

Backing the Newlywed in the Struggle for the Long-Term

Anyone who has studied to read this Parasha from the Torah Scroll is likely to be struck by the number of passages which begin with the words with the same phrase: “When a man takes a woman [to wife],” the repetition of which, with varying intonations and in various following contexts, gets confusing and is likely to throw the reader off. This phrasing is so common that it becomes in Tractate Kiddushin the founding basis for defining marriage in Jewish Law: “taking,” in the sense of “taking possession” of a wife. It is also from our Parasha at the beginning of Chapter 24 that we learn explicitly how divorce is executed: through the husband’s having “written her a bill of cutting-off, giving it in her hand and sending her away from his household.” In context, even the passage about divorce is not literally prescriptive, but it at least describes the formal procedure for executing a divorce. In contrast, the procedure for “taking” a wife is left vague, although the fact that so much explicit formal legislation is conditioned upon such a “taking possession of a wife” clearly implies that such “marriage” also involved a very formal legal procedure: Perhaps that was assumed known from Near-Eastern common-law, which is hereby being validated by our Parasha’s pursuant legislation. The legal details of the formal procedures which constitute “marriage” are teased out by the Talmud directly from this phraseology in our Parasha describing a man’s “acquiring” a wife.

We read Ki Tetse in quite a season for weddings, so I have had much pause to reflect upon these words, aside from my reviewing them in various contexts with varying intonations in teaching our Bar-Mitzvah, Sammy Friedman. I also noted that the law whereby a groom is exempted from military service is mentioned in two Parashiyot in a row, in Deut. 20:7 from last week, as well as in 24:5 this week. In last week’s reading, the law is stated in terms of a man who has “betrothed” a woman as his wife but has not “taken” her. The explanation given there is that he should return [from the mustering], “lest another man take her;” whereas this week’s law exempts a newly married man from being mustered for the year following matrimony. I’m fascinated by the idea that this privilege of military exemption given to a groom was thought so important and worthy of repeated emphasis. The apparent advantage of this exemption to the community is: Within that year, a presumably young and vigorous groom might likely produce a surviving heir in the event that he himself should prematurely meet his end, and in that way his clan and community will continue to endure. The exemption is limited to one year, and it was given universally to every member of the community. But such “long-term survival insurance” of the entire lineage of the community against wartime decimation was considered worth the loss of manpower in the battle at-hand.

I couldn’t help but remark sadly upon comparing this and other great traditional privileges given through Judaism’s long-term and forward-looking thinking with the lack of such privilege and respect given to bridegrooms in our society, especially when I read about a “fertility crisis” in America today. Although weddings, marriages, and relationships continue to involve the investment of great resources, emotional and financial, in most communities the communal investment in groom and bride is comparatively weak. Our grooms too often must manage their relationships and the affairs connected to them single-handedly. Not only is there scant honor, there is often scant help in setting up to accommodate the needs of a household. Amsterdam and many Sephardic communities had their “Dotar” funds for the dowries of the poor; leases for apartments or communal house-building were arranged, and even communal cooking and sewing for the wedding day were once common. Although we do have “Jewish singles events,” young men and women approach them warily and suspiciously, sensing that little true backing will the community offer, only parties. We can joke about how nobody stands up in honor of a groom, nor provides him with an entourage of attendants, nor treats him as a “king” anymore, but these are serious and difficult issues, areas in which some have made great contributions (and I wish fully to acknowledge them), but with which we must struggle for the future. Our Parasha’s repetition of this same law from last week should teach us the importance of communal backing for the new groom and bride in the long-term struggle for the survival of our People.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Ki Tetse

September 5-6, 2025 | 13 Elul, 5785

Kaplan: Parasha: 966 | Haftarah: 1238

Hertz: Parasha: 840 | Haftarah: 857

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 7:03 pm

Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush Luncheon | Levy Auditorium | *Sponsored by the Raynes Friedman family, in honor of Samuel becoming a Bar Mitzvah*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Teen Shiur will not meet this week.

Evening Services (including *Selihot)** | 7:00 pm

Habdala | 7:56 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Monday-Thursday (Minha & Arbit): 6:30 pm

HIGH HOLIDAYS

The deadline for High Holiday registration has passed, but we are still accommodating reservations. If you have not registered, or if you are a member who has not opted in or opted out, please contact Sarah Gross at sgross@shearithisrael.org as soon as possible!

If you have registered, tickets will be going out the week of September 15.

Your High Holiday Checklist

Get it all done at shearithisrael.org/high-holidays-5786

- Make your holiday offerings
 - Sponsor Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat Teshuba Derasha
 - Order your lulab & etrog set through the synagogue
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Elul Learning Series | "Gates of Repentance: Yona of Girona" with Baruch-Lev Kelman | Tues after Evening Services | Sept 9 & 16

This High Holiday season, join Baruch-Lev in a study of Yona of Girona's holiday classic *Gates of Repentance*. The preeminent sage of medieval Catalonia, Yona's strenuous and tumultuous career informed his view of struggle, forgiveness and the human condition.

Shabbat Teshuba Derasha

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Shabbat, September 27 | Following Morning Services

Sponsor at shearithisrael.org

COMING UP

Family Fun Welcome Back Seudah Shelishit

Jewish Astronomy Workshop

Led by Baruch-Lev Kelman

NEXT Shabbat, Sept 13 | 4:45 pm (followed by 6:45 pm Evening Services)

Join Baruch-Lev for an afternoon of family learning and astronomical games! Learn the Hebrew names of constellations and how to make your own Jewish calendar from scratch. Join in the Game of Gamliel, a strategy challenge that's part Hide & Seek and part Capture the Flag. Make sure to register (free!) at shearithisrael.org/astronomy.

COMING UP

Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

Next Tour: THIS Wednesday, September 10 | 5:45 pm

Individuals and groups are welcome to attend a free, guided tour on the second

Wednesday of every month, prior to Evening Services, led by Rev. Z. Edinger.

Suggested donation of \$5 per person; any amount appreciated. Tours generally last 45 minutes.

Lulab Wrapping Workshop | Red Strings & Gilded Baskets

Led by Baruch-Lev Kelman & Z Edinger

Sunday, October 5 | After Evening Services

Join Baruch-Lev and Z for a workshop of traditional lulab assembly for all ages. Featuring the customs of various Jewish communities from ancient Rome to modern Yemen.

Decorate your lulab with scarlet threads in the traditional Portuguese manner.

Registration coming soon.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome the following new members to our growing Shearith Israel family:

Eliana & Sam Freilich

who joined as Young Couple Members. We are especially delighted when longstanding members like Sam, who grew up at Shearith Israel, become members in their own right, especially since getting married and starting their own household.

Sarah & Paul Kaplan

Valerie & Ted Schweitzer (welcome back!)

Mazal tob to **Rose & Henry Edinger** on the recent marriage of their grandson, Avi Herman, to Gefen Rodgold, in Jerusalem. Avi is the son of Nehama & Geoffrey Herman.

Mazal tob to **Samuel Friedman**, upon becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations as well to his parents, **Zoya Raynes & Naftali Friedman**, and his grandmother, **Rima Raynes**.

Mazal tob to **Helena Lustig**, upon her upcoming marriage to Benjamin Turner. Congratulations as well to her parents, **Rachel Brody & Michael Lustig**.