

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

The Famous, Zealous, Anonymous God

1 But the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for because of My Mighty Hand he will let the people go; because of My Strong Hand he will drive them out of his land." 2 God also told Moses, "I am YHWH. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but My Fame [as] YHVH I have not made Myself known to them (Ex. 6:1-3).

In my rendering of the verses above I changed little else but one letter from the standard translations: I translated the Hebrew word **שֵׁם** as "Fame," with an "F", rather than the usual translation as "Name," with an "n." Both English terms rhyme perfectly with the Hebrew term pronounced "Shem," but commentators have traditionally struggled with the common translation: After all, Genesis and the beginning of Exodus use the "YHVH" several times before this, so how can our text write that "My Name [as] YHVH I have not made Myself known to them?" But this Hebrew term usually translated as "name" has another definition in Biblical Hebrew lexicons meaning "reputation," "fame," usually a glorious reputation. We similarly use the word "name" in English when we say we want to "make a name" for ourselves. Similar Hebrew understandings of the term are evident in the Tower of Babel story when they build the tower "to make a name" for themselves, or when God promises to magnify Abraham's "name," meaning Abraham's reputation. Usually this refers to a "glorious" reputation, but the term can be translated as a "byword" or "reputation" for evil, as well as good.

This helps explain why the "hardening of Pharaoh's heart" has to happen in the story: The LORD's Fame and Reputation as a powerful God is made manifest through the Plagues and His having forced Pharaoh to do His bidding. But wasn't this Glorious Reputation already made manifest to Abraham, for example, in his War of the Nine Kings? The answer is no: Against Egypt, YHVH Himself wages war, and His Personal Glorious Fame and Reputation as Warrior/Protector of Israel is made manifest. Abraham, on the other hand, was not yet a nation; he waged war as an individual "general" or "commander" of ordinary battle forces, although there was Divine blessing and protection. But now, after their multiplying and becoming a nation in Egypt, Israel has need to establish a reputation as having a powerful and formidable collective "National Spirit" to save the common territory and commonwealth of their nation from internal enemies well as from those on its boundaries. This is why the next verse goes on to connect the establishing of God's Formidable Reputation with the promise to give Israel its own National Territory in Canaan. Israel's National Spirit must establish His Reputation established as a Force to be reckoned with.

Perhaps I should add that this "Fame" of God is particularly associated, as it is here, with YHVH's jealous rage against any violations of Israel's covenant of exclusive loyalty to Him, whether Israel is forcefully violated through others (such as, in this case, enemies such as Egypt) or whether Israel of its own accord chooses or is led astray to violate its contract with God. But the "Fame" of God associated with God's "Name" is also associated on the positive side with YHVH's keen, zealous, loyal, and rather exclusivist love for Israel, as well. God is Famed for both His Fervent Love as well as His Jealous Vehement Rage. It is less clear, however, what the YHVH itself means, although this may be connected to His devotional, exclusivist zeal.

Particularly in the verses I quoted above I argue that the term **שֵׁם** should be understood as "reputation" or "fame." Now, a "name" is always connected with repute, since it is through having a particular, differentiated and recognized "name" that one avoids "anonymity," which literally means being "nameless." One has no repute if one is nameless. At the same time, names tend to pin us down, and make us too "recognizable." So perhaps what the Torah is striving for here as "u-Shemi YHVH" is a combination of fame and repute with iconoclastic namelessness. The LORD of Israel could be termed "The Famous, Zealous, Anonymous God."



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vaera

January 20-21, 2023 | 28 Tebeth 5783

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 232 | Haftarah: p. 244

Kaplan: p. 281 | Haftarah: p. 1096

Candle Lighting | 4:45 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:45 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | following services | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am

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

"The Secret of Pharaoh's Telltale Heart: Torah, Edgar Allan Poe, and Egyptology"

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:50 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Evening Services | 4:35 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 5:28 pm

Rosh Hodesh Shebat will begin on Sunday night.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

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

Featuring our own Rabbi Robde and Rev. Edinger

Friday Evening, Shabbat Shira, February 3

Following Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

What better way to enjoy Shabbat Shira than with *shira*, song? *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.

How to Talk To Your Children About Antisemitism

Virtual Event | Wednesday, February 1 | 8:00 pm

*This virtual event is open to all but specifically geared for parents
of children in grades K-8*

Refer to our emails for the registration link

In the face of the increasing normalization of antisemitism across mainstream society, join UJA-Federation of New York for a timely briefing on how parents can communicate to their children about this critical topic.

COMING UP

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

Sunday, January 29 | 11:00 am | For kids & their parents

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.

West Side-Wide Ski Trip

Sunday, February 5 | 7:30 am - 4:30 pm | Camelback Mountain | For all ages

Register at jewishcenter.org.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences to **Rabbi Sjimon den Hollander**, upon the passing of his father, Antonius den Hollander.

Condolences to **Debbie Sable**, upon the passing of her mother, Miriam ("Mimi") Avner.

We mourn the loss of our friend, Stephen Neuwirth.