

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Man Requires Cleansing to Flourish, Just Like the Earth Needs Water

In our morning Zoom Ezekiel class, we have been discussing related terms used for the “sprouting” of Aaron’s staff and the “sprouting” of hair on the body, as well as related terms for “braids,” which also came to be the term for the “braid (‘tzitzit’) fringe” we wear on each corner of our four-cornered garments. I commented that many terms used for hair growing out of skin as well as diseases “flourishing” in skin, as we have in this week’s Parasha, use terms taken from plants sprouting or flowering (צמח, פרה צץ); the skin being comparable to the earth. I quipped that I might try putting fertilizer on my bald pate (and certain types of “baldness” are treated in our Parashah) to see if I could “sprout” a little more! And I am reminded that barren hilltops are also referred to in Hebrew as “bald.” Of course, the main treatment I use for my flaky dry scalp is the favored choice of the Mediterranean elite for centuries: “I have anointed my head with oil. (Ps. 23:5).” I do so not because of any Messianic pretensions on my part, but rather because my wife says she sees a few more “sprouting” hairs (and less itch for me) through such treatments. I sometimes add more “exotic” oils (myrrh, rosemary, castor, Moroccan argan, jojoba, coconut, cocoa butter, shea butter) to the olive, but I do not attempt to follow any particular Messianic recipe.

But of course, the main treatment human skin requires, like the soil, is water. Human skin, I think we would say, requires bathing in water much more than any of our fellow land-mammals. As “naked apes,” the surface of our skin, like the surface of the earth in many places, is exposed. While the process by which plants sprout up from the watered soil and the bathing of human skin to keep skin and hair healthy are different, human skin requires clean water for cleansing and purification (if not, like plants, for actual nourishment), similar to the way the earth requires the nourishing and cleansing rain to cause it to sprout forth. The purification of the leper, aside from the diagnosis, quarantine, and offerings, requires one essential practical step, and that is bathing in water. One of the major signs of the disease is unusual, diseased hairs, and one of the signs of cure is that new, healthy hair has sprouted in its place. As part of the purification, old diseased hair-growth is shaved so that new healthy hair can sprout in its place. I have in previous years pointed out that our tradition to read these Parashiyot of Leviticus and to observe Passover in the Springtime reflects ancient Springtime motifs celebrating rebirth, the sprouting anew of life after the cleansing, fertilizing, and nourishing waters of Winter. Like plants and all other animals, we humans require water for nourishment. But unlike our furry mammal relatives, our bare skin makes us particularly susceptible, and I know of no other species of hairy mammals which requires water for cleanliness as much as man. Cleanliness/purification, and the water which makes this possible, is a basic human need, in order to flourish, just like the exposed Earth requires water to nourish, clean, and flourish.

We seldom have occasion to read our Haftarah about the Prophet Elisha’s curing/purification of the Syrian general Naaman from the disease of leprosy. Naaman expected Elisha to make some type of incantation or invocation, or at least some check-up or hands-on medical procedure. But Elisha’s instruction was simply that Naaman should immerse himself in the cleansing, purifying waters of the Jordan. Of course, Naaman was to bathe specifically in the Jordan, not in the Damascus streams Naaman had access to at home. After he is cured, Naaman requests to take a load of Israeli dirt back home to Damascus with him. Naaman evidently feels he needs such dirt in order to worship the God of the People and the Land of Israel properly while he is abroad on foreign soil. Now, the point of the story is to speak of acknowledgement by a foreigner of the supremacy of Israel’s God, His Prophet, His People Israel, and the Land of Israel. But here too, we find that Man’s health/flourishing is produced through the simple Refreshing of Earth with Clean Water. Purity and Cleanliness, whether of the Body and the Material World or of the Soul, constitute a Basic Need of Man, as basic as the Earth requiring Pure Water, in order to flourish.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Tazria

April 12-13, 2024 | 5 Nisan, 5784

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 556 | Haftarah: p. 1156

Hertz: p. 460 | Haftarah: p. 1005

Candle Lighting | 7:15 pm

Evening Services | 6:45 pm

SEASON FINALE: Friday Night Lights | after services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Young Professionals Pre-Pesah Shabbat Dinner | *for registered guests* |
after Friday Night Lights | Elias Room

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat 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 | following services | *Kiddush supporters: Charlotte Triefus & Lloyd Zuckerberg, with our thanks for supporting last week’s kiddush as well*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 6:25 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary

Teen Shiur | 6:25 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman | Elias Room

Evening Services | 7:10 pm

Habdala | 8:11 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (Minha & Arbit): 6:30 pm

ANNOUNCING:

ANNUAL SPRING FUNDRAISER VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES

"A History of Judaism in Five Foods"

A Virtual Lecture Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

May 8-June 4

Sign up and sponsor at shearithisrael.org/spring-fundraiser2024



Join our virtual culinary journey through Jewish history and discover the truth behind the statement of the French politician Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are."

As our annual Spring Fundraiser, this lecture series provides essential support to our Congregation. Premiering **Wednesday, May 8**, and airing on **Tuesdays, May 14 – June 4**, each engaging session will be **livestreamed over Zoom at 7:30 pm**.

Sponsorship Opportunities

SERIES UNDERWRITERS*	SESSION SPONSORS
Seudah \$18,000	Entrée \$1,800
Banquet \$10,000	Mezze \$1,000
Feast \$5,000	Appetizer \$360
Buffet \$3,600	Dessert \$250

All sponsors and underwriters will be recognized in a beautiful content-rich commemorative booklet.

***For Series Underwriters Only:** You will be invited to attend **live culinary "edutainment" experiences with Rabbi Soloveichik**. And don't worry about missing a livestream; **a recording of the series** will be made available to you at the conclusion. Stay tuned for more details!

PESAH IS COMING

Visit shearithisrael.org/pesah5784 in order to:

- Sell Your Hametz
- Give Maot Hittim
- Sponsor Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat HaGadol Derasha (*see below*)
- View the Pesah Schedule
- Refresh your memory of Pesah halakhot and customs
- Sponsor a Pesah kiddush
- Join the Women's Virtual Shir HaShirim (*details below*)

Shabbat Hagadol Derasha

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Shabbat, April 20 | following Morning Services

"From Door to Door: Ancient Egypt, Modern Israel, and the Secret of Jewish Endurance"

Now on Zoom, in partnership with our sister synagogue, Mikveh Israel

Women's Pre-Pesah Virtual Shir HaShirim Reading

Thursday, April 18 | 7:00 pm | On Zoom

Now open to girls & women of all ages -

Moms and grandmothers, consider doing this with your girls!

Girls and women of all ages in our congregation will recite the Song of Songs.

This year we are again partnering with our sister synagogue, Mikveh Israel, for a virtual reading.

To sign up for a part, please contact Ella Lalwani:

Email: ella.lalwani@gmail.com

text: 732.485.1863

UWS-Wide Hol HaMoed Trips

Thursday, April 25

Two trips will be heading to Six Flags over Hol Hamoed: one for teens, and one for families and kids of all ages!

For details and registration, go to wsisny.org.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Make sure to check your drawers in the synagogue for hametz!