

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Behar-Behukkothai

May 12-13, 2023 | 22 Iyar 5783

Consecration Anniversary of our 70th St. Synagogue (1897)

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 630 | Haftarah: p. 1178

Hertz: p. 531 | Haftarah: p. 551

Candle Lighting | 7:44 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am / **Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Parashat Behar contains the verse "You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants." (25:10) This verse is written on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. We use our own finial "Liberty Bells" to adorn the Torah this shabbat.

Parashat Behukkothai concludes the Book of Leviticus. At the conclusion of the last verse the congregation says: חוק ונתחזוק - חוקו ויאמץ לבבכם כל המיזחלים לה' *congregation says:*

Youth Groups/Tot Shabbat | Meet at 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room | *Tot Shabbat* led by special guest, *Liz Rios*

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue | Led this week by Naftali and Avi Friedman

Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush Supporter: Family of Robert I. Shapiro, in his memory*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 6:55 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Evening Services | 7:40 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 8:44 pm

Yom Yerushalayim begins on Thursday night.

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, please contact Z. Edinger.

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | www.shearithisrael.org

"Doom & Gloom," Rebuke for Sin and Why We Need Them

The תּוֹכְחָה or "Rebuke" at the end of Leviticus (Chapter 26) parallels much longer the longer "Rebuke" at the end of Deuteronomy. At first comparison this "Tokhaha" in Leviticus might seem to predicate the "Doom and Gloom" it portends upon Israel's bad behavior, whereas the "Doom and Gloom" in Deuteronomy might seem a predestined a fate Israel cannot escape. But upon further examination it becomes clear that even in Leviticus, the death and destruction it portends - as well as the revival of the remnant of Israel - is Israel's unavoidable fate and destiny. Those who know me are familiar with my particular penchant for the "Doom and Gloom" teachings of Judaism, as well as those which harp upon Jewish teachings of sin and guilt, and my famous insistence upon keeping day-to-day recitations of penitential prayers and confessions of sin in the liturgy whenever they have traditionally been indicated.

Let me explain that my interest in these aspects of Judaism stems from more than my naturally brooding, melancholy, pessimistic personality! In all genuineness I must say that I find this aspect of Judaism, as well as those aspects of Reproof and Impending Doom which persist in Judaism's daughter religion, Christianity, to be one of Judaism's most important heritages to Western thought, a heritage worth treasuring and preserving. Judaism and Christianity are religions with particularly strong consciousnesses of sin and guilt. Whenever we see evil coming upon us, we traditionally would examine our ways, thinking of the possible sins which might have contributed to bringing this upon us. Against our modern culture which encourages self-confidence, assuredness, and entitlement, and view those as hallmarks of healthy attitudes, I like to point out that Judaism and its daughter Christianity inculcate a high degree of self-doubt and humility. And I see those as responsible for much of the success of Western culture. Assuming the burden of fault and guilt personally forces us to take the responsibility to change.

Of course, Plato's Socratic philosophy also inculcates a great degree of self-doubt. Socrates is wise precisely because he is aware that he doesn't understand, and he is virtuous because he does not pretend to know or possess virtue, whereas the knowledge of the so-called "Sophist" and the justice and piety of Euthyphro turn out to be pretension. And I often compare the "Doom and Gloom" epics and tragedies of Ancient Greece to Biblical prophecies like Isaiah's and Jeremiah's. I have long been struck by the historical observation that the progress of modern Western science since the Medieval period has much to do with religious casting doubt and critique upon older scientific theory. However much our modern science has come to understand, this has often come out of Western willingness to cast doubt upon existing theory and to question. And much of the source of that is our Judeo-Christian religious tradition, which anchors us in faith and security, but balances that sense of security with questioning and self-doubt. That balance and the drastic contrast it implies is evidenced in the Tokhaha: In the same paragraph the Rebuke combines predictions that terrible destruction is fated following Israel's disobedience with opposite assurances that nonetheless a remnant of God's Chosen Israel will survive and will come to thrive once again. And indeed, the Jews were one of few ancient people to have been completely destroyed, exiled, and yet recovered. One can scarcely think of any other people who have been through such a test of their resilience and come back. So Jewish capacity to use affliction, trepidation and doubt positively, it would make sense, would be one of our most important contributions.

Biblical critics have hypothesized that these Tokhaha passages of Leviticus and Deuteronomy might be later interpolations into the Torah's Pre-Conquest story-line, Post-Exilic "insertions" of "predictions" of the Exile and Return which actually took place later. I don't think we have to go so far: I'm sure that Jews like many ancient peoples had an ancient institution of Prophets and Augurers of both Good Fortune as well as Doom and Gloom, who warned that sin, corruption and decadence will bring about destruction. Indeed, Balaam's Prophecy is good evidence of this. Classical notions like this were common in many mountain-fortress city-states, such as those of the Greeks, and I'm sure this concept was common among many Near-East cities. Discipline of the polis and submission to law brought about strength and safety; disobedience, disorder and decadence opened the door to neighbors and far-off empires to conquer and destroy. But few of these cities were to take these teachings so much to heart that they could survive complete destruction and exile and yet restore discipline and virtue, eventually making a comeback, the way the Judeans did. Going through that experience, which literally confirmed the ancient Torah and prophecies, would have reinforced ancient Jewish traditions of prophetic rebuke and prophecies of doom, perhaps causing them to have been better kept and preserved.

In any case, my general observation is that Islam, for example, does have similar concepts of prophecy, sin, and guilt but has nowhere near the constant consciousness of sin and guilt which Judaism and Christianity have. And that stands to reason since, of course, Islamic civilization has never suffered the calamity or persecution which Judaism and Christianity have known. Daily penitential prayers as well as regular confessional prayers have a place in Judaism and Christianity but much less of a place in Islam, which seems a far more self-assured faith. In order to counter a self-assured Islam, medieval Christianity and modern Judaism have had to assert more self-assuredness. For various reasons, many modern spiritual Jewish movements such as Ashkenazic Hasidism have emphasized Jewish confidence and have minimized Tahanun and the penitential tradition. Others want Tahanun to be glossed over quietly and quickly. Many traditions, in fact, including our own, read today's Tokhaha rather quickly and quietly, both because they find it disturbing as well as to minimize the maledictive force of speaking its Curse aloud. But the Tokhaha of both Leviticus and Deuteronomy have much in common with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and rest of the Prophetic Books, so these "Rebuking" statements of the Torah have deep roots in the Bible. And I see such Prophecy of Doom and Gloom accompanied by assurances of eventual Redemption, like the Tokhaha in our Torah Reading as well as in our Haftarah from Jeremiah, as a major contributor to the strength and resiliency of the Jewish and Western Heritage.

As we mark the Anniversary of the Consecration of our synagogue building this Shabbat, I would add that my understanding of Sephardic tradition has pointed to a markedly greater consciousness of sin and guilt among Sephardim than among Ashkenazim. This seems well-evidenced by the length of the classic Sephardic Penitential and Confessional liturgy. Perhaps Sephardic tradition was influenced by Catholic notions of guilt, and even more because of the calamity of the Spanish Expulsion as well as the experiences of forced conversion, but Sephardim assumed a greater burden of guilt upon themselves. And yet Sephardim traditionally also had notably more "joie de vivre" than Ashkenazim. I always felt that this had to do with Sephardic consciousness of sin and guilt successfully inspiring responsibility and resiliency. This I have felt is a powerful part of our congregation's particular heritage and legacy.

2023 SPRING FUNDRAISER

Don't Miss Next Week's Double-Header!

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

Session #5 | Tuesday, May 16 | 7:30 pm

“Begin And Sadat:

The Unlikely Friendship that Changed the Middle East”

Session #6 | Thursday, May 18 | 12:30 pm ET/7:30 pm Israel time

“Soldiers at the Wall: A Yom Yerushalayim Presentation”

Sign up at shearithisrael.org/giving/SpringFundraiser2023



Congregation Shearith Israel cordially invites you to our
2023 SPRING FUNDRAISER SEVEN-PART VIRTUAL SERIES

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS:

Seven Iconic Images in the History of Israel, and the Stories Behind Them

April 17th through May 23rd

As we recognize the significance of Israel's 75th year, this extraordinary series by Rabbi Soloveichik will examine seven of the most iconic images in Israeli history, revealing largely unknown aspects.

NEXT SHABBAT

Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner

NEXT Friday night, May 19 | For ages 21-35

Services at 7:00 pm | Dinner at 8:00 pm

*Dinner Committee: Isaac Haberman, Devorah Goldstein, Ariel Bengio,
and Daniel De Sola Marks*

Register at shearithisrael.org/yp-march-dinner.

SHABUOT

Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture

Shabuot night, Thursday, May 25 | 11:00 pm

“King David, the British Monarchy,
and the Grandmother of King Charles III”

Come for the Torah, stay for the cheesecake!

Sponsor the lecture at shearithisrael.org/shabuot5783.

Girls' & Young Women Book of Ruth Reading on Shabu'ot

Shabuot, Shabbat, May 27

Rehearsal: May 14 at 10:00 am

Sponsor Kiddush in Honor of our Readers

Shabuot, Shabbat, May 27 | Following the reading

Sponsor at shearithisrael.org/events/ruth-reading5783.

Memorial Day at Chatham Square Cemetery

Memorial Day, Monday, May 29 | 55 St. James Place

Please join us to pay tribute to those who have died in active service to our country, and to honor the members of our community who have served in the Armed Forces.

Special presentations will be made by Ambassador John L. Loeb, and Col. Carl Singer, US Army, Retired. The graves of 18 patriots of the American Revolution buried in this historic cemetery will be decorated. A color guard and field music will participate in this always meaningful and delightful ceremony. Veterans are encouraged to attend in uniform.

5th Annual Smash The Stigma Event

Presented by Shearith Israel's Caring Connection

Wednesday, May 31 | 7:00 pm | In Person at Shearith Israel

Held annually during Mental Health Awareness Month and co-sponsored by a consortium of neighborhood synagogues and Jewish institutions, these profoundly important Smash the Stigma events help to raise awareness and facilitate conversation about the difficult realities of mental illness and suicide in the Jewish community.

For panelist details & to register, visit shearithisrael.org/smash-the-stigma.

Minyan Happy Hour with Z. Edinger

Thursdays | Following Evening Services

Join us for “Happy Hour” every Thursday night following evening services - free for those who attend services. You'll be glad you came!