Debar Torah: Parashat Bo
—Rabbi Yanetz—

After the eighth plague, Pharaoh changed his mind: he was willing to let the Jews go. Careful reading of the pesukim can teach us an important lesson which sheds light on the purpose of the entire Passover story.

Pharaoh calls Moshe and Aharon, informing them that he is willing to let the Jews go serve their god. But then he asked them: “Who are the ones that you are planning to take with you?”

Moshe replied, “We shall go with our youth and our old people.”

To that, Pharaoh responded, “Only the adult men shall go.”

What is so important about Moshe’s insistence on the children go with him? A popular answer is that we need to take the children to teach how to serve our god. Rabbi Chaim Palagi claims that taking the children with us is not a technical issue, but rather the ultimate goal of the whole story—to pass down the Mitzvot to our future generations.

He derives this from the pasuk (Shemot, 13:8), “And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt.’”

That is the aim of the whole story, that we will educate our children to know that God exists, watches, acts, controls all powers in the world, and can change nature when he decides to do so—that what he did during the Ten Plagues in Egypt is what he can do at any time and every minute. That’s why we add so many questions and interesting activities to attract the children on the night of the Pesah Seder, so that kids will stay up and be actively interested during the Seder.

This reminds me of a true story that happened during the Holocaust, at one of the concentration camps. Before Pesach arrived, a group of Jewish prisoners were looking for kosher matza to eat for the coming holiday. It was hard to get it, of course, but one of the Jews risked his life and managed to get a small piece of matza. When the night of Pesach arrived, he was happy to gather with the other Jews telling them that he has a kezayit of matza, but he realized how bad his friends felt that no one else had any matza but him. He started wondering if he should hand it over and allow someone else to have the kezayit of matza. An argument broke out among the gathered audience: who should have the matza? Someone said that he should have it since he risked his life to get it; others said to hand it to the oldest member of the group or maybe to the Rabbi. It was definitely hard decision to make.

But this of the women raised her hand and said, “Give it to the child!”

This was a surprise, since a child is not even obligated in that mitzvah. But the Rabbi understood her point, and explained that she is actually right. What is all Pesah about? To teach our belief to our children? We all here are old people in this prison, and how long will we stay? Our biggest chance to have a Jewish future is this child. He should get the matza, and we will explain to him the miracles that God made for us.

And that is exactly what happened: this child survived the war, he immigrated to America, became a Rabbi, and every year, he told over that story. Passing down our belief and our strongest faith to our children is the essence of Pesah.

It’s now clear why Moshe insist taking the children with the adults, since that is the lesson and the goal of our story, to instill in that in our children and they will instill in that in their children, and so on, until the ultimate redemption comes.
RSVP DEADLINE: THIS MONDAY, JANUARY 14

Shabbat Shira Sing-Along Luncheon
Featuring our talented musical triumvirate:
Hazzan Rabbi Ira Rohde, Associate Hazzan Rev. Philip L. Sherman, and Shamash Zachary Edinger

Shabbat, January 19 | Following Morning Services
Have you ever wished you were more familiar with Shearith Israel’s unique liturgy and melodies? Do you ever have the urge to sing along with the Shearith Israel choir (or belt it out at your own home)? At this special Shabbat luncheon, join the uplifting voices of our clergy in discussing, learning, and singing classic Shearith Israel tunes in a laid-back, cozy atmosphere. Meals like these are a great opportunity to invite your friends to our community without having to host them yourself!

Register or sponsor at shearthisrael.org/sing-along-luncheon.

This event is one of our many Year of Years, 365th Anniversary events, showcasing and transmitting the unique musical traditions of our congregation.

Remembering Baghdad Continued:
Upcoming Film Screening
Wednesday, February 6 | 7:00 pm
The Last Jews of Baghdad
Marking the anniversary of the Baghdad Hangings
With opening remarks from producer Carole Barri
Today, only 5 Jews remain in Iraq from a population of 160,000. This film asks, “Why did the Iraqi Jews leave?” The answer is found in the discriminatory laws and policies enacted by Iraq’s government and leaders against these former members of Iraqi society who still consider themselves “Iraqi Jews.”

Register at shearthisrael.org/baghdad-screenings. Only $5 per member/$8 per non-member in advance, $10 at the door.

Special Commemorative Baghdad Booklet
Our limited edition "Remembering Baghdad" booklet, featuring exclusive photographs and life stories of our many Iraqi Jewish community members, will be available at the screening for $5. This beautifully designed volume is only available through Shearith Israel. You can buy it at this screening, or place an order online at shearthisrael.org/baghdad-book.

This screening is part of our many Year of Years, 365th Anniversary events, showcasing the extraordinary diversity and heritage of our congregation.

Shearith Israel Toddler Program
Mondays and Wednesdays | 9:30 am-11:30 am
January 2-June 5
For ages 16-34 months | Parent or caregiver attendance required.
There is still time to enroll your toddler for the Spring Semester of “the best-kept secret on the Upper West Side”!
To learn more and apply, go to shearthisrael.org/toddlerprogram.

Parent-Child Learning & Pizza
On Upcoming Saturday Nights:
THIS Saturday night, January 12 | 6:45 pm
Led by Rabbi Ira Rohde
February 9 | 7:00 pm—Led by Z. Edinger
For Children Aged 5-12 & Their Parents or Grandparents
A wonderful opportunity for parents (or grandparents) to study Torah with their children together with Shearith Israel’s clergy.
Pizza and prizes help make this a fun-filled evening of inter-generational learning.
Register for the January 12 session (only $5 per person) at shearthisrael.org/parent-child-learning.

PTTS Shabbaton 2.0
Shabbat, January 19
On this special Shabbat, PTTS students take the lead at Jr. Congregation. Feel free to stick around by signing up for our Shabbat Shira Sing-Along Luncheon!

Calling CSI Teens
We are looking for a few experienced Junior Congregation participants to mentor some of our PTTS students to help them prepare for this special event. This is a rewarding and fun chance to support our PTTS students, and can also be used to fulfill community service hours.

Contact Yona Glass at yglass@shearthisrael.org if you would like to help a PTTS student master their part.

Meldadera of Reverend A. L. Cardozo
Monday, January 28 | Following 6:30 pm Evening Services
All are welcome to join us at the Meldadera marking the 13th nhaad of Reverend Abraham Lopes Cardozo.
Services begin at 6:30 pm with Arvit in the Little Synagogue.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tov to Ahron Herring, upon his marriage to Jessica Schechter this upcoming Sunday.

Mazal tov to Ellen & Robert Kapito on the birth of a baby boy to their children, Shira & Josh Arcus.