

You May Be Free, But Think of Yourself As a Slave

I've often wondered why the Torah in our Parashah tells the story of the Egyptians being reduced to selling their property and themselves into slavery to Pharaoh, as well as the statement at the end which uses this as justification of what it says was the current Egyptian taxation of one-fifth of all produce to Pharaoh (and, presumably, to Pharaoh's government). Does it help explain Egyptian eventual enslavement of Israel? Does it enhance the tale of the greatness of Joseph insofar as Joseph's innovation of governmental storehouses as a public safeguard against famine was responsible in enhancing Pharaoh's resources and power? Does it provide a contrast with between later subjects of the Israelite and Judean Kingdoms who are thought of as freemen, own land, and only have to give a tenth, and subjects of the Egyptian Kingdoms, who are thought of as slaves, are mere tenants, and owe a fifth in taxes? But even by the Torah's laws, in most years Israelites have a second tenth they have to put aside, so in most cases they too end up giving a fifth. Of course, by the Torah's laws Israelites give their tithe to the Levites and Priests, not to the "secular" king or government. In Egypt, by contrast, it would seem that their "priests" might not get direct tax monies, but rather would get a portion from Pharaoh. Furthermore, the priests never were enslaved, hence they own their own land. And consequently, the priests of Egypt never had to commit themselves to paying taxes on their produce.

My interest in these matters was piqued recently as our Prophets study group completed the Book of Ezekiel. Our haftarah this week is also from Ezekiel. The end of Ezekiel puts forward this ideal vision of the Israel of the future, which seems at times to lack any grounding in physical, geographic, and social reality. In today's haftarah, of course, his vision is of the restoration of the Ten Tribes and a reunified Israel and Judah ruled by the House of David. The end of Ezekiel speaks of Israel being ruled from Jerusalem by a "Prince." Interestingly, the ideal future taxation system Ezekiel foresees is a fifth of all produce, just like we see here in Egypt. Also as in the description of Egypt here, the tax in Ezekiel is owed to the "Prince" or government. Portions of sacrificial and other offerings are given to the Priests in Ezekiel, but the Priests and Levites don't seem to get tithes or portions of taxes directly. Indeed, in Ezekiel the Priests and Levites seem to get an expansion of the amount of land they own, similar to what we find among the Egyptian priests. Ezekiel's changes to the taxation/obligation system seem based upon the need to find a more regular and legitimate source of funding for a more highly centralized government than Israelite law had originally envisioned. Ezekiel feels that because the centralized monarchies in Israel lacked major legitimized sources of funding, they often ended up illegitimately seizing property or expropriating funds from the people or from the priesthood. Ezekiel's aim was to restore a kind of idealized fairness, equality, and legitimacy in the governance of all Israel, accomplished by such a regularized tax system, which surprisingly comes out to be more like that depicted here in Egypt than the one which the Torah seems to have originally envisioned.

But of course, by endorsing a taxation system like Egypt's, and a centralized government with a huge Capital District, Ezekiel is implying much more. Although Israelites consider themselves freemen, we should also think of ourselves as slaves. Large centralized governments like the Monarchy are a necessity, and willingly submitting to them by paying large portions in taxes is a necessity. Israel can only stay free by thinking of ourselves as slaves to God and indebted to our Government for everything, and we must learn to submit as if we were slaves. Egyptian governance remains a model to us; indeed, we use the story of Joseph to take some credit for it.



Shabbat Vayiggash

January 3-4, 2024 | 4 Kislev, 5785

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 169 | Haftarah: p. 178 / Kaplan: p. 222 | Haftarah: p. 1086

Reminder: Due to *Year of Hope* carpet renovations, Services will be held in the **Levy Auditorium**, and Kiddush will be held in the **Elias Room**. There is no access to the Main Sanctuary.

- Candle Lighting | 4:24 pm
- Evening Services | 4:30 pm | Levy Auditorium
- Friday Night Lights | Baruch-Lev Kelman | following services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family*
- Zemirot | 8:15 am | Levy Auditorium
- Shahrit | 9:00 am | Levy Auditorium
- Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room
- Youth Groups & Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue
- Kiddush | following services | Elias Room
- Teen Shiur | 3:35 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman
- Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat afternoon class will return next week.**
- Evening Services | 4:20 pm
- Habdala | 5:09 pm
- Parent-Child Learning | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Rohde | Elias Room

There is no choir this week.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday (Minha & Arbit): 4:30 pm

Monday-Thursday (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

CSI YOUTH/TEENS

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

Parent-Child Learning

THIS Motzei Shabbat, January 4 | 6:15 pm

Led by Rabbi Ira Robde

Upcoming sessions:

February 8 | 7:00 pm | Dr. Peshah Kletenek, Head of School, MDS

March 8 | 7:30 pm | Ellin Cooper, Yoetzet Halakha

Teen Outing with Baruch-Lev:

Midrash at the Met: How Jewish Thinkers Ancient and

Modern Experienced the Word Around Them

THIS Sunday, January 5 | 10:30 am | Metropolitan Museum of Art

Taking advantage of the treasures right in our backyard, Baruch-Lev and an intimate group of Shearith Israel teens will explore Midrash at the Met.

For members only; please RSVP to Baruch-Lev at bkelman@shearithisrael.org for specific meet-up details.

COMING UP

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

with Rev. Z. Edinger

Next Tour: Wednesday, January 8 | 5:45 pm

(Virtual) Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

All proceeds will be donated to help families of Israeli soldiers

FINAL FILM DISCUSSION:

Sunday, January 26 | 4:00 pm | Walk on Water (2004)

A link is sent to registrants to watch the film a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom.

COMING UP

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

Community Shabbat Dinner: Magevet Returns!

Yale's premier Jewish acapella group

Friday Night, Shabbat Shira, February 7

Following Friday Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Early bird pricing through January 13

Following our Friday evening services – always musically exquisite – registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by Magevet, Yale University's Jewish, Hebrew, and Israeli a capella group. A co-ed ensemble, comprised of talented undergraduate students at Yale University, Magevet is known for its sweet blend of voices, unique arrangements, and lighthearted sense of humor, and is one of the nation's premiere Jewish a capella singing groups.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Juliana & Dr. Howard Levite**, upon the birth of a grandson born to their children, Danielle & Brett Levine.

Mazal tob to **Sondra & Arnie Rosen**, upon the birth of a granddaughter born to their children, Zaloo and Kenny Rosen in Israel.

Mazal tob to **Carol & Alan Schechter**, upon the marriage of their granddaughter, Aliza Schechter, to Izzy Zelman.

Mazal tob to **Carol & Alan Schechter**, upon the engagement of their granddaughter, Ita Schechter, to Aharon Teigman.

Drs. Stephanie & Jonathan Freilich are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter, Naomi, to William Schwalbe, son of Jill Schwalbe and James Schwalbe of Englewood, New Jersey. Mazal tob as well to proud grandmother, **Estelle Freilich**.

Condolences to **Cynthia Trop (& Stuart Ellman)**, upon the passing of her brother, Richard Lee Sires.

EARLY BIRD OFFER

Pre-Pay Next Year's Dues at This Year's Rates!

Until January 15, 2025

Note: You must be logged into your ShulCloud account in order to pay your dues.