

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Tribulations of the Exodus: Proving God's Manifestation to Israel

Judah Halevi's Kuzari makes the argument that the public nature of the revelation at Mount Sinai is a unique proof for the truth of Judaism, claiming that the revelation to 600,000 Israelite men plus women and children was unlike the relatively private miracles and revelations given to other prophets and supposedly witnessed in other faiths. This mass witnessing and collective memory of a miraculous Revelation was attested to by the mass of the whole Nation of Israel and hence much less unlikely to have been fabricated, unlike revelations vouchsafed to only a few acolytes. This contrasts Judaism with the original revelations in Christianity and Islam., whose original witnesses were few in number and confined to small circles of followers already predisposed to belief and trust in a charismatic figure.

I note that Halevi emphasizes the publicly manifest nature of the Revelation of the Torah at Sinai, and not so much the even more publicly manifest nature of the Revelation of God's Redemptive Power in taking Israel out of Egypt, although that (and the miraculous Revelation at the Crossing of the Sea) Halevi sort of subsumes as the first stages of the Revelation at Sinai. Actually, though, the Exodus from Egypt was even more public than the Revelation at Sinai: It was witnessed and had lasting effects upon both Egypt and Israel, and historically created an acknowledged international distinction and even borders (such as the so-called "Brook of Egypt") between the neighboring peoples. True, there is no explicit witnessing evidence from the Egyptian side, but despite various Egyptian intrigues and power-plays at the courts of Israel's monarchs, as well as some odd forays up the coast of Canaan, Egypt rarely ever again gained direct hegemony over the Canaanite areas it had controlled during the previous Bronze Age. Our haftarah from Jeremiah makes it quite clear: Egypt is a spent power, nothing but a "paper tiger." *"They cried there: 'Pharaoh King of Egypt is but a noise: He has passed the appointed time'* (Jer. 46:17)." The background of the Exodus is quite plausible: Egyptian strife with and enslavement of neighbors, Asians to the northeast and Kushites, Nubians, and Africans to the southeast and south, was a known phenomenon. And Israel, even when some Israelites later return to live in Egypt, are very aware of the distinctions between themselves and the native Egyptians. In sum, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt would have been even more established as a public Revelation in historical fact than some mysterious Lawgiving vouchsafed to Israel alone (perhaps in some mass dehydrated desert mirage!).

Of course, Halevi wishes to contrast the documented Law of the Torah and its validity with the documented Law of the Koran, as well as the "law" derived from the documented "new covenant" of Christianity. In addition, making claims about God's Redemptive Power as once was witnessed in Egypt, during the Middle Ages, at a time when Israel seemed, at least physically, so bereft of such Redemption, as the title of Halevi's book makes clear (*Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion*, the rhyming Arabic title of which emphasizes how disparaged and despised Judaism was for its lack of any power or trace of God's Favor), would have had equivocal implications for his argument. Besides, Islam and Christianity both acknowledged the Exodus - the implications of the Exodus for later times in terms of the Laws of the Torah was what was, rather, in dispute. Moreover, also, the Torah is a document which can still be seen; the Exodus is a tale (to be sure, re-enacted every year at Passover) told of an event long ago. But in the text of the Torah the public nature of the Revelation at Sinai is mentioned side by side with the public nature of the Exodus as two proofs of the veracity of God's Revelation to Israel: *"Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire, as you have, and lived? Or has any god tried to take as his own a nation out of another nation— by trials, signs, wonders, and war, by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors— as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt, before your eyes"* (Deut. 4:33-34)? Indeed, in our Parasha, even before we get to the story of Sinai, it is the public Manifestation of God's Power and Redemption of Israel from Egypt which is seen as the main proof of God's special Revelation and Covenant with Israel. This is why Passover and its Laws for all time must be legislated already in our Parasha (Ex. 12:14ff.), way before the Giving of the Torah at Sinai.

And likely it is because of the need to have manifest, public proof of the veracity of Divine Revelation that the slavery, the plagues, and the trials of the Exodus must be so severe. Indeed, this strikes me as the explanation as to why Pharaoh's heart must be hardened: so that the God of Israel should win a resounding and wondrous defeat of Pharaoh and Egypt for all time. This proof is needed both for Israel as well as for all other nations of the world, so that they can never forget nor discount God's Manifestation to Israel.



CONGREGATION SHEarith ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Bo

January 23-24, 2026 | 6 Shebat, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 248 | Haftarah: 263

Kaplan: Parasha: 300 | Haftarah: 1102

Candle Lighting | 4:45 pm

Evening Services | 4:45 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights will return next week.

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 | following services | *Scotch sponsored by Suzanne Morad, in memory of Benjamin Morad*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:55 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Teen Shiur will return next week.

Evening Services | 4:40 pm

Habdala | 5:32 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: 4:45 pm

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

IN CELEBRATION OF THE US SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

And 250 Years of Jewish Life in the United States



Rabbi Soloveichik's Major Lectures

Next Installment:

Next Shabbat, January 31

After Morning Services

These lectures highlight Shearith Israel's historic personalities central to the founding and formation of our American democracy.

Stay up to date at shearithisrael.org/us-250.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: This Sunday, January 25!

A Musical Shabbat Shira Dinner

Featuring Magevet, Yale's premier Jewish a capella group
Friday night, Shabbat Shira, January 30

Following Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Following our Friday evening services, registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by Magevet, Yale University's Jewish a capella group. This year, as part of our Squintennial celebrations, Magevet will include a selection of Americana.

Register and sponsor at shearithisrael.org.

FAITH FOR FOOD

Learn more & contribute at shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food

The Masbia UWS Food Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel

This year-round weekly kosher food pantry provides ample and nutritious grocery staples to our neighbors each Tuesday.

To Help Someone in Manhattan with Food Insecurity

If someone you know in Manhattan could benefit from this program, email

CSIApron@masbiarelief.org with a name and cell phone number. A trained Masbia representative will reach out regarding enrollment.

Thank you to our faith partners: The Jewish Center, Masbia, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

YOUTH CORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*Flat and crunchy, simple and plain,
We ate it fast as we left in a train.
No time to wait for dough to rise,
What Passover food is this tasty surprise?*

COMING UP

Register at shearithisrael.org

Bedeck HaBayit Day with Rev. Z. Edinger

WILL BE RESCHEDULED DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

Contact Rev. Edinger for the new date: zedinger@shearithisrael.org

Tu B'Shebat Seder with Baruch-Lev Kelman

Sunday, February 1 | Following 6:30 pm Evening Services

Celebrate the renewal of the Jewish spirit, through the lens of educator Rabbi Zev Yaavetz, who helped revive the very idea of planting trees as a modern mitzvah. Together we'll explore his spiritual vision: the messianic rooting of Judaism's mysterious "rootless tree."

CSI Youth Tu B'Shebat Seder with Dalya & Jake

Sunday, February 1 | 10:00 am

2nd Annual Sisterhood Culinary Continuity: BOUREKAS!

Sunday, February 8 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm | At Shearith Israel | \$25

Join us to learn about the dish common to all Sephardic kitchens from Greece, Morocco, Italy, Syria, to Turkey. Sephardic savory pastry aficionado Ruth Altchek will give us a history of the boureka as well as a hands-on demonstration on how to make them.

We will get to eat them too!

Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

FINAL DISCUSSION: Sunday, February 8 | 4:00 pm | The Testament (2017)

Special Presentation: Cinematic Memorial Event: Arthur Cohn | Sun. Feb. 22 | 2 pm

Shearith Israel League Super Bowl Party

Sunday, February 8 | 6:00 pm | At Shearith Israel

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thank you to **Vivien Eisenmann**, for sponsoring a breakfast, in memory of her husband, Leon Eisenmann HeHaber Leib b. HeHaber Shemuel HaLevi.

Empower Yourself to Help Protect Our Community

We invite our members to consider CSS's newly launched ROAM initiative, which equips Jewish volunteers with advanced skills in event safety and community protection.

For more details, visit thecss.org/joinroam.

We also encourage members to join our existing CSS volunteers who assist on major holidays — contact Vicki Bengualid at vbengualid@gmail.com.