

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Entrusting Noah the Just with Stewardship Over the Natural World

Last year in my Debar Torah I wrote that by the Rainbow Covenant God put Noah in charge of administering justice among men on Earth. No longer would God interfere in dispensing Justice, utterly destroying Earth in punishment for Man's corruption. Hence from the time of Noah, Man is traditionally understood to be required to set up a justice and governmental system to administer the so-called Noachide Laws. Some of the actual rules preceded Noah, going back at least as far as Cain. But they are Noachide in the sense that from the time of Noah, the primary responsibility for enforcing these laws was placed upon Noah and his descendants. Before that, the responsibility for enforcement and punishment had been upon God Himself. But Noah as the first "tzaddik," the first truly just or righteous man, found favor in the Eyes of God, and God entrusted stewardship over human justice to Noah and his descendants. In next week's Parashah, of course, God does get directly involved in bringing the inhabitants of Sodom to justice. But we can explain that the problem with Sodom was precisely that its inhabitants had reneged upon their responsibility to enforce the Noachide Laws and administer justice. When a society does try to administer justice, perhaps even if that government does not do so particularly well, God won't interfere directly. However, in the case of Sodom, when no attempt is even made to administer the laws and the laws are ignored, perhaps God reserves the right to intervene. Perhaps that is also the case when Nineveh was threatened during Jonah's time, or when Israel ignored enforcing our own special Covenant, and that's why God would punish directly.

But this year I also note that by the Rainbow Covenant Man is given stewardship over the Natural World, in addition to the Human World. Perhaps Adam was theoretically given dominion over the Natural World, from the plants of the field to the trees to the fowl of the skies, to the domesticated and wild animals upon the Earth, down to the fish in the Sea. But it is not until Noah that Man is actually given administrative and stewardship duties over all of these. Noah's being given stewardship over the animals in the Ark and his having carried out that stewardship in a Just and Righteous way showed that he and his descendants could be trusted as faithful wardens and guardians over the Created Natural World, in addition to the Human World. Noah is explicitly permitted to eat meat of every kind because, in return for administering and stewarding the animals on the Ark, Noah's descendants are henceforth charged with stewarding and governing the animal world.

Was God right in trusting the stewardship and governance of both the Natural as well as the Human World to Man? Is Man indeed the rightful and fit Monarch and Steward of Creation? Well, last week I got some responses from two sources: One friend pointed out that Man has continually failed in administering justice among men, and that our human societies are constantly filled with injustice. And with regard to the Natural World, Man continues to pollute, disrespect and deteriorate the Natural World. Another friend wrote that Man's technology from the beginnings of agriculture on have been continually devastating the Natural World, and the pace of that natural devastation quickens as the technology becomes more advanced. The solution for him may lie in a return to being in harmony with the Natural World, not in attempting to exert Man's rulership and dominion over it. In the Human Realm, the parallel solution would be to refrain from anything which smacks of Monarchy and Government, instead trying to adapt Human Society to the quirks of different personalities, trying to attune society to different people's natures and to try as best we can to respond and harmonize with what each one naturally wants.

My answer to those objections is that although I don't wish to offend those who've witnessed so much rampant destruction, nowadays ever more technologically-empowered (and hence amplified in its destructive capacity), of humans as well as of animals and Nature itself, I believe our Jewish tradition still maintains the Biblical optimism of Genesis and Noah: Man indeed is fit to be a responsible governor and administrator of justice in both the Human and Natural World. Governance can indeed attune itself with people's different natures, and this can indeed form a part of a strategy of Governance and Guardianship. But we needn't give up upon Man's reigning and serving as guardian over both Humankind and Nature. I previously summarized my view of punishment in the Bible as the thesis that "Punishment Works." Well, now I would expand that thesis to say "Government Works." The answer is not a return to a reliance upon Nature. The Bible is confident that Noah the Just's descendants are endowed with the capacity to responsibly rule and exert dominion over both the Human and Natural realms. Despite all Man's miscarriages of justice, the Bible is optimistic that Man can and will govern justly. Despite Man's destruction of Nature, Man can indeed protect and even enhance the Natural World, tending it as his garden and park preserve. Man's agricultural technology enhances Nature's productivity, providing more food for Man and beast and enabling them all to be fruitful, multiply, and thrive. Man fully can and will eventually restore and establish Just and Good Human Governance, and he can and will restore and enhance Nature, even when it has been decimated. Here in New York City, many times I've marveled at how polluted environments can be restored, and I've swum in a cleaned-up Hudson River, with plentiful small fish and even tuna and whales returning to New York Harbor. Of course, Man will make many destructive errors, for as God says, Man's Heart's Inclination has been Evil since his very Youth. It might be possible to interpret God's giving over governance of Man and Nature to Man as God "throwing up His Hands," handing the reins to Noah's descendants in disgust. But to me, it seems that the favorable acceptance of Noah's offering implies the more positive outlook. With careful human tending, deserts can bloom and justice can be pursued. But as my friend Barefoot Ken writes, "just that it is incumbent...to hold ourselves accountable. Remain vigilant. Challenge our assumptions. Take nothing for granted. Think through the implications of our choices and decide accordingly, the way a Partner [in Creation] should."



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Noah

October 28-29, 2022 | 4 Marbeshvan 5783

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Bar Mitzvah of Ness Sasson-Gelman

Hertz: p. 26 | Haftarah: p. 41

Kaplan: p. 26 | Haftarah: p. 1054

Candle Lighting | 5:39 pm

Friday Evening Services | 5:45 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights 5783 Premiere & Myer Myers *Rimonim* Exhibit | following services | *2022-2023 Season of Friday Night Lights is sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush Luncheon | following services | Paved Paradise | *Sponsored by the Sasson-Gelman family, in honor of Ness's Bar Mitzvah*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:45 pm

Evening Services | 5:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 6:26 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: **5:40 pm**

THIS SHABBAT

***Friday Night Lights* Season Premiere & Exhibit**
Shearith Israel's Three Sets of Myer Myers *Rimonim*
This Shabbat, October 28 | Following Friday Evening Services
At Shearith Israel

Myer Myers: the preeminent Jewish silversmith of the colonial era; congregant and Parnas of Shearith Israel; creator of three of Shearith Israel's priceless sets of historic *rimonim*, admired by experts and collectors of American Judaica.

After a beautiful holiday season at Shearith Israel and this one-time opportunity to view them, the three sets will be re-loaned to their temporary abodes at the New-York Historical Society, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and at the Touro Synagogue, respectively.

*With promotional support from the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan &
New-York Historical Society*

LAST CHANCE

There's Still Time to Support our
Hatanim Celebration Fall Fundraiser
Add your name to our list of generous supporters

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To join our list of sponsors, go to shearithisrael.org/batanim5783.
(List as of October 25, with apologies for any omissions)

COMING UP

The Sisterhood invites the entire community to a Sunday Matinee

ARRIVALS: A Sephardi-Ashkenazi Love Story
Sunday, November 6 | 3 pm | Discount: \$36 per ticket! (Regular: \$50)
Performed at the Center for Jewish History, 15 W 16th St.

The Sisterhood invites the whole community to join us for the NY premiere of this new off-Broadway show, telling a Romeo and Juliet style tale of how a Sephardic Jew from Turkey met an Ashkenazi Jew from Russia in Seattle, WA. The show is appropriate for adults, teens, and tweens.

Use code "GroupSHI" at tinyurl.com/ArrivalsPlay to get your discount.

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood is back!
Starting on Sunday, November 13

This season we are presenting our own mini Israeli film festival.
We are offering three Israeli films, one each in November, December, and January, each to be viewed at your leisure. Then we will come together on Zoom to discuss the featured film with our host, **Emanuel Cohn**, a prominent Israeli film lecturer, actor, and screenwriter. The discussion will include peeks behind the scenes and in-depth conversation as we explore the relationship between history, culture, and identity in each film.

Registration and details at shearithisrael.org/events/sisterhood-film-fest.

Each film: \$10.00 | All three: \$18.00

A link will be sent to you to watch the film, a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Ness Sasson-Gelman** upon becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations as well to his parents, **Edie Sasson-Gelman & Michael Gelman**, and the entire family.

Mazal tob to **Florie & Benson Jerusalem**, upon the birth of a grandson.

Mazal tob to our Segan, **Michael Lustig**, who will be honored with the *Shofar Award* at this year's JCRC Benefit, which will be held on Thursday, December 15. To learn more and support Michael and the JCRC, visit jrcrcnybenefit.org.

Of interest: **Joelle Wallach's** *Suffrage Signatures* for flute, harp, violin, viola, and cello, commissioned by Canta Libre Chamber Ensemble and created to celebrate 100 years of women having the right to vote, will be presented on November 12 at 7:30 pm at Vladek Hall, 74 Van Cortlandt Park South in The Bronx.