

The Importance of the Humbling Memory of Slavery

For quite some time I have been trying to ponder the founding stories, lore, and law of the Torah from the perspective of why the later generations who kept this lore found it valuable and what preserving this lore tells us about the views and perspective of those who kept it. The story of Israelite origins from slavery in Egypt and Exodus from it was clearly one of the key elements of Israelite origins which both God and Jews wanted preserved and kept in mind in many ways, and we must examine what that says about Jewish Israelite self-conception.

It's worth remarking, first of all, about the uniqueness of such a strong preservation of the memory of having formerly been slaves among Jews. It is so strong that a good number of our observances, such as Passover and Shabbat, are dedicated to conserving this self-conception. I don't believe that Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists or other national and ethnic entities root their origins in abject slavery and memory of it in such a way. Christians who preserved the Bible seem to have seen themselves as rooted in sin, arrogance, poverty, and death and in that way lack redemption and salvation, but don't require the Christian to see himself as a former slave. Americans couch their understanding of themselves as a people who struggled to be free, but it is a struggle to preserve freedoms and rights from being infringed rather than an emergence out of being enslaved. African-Americans did indeed have the memory and lore of having been enslaved as a key part of their identity, but are in a number of ways ambivalent about how foundational its memory and lore should be.

For Israel, Judeans and later Jews, on the other hand, thinking of their people and themselves as founded under slavery is at least supposed to affect their self-conception in a number of ways. There is a certain type of implication that Jews should be humble and lowly because we had nothing and were entitled to nothing as slaves, and we had rather be thankful for every freedom and worldly benefit which God bestows upon us. In exchange for His securing our release from servitude to a human master, we instead now owe Him eternal bondage to do His Will. We have turned humility and servility into a positive. We feel we "learn" from the many bad things which happened to us in slavery, and we will continue to "learn" from other similar adversity. The "punishment" of Egyptian slavery expiated the sin of Joseph's brothers, and keeping its memory alive we think will help later Israelites from committing similar atrocities against their fellows which would sell-out their brother Israelites. As I keep emphasizing in our Biblical Prophets class, for the Bible, punishment is considered effective and good. The emphasis upon our beginnings in abject slavery is a particularly salient aspect of this in Jewish thought.

At the same time, however, there is an extreme comparison and contrast of slavery with nobility and even royalty which is not altogether negative and in many ways is good. The Israelites come from noble origins. Joseph himself was a powerful and noble figure. Moses was saved by the daughter of Pharaoh and grows up as a Pharaonic royal prince. Israelite freedom and nobility is work attaining, and freedom from enslavement must be valued and fought for. The experience of abject servitude and subjugation to foreign human powers should make us all want to subjugate and humble ourselves in service to God, to our families/brethren to and country. In that way, we hope to merit that we not suffer such brutal treatment by others ever again.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Shemoth

January 13-14, 2023 | 21 Tebeth 5783

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 205 | Haftarah: p. 229

Kaplan: p. 258 | Haftarah: p. 1212

Candle Lighting | 4:33 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

The choir will return next week.

Friday Night Lights | following services | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary | Special Lecture by Rabbi Soloveichik:

"Who Was the Pharaoh of the Exodus? A Tale of Rameses, Moses, and Akhenaten"

The choir will return next week.

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:40 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Evening Services | 4:25 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 5:19 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday & Monday (MLK Day): 8:05 am | Tuesday-Friday: 7:05 am

*Our office will be **closed** on Monday for the legal holiday.*

Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: **4:45 pm**

The earlier time means a harder time making a minyan. If you can help out and attend minyan, morning or evening, please contact Z. Edinger.

COMING UP

A Community Shabbat Dinner with *Magevet*, Yale's Jewish Acapella Group

**Friday Evening, Shabbat Shira, February 3
Following Evening Services & *Friday Night Lights***

What better way to enjoy Shabbat Shira than with *shira*, song? Following our Friday evening services – always musically exquisite – registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by *Magevet*, Yale University's Jewish, Hebrew, and Israeli acapella group. A co-ed ensemble, comprised of talented undergraduate students at Yale University, *Magevet* is known for its sweet blend of voices, unique arrangements, and lighthearted sense of humor, and is one of the nation's premiere Jewish acapella singing groups.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/events/magevet-dinner.

PRICING

Member Adult - \$52

Non-member Adult - \$56

Child - \$35

Sponsorship opportunities available

*The Shearith Israel League, the American Sephardi Federation,
the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, & the Sephardic Foundation on Aging
proudly present:*

Kontar i Kantar: 6th Annual New York Ladino Day

**In-Person | Sunday, January 29 | 2:00 pm
Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, Manhattan**

Ladino is a bridge to many cultures. A variety of Spanish, it has absorbed words from Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, French, Greek, and Portuguese. The mother tongue of Jews in the Ottoman Empire for 500 years, Ladino became the home language of Sephardim worldwide. While the number of Ladino speakers has sharply declined, distinguished Ladino Day programs like ours celebrate a vibrant language and heritage. These programs are, as Aviya Kushner has written in the Forward, "Why Ladino Will Rise Again."

For registration and details, visit shearithisrael.org/events/ladino-day2023.

COMING UP

CSI Youth Tour of the Museum of Natural History With Rabbi Soloveichik

Sunday, January 29 | 11:00 am

Signup instructions at shearithisrael.org/events/amnh-youth-tour.

The Sisterhood presents

Bird Rescue Workshop with Wild Bird Fund

Sunday, February 5 | 11:00 am-1:00 pm | Levy Auditorium

All ages welcome!

The Sisterhood has partnered with the Wild Bird Fund to present this special workshop for all ages. Have you ever wondered who the NYC birds are? What is bird rehabilitation? How can you help? Join us to learn!

Register at shearithisrael.org/events/wbf.

Guided Tour of "Crossroads of Sefarad" Exhibit

February 12 | 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Upon entering the Levy Auditorium, you will no doubt notice the beautiful new exhibit displayed on the walls. Created by ANU – Museum of the Jewish People, in partnership with the Jewish Heritage Alliance, this exhibit explores the history of the Sephardic Jews on the Iberian Peninsula, their prosperity and growth under different governments, and their eventual expulsion starting in 1492.

Warren Klein, curator of the Herbert & Eileen Bernard Museum of Judaica at Temple Emanu-El, will lead a guided tour of the exhibit on February 12 - don't miss it!

Sign up for the tour at shearithisrael.org/events/crossroads.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We mourn the loss of our former member, **Els Bendheim** (née Salomon). Condolences to her daughter, **Aviva Sussman**, and to the entire Bendheim and Salomon family.

We mourn the loss of our member, **Thomas Unterberg**. Condolences to his daughter, **Emily Satloff**, and the entire family.