

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Terumah: Elevating Our World to the Image of the Divine Above

Tell the Israelite people to take Me a levy; from every person whose heart so moves him you shall take my tribute.... According to all that I show you regarding the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of its furnishings: Just so shall ye make it.

This is what everyone who is entered in the records shall give: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight—twenty gerahs to the shekel—a half-shekel as a levy to the LORD. Everyone who is entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, shall give the LORD's levy" (Ex. 25:2, 25:9, 30:13-14)

The term “Terumah” used in both in the main Parasha as well as in describing the half-shekel about which we read about in the Maftir is etymologically parallel to our English term “levy” for a tax. The Hebrew verb root means “to raise” or “to lift up.” We use the verb in a monetary sense when we talk about “raising funds” or even a “raise” in salary, although we seldom use the noun form to mean either a voluntary or obligatory tax. The word “levy” is used to mean a tax which is “levied” or “raised” comes from the Norman French-derived “lever” meaning “to raise” or “lift” (perhaps, indeed, “lift” and “level” are also related etymologically) and it provides a better equivalent, although a “levy” is mandatory whereas the items and funds raised for the tabernacle seem to be a voluntary “contribution.” Of course, “contribution” or the related term “tribute” (which does sound a lot like “terumah” but is unrelated) is also an appropriate equivalent, meaning something “bestowed.” And as we all know, voluntary contributions often become mandatory tributes!

But the root meaning of the Hebrew “terumah” has other nuances of meaning. It is a levy “lifted” “off-the-top.” The “terumah” of produce given to a priest would often be taken off the top of a pile of wheat or other produce before the rest of the pile could be dug into and consumed. Taking the contribution off the top made sure the percentage of the produce was calculated properly and further that the commitment would be given and honored place and not neglected. Our payroll taxes which are deducted “off-the-top” from our salary in advance preserve this aspect of these types of imposts. In Parashat Terumah, it’s interesting that Philo Judaeus understands the term as meaning “first-fruits” for which there are usually other Hebrew terms, but making it first is consistent with the connotation that it must be given “off the top” priority. Philo also takes note of the odd use of the verb “taking” a tribute alongside “giving”: “In the first place you have, says God, no good thing of your own, but whatever you fancy that you have, another has bestowed it upon you. From which it is inferred that all things are the property of God who gives them... Even if you take them, take them not for yourself, but think what is thus given you a loan or deposit, and be ready to restore it to him who has deposited it with, or contributed it to you” (Who is the Heir of Divine Things 103-105).

Moses was still on the Mountain when he was shown the plan of the Tabernacle. “I think then that this is what was intimated in the words, ‘Take for me;’ God, intending to send down the perfection of his divine virtue from heaven to earth, out of pity for our race, in order that it might not be left destitute of a better portion, prepared in a symbolical manner the sacred tabernacle and the things in it, a thing made after the model and in imitation of wisdom” (112). So there seem to have been no physical plans or sketches. As Philo writes: Moses now determined to build a tabernacle, a most holy edifice, the furniture of which he was instructed how to supply by precise commands from God, given to him while he was on the mount, contemplating with his soul the incorporeal patterns of bodies which were about to be made perfect, in due similitude to which he was bound to make the furniture, that it might be an imitation perceptible by the outward senses of an archetypal sketch and pattern, appreciable only by the intellect... Therefore the general form of the model was stamped upon the mind of the prophet, being accurately painted and fashioned beforehand invisibly without any materials, in species which were not apparent to the eye; and the completion of the work was made in the similitude of the model, the maker giving an accurate representation of the impression in material substances corresponding to each part of the model” (On the Life of Moses II, 74).

The relation of the very physical and concrete Tabernacle to the spiritual realm of Sinai has been a long-time subject of Jewish discussion. The Tabernacle could be seen as “bringing down” God’s Presence to our World beneath. But our Parasha’s name also indicates a “raising up,” a “lifting up” of that which we normally take down. And the Shekalim Maftir reading also begins literally with “lifting up the head.” By contributing “off the top” from the best our mundane world has to offer and dedicating ourselves to structure our existence following the Divine Pattern we Elevate our World, restoring the World and Man to their proper (but lost) role as a lower Reflection of the Divine Image Above.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Terumah-Rosh Hodesh-Shekalim

February 28-March 1, 2025 | 1 Adar, 5785

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 325 | Rosh Hodesh: 695 | Shekalim: 352 | Haftarah: 992, 994 v1, 947 v23

Kaplan: Parasha: 380 | Rosh Hodesh: 814 | Shekalim: 440 | Haftarah: 1270, 1266 v1, 1268 v23

Candle Lighting | 5:29 pm

Evening Services | 5:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Special Shabbat Morning Shiur | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik | *Sponsored by Sondra & Arnie Rosen, in honor of their granddaughter, Gefen Batzion*

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups & Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush Luncheon | following services | Levy Auditorium | *Kiddush and Scotch sponsored by Sondra & Arnie Rosen, in honor of their granddaughter, Gefen Batzion, born to their children Kenny & Zaloo in Israel*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:35 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 4:35 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 5:20 pm

Habdala | 6:20 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday (Minha & Arbit): 5:30 pm

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

PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

View the full schedule & offerings at shearithisrael.org/purim5785

Your Purim Checklist

- Become a Women's Megillah Reader - **there's still time!**
 - Sign up for our Purim Dinner & Mini Show!
 - Give Matanot L'Ebyonim
 - Sponsor Purim Breakfast
 - Get your kids excited for the Purim Night Kids' PurimPalooza!
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Purim Dinner — and A Mini Show!

Thursday Evening, March 13

Following Megillah | Levy Auditorium

This Purim, we journey back to 16th-century Mantua, city of love, intrigue, and...rabbis! All while enjoying a relaxed dairy dinner.

Shearith Israel's own theater troupe Los Bilbilicos – led by Baruch-Lev Kelman, Adams Kornblum, and Shearith Israel League President Laurent Nahon – will offer a sneak peak of their upcoming production of *A Wedding Comedy*, adapted from Leone de Sommi Portaleone's hit play *Tsahot Bedibuta de Kiddushin* (c.1550).

This unique Jewish twist on the classic Romeo & Juliet starcrossed lovers' tale definitely won't be like anything you've seen before!

Kids' PurimPalooza!

Featuring Froggle!

Thursday Evening, March 13 | During 7:00 pm Megillah Reading
Dropoff in Fidanque Youth Room at 6:45 pm

Get ready for a fabulous Purim celebration filled with laughter, magic, and nonstop fun! Our action-packed kids' entertainment extravaganza for kids aged 2-12 will feature comedy magic, puppetry, party games, music, and dancing! Watch in amazement as bubbles float through the air, and chase after soaring rocket balloons!

Children under the age of 5 must be accompanied by an adult.

PLUS: Families who sign up for the Purim Dinner (see above) will enjoy an exclusive balloon twisting session while they eat!

THIS WEEK

“A Random Walk Down Mill Street”

with Rev. Z. Edinger

This Wednesday, March 5 | 8:00 pm | on Zoom

Join in to hear short presentations about the liturgy, music, or minhag of Shearith Israel.

Follow our emails for the Zoom link.

SAVE THE DATE

Scholar-in-Residence Shabbat:

Miriam Zami

Friday, March 28-Shabbat, March 29



Join us for this special Shabbat, when our visiting scholar will deliver *Friday Night Lights*, a Shabbat Morning Sermon, and the Afternoon Class.

Miriam Zami is a PhD candidate in Talmud and Ancient Judaism at Yeshiva University, where she is writing her dissertation on comedy in rabbinic literature. She teaches Jewish education widely in academic and communal settings, with particular focus on the Sephardic Syrian community. Miriam is a member of the Sefaria Word-by-Word Fellowship and was named the inaugural Emerging Scholar Fellow by Ma'ayan in the greater Boston area. She previously served as an editor at the Lehrhaus, an online publication of Jewish thought. Miriam lives in Brooklyn with her husband, Ian, and their daughter, Helene.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **David Aboodi & Meredith Berman**, upon the birth of a grandson, Theodore (Oded), born to Gabrielle Aboodi & Hugo Amorim.

Condolences to **Sharona (& Gideon) Gordon**, upon the passing of her father, Aharon Shooshani.