DEBAR TORAH: BELIEVE IN THE WISDOM OF THE GOODLY FOODS
BY HAZANN RABBI ERA ROVNIK
And you shall make garments of linsey-woolsey for Aaron your brother for splendor and for beauty. And you shall make Aaron and his sons garments to sanctify him as priests to me.

Last week’s Debar Torah by Jonathan Weinstein emphasized both the necessary obligations as well as the voluntary aspect of Torah observance. It was asserted that beauty is elicited by creative energy, an energy coming from passion and joy which can only be voluntary.

In contrast, I’d like to assert something different: that it is the object of a beauty which is goodly and goodly form which naturally arouses our passion, and both joyous devotion as well as drudging toil. How can that be, you may ask. Isn’t beauty in the eye of the beholder? That which one object finds beautiful and good, and hence arouses his passion, will not necessarily be according to another’s aesthetic tastes. Hence each must find what arouses his passions and seek joyously and creatively to incorporate that aspect of the beautiful and good in his worship of God. So runs the modern argument.

The Ancients, most of them, did not think that way. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, all thought that what was beautiful and good was universally agreed upon. And the Torah seems to concur. There are universal, classic canons of beauty just as there are universal, classic canons of morality. What all of us see and hear as beautiful and in art and music, despite our modern-day protests to the contrary, is remarkably similar, and often can be demonstrated to be based upon sound, universal principles of mathematics and physics. Classic proportions and simple yet graceful, sturdy, well-planned but careful design are valued everywhere.

Abraham Joshua Heschel is quoted as having said that one should craft one’s life as one would a work of art. But it is the goal of crafting a thing of beauty and perfection which should arouse our passion, as well as our toll and drudging toil.

And the truth is, I’d argue philosophically, that we in fact do agree, deep down, on what is beautiful and good far more than we want to admit in our modern, relativistic age. We certainly argue about such things aplenty, and such arguments make no sense to the eye of the beholder. As an old-fashioned Platonist Jewish thinker, I’d argue that beauty and goodness are still based upon correspondence as well as variation from classic, ideal forms. And hence the best way to increase our passion is to strengthen our faith in those classic, beautiful forms. I’ve written before about the Tabernacle being designed as a model, well-furnished home, with regular meals, lighting, and fragments, which come to us as an idea of a world, well-furnished and beautiful home life.

A healthy, attractive home of the heart will arouse our passions and devotion; we want to come home to it again and again. Sadly, many do not really believe in the “magic” of a beautiful, orderly home life. And the same goes with common goodness as well. But underneath it all, classic categories of graciousness, symmetry, simplicity, proportion, harmoniousness are still operative: The basic canons, both of law and morality, as well as in aesthetics and the social graces, still count, deep down, although in them is badly shaken.

What we must restore is our faith, our belief in the “magic” of classic models! Well, for me, although this might seem improbable, perhaps our modern forms of art and music point to a way: “Abstract” art is now being analyzed in terms of classic canons and the way it concurs and differs. Our most modern forms of music, dance, and athletics are being analyzed and improved according to classic techniques. I have a singing teacher who is still training the most extreme rockers and rappers according to the classic models of singing.

Is this a case of self-deception? Of course, we should all be reassured by Scripture and the promises of Jewish tradition: These canons were devised by the wise ones of the wise, whom God filled with the spirit of wisdom to make the most beautiful things. Let us do our best to follow their blueprint for goodness and beauty, and hopefully God will inspire us with energy and passion, as well.
**PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL**

**Schedule**

**Fast of Esther**
Wednesday, February 28th

Dawn (Fast Begins) .................................................... 5:10 am
MORNING SERVICE (SHAHRT)....................................... 7:15 am

**Eve of Purim**
Wednesday Evening, February 28th

MINAH (MEN WEAR TEFFILIN).......................................... 5:15 pm
ARBIT (EVENING) SERVICE ........................................... 6:00 pm
END OF FAST.................................................................... 6:07 pm
READING OF MEGILAH................................................. 6:15 pm
MEGILAH IS FOLLOWED BY HERRING FEST DINNER FOR REGISTERED GUESTS
LATE READING OF MEGILAH .......................................... 8:00 pm

**Purim Day**
Thursday, March 1

MORNING SHAHRIT...................................................... 7:15 am
MORNING MEGILAH READING........................................ 8:00 am
WOMEN’S MEGILAH READING...................................... 8:00 am
MEGILAH IS FOLLOWED BY BREAKFAST FOR ALL
LATE MORNING MEGILAH READING............................. 11:00 am
END OF PURIM DAY................................................... 1:06:08 pm
POST-PURIM SERVICE (ARBIT ONLY)........................... 6:30 pm

**Don’t Forget To Give Matanot L’Evyonim**

It is one of the mitzvot of Purim to give charity to the poor, Matanot L’Evyonim. You can easily fulfill this mitzvah through the synagogue: your online gift or check made out to the "Rabbi’s Discretionary Fund," will be distributed by Rabbi Soloveichik on Purim to those in need. Donate online at shearithisrael.org/matanot.

**Sponsor Our Annual Purim Breakfast**
Thursday, March 1 | 8:30 am

Every year we treat our congregation to a festive Purim Breakfast following the reading of the megillah on Purim morning. Help ensure that we have plenty of hamantaschen to go around by going here to sponsor: shearithisrael.org/purim-breakfast

**PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL**

**Children’s Musical Storytelling by Story Arts**
Wednesday, February 28th | Elias Room

**Arrive early at 6:00 pm**

Parents are encouraged to arrive at 6:00 pm, in order to help their children settle in, and then make their way to the Large Synagogue in time for megillah. Liz Rios and Yona Glass will provide supervision, but children under the age of 5 must be accompanied by an adult. Heather Forest of Story Arts will perform a dramatic telling of the Purim story and other Jewish folktales, accompanied by her guitar.

Our children’s programming is free and open to all, though sponsors are greatly appreciated to help defray the cost.

Visit shearithisrael.org/storyarts to sponsor.

**COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Condolences to Lawrence Kobrin**

on the passing of his brother, Jay Kobrin.

**Seeking Teen Girls for Annual Shir Hashirim Reading**

**Eighth Day of Passover, Saturday, April 7**

After ma’aseh on the last day of Passover, the teen girls of our synagogue take part in our unique tradition as they read The Song of Songs for the congregation in the Main Sanctuary, Full preparation and training provided. Newcomers welcome!

For information and to participate, please contact Hazzan Rabbi Ira Rohde at irohde@shearithisrael.org.

To sponsor the kiddush in the girls’ honor, go to shearithisrael.org/teen-girls-shir-hashirim-2018.

**CALL TO ACTION:**

Help Make our March 18 Event, “Passover and the American Imagination,” A Great Success

We have seen tremendous enthusiasm for our upcoming symposium and luncheon, an event which constitutes a novel approach to our annual fundraiser. As we enter the home stretch, we need your help to catalyze registration in the short time we have left.

Your personal outreach will make a big difference in encouraging more attendees to register and to give generously. If you would like to dedicate some time and energy toward spreading the word and recruiting membership to support the success of this event, please contact Barbara Reiss at breiss@shearithisrael.org.

**DEADLINE TO BE LISTED IN OUR HAGGADAH COMPANION TRIBUTE FOLIO: MARCH 4**

Sunday, March 18, 2018

**Passover and the American Imagination**

**This major event is part of our Year of Years Celebrations which will culminate in 2019 when we mark 365 years of our congregation and Jewish life in America.**

Hosted by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, participants will enjoy exclusive experiences, including:

- Lectures and discussions with pre-eminent scholars such as Lincoln historian, Harold Holzer
- Remarkable Passover stories and lessons of liberty from the American Jewish historical narrative
- An exclusive viewing of rarely exhibited archival materials, such as Thomas Jefferson’s Letter to Mercedal Manuel Noah of Shearith Israel
- A take-home Haggadah companion custom created by Rabbi Soloveichik, which participants can use to inspire their own Seder this year
- A bonus conversation—for luncheon participants only—with Harold Holzer and Rabbi Soloveichik on the making of Steven Spielberg’s critically acclaimed film, Lincoln

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Tickets start at $25. RSVP by March 4: shearithisrael.org/gala2018

Sun., March 18, 2018 | Symposium 9 am - 12:30 pm
Luncheon to follow with a special tribute to Shearith Israel’s 517th Bar Mitzvah
Simon Solana-Caro, Nisan Torah
Robert Kapito, Morton Benesh