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Community Announcements

Mazal Tov to Jesse Lipschutz on becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations to his parents Liz Edelman and Henry Lipschutz.

Mazal Tov to Rafael Lipschutz on becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations to his parents Liz Edelman and Henry Lipschutz.

Crime, Punishment, and Reputation
Rabbi Richard Hidary

"Hashem spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew close to the presence of Hashem" (Leviticus 16:1).

The parasha opens with a reference to the death of two of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, on the day of the consecration of the Mishkan. The verse includes just one detail, “they drew close to the presence of Hashem,” which prompts us to wonder what crime they committed that was so terrible to deserve immediate capital punishment. The story presented back in Leviticus 10 provides only slight help in describing their incense offerings as an improper “foreign fire.” Commentators ever since have struggled to reconstruct the details of this cryptically concise narrative.

Interestingly, there are two echoes of this story in the Prophets that may help shed light on this story. The first is about Eli the Priest at the Mishkan in Shilo who also has two sons who served in the Mishkan but performed the most horrific sins. They would forcibly grab from worshippers to come to the Mishkan any part of their animal sacrifice they wanted, even prohibited parts and even before parts of it were offered on the altar. They also would sleep with women who congregated in front of the Mishkan, probably widows and poor people asking for charity and vulnerable to predators. They acted with great insolence and impiety both to people and to God (2 Samuel 2:12-22). Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain soon after in a war against the Philistines. The parallels between the stories are striking: two chief priests whose two sons die because of improper behavior with sacrifices in the Mishkan.

A second intertext is that of Yerobam who builds two altars in the North of Israel, in defiance of the Jerusalem Temple. He also has two sons who die prematurely. The first named Abiah dies young from a sickness. The second named Nadab reigns over the Northern Kingdom for just two years and is then killed along with all of the descendants of Yerobam (1 Kings 14-15). The parallels to this story are equally striking: While busy with consecrating the new altar, Aharon loses two sons named Nadab and Abihu. Yerobam, in the act of building two new altars, loses two sons with almost the exact same names: Abiah and Nadab.

If we read the later stories as commentaries on the earlier, we can propose that there may be more behind the story of Aharon’s sons than meets the eye. We do not know whether their misdeeds were motivated by personal greed, like the sons of Eli, or whether their actions undermined national unity and religious interests, like Yerobam and his sons. Either way, it is very significant that the Torah tells us only that they were worthy of capital punishment but withholding the details of their actions.

(continued on back panel)
UPCOMING EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

“A Tale of Two States: Comparing the Declarations of Independence of Israel and America”
Rabbi Soloveichik in Conversation with Leon Wieseltier
Co-sponsored by the YU Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought Program and Congregation Shearith Israel
Wednesday, May 11 | 7:00 pm | Held at Shearith Israel
Email strauscenter@yu.edu to RSVP.

Two Part Series with Professor Yaron Harel
Monday, May 9 | 7:00 pm | The Encounter between the Jews from Spain and the Jews of Aleppo at the Beginning of the 16th Century
Monday, May 16 | 7:00 pm | Jews, Muslims and Christians in Syria in the 19th Century
Prof. Yaron Harel is a member of the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, and the head of the academic committee of the Dahan Center at Bar Ilan University. His research interests are engaged in political, social and cultural history of the Jews in the Middle East. He published twelve books and dozens of articles worldwide.

Yom Yerushalayim at Shearith Israel
Sunday Morning, June 5 | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik
Following 8:00 am morning services, Rabbi Soloveichik will deliver a special shiur in honor of Yom Yerushalayim.

Shabu’ot Public Lecture
Saturday Night, June 11 | 11:30 pm
Rabbi Soloveichik will deliver a special public lecture entitled “When Jews Owned Slaves: An Often Untold Tale of History, Rituals and Jewish Law” After the talk, guests are invited to enjoy some cheesecake!

Annual Pre-Memorial Day Service: Honoring Veterans of the Revolution and Members of the Armed Forces
Sunday Morning, May 22 | 10:30 am
Chatham Square Cemetery
Join us at the Chatham Square Cemetery in Chinatown to honor veterans of the US Armed Forces including members of our congregation who participated in the Revolutionary War. Led by Rabbi Soloveichik, this special service is open to all members of the community (veterans are encouraged to attend.) The cemetery, active from 1682-1828, is located at 55 St. James Place, opposite Chatham Square.
Transportation from and back to Shearith Israel is available. Go to shearthisrael.org/chatham-square-service to sign up.

Calling all Veterans!
Shearith Israel is honored by our members’ long history of military service – going back to the Revolutionary War! We are currently updating our “honor roll” of veterans for our congregational records. If you or a family member are a veteran or are currently serving in the United States Armed Services, the IDF, or other military organizations, we would like to know. Please contact Zachary Edinger at zedinger@shearthisrael.org.
Additionally, if you are interested in learning about Shearith Israel’s revival of the “Sephardic Post” of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, please contact zedinger@shearthisrael.org.

Girls’ Megillat Ruth Reading
First day of Shabuot | Sunday, June 12
The girls of our synagogue recite Megillat Ruth for the congregation in the Main Sanctuary after services. If your daughter would like to participate, please contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com.
Please consider sponsoring or contributing to a kiddush in honor of our girls.

WEEKDAY JUDAIC EDUCATION
For details go to: shearthisrael.org/judaic-education

Tuesday
◊ Rambam’s Mishneh Torah | Rabbi Hiday | 7:45 am
◊ Feasts and Fasts: The Festivals in Jewish Thought- A Class for Women | Rabbi Soloveichik | 9:00 am
◊ Talmud Class: Tractate Rosh Hashana and the Philosophy of Jewish Time | Rabbi Soloveichik | 8:00 pm | Spring semester sponsored by Gregory Bell

Sunday
◊ The Book of Kings | Rabbi Hiday | 8:40 am
◊ Saadia Gaon’s Book of Beliefs and Opinions | Sjimon den Hollander | 9:30 am

Don’t let us go dry.
Be a Scotch or arak sponsor. To sponsor or contribute go to shearthisrael.org/scotch-and-arak-sponsorships

Please consider sponsoring a semester or a class. Go to: shearthisrael.org/sponsoraclass

Parnas Office Hours
Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearthisrael.org.

Our next public tour is:
Wednesday, May 11 at 11:00 am