

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

When Responsibility for a Just Law Isn't Kept, All Hellfire's Let Loose

The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah is supposed to set an example for Israel, we are told in Deuteronomy. God makes the land itself "spit up" when human behavior revolts from God's law. The earth itself, so to speak, could no longer "swallow" such "spoiled" fare: The earth itself found human sin and defilement so "revolting," causing such "upset," that it "upset" the very order of nature.

Human law and natural law, the Torah's view seems to be, are congruent with one another to some extent. By the Rainbow Covenant with Noah, of course, God agreed to not punish all of the earth for its sins, and indeed empowered Man and his legal/political institutions with the task of keeping law and order on earth. But when the political and legal institutions of a place fail to administer Law and Order there, well, then, the full fury of the Wrath of God may be let loose. The story of the Hellfire and Brimstone let loose upon Sodom placed here at the very beginning of Israel's founding is to serve as a warning. Of course, this doesn't happen to Israel, nor is that destruction actually experienced by Israel. Indeed, the Sodomites are Canaanites, and what they exhibit is considered to be the worst of Canaanite behavior. Sodom's populace acts like an uncontrolled mob, not like a polity. And the Land of Canaan seems known for its particular sensitivity to lack of law and order, unlike Egypt or Mesopotamia, because Canaan depends upon God for its every need. The Land of Canaan has "no stomach" for political disorder and injustice. Lot is not actually Canaanite, but he experiences this, and his offspring people are born under this monstrous cloud and acrid taint of destructive unlawfulness and illegitimacy. And Lot and his descendant peoples are among Israel's closest relatives. Although it is not mentioned here, the practice of child sacrifice for which Lot's descendants were famous was adopted from the Canaanites, and was doubtless considered part of that taint. And killing children has to be one of the most heinous examples of shedding the blood of innocents which justice is charged to prosecute.

By Noah's Covenant, the Rabbis teach us, every polity is required to set up judges, authority, law, and enforcement. Violent mobs and gangs are not supposed to force their way. There has to be responsibility. This is what Abraham and his descendants are known for: that they act responsibly to see that justice is done and that law and order is kept and enforced. They act justly and do not shirk their responsibility to administer justice. They do not abide the blood of innocents. Of course, God in choosing Abraham was well aware that most peoples and polities would not fully live up to the Noachide Covenant. Nonetheless, God had already conceded that He would not get involved every time. Some polities are better than others; as long as there is basic justice and order, God doesn't get involved: "The inclination of Man is Evil, from his youth," and Man just has to bear the consequences in less-just polities. Abraham's descendants are known for their example of justice and law to the world; other peoples, it is implied, often do much worse. But when civic and legal responsibility to the people is utterly shirked, Law and Order is not kept, and the society is abandoned to mob rule: Well, then, all Hellfire is liable to break loose.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayera

November 3-4, 2023 | 20 Marheshvan, 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 78 | Haftarah: p. 1060

Hertz: p. 63 | Haftarah: p. 76

Candle Lighting | 5:32 pm

Friday Evening Services | 5:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights will return next week.

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

Kiddush | following Services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:40 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman | "King Solomon's Stork: The Unwavering Hope of Ethiopian Jewry"

Evening Services | 5:25 pm

Habdala | 6:18 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (**Arbit Only**): 6:30 pm

COMING UP

For details and signup, go to shearithisrael.org

Sacred Soil: The History and Rehabilitation of the West 11th Street Cemetery

A Presentation by Rev. Z. Edinger

In Person at Shearith Israel

Wednesday, November 15 | 7:00 pm (following 6:30 pm services)

Return of Parent-Child Learning!

First Session: Motzei Shabbat, November 18 | 6:00 pm

Led by Rev. Z Edinger

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

All proceeds will be donated to Friends of the IDF

Sign up for all three films: \$50.00 | Individual films: \$18.00 each

Link to each film will be sent in advance for viewing at your leisure

Film discussion with host Emmanuel Cohn will take place on Zoom

FIRST FILM DISCUSSION: Sunday, November 19 | 4:00 pm

"The Women's Balcony"

Thanksgiving at Shearith Israel

Thursday, November 23

Register & Donate to our Annual Pack-A-Thon

Help us reach this year's goal of \$25,000!

Thanks to a matching grant, all contributions (up to \$10,000) will be **doubled**.

Register Your Children for Parade Viewing

Member children & children of Pack-A-Thon donors of \$180 & up: **Free!**

Non-Member children: **\$36 in advance | \$50 at the door**

Congregation Shearith Israel and the K3 Council at Japan Society present

A Story of Moral Clarity and Courage:

The Incredible Japanese Tale of Setsuzo Kotsuji,

Protector of Jews, Convert to Judaism

Monday, December 4 | 7:00 pm | At Shearith Israel

NEXT WEEK

STANDING WITH ISRAEL

United For Israel: Vigil & Rally Marking 30 Days

Monday, November 6 | 5:30 pm | Central Park West & 83rd Street

Organized by UJA Federation & JCRC

30 Days Later:

UWS Congregations Come Together in Heartbreak, Song, and Solidarity
Tuesday, November 7 | 6:30 pm | Cong. Rodeph Sholom (7 West 83rd Street)

CSI Young Professionals and Shearith Israel present:

Super-Shabbat Dinner with Guest Jordan Gorfinkel

author of the Graphic Novel Haggadah & Graphic Novel Megillat Esther
Friday Night, Nov. 10 | 6 pm, following 4:30 pm services | All ages welcome!

Preferred pricing for Young Professionals and Young Families!

For additional details and signup, go to shearithisrael.org.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Theresia ("Thea") Rodrigues Pereira** on the birth of a great-grandson, born to Rebecca Haber & Mitch Woletz.

Mazal tob to **Alyse & Josh Rozenberg** on the birth of a daughter, Olivia Rae (רחל אמונה). Congratulations to proud grandparents, **Susan & Avery Neumark**, great-grandfather **Mel Neumark**, and to the entire Neumark and Rozenberg family.

Condolences to **Marty Grumet**, upon the passing of his mother, Harriet Grumet.

Masbia Bean Drive

Through November | Dropoff outside Levy or at any Pack-A-Thon Partner

This year, in addition to our Annual Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon, each partner organization will also be collecting dry beans for Masbia's Soup Kitchen Network. Make sure to drop off your dry beans at Shearith Israel or any of our partners now!