

The Personal Assumption of the Collective Burden of Sin

What finally made Joseph reveal himself to his brothers? Judah did come forward to offer himself as a slave in place of Benjamin. But if we look at the end of last week's Parashah, we see that Judah had already stepped forward to say that all of the brothers would serve as slaves along with Benjamin. Judah's self-sacrificing offer to replace Benjamin as a slave was in that sense not new. Judah's original offer did not specifically say that they would serve while Benjamin might be freed: Presumably Judah meant that by serving together with Benjamin the brothers might be able to at least protect him and shorten the term of slavery (because the point would be to "work off" the fine owed for stealing earlier, through adding up the value of all the brothers' service) so they might soon achieve his freedom. But Joseph had refused Judah's original offer, insisting that he would only accept Benjamin staying as a slave, and that the others should return to Jacob without Benjamin.

Judah then launches into this story about how their father would die if they went home without Benjamin. Perhaps it was the story itself and the plea for their father's life which aroused Joseph's compassion. But there was something else included in that plea: Judah was telling a personal confessional story. Judah takes upon himself personal responsibility for the sin of himself and others, something which we see several times. In last week's Parasha we saw Reuben's offer that Jacob should kill his two sons if he didn't bring Benjamin back was rejected by Jacob. That offer was bizarre, anyway, for what good would that have done, except as a strange form of (doubled as we find as penalty for stealing) recompense. But it was Judah's much simpler offer which was, in the end, accepted: I will guarantee him, Judah says, and if I don't bring him back I will have sinned, or there will be something missing on my part which you shall beseech from me, which I will owe you all [my] days. It was Judah's simple but personal taking responsibility and willingness to confess his sin and lack should he fail (although it was not his alone) which gained Jacob's begrudging assent.

It was the story of this "confessional" which aroused Joseph's feeling. We understand that in the sale of Joseph what was missing was just this personal assumption of responsibility, although both Reuben and Judah had had some good intentions: Reuben intended to rescue Joseph from the pit, and Judah suggested they sell Joseph rather than kill him through abandonment. What Judah and Reuben had not then done was to take it upon themselves to confront the others. Our Torah teaches we must go far beyond a reversal of Cain's plaint "am I my brother's keeper?" It proclaims personal responsibility and guilt for the sin of the entire collective. This willingness to confess and be responsible for the guilt of the collective became one of Judaism's hallmarks. We take responsibility first of all for what is lacking in ourselves and even beyond ourselves for the sin of others. Judah already accepted his responsibility with his daughter-in-law Tamar, and he goes on to be the ancestor of David, who is known for his confessions of sin. Our liturgical tradition, in particular, is richer than any other in collective confessionals. Some of this can seem unjustified and it perhaps can be considered lacking in sincerity. The traditional Jewish guilt-trip can be criticized and must be channeled productively if it is to not be overly detrimental, it can be argued. But it is one of our tradition's hallmarks as descendants of Judah We Jews assume personal responsibility for the collective sin of all our people.



Shabbat Vayigash

December 22-23, 2023 | 11 Tebet, 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 222 | Haftarah: p. 1086

Hertz: p. 169 | Haftarah: p. 178

Afternoon & Evening Services | 3:45 pm

Candle Lighting | 4:14 pm

Friday Night Lights will resume next week.

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Morning Talk | At Morning Services | Baruch-Lev Kelman | "A Sisterhood of Scepters: Ezekiel and the Secret of Jewish Unity"

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush Supporters: Vivienne Roumani-Denn and Morton Denn, in memory of Yosef Roumani b. Bercana and Esther Denn b. Lena*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman | "Herzl's Rabbis: Haham Yehuda Alkalai & Rabbiner Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer"

Teen Class will resume next week.

Evening Services | 4:10 pm

Habdala | 4:59 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday & Monday (Legal Holiday) Morning: 8:05 am

Tuesday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

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

COMING UP

For details & registration, go to shearithisrael.org

DEADLINE: Monday, January 1

Community Shabbat Dinner

The Return of Magevet, Yale's premier Jewish acapella group
Friday Night, January 5 | after Friday Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

All ages welcome!

Preferred Pricing for Young Professionals & Families

and Baruch-Lev Kelman will have some fun for our kids

Coney Island Polar Bear Club New Year's Day Plunge

Shearith Israel participants led by Rabbi Rohde

Monday, January 1

This annual New Year's Day Plunge welcomes thousands of BRRave souls from NY to Paris and everywhere in between to check off one of the "coolest" events on their bucket list! Bring your towels and head to Coney Island with Rabbi Rohde for this chilly adventure and NYC tradition.

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

All proceeds will be donated to Friends of the IDF

Individual films: \$18.00 each

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

Film discussion with host Emanuel Cohn will take place on Zoom

FINAL FILM DISCUSSION: Sunday, January 7 | 4:00 pm | "Footnote"

Grandparents, parents, and kids are invited to bond at

Parent-Child Learning

On Select Saturday Nights | 1 hour after Habdala

Next session with Baruch-Lev Kelman:

Saturday night, January 13 | 6:00 pm

Please register so we'll be sure to have enough to eat!

EARLY BIRD DEADLINE: THIS Sunday, December 24

The Shearith Israel League is a proud co-sponsor of

Bendichas Manos: The 7th Annual New York Ladino Day

Sunday, January 21 | 2:00-4:30 pm

15 W 16th St | Hosted by the American Sephardi Federation

NEW CLASSES

For details & to sponsor one of the classes below, go to shearithisrael.org

Weekly Teen Class

Shabbat Afternoons | 3:30 pm | *With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern*
Resuming next Shabbat, Baruch-Lev will give a class for Teens in the Elias room. Expect snacks and socializing — a perfect opportunity to connect with like-minded peers in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

Weekly Parasha Class

Wednesdays | following Evening Services

With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern

Around the (Jewish) World in 20 Days

Thursdays | following Evening Services

With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern

Join Baruch-Lev on a tour of the Jewish world from the comfort of the Elias Room.

Sunday Morning Mishna Class

In memory of Sgt. First Class Yosef Malachi Guedalia, HYD

Sundays | 9:00 am (following 8:05 am Services)

Through collective study, we honor the memory of Yosef Guedalia, a grandson of the Guedalia & Bendheim families of our congregation, who was killed defending Israel on October 7.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to our former Educational Director, Rabbi Shalom Morris, Rabbi of Bevis Marks, our sister synagogue in London, upon winning a significant victory in securing protection against local planning developments that could have had a detrimental effect on its historic character.

Condolences to **Katherine Vieyra** on the passing of her mother Phyllis Raab.

Membership Pre-Payment Offer

through January 15, 2024

Members, remember that you can pre-pay your July 2024-June 2025 dues now at this membership year's rates. **Note: You must be logged into your Shulcloud account in order to pay your dues.** Refer to our emails for the link.