



The Pillar of God, Protection from Our Shifting Fears

In 13:21 we are told that a Pillar of Cloud went before the Israelites to lead them by day, as well as a Pillar of Fire at night. The Pillar somehow embodied God's Presence. Since God is One, I always pictured only one Pillar, a Pillar of Fire at night which tuned into a Pillar of Cloud in the daytime. But we are not told about such a pillar metamorphosis. So perhaps there were indeed two distinctly different Pillars! Further, if the function was to lead the people on their way in the desert, why there was need for a Pillar of Cloud at all? Couldn't a Pillar of Fire have shown the People the path daytime and nighttime? One could answer that in the bright desert sun a fire would not have been that distinctive, but I would have thought that even during the day a Pillar of Fire would have been visible enough! However, other considerations must have been at play! Even Divine Fires would have been hot, and you wouldn't want to follow it during daytime desert heat! And a bright beacon during the daytime would have been followed not only by Israelites, but by their enemies, as well. Whereas desert night is known to be especially dark, and, hence few enemies were likely to venture out anyway. Moreover, a bright beacon in just one spot would not have been enough to take away the overall cover of darkness of the desert night. On the other hand, during the daytime, a Cloud Pillar would have been able to lead and yet keep the Israelites under cover. Further, a Cloud Pillar, even if it was way out in front of them, would offer at least some relief, cover, and protection from the scorching desert heat. And it is indeed unclear whether these "pillars" were indeed solely out in front or whether they hovered over the Israelites somewhat to provide the Israelites with shelter from heat and light so they could see in general, not just directing them. The Israelites needed shelter and light all about them, not just in front! So already in 13:21, the function was more than just to lead Israel on their way day and night: They served a protective function, as well.

Hence it becomes less surprising when the Pillar or Pillars switch position in 14:19 and stand at the backside of the Israelites, between the Israelites and the Egyptians, as the Israelites are ordered to cross into the split Sea. Of course, that section is difficult to interpret: The verse speaks of there being "the cloud and the darkness, and it illumined the night." We hadn't heard the term "darkness" before: was that yet another manifestation of the "Pillar," or was the darkness a manifestation of a dense fog in the middle of the Pillar of Cloud? Was the illumination from the Pillar of Fire? But Fire in back would have brought illumination not only to Israel but to the enemy, as well! That's why Hizkuni suggests that the Pillar of Fire stayed in front of Israel and that it was only the Pillar of Cloud which switched positions, an interpretation which is in line with our supposition that there were two Pillars. Another possibility: Perhaps the term does not mean to "illumine" at all, but might mean to provide cover, or alternatively to cause a further curse of darkness to fall upon the night. I can imagine it might mean to illumine with lightning bolts and storm, also implying that this was thick stormy Darkness from the Pillar of Cloud, not Fire. Also, if there was no Fire Pillar leading in front, how did the Israelites find their way? (Although you can answer that it was probably obvious to find their way through the part of the waves to the other side!) One could also answer that a beacon from behind them projected light to the front, illuminating their steps from slipping in the mud, but that this light was concealed from the Egyptians by the thick Darkness of the Cloud.

All these conjectures show that the Pillar served as a multi-purpose and multi-faceted protection from that which Israel feared, and that applies to us as well: At times, that which we fear is the unknown we cannot see ahead of us. At other times, we fear the destruction coming from the scorching sun or the rain, and need cover and shelter from above. And then there are times when we fear not so much plowing ahead but must be on guard and be protected from the enemy which stalks behind. From all these we must stand firm and not fear, but rather rely upon God, our One Pillar of Strength.

Shabbat Beshallah-Shira

January 26-27, 2024 | 17 Shebat, 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 320 | Haftarah: p. 1108

Hertz: p. 265 | Haftarah: p. 283

Candle Lighting | 4:48 pm

Evening Services | 4:45 pm

Friday Night Lights | Following Services | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Morning Talk | At Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush Luncheon | following services & short Bat Mitzvah program | *Sponsored by Nicole and David Cohen in honor of Lily becoming a Bat Mitzvah. All congregants invited.*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:00 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary | *Session Sponsor: Ellen Zimmerman & Edward Miller, in honor of Susan & Avery Neumark, and in memory of Charlotte & Joel Zimmerman and Symma & Leon Miller*

Teen Class will return next week.

Evening Services | 4:45 pm

Habdala | 5:35 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

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

DEADLINE ALERT

Registration Deadline: THIS Monday, January 29!

COMMUNITY SHABBAT DINNER

featuring **Rabbi Soloveichik**

in Conversation with Author Liel Leibovitz

Friday Evening, Feb. 2 | after Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Join Rabbi Soloveichik and Liel Leibovitz for a spirited discussion of Leibovitz's inspiring book, *How the Talmud Can Change Your Life: Surprisingly Modern Advice from a Very Old Book*.

Register at shearithisrael.org/events/leibovitz.

COMING UP

CSI YOUTH:

Upper West Side-Wide Dave & Buster's Trip

Saturday Night, February 3 | 7:00 pm

Registration Deadline: **THIS Monday January 29**

Details and registration at wsisny.org.

**Volunteer for a Shearith Israel CSS
(Community Security Service) Team**

Entry Point training on Zoom | Virtual one-hour training session

Tuesday evening, February 6 | 8:30 pm

Refer to our emails for the link and signup details.

Grandparents, parents, and kids are invited to bond at

Parent-Child Learning

Next Session with Dr. Peshah Kletenik, Head of School, MDS

Motzei Shabbat, February 10 | 6:30 pm

Make sure to register at shearithisrael.org/pcl-5784.

READERS WELCOME: Women's Megillah Reading

Megillah Reading on Purim morning, Sunday, March 24 | 8:30 am

Rehearsals: *Sundays, Feb 25 & Mar 10 | 7 pm*

Women and girls over the age of 12 are welcome to contact Mrs Lisa Rohde at lrohde-csi@yahoo.com to participate.

ANNOUNCING:

2024 Year of Hope Capital Campaign
Replacing our Sanctuary Carpet & Other Vital Repairs

Our Sanctuary is a prayer space of profound beauty, dignity, and serenity that has stood the test of time. While to the casual eye, the majesty of the space endures, there's an undeniable truth beneath our feet—our carpet is torn and tattered, bearing witness to the countless footsteps of generations within these walls.

Among other infrastructure repairs, it's time to replace the carpet, in both the men's and women's sections, so that our sacred space reflects the reverence it deserves.

We're off to a great start! Help us reach \$500,000 by March 31.

Donate at shearithisrael.org/giving/year-of-hope.

SAVE THE DATES - Registration coming soon!

A Shabbat Adar Community Dinner

From Singapore to Savile Row to Bespoke in Brooklyn:

***A Hasidic London-Trained Tailor In Conversation With
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik***

Friday Evening, March 8 | Following Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner with the ZOA

featuring Shearith Israel member Dov Zigler

in conversation with ZOA member Akiva Covitz

Friday night, February 23 | Ages 21-35

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Lily Cohen**, upon becoming a Bat Mitzvah.
Congratulations as well to her parents, **Nicole & David Cohen**,
and the entire family.

We welcome new member, **Victor Toledo**, to our growing Shearith Israel family.