

Ashes: The Dirty and the Clean

“Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This [is] the law of the burnt-offering, the burnt-offering which is upon the flame on the altar all night until morning, with the fire of the altar incinerating it: That the priest shall don his long robe of linen, and linen trousers he shall garb upon on his flesh, and shall pick up [some of] the ash [which remained] when the fire consumes the burnt-offering on the altar, and he shall put them near the altar. Then he shall strip off his garments, and don other garments, and shall take the ashes out of the camp, unto a pure place.” (Lev. 6:2-4, some editions Lev. 6:9-11)

The law concerning the highest level of the sacrifices begins with the priest’s taking out the garbage! Of course, this is no ordinary garbage, but rather the ash remains of the wholly-burnt animal sacrifice, the “olah [עֹלָה]” the sacrifice which “went up” [in smoke to God]. What remained of this each morning was like what remains after a barbecue: ash, with some remaining fat and solids which were not completely burnt. “Deshen [דֶּשֶׁן]” can mean both “ash” and “fat,” which always made me assume a high fat content in the ash, increasing its meaty “barbecue” smell. This is why ashes are sometimes referred to as “smell [ריח]” or a “savor.” In some sense, the remains are kind of an “essence,” just like we boil down or compress vegetable products to extract their rarefied “essence.”

The verse describes that the burnt offering is to be burnt upon the fireplace all night until the morning, being incinerated in the altar’s fire. Most interpreters count this as the first law, but I think the simple translation of the verse’s phrasing assumes the reader knows that already: It’s telling us that the first law of the burnt offering which has been burning all night was that the priest should take some of its remaining ash. Why should the Torah begin with this law? Of course, you have to clean the remains of the previous day’s offering before you could start the new day’s offerings. And given that the previous day’s burnt offering could burn all night, the first part of every morning’s duties would be to clear away yesterday’s ashes.

Actually, though, there are two completely separate procedures described in these two verses, clearly differentiated by the priest’s change of clothes: Verse 3 describes a kind of “offering” of some of the ash being placed next to the altar. Verse 4 describes the real disposal of ash. The two duties are clearly differentiated by the clothes the priest wears. The special linen robe and breeches which the priest wears for this snatching up of some of the ashes and laying them next to the altar marks this as a sacrificial act in and of itself which was integral to the rite of the burnt-offering sacrifice: Having made an offering of the animal’s blood and its body parts having been offered up to God in the sweet smoke of the barbecue, one last offering is made from some of the ash to which its purified essence has been reduced. The linen garments signify purity and cleanliness, and although the ash itself was dirty, this taking of the ash as an offering was the equivalent of offering the animal’s rarefied, purified essence. Even Verse 4, which has the priest wear the usual priestly garb which he is used to getting soiled, says that the remaining ash disposed “outside of the camp” must be taken to a “pure” place. Part of this is because the remaining ash still comes from a consecrated animal, but also partly because it is what remains of the animal’s rarefied, purified essence.

The theme of the disposal of dirty remains which is cleansing and purifying is quite relevant to us as we take upon ourselves the duties of Passover cleaning. Getting ourselves dirty is very much connected to getting clean. Cleaning and soiling, purifying and sullyng, are tied to each other in an endless cycle. But in the end, what remains – its essence - is clean.



Shabbat HaGadol-Tsav

March 27-28, 2026 | 10 Nisan, 5786

Consecration Anniversary: Second Mill Street Synagogue (1818)

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 429 | Haftarah: 1005
Kaplan: Parasha: 520 | Haftarah: 1288

Candle Lighting | 6:58 pm

Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

SEASON FINALE: Friday Night Lights | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik | *5786 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat HaGadol Derasha | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

“The Writing on the Wall: Purim, Pesah, & the Patterns of Jewish History”

See inside for full sponsorship listings.

Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class & Teen Shiur will return next week.

Evening Services | 6:55 pm

Habdala | 7:52 pm

Pesah begins on Wednesday night. See inside for the First Days schedule.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Wednesday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday-Tuesday (**Minha & Arbit**): 6:30 pm

PESAH AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Thank you to our Shabbat HaGadol Derasha Sponsors (as of 3/25):

Halana & Alan Greenberg, *in memory of their parents, Rita & Harold Greenberg and Jack E. Mizrahi*

Solomon Family

Anonymous

Raquel & Steve Herz, *in honor of Rabbi Meir & Loyaliza Soloveichik on the birth of a granddaughter*

Carol & Alan Schechter, *on the nahala of Carol's father, Mathisyahu b. Koppel*

Meralee & Sidney Schlusberg

Esther & Bill Schuller, *in memory of Rae Kushner*

Lu Steinberg & Michael Schuller, *in honor of Rabbi Soloveichik*

Faith For Food + Maot Hittim

This year, in addition to collecting Maot Hittim to benefit members of our own *kehillah* (and beyond), **we are collecting funds to support our substantial Maot Hittim effort through Faith for Food.** *Faith for Food* is Shearith Israel and Masbia's new UWS food annex on Paved Paradise that supplies our neighbors with weekly groceries. For Pesah, Masbia will be supplying ample Kosher for Passover food packages including chicken and other items that will feed a family for 8 days of Pesah. The packages cost \$18,000 (\$216 each) for about 80 families — if you can, please contribute so that everyone in need in our community can celebrate Passover with dignity.

Donate at www.shearithisrael.org/maot-hittim-5786.

If you are sponsoring a package of \$216 or more, indicate "FFF" in the note field.

To Help Someone in Manhattan with Food Insecurity

Email CSIAnnex@masbiarelief.org with a name and cell phone number.

A trained Masbia representative will reach out regarding enrollment.

Learn more about Faith for Food & contribute at shearithisrael.org/faith-for-food.

Experience Ancient Egypt—Hol HaMoed Youth Trip to the Met

Monday, April 6 | 11:00 am | Metropolitan Museum of Art

With Jake and Baruch-Lev | Register at shearithisrael.org

SAVE THE DATES

Shabbat, April 25: **Siyyum HaTwain: A Community Shabbat Luncheon**
with Guest Speaker Prof. Susan K. Harris

Monday, June 8: **Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment**
A Symposium on Religious Liberty at Touro Synagogue

FIRST DAYS PESAH SCHEDULE

Pesah Preparations

***Search for Leaven* — Tuesday Evening, March 31**

At night on Tuesday | after sunset, 7:20 pm

***Fast of First Born* — Wednesday Morning, April 1**

Fast begins (Dawn) | 5:23 am

Shahrit & *siyyum* for the First Born | 7:05 am

Stop eating *hametz* | by 10:53 am / Dispose of any remaining *hametz* | by 11:56 am

Erub Tabshilin Preparation* | by sunset 7:21 pm

****Erub Tabshilin*:** *When the festival begins on Wednesday eve, the Erub in the form of matza and food prepared for the following Sabbath is set aside prior to the festival before sunset.*

First & Second Days of Pesah

Eve of Day I — Wednesday, April 1

Candles (18 min. before sunset) | 7:03 pm

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:45 pm

Begin the First Haggadah | after 7:44 pm

Day I — Thursday, April 2

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am

Tikkun HaTal | inserted in Musaf, 10:30 am

Men's Reading of **Shir HaShirim** | 6:20 pm

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:45 pm

Candles, Second Haggadah, & **Omer Counting** | after 7:45 pm

Day II — Friday, April 3

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am

Shabbat Hol HaMoed Pesah

Eve of Shabbat, Friday, April 3

Men's Reading of **Shir HaShirim** | 6:20 pm

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 7:00 pm

Candles (18 min. before sunset) | 7:05 pm

Shabbat Hol HaMoed Day, April 4

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am

Women's Reading of **Shir HaShirim** | 11:30 am

Minha & Arbit | 7:05 pm / Habdala | 8:00 pm

On all days of Pesah: Youth Programming begins at 10:00 am in Fidanque

ELECTION RESULTS

Congratulations to **Rabbi Soloveichik, Rabbi Rohde, and Rev. Edinger** upon being re-elected to their constitutional positions of Hazzan, Shohet, and Shamash, respectively. Congratulations as well to our newly voted-in electors: **Juan Mesa-Freydell** and **Rima Raynes**. We encourage you to welcome our new electors, and we look forward to having them sign their names in our historic book.