

## DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

### Making Ourselves Vulnerable to Entice the Enemy into Final Defeat

What made Pharaoh chase after the Children of Israel near the Reed Sea? Several reasons seem combined in Ex. 14:1-5, but the first and most comprehensive is that Pharaoh was “taken in” by a trap, enticed by the apparent ease with which he thought he could take back the Israelites. God gives explicit orders to Moses to “turn back” and encamp near the Sea, maneuvering to a spot in which they seemed quite vulnerable, “closed in,” it seemed, by the desert on the one side and the Sea on the other. It’s not clear exactly what this meant geographically, for they were still headed towards Sinai or the eastern Egyptian coast, and surely were not headed west towards the Nile valley of Egypt proper. But in the context of their having declined to take the northerly coastal “road of the Philistines,” and likely after moving northwards to start and consider such a route, we may propose that that they now headed southwards towards the Egyptian Gulf of Suez coast. Although such a move was still eastwards, away from the Nile, it was now southerly in the general direction of Egypt (although where exactly Baal Zephon is, which seems to have to do with some “northerly” locale, is subject to debate). The maneuver seems to have been geared to trick Pharaoh into thinking that the Israelites were “caught up” in aimless wandering in the desert, and to entice him and his Egyptian forces to give chase. According to this view, it would seem, God intended from the outset to lead the Israelites through the Sea; the Splitting of the Sea was not a response to the outcry of the Israelites per se. Indeed, their outcry seems entirely justified in light of this maneuver’s having made them more vulnerable.

Verse 5 says that “when the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled,” implying that up until then Pharaoh and the Egyptians had believed the Israelites were just going to observe a festival for three days or so and return. Perhaps the move in a generally eastward direction rather than westwards towards the Nile did definitively demonstrate the Israelites’ true intentions to leave Egypt and Egyptian slavery once and for all. But it’s likely that most of Egypt had already wanted the Israelites, the curse of their plagues and their God, gone for good, with no thought that they should return. Hence the report the Israelites had definitively fled and gone off away from Egypt was just an excuse. Similarly, the realization that this agreement to send off the Israelites for their festival now meant the permanent loss of their slaves was mostly an excuse for the Egyptians’ “change of heart.” What really enticed Pharaoh to change his mind and give chase was the impression left by the maneuver that the Israelites were now hemmed in and trapped and hence an easy target. Pharaoh thought he had little or nothing to lose by pursuing this seemingly lost, ragtag and inexperienced rabble in the desert, so why should Egypt give up on regaining them as slaves?

The Children of Israel, on the other hand, became desperate and terrified, both by the prospect of seeming lost and hemmed-in by desert and sea as well as by the oncoming Egyptian advance. They must have realized that Moses’ unexplained order to “turn back” to this spot between the desert and the seacoast left them apparently even more exposed and vulnerable than before. Yet only this way, through a final, decisive trouncing of Pharaoh’s forces, could God give Israel the freedom they sought. Only this dangerous and deceptive maneuvering to entice Pharaoh to pursue Israel to the coast and then follow into the very seabed itself, which was all part of this one last “Hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,” would lead to Egypt’s decisive defeat and Israel’s independence. And only Israel’s desperation at being cornered and having no other choice could have spurred them to push forward into the seabed. Of course, the weaknesses of relying upon chariot warfare tactics were quite well-known to later Israelites, as seen in the haftarah from Judges, and perhaps those weaknesses were already well-known at the time of the Exodus. Chariots could move quickly on roads and when the terrain was flat and easily passable, but Israel tended to settle in more difficult terrain, among steep hard-to-climb hilltops and deep ravines and valleys like the Jezreel-Kishon which could flood suddenly. The Torah’s prohibitions against a king’s amassing horses were based upon a traditional Israelite bias against chariot warfare because of these drawbacks. So although the Splitting of the Sea was doubtless a unique miracle, maneuvering foot-soldiers in order to entice and ensnare a chariot-armed enemy was likely a known warfare tactic.

There come times when only desperation and pushing things to the brink will bring a full release. This may require putting ourselves and others in peril and maneuvers which seem to leave us exposed and vulnerable, emboldening our opponents. But at times independence and freedom can only be decisively won by pushing for such a final confrontation, even at the price of increasing our apparent vulnerability.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Beshalah-Shira

February 3-4, 2023 | 13 Shebat 5783

### SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 265 | Haftarah: p. 283

Kaplan: p. 320 | Haftarah: p. 1108

**Candle Lighting** | 4:58 pm

**Friday Evening Services** | 5:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

**Friday Night Lights** | following services | Main Sanctuary | *2022-2023 Season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family*

**Community Dinner with Magevet** | *for registered guests* | following Friday Night Lights | Levy Auditorium

**Zemirot** | 8:15 am

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

**Youth Program** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

**Kiddush** | following services | *Sponsored by Liliane Marks in memory of her husband, Neville Marks | Kiddush support by Esme and Roger Berg in honor of their son, Louis Alexandre Berg, reading his haftarah, and the birth of his son, Raphael Leon (Arieh), who was born in October*

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 4:05 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

**Evening Services** | 4:50 pm | Main Sanctuary

**Habdala** | 5:46 pm

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

#### Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: **5:10 pm**

*If you can help out and attend minyan, morning or evening, please contact Z. Edinger.*

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | [www.shearithisrael.org](http://www.shearithisrael.org)

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## THIS SUNDAY

*The Sisterhood presents*

### **Bird Rescue Workshop with Wild Bird Fund**

For all ages!

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

The Sisterhood has partnered with the Wild Bird Fund to present this special workshop for all ages. Join us for a unique experience, including a presentation on the fascinating world of birds, a display of posters with stunning bird pictures, and some hands-on fun with live pigeons for you to observe and interact with!

Register at [shearithisrael.org/events/wbf](http://shearithisrael.org/events/wbf).

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### **The Fruited Song:**

#### **A Tu B'Shebat Lecture and Sample Dishes**

*with Rabbi Ira Rohde*

This Sunday, February 5 | 7:30 pm | On Zoom

Continuing his study of fruits in Hebrew poetry in honor of Tu B'Shebat, Rabbi Rohde will be discussing fruits and other Biblical flora mentioned in the Song of Songs, and what these allusions signify. Join him this year as he examines "The Fruited Song." At that time, Rabbi Rohde will present samples of some of the mentioned fruits and sample dishes made from them.

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## COMING UP

*Sundays with Sisterhood*

### **The Illustrated Sephardi Ketubah Over The Ages**

Sunday, February 12 | 10:00 am | On Zoom | Cost: \$12.00

*Led by Shalom Sabar*

Our speaker will be the world-renowned scholar and author, Shalom Sabar, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Art History and Folklore at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As part of the Sisterhood's ongoing exploration of history, culture, and identity, Professor Sabar will dazzle us with an illustrated tour of the evolution of the *ketubah*, from pre-expulsion to its flourishing in the Sephardi world.

Register at [shearithisrael.org/events/ketubbah](http://shearithisrael.org/events/ketubbah).

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## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Esther & William Schulder**, upon their, grandson, Zeke (son of Jessica Orbach & Meyer Orbach of Englewood, NJ), becoming a Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat.

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## COMING UP

### **Motzei Shabbat Parent-Child Learning**

Sat. Night, February 11 | Led by the Jakobishvili family

Sat. Night, February 25 | Led by Dr. Peshia Kletenik, Head of School, MDS

Register at [shearithisrael.org/pcl](http://shearithisrael.org/pcl).

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### **Guided Tour of "Crossroads of Sefarad" Exhibit**

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

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 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](http://shearithisrael.org/events/crossroads).

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## PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Monday night, March 6-Tuesday, March 7

Purim Night Services, followed by Megillah: 5:55 pm

For CSI Youth: Myron the Magnificent's Purim Magic Show: 5:45 pm

Late Reading of Megillah: 8:00 pm

Purim Morning Reading of the Megillah: 8:00 am

Women's Megillah Reading in Small Sanctuary: 8:00 am

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*Readers Welcome!*

### **Women's Megillah Reading**

Purim Morning, Tues, March 7 | 8:00 am | *Rehearsals: Feb 12 & 26 | 6:15 pm*

On the morning of Purim, the women and girls of the synagogue conduct a parallel Women's Megillah reading in the Small Synagogue. Join us for our 34th year!

**New readers are warmly invited to participate.**

*Any woman or girl above bat mitzvah age is very welcome to participate and should contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at [lrohde-csi@yahoo.com](mailto:lrohde-csi@yahoo.com) as soon as possible for an assignment of at least half a chapter.*