Life and Death Hang in the Delicate Balance of Favor
Rabbi Ira Rohde, Hazzan

The double portion of the Torah read this week contains the widest variety of laws listed anywhere. But Leviticus brings a much more intensifying perspective to laws found elsewhere. It’s not merely, to paraphrase Rashi’s parable at the beginning of our parasha, that a patient is more likely to take the advice of a doctor who can point to an example of someone who died as the result of ignoring his prescriptions. It’s not merely that Nadab and Abihu died, but rather, in an existentialist sense, precisely because they have died for an offence so trifling. According to Rashi, the pesah interpretation is that Nadab and Abihu died simply because their offering was unauthorized and unbidden. It not only failed to curry favor and propitiate God; it led to the most vehement and violent rejection of the offerants. Sacrifice must above all else be a matter of beseeching God’s goodwill. Any undue attempt to influence the Divine smacks of sorcery and theurgy, of trying to force God’s hand. There is a fine distinction between Queen Esther, who acknowledges her place and delicately seeks the King’s favor, and Haman, who behind the king’s back boasts of his power to tip the king’s hand. But that keeping that delicate distinction, that fine balance, is literally a matter of life and death: That’s a lesson we learn most especially from the sacrificial system, where the connections between life and death, growth and corruption must be ever so carefully and delicately handled. In order to have fresh, life-giving meat, man must slaughter and kill, keep the meat from contamination, cook and store his food. It is a life-giving process fraught with the dangers of death, and the only way for man to avoid those dangers is to acknowledge and admit his own lowly place in this: Life, strength, and growth are gratis gifts bestowed by God which man does not own, control, or deserve. Clean, freshly-slaughtered meat gives life; carrion, unclean and putrid meat brings death. Some forms of death and blood are life-giving and purifying; others bring on defilement, disease, and further death.

(continued on side panel)
UPCOMING EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

Special Lecture Sponsored by The Hebra Hased vaAmet
This Shabbat, May 6, Following Morning Services
This week’s seminar is sponsored by the Hebra Hased vaAmet. The Hebra has a long history of service to our congregation. The Hebra continues to provide essential support for the synagogue and community during times of need. To learn more about the Hebra or to become a member please speak with Jack Daar or Zachary Edinger.

We wish Rabbi Soloveichik and the participants on this Shabbat’s Washington DC/ Monticello trip a wonderful time as they learn, celebrate and make history. We look forward to hearing about their adventure when they return!

Carvalho’s Journey Film Screening
Followed by a Talk-Back Session with Filmmaker, Steve Rivo, Featured Historian, Arlene Hirschfelder, Moderated by Sexton, Z. Edinger
Wednesday, May 17, 7:00 pm
Screened in the 2016 NY Jewish Film Festival to critical acclaim, Carvalho’s Journey tells the amazing story of Solomon Nunes Carvalho (1815-1897), an observant Sephardic Jew of Portuguese descent. Born in Charleston, SC, Carvalho later moved to Philadelphia, as well as New York City (and is buried in our cemetery). The film chronicles his life as a groundbreaking adventurer, portrait painter, and photographer. $5 members/$8 non-members.
Register at shearithisrael.org/Carvalho

Annual Pre-Memorial Day Service:
Honoring Veterans of the Revolution and Members of the Armed Forces
Held at the Chatham Square Cemetery
55 St. James Place
Sunday, May 21 | 10:30 am
Head down to Chatham Square Cemetery in Chinatown to honor members of our congregation who participated in the Revolutionary War. Our historic ceremony and Color Guard is a special Shearith Israel tradition and is open to military veterans, clergy, and members of the community. Join us to place American flags at the graves of our twenty-two veteran congregants. Transportation from and back to Shearith Israel is available. To register and sign up for transportation, go to shearithisrael.org/chatham-square-service.

Shabuot Public Lecture
Delivered by Rabbi Soloveichik
Tuesday, May 30, 11:00 PM
Rabbi Soloveichik will deliver another intriguing lecture at what has become a prime Shabuot learning destination on the Upper West Side. After the talk, guests are encouraged to enjoy some cheesecake! To sponsor go to shearithisrael.org/shabuot-public-lecture

Girls Megillat Ruth Reading
Wednesday, May 31 | 11:30 am
On the First Day of Shabuot, after musaf, the girls of the synagogue chant the Book of Ruth for the congregation in the Main Sanctuary. Any girl (teens included) who can read Hebrew and wants to participate should contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com. Afterwards, the congregation joins together for a Kiddush in the their honor. To co-sponsor the Kiddush, go to shearithisrael.org/girls-book-ruth-reading.

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

Sunday
◊ Saadiah Gaon’s Book of Beliefs and Opinions | Simon den Hollander | 8:45 am
Monday, Wednesday, & Thursday
◊ Habruia (Paired) Learning | 5:15 pm - 7:15 pm | Before and after evening services, Rabbi Chaim Yanetz and rabbinical students from YU are available in the Elias Room to study habruia with congregants of all ages.
Tuesday
◊ Minyan Class and Breakfast | Following Morning Services | Sponsored by Chaim Katzap
◊ Feasts and Fasts: The Festivals in Jewish Thought - A Class for Women | Rabbi Soloveichik | 9:00 am | Spring semester is sponsored anonymously in memory of Debby Neuman
◊ Talmud Class: Tractate Sanhedrin | Rabbi Soloveichik | 7 pm

To sponsor a single class or an entire semester, go to shearithisrael.org/sponsoraclass
To find out when your favorite class is held, canceled or for special topics, go to shearithisrael.org/join-our-mailing-lists to select which emails you’d like to receive.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences to Margo Weaker Suckewer on the passing of her mother, Anne Weaker.

Weekday Toddler Summer ‘Camp’
June 20–August 17
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-11:30 am
For children aged 16-33 months.
Includes outdoor play and a wading pool. Adult caregiver presence is required. Register online at shearithisrael.org/summer-toddler-camp.