



## Purification for Battle: Seeking Atonement & Forgiveness When You Muster

The placement of the offering of a half-shekel per enlisted man to number the ranks of the Israelites amongst the laws of sacrifices and the Tabernacle seems unusual. And yet many of the terms associated with the half-shekel offering reflect the context of sacrifice: Above all, there is an emphasis upon atonement; indeed, “atonement for their lives/souls.” And even the very title term “Ki-Tissa” for the Parasha, taken from the start of its second verse (30:12), could be interpreted to mean: “When you seek forgiveness for each one of Israel in their ranks...” This interpretation would tie this section more closely to the sections about sacrifice, atonement and purification which surround the section as well as to the story of the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf which follows. But despite all the similar terminology and the implication of seeking forgiveness, why bring up this half-shekel topic right in the middle of the Tabernacle laws?

One could answer that this regular “tax” of an equal payment per man is how much of the public sacrifices of animals, flour, wine, oil, and incense were paid for. The Torah wanted to make sure that every adult male citizen had a stake in the public welfare which in some ways was equal to that of every other citizen to assure a level of public equality. But it’s not indeed clear from the passage that this was the primary use for these funds, or that the sacrifices were largely funded from this source. There were several collections of funds for the Tabernacle, and it’s not clear what was specifically collected for construction needs and what was used to pay for ongoing sacrifices. And if the half-shekel was indeed the sacrificial funding source, why discuss this in the middle of the sacrificial descriptions? Does this imply they only got tax money for sacrifices when they took a census of the fighting men?

Perhaps, indeed, this was the only way of imposing a universal fair public tax. And perhaps this section is not only talking about counting men for warfare, but a similar equal procedure of a half-shekel per man was used on a regular basis whenever equitable taxes for public civic duties needed to be raised. Yet the terminology of “atonement for your lives” suggests that something much deeper than fair tax collection is what is primarily under discussion.

J. H. Hertz mentions a Karaite commentator’s interpretation that the “plague” which was to be avoided through counting the ranks via half-shekel offerings was a military defeat. Quantifying the numbers of the ranks could easily lead to either overconfidence or under-confidence. Strength and victory in battle comes from God, and does not come from numbers alone, although it is necessary to array the ranks by number. In order for God to bring victory without great losses, let alone suffering and defeat, we must purify ourselves and our hearts in loyalty to God and his command, and seek His Favor for our cause. For that we require atonement and forgiveness from Him first. The inclusion of the narrative of the Golden Calf in the middle of the instructions for the Tabernacle and its sacrifices also seems to be quite an aside. The most salient interpretation is that the idolatry of the Golden Calf was seen as the archetypal sin of disloyalty, and the means by which atonement and forgiveness for that great sin were attained became the prototype for whenever forgiveness and atonement were sought. The story of the Golden Calf, in other words, was included within this “sacrificial” context because of Moses’ successful beseeching of God’s forgiveness and the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy learned from that episode, which our liturgy invokes ever since, when we require atonement from sin and God’s forgiveness.

Battle was the most severe and frightening of the tests the Israelites faced. It therefore required the most severe of disciplines, preparations, and sacrifices if it was to succeed. The esprit de corps had to be mustered as well as the troops. Battle was the ultimate sacrifice. The troops had to feel certain God and their comrades were on their side. Oddly enough, the discipline, the giving of sacrifice or moneys for atonement, didn’t burden the men, but made them feel each had a stake in the outcome of the battle. Mustering to battle for the common good required the culmination of pure faith that God Alone would bring them victory, not the strength of their own arms. The great sacrifice and dedication needed for the public good must be inspired by a context of pure intention for private and public sacrifice and dedication. When you muster to prepare yourselves for battle against enemies without and within – this is the moment when you most need to seek purification, dedication, atonement and forgiveness from God. In your fear, you might seek recourse in statistics, but you instead must most invoke God’s Mercy, seeking atonement and forgiveness. God awards victory to those whose dedication is pure. This is the fitting message of this Parasha upon this Shabbat Parah, the Sabbath of Purification par excellence.

## Shabbat Ki Tissa-Parah March 10-11, 2023 | 18 Adar 5783

### SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 352 | Haftarah: p. 999 | Parah: p. 652  
Kaplan: p. 440 | Haftarah: p. 1278 | Parah : p. 756

**Candle Lighting** | 5:39 pm  
**Friday Evening Services** | 5:45 pm | Main Sanctuary  
**Friday Night Lights** | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik | 2022-2023  
*season 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** | following services | Levy Auditorium | *Scotch sponsor: Suzanne Morad, in memory of Benjamin Said Morad*

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 4:50 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik  
**Evening Services** | 5:35 pm | Main Sanctuary  
**Habdala** | 6:32 pm

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

#### Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: **6:30 pm**

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

## COMING UP

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### *2023 Spring Fundraiser*

#### **WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: Seven Iconic Images in the History of Israel, and the Stories Behind Them**

*An Important 7-Part Virtual Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik*  
**Beginning Monday, April 17**

In this series of seven lectures, Rabbi Soloveichik will examine seven of the most iconic images in the history of Israel, telling the story behind each photo, and the event or person it captured. Each presentation will be offered over Zoom and will be a visual experience, pairing the image with many others, revealing largely unknown aspects in Israeli history. This, in turn, will allow us to better appreciate what it means to mark Israel's 75th year, and to look expectantly toward its future.

This special series serves as our Congregation's annual Spring Fundraiser and provides essential support to our Congregation. **All sponsors will be recognized in a beautiful content-rich commemorative booklet that will be mailed out after the series.**

**Sign-up levels from \$250 to \$18,000**

*Sign up at [shearithisrael.org/events/SpringFundraiser2023](https://shearithisrael.org/events/SpringFundraiser2023)*

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### **CSI Youth Shabbat Family Luncheon**

**NEXT Shabbat, March 18 | Following Services and Kiddush**  
*featuring family-friendly lunch from Holy Schnitzel*

Kids! Get ready for an epic game of Gaga with Gabi!

Parents, just relax and enjoy each other's company.

Don't forget to invite your local friends to share in the beauty of Shearith Israel and the warmth of our community.

*Register or sponsor at [shearithisrael.org/events/yf-march-lunch](https://shearithisrael.org/events/yf-march-lunch).*

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*SOLD OUT – Join the Waitlist*

### **Exclusive Pre-Pesah Tours at the Metropolitan Museum of Art**

*Led by Rabbi Soloveichik*

**Sunday Afternoon, March 26**

*Register at the link below to have your name added to our waitlist. If we are unable to accommodate you, we will offer you a refund. Join the waitlist at [shearithisrael.org/met-tour23](https://shearithisrael.org/met-tour23).*

## COMING UP

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*AN IMPORTANT BOOK LAUNCH*

### **The Posen Library of Jewish Culture & Civilization: *The Early Modern Period, 1500-1750, Volume 5***

**Thursday, March 23 | Main Sanctuary | 7:00 pm, following 6:30 pm Services**

*Featuring*

**a panel discussion with distinguished Jewish historians, and  
a short performance by the Shearith Israel Choir**  
*Followed by a reception in the Levy Auditorium*

Join panelists Professors **Deborah Dash Moore, Elisheva Carlebach, Francesca Bregoli, and Mayer Juni**, with opening remarks by **Rabbi Soloveichik**, to celebrate the publication of *The Early Modern Period, 1500-1750, Volume 5* of The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization edited by Yosef Kaplan. The discussion will present fascinating dimensions of Jewish culture and civilization across three centuries from 1500 to 1800.

*Register at [shearithisrael.org/events/posen](https://shearithisrael.org/events/posen).*

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*The Sisterhood of Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue presents:*

### **Hands-On Flower Arranging Class with Rose Edinger**

**Tuesday, March 21 | 7:30 pm | On Zoom, from the comfort of your home**

With Spring just around the corner, it's time to bring the joy of flowers into your life.

All you need are fresh flowers, foliage, a vase, clippers, and a few basic design principles, and you too can add a burst of style and color to your home.

Our own Rose Edinger, award-winning floral designer extraordinaire and long-time instructor at the New York Botanical Garden, will guide us in creating our own arrangements during the session. At the end, she will offer suggestions on how to improve your work. Registration coming soon!

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## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Mazal tob to **Henri Bengualid**, upon the birth of a great-grandson, Ely Jack Harary, born to Elana & Jack Harary (Elana is the daughter of Marc & Beth Bengualid).

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*Of interest to our community:* Our Segan, **Michael Lustig**, will be a panelist on the March 15 AJC New York panel *State-to-State: From Startup Nation to Impact Nation*, at The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan.

For more information, visit the JCC website.