **NYC will send a trained clinician to your home to do a free PCR test.** Available 7 days/week, 9am-7pm.

Call 929-298-9400 to schedule an appointment.