

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

The Necessity for Clear-Eyed Assessments, Yet Not Be Swayed by Them

The simplest understanding of the context for the exposition of the law of giving a half-shekel is as part of a mustering for the purposes of warfare. The proper form of taking a census of all men over the age of twenty would assure that “no scourge would come upon them when they are mustered.” The term I translate here as “scourge,” נגף, can have many meanings, sometimes indicating a spreading “plague” of illness, but some commentators say this means they will be “scourged” by defeat at the hands of their enemy, and I think this the most likely interpretation. The grave and fear-fraught danger of battle and warfare can also explain the curious phrases “as a reminder before the LORD, as expiation [לכפר] for your lives.”

The insistence upon every man giving exactly the same is noteworthy: War fought by a whole society supporting each other can be a great leveler. Although there are going to be differences in rank, ultimately it is necessary for the whole society to come together to support it equally, if it is to succeed. Nothing can replace the basic manpower of a polity. Nothing can replace the popular support of a society as a whole. It doesn't so much matter how big or small the manpower is, but there must be an accurate reckoning so that they can stand shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity. Overestimation of their numerical strength can certainly lead to overconfidence and defeat, but so can under-counting. They must walk into battle with a clear-eyed assessment of both their strengths as well as possible weaknesses.

The donation of these half-shekel tokens of their manpower strength as a gift to God signifies that they realize that their victory or defeat lies not in their manpower, but in God's Spirit dwelling in their midst, in the hands of God and his Favor, which they entreat through this offering. Counting via token contributions also assures accuracy and accountability: If any error is suspected in the count, there can always be a recount. A sum of silver can be looked at dispassionately, as no more than an accounting, unlike a row of men who are likely to leave more swaying impressions of strength or weakness.

What the actual sum of the manpower is far from an indicator of weakness or strength, but one must have an accurate assessment of the sum of one's possible strengths and weaknesses, knowing at the same time that they are not definitively determinative. Clear-eyed, rational assessments of the situation assessments are necessary, but they also must be looked at with a level of dispassion, without being swayed by them. The leveling of the society and showing that their manpower stands shoulder-to-shoulder as equal comrades-in-arms goes a long way towards helping to tip the scales in their favor; trusting in God's Spirit and pleading for His favor will hopefully do the rest.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Ki Tissa-Parah

March 6-7, 2026 | 18 Adar, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 352 | Parah: 652 | Haftarah: 999

Kaplan: Parasha: 440 | Parah: 756 | Haftarah: 1278

Candle Lighting | 5:35 pm

Evening Services | 5:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

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

Zemirot | 8:10 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

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:45 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 4:45 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 5:30 pm

Habdala | 6:27 pm

Daylight Savings Time begins on Saturday night.

Remember to turn your clocks forward 1 hour!

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

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

COMING UP

Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

Next Tour: THIS Wednesday, March 11 | 5:45 pm

Individuals and groups are welcome to attend a free, guided tour on the second Wednesday of every month at 5:45 pm (prior to Evening Services), led by Rev. Z. Edinger.

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

PESAH PREVIEW

Bedek HaBayit Day

Sunday, March 22 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Join us for a special hands-on volunteer opportunity to help care for our Synagogue in advance of the Spring holidays. Together, we'll polish ritual silver, reattach bells to Rimonim, sort and inspect talitot for repair, mend Humashim and prayerbooks, and inventory synagogue textiles. No experience needed – just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to help. By working together, we can all take pride in helping to maintain the beauty and sanctity of our synagogue.

For questions and to RSVP, contact Rev. Z. Edinger at zedinger@shearithisrael.org.

Shabbat HaGadol Derasha

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Shabbat Morning, March 28

Sponsorships available at shearithisrael.org.

READERS WELCOME: Women's Reading of Shir HaShirim

Shabbat of Pesah, April 4

Open to women and girls of all ages! If you're interested in learning parts, email Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lrohde-csi@yahoo.com. With the audio available on the Synagogue's website, learning a part is made very mobile and accessible.

CSI Youth Matza Factory

Sunday, March 22

Stay tuned for more details!

ONGOING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Faith for Food

The Masbia UWS Food Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel
Learn more & contribute at shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food



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

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

A trained Masbia representative will reach out regarding enrollment.

Songs for Shabbat, with Rev. Z. Edinger

Thursday Evenings | Light refreshments will be served

Join us on Thursday evenings at 6:30 pm for weekday services, followed by the start of a new weekly series where we'll sing traditional S&P Shabbat table songs together. Each week we'll focus on one song — exploring its meaning and melody and singing it as a group — so you can bring it home and share it at your own Shabbat table.

No RSVP required!

TUESDAY NIGHT SERIES

Reading Outside the Box: An Exploration of the Apocrypha

Led by Baruch-Lev Kelman

Tuesdays after Evening Services

7:00 pm (after 6:30 pm Evening Services)

KIDS KORNER

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

*In the desert they grew tired of waiting all day long,
So they made something shiny, but it was very wrong,
They danced around a statute made from their melted chaff –
What was that idol called?*