

Strength and Prosperity through Divine Blessing

“Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat your bread to satisfaction and live in safety in your land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down with no one to make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. You will still be eating last year’s harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new” (Lev. 26:5-10)

Strength and prosperity are about so much more than purely physical strength and purely physical prosperity. That is one of the distinct lessons from our Parasha, concluding the Book of Leviticus. True strength and prosperity come from God’s blessing, which Israel gains through following God’s laws and commands. Prosperity is defined as plenty enough to satisfy, as well enough to last. They will not have overabundance, but they will have enough to last from one crop-season to the next crop-season, as we find written here, as well as during stretches when they will not be planting and harvesting, such as over the Shemittah and Jubilee years, as mentioned in the previous Parasha. Their population shall increase. In terms of strength, it’s not as though they will be so powerful, but they will be strong enough to have peace without terror or fear: On the contrary, Israel’s enemies will be afraid of them, and they shall chase their enemies. A striking motif in the text is the phrase “five shall pursue one-hundred, and one-hundred shall pursue ten-thousand.” This “projection” of power, arousing such fear and dread in their enemies that the enemy will be afraid and flee even when that enemy is vastly larger than them, is seen as “miraculous,” a sign that their victory is the result of Divine Blessing.

Similar phrasing about weakness and fear, as well as impoverishment and desolation, are used in the “curses” section which follows. When Israel doesn’t follow God’s commands and laws, they come under God’s curse, which leads to weakness and desolation which are astonishing, inexplicable by any natural means. So fearful and filled with dread shall Israel become that they will flee even when no enemy pursues them, or when Israel is physically more numerous and stronger than their enemies and neighbors. Warfare and wanton destruction will lead to abandonment, causing cultivation to cease. Without cultivation the land will become desolate, wild desert, void of any sustenance. Thus weakness and impoverishment, too, can be about far more than physical issues. Although these “spiritual” sides of strength and prosperity and their opposites seem over-emphasized here, we all know how important they are even under more prosaic circumstances. Good morale and spirit leads to strength and prosperity, whereas poor morale can lead to downward spirals far worse than the original weakness and impoverishment. And our morale is very much related to our morality and discipline, our keeping God’s commands and laws.

Leviticus ends with a kind of “appendix,” after the blessings and curses. Although several of these laws are difficult to understand, what they all have in common is the payment of cash to redeem someone or something dedicated to God. There are many instances in which this cannot be done, but often, for a set fee, or for a fee on top of the basic worth, redemption of that which was required to be forfeited to God is possible. Of course, the Hebrew word for redemption of forfeit property is the same word used for God’s Redemption of His captive People, Israel, who have, on account of their sins, been forfeited to their enemies. This “appendix” section is thus intended to offer a renewal of hope, after the preceding curses which seemed to end the book. First the curses will take their toll and disobedience and lack of discipline must exact a heavy price. But the blessings of prosperity shall yet return once again, enabling the steep redemption price to be paid off. For its sins, Israel will not utterly be forfeit. Blessings and prosperity shall yet return. Israel will learn the discipline to pay its dues to God and discipline itself by God’s commandments. This will set Israel free and clear. Much will Israel have to forfeit to God’s wrath. But this will, in its wake, bring a great prosperity and security which will only be explainable as the result of God’s unique spiritual blessing.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Behukkothai

May 27-28, 2022 | 27 Iyar, 5782

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 542 | Haftarah: p. 551
Kaplan: p. 640 | Haftarah: p. 1178

Candle Lighting | 7:58 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Outdoors on Paved Paradise

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Gabi & Raph | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | Outdoors on Paved Paradise

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:15 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 8:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat Ends | 8:59 pm

Rosh Hodesh Sivan begins on Monday night.

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday (Yom Yerushalayim, with Hallel) & Monday (Memorial Day): 8:05 am
Tuesday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 6:30 pm

THIS WEEKEND

Girls' & Young Women's Annual Ruth Reading

TWO OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN!

Virtual date: THIS Sunday, May 29 | 9:00 am

In person on Shabuot Day II, Monday, June 6

Refer to our emails for the registration and zoom links.

Annual Chatham Square Memorial

Memorial Day, THIS Monday, May 30 | 10:30 am

Held at Chatham Square Cemetery, 55 St. James Place

Guest Speaker: Rabbi Yosef Zarnighian, Assistant Minister at Mikveh

Israel & Air Force chaplain

All ages are welcome. No registration required!

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

SPRING FUNDRAISER: GRAND FINALE

Last chance to be listed in the commemorative booklet!

A Special Videostream from Israel

filmed at ANU - Museum of the Jewish People

"What Shakespeare Missed:

The Sacred Sanctuaries of the Venice Ghetto"

THIS Tuesday, May 31 | 7:30 pm

For the full details and to sponsor or register, refer to our emails.

DEADLINE: Submit your tributes by THIS Tuesday, May 31!

Honor our Longtime Choirmaster, Leon Hyman

Day I of Shabuot, Sunday, June 5

Help us celebrate Leon Hyman's 66 years of service to Shearith Israel.

See our emails for instructions on how to pay tribute to Maestro Hyman.

SHABUOT

Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture

Saturday Night, June 4 | 11:00 pm

Enjoy this annual public lecture — Come for the Torah; stay for the cheesecake!

Early Evening Shabuot Pajama Party for CSI Youth

Shabuot I, Sunday, June 5 | Exact Time TBD | Led by Gabi & Raph

Who's ready for a Shabuot Pajama Party? Mac n Cheese, no-bake cheesecake, and family learning... all in partnership with the Sisterhood. Stay tuned to sign up!

COMING UP

Take advantage of our discount code "shearithisrael50" for 50% off!

Upheaval: The Journey of Menachem Begin

with introductory remarks by Rabbi Soloveichik

Wed, June 8 | 7 pm | 334 Amsterdam Ave, Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

In memory of Ambassador Yehuda Avner, whose opus, The Prime Ministers, inspired the production

In Rabbi Soloveichik's words: "As we mark the anniversary of the Osirak operation, we remember the man who stunned the world in 1981, a leader who joined strong action with communion to the past, who could order an ingenious operation and then pray to God for its success, a leader who joined faith and political leadership, a leader whose legacy looms so large today."

Refer to our emails for the registration link.

2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor & Graduation Kiddush

Shabbat, June 18 | Following Morning Services

Submit your graduate's information to ensure that we can properly list and congratulate them in our 2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor! Kiddush sponsorships are appreciated.

Refer to our emails for the link.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Gail Propp**, upon receiving an honorary degree from Bar Ilan University.

We mourn the passing of our member, **Judith Sherman**.

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Support West Side Hatzolah!

West Side Hatzolah counts on our support to finance their important work!

To donate, go to hatzalahthon.com/westsidehatzolah/sp.