

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

“The LORD Shall Fight for You, and You Shall be Silent”

(Ex.14:14)

Three possible interpretations come to mind when I read about “silence” in our title verse: (1) Are the Israelites here being commanded to stop complaining? (2) Is it an announcement that God’s defeat of the Egyptian forces through their muddy entrapment and drowning by the crashing Red Sea waters will astound the Israelites into silence? Or (3) does it serve to emphasize that the Israelites would not have to do or say much of anything to bring about the Egyptians’ defeat, since God was going to be doing the fighting for them?

Interpretation (1) makes some sense, for preceding this, Israel had indeed been “complaining,” or at least worriedly murmuring, about how they could possibly escape from the Egyptian forces which were closing in and cornering them against the seashore, which blocked their way ahead. Some Israelites might even have thought of retreating back to Egypt or at least to one side, to escape the onslaught, rather than pressing further on their path towards the sea. The verse then is a rebuke to that murmuring: God Himself will be at your side fighting for you, so you - shut up and stop complaining! Or perhaps it is not so much a rebuke for their complaining as reproaching them for their cries of anxiety, a reprimand for the shameful fear and panic they show, or at least telling them it is unnecessary. “God Himself is fighting for you, so put a lid on all that jittering, quivering, and shaking: Stop throwing a fit, pipe down with all that shrieking, stifle that fear – Now shush!”

Regarding interpretation (2), the message of the verse does seem to have something to do with an astounding display of God’s force: “Just you wait, and the Power you will see will leave you speechless! Simmer down, Israel, lay back and sit tight! Your Ally with the Big Guns is coming to your relief, with a display of Shock and Awe like nothing you ever seen! God’s Uncanny Superhuman Strength will dazzle you into silence as He overwhelms and obliterates the enemy for you! The verse in this sense points ahead to the fantastic description of the event which follows, as Moses brandishes his staff and the sea parts into “walls” of water which first protect the Israelites’ escape, then admit the Egyptian chariots, and afterwards crash down on the mired Egyptians, casting them into the waves. This Demonstration of their Ally’s Superior and Unbeatable Strength and Force fighting on their side would bolster Israel’s confidence, boldness, and strength in any endeavor or struggle. Of course, although the case in our Parasha is one of a shocking and awesome display which reveals God’s Miraculous Superpower and defeats the enemy solely through Divine Force, God’s Power is usually much less manifest, rather working discreetly behind the scenes. Nonetheless, we are to remember that His Forces still lurk at the ready in the background, and just how shockingly Powerful He is, even when that Power seems dormant and lying low.

But interpretation (3) makes perhaps the most sense, that the point of God’s manifest display of His Single-Handed Valor in this instance was to remind Israel that He would Ever be on their side, fighting their battles and struggles with them and for them. Israel is to be reminded of this even when He seems hidden: Remember, behind the scenes, He is working for you! Perhaps it has to do with God’s truth and justice and the boost to morale and confidence which that gives: Israel’s cause is its survival and flourishing as a small nation which values true and virtuous ideals and seeks fair, righteous justice. Israel does not essentially seek power, conquest, and empire. Rather, confidence in the justice of their cause, and knowledge that God is on their side as true Magistrate and Judge, as the Force for Good and Truth, opposing evil and falsehood, generates an esprit de corps which makes battles easier to fight and will carry the day for them. Even here at the Red Sea, Israel too had to do its part as Moses ordered their march forward straight ahead into the murky sea-bottom and the waves stood perilously piled up: Israel had to be bold, brave, and strong of heart, having faith and confidence that the Power of God was on their side and would deliver them, but then God would take care of the rest. Although most times it would be less apparently visible, as long as Israel kept faith with Him, dutifully fulfilling their part, God would always continue fighting their battles miraculously. God would do much of the heavy lifting for them and, at least relatively speaking, Israel would not have to do or say much.

Every time I recite this verse, its rather inscrutable usage at Shearith Israel’s funerals, where it is recited three times as a closing incantation, echoes in my ear. A shroud of mystery envelops funerary liturgy, but the best I can come up with is that the deceased can no longer struggle to fight Israel’s battles. Their lips and arms must perform fall totally silent. Their souls must then rely entirely upon God Alone to continue fighting the battles and struggles they began on Earth. They then truly and fully rely upon God exclusively for His Miraculous Protection on their perilous journey and transition into another Realm of Existence.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Beshallah-Shira

February 7-8, 2025 | 10 Shebat, 5785

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 265 | Haftarah: p. 283 / Kaplan: p. 320 | Haftarah: p. 1108

Candle Lighting | 5:04 pm

Evening Services | 5:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family | Session sponsored by Rima Raynes, in memory of her daughter, Svetlana Raynes*

Shabbat Dinner with Magevet | for registered guests | Levy Auditorium

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

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

Kiddush | following services | Levy Auditorium | *Sponsored by the Solomon family, in honor of Magevet*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:15 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 4:15 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 5:00 pm

Habdala | 5:52 pm

Parent-Child Learning | 7:00 pm | Dr. Pasha Kletenik, Head of School, MDS

Tu B'Shebat begins on Wednesday evening.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday (Minha & Arbit): 5:00 pm

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

THIS WEEK

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

Tu B'Shebat Seder

“Letters in Bloom: Isaac Luria and the First Tu B'Shebat Seder”

Wednesday, February 12 | 7:00 pm | with Baruch-Lev Kelman

After last year's successful Seder, gourmand Baruch-Lev will again lead this tasty banquet of fruity delights native to the land of Israel. Join for a night of flavors, mysteries, and histories!

Co-sponsored by Shearith Israel and The Habura

Between Tradition & Modernity:

The Life of R' Elia Benamozegh

A Scholarly Discussion moderated by Baruch-Lev Kelman

Thursday, February 13 | 7:00 PM | At Shearith Israel

After services, join us for an exciting panel event celebrating the life and thought of Rabbi Elia Benamozegh of Livorno, a 19th century scholar and visionary.

In partnership with the Habura, Shearith Israel is excited to host Dr. Clemence Boulouque, Associate Professor in Jewish and Israel studies at Columbia University & author of *Another Modernity: Elia Benamozegh's Jewish Universalism*.

Stitch & Fix

Presented by the Sisterhood

Alternating Wednesdays in the Fidanque Room

Upcoming Sessions: February 12 & 26

RSVP to Rose Edinger at rgedinger@gmail.com.

COMING UP

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

The Sisterhood presents

"Let's Get Organized" with Bohne Leah

Sunday, February 23 | 4:00 pm | On Zoom | Link provided upon registration

Have you ever wanted to organize an area in your apartment? In need of organization tips? Then this is the event for you! Professional organizer Bohne Leah will introduce customized solutions to your organizational problems and get you jumpstarted on that organization you've been putting off.

COMING UP

Sign up at shearithisrael.org

In partnership with the Jewish Center, Lincoln Square, & WSIS

UWS Ski & Snowboard Trip

Sunday, February 16 | At Camelback Mountain | For All Ages

Departing from Jewish Center at 7:30 am | Prices go up after Feb 9!

Register at jewishcenter.org.

Film Screening

Kidnapped: The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara

With remarks from Baruch-Lev Kelman

Saturday Night, February 22 | 7:00 pm | \$12.00 per person

Presented by the Sisterhood & the League

Join us for this award-winning Italian film from one of Italy's most revered directors, Marco Bellocchio, telling the story of a young Jewish boy forcibly taken from his family by the Pope to be raised Catholic. Our Rabbinic Intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman, who worked at the Vatican in the past, will provide additional remarks and context for us to better appreciate the history behind this sadly true story.

PURIM PREVIEW

Your Purim Checklist - complete it at shearithisrael.org/purim5785:

- Order Sisterhood Mishloah Manot
- Become a Women's Megillah Reader
- Give Matanot L'Ebyonim
- Sponsor Purim Breakfast
- SAVE THE DATE: Purim Night, March 13 - Megillah Reading, Kids Purim-Palooza, plus Purim Dinner & A Mini Show

Kids' PurimPalooza!

Featuring Froggles!

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 (registration coming soon!) will enjoy an exclusive balloon twisting session while they eat!