Debar Torah: Parashat Ki Tissa
—Rabbi Yanetz—

One of the most critical times for the Jews after they left Egypt was in this parasha: the sin of the golden calf.

It is hard to understand. How could this special people — the same people who saw the miracles in Egypt, the splitting of Yam Suf, and received the Torah on Mount Sinai only 40 days ago — could tell a statue of a little calf: “You are the god who took us out of Egypt”?

Even if they were really missing Moshe, and were afraid of what had happened to him after he didn’t show up after the 40 days, why didn’t they get another person as a leader instead of him? Why an animal?

Rashi quotes the midrash that that Erev Rosh (mixed nations that joined the Jews from Egypt) initiated the golden calf and encouraged the Jews to do it. But this explanation is still somewhat incomplete. Even if there were other people initiating this behavior, how could the Jews join that?

The midrash describes that the Satan’Yeter Hara showed them a vision of Moshe in a coffin, frightening the Jewish people into feeling that Moshe would no longer be with them. This caused confusion, insecurity, and panic.

Rambam (Maimonides) explains that in such a situation of great confusion and fear, some of the Jews acted—by default—as they used to do in Egypt: worshiping a similar animal. It was engraved deep in their mind after so many years of idolatry, and they turned to it instinctively, despite what they had seen in the recent two months.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz concludes that this can teach us two great points:

First, the Yeter Hara’s strategy is first to make one confused and insecure, a confusion about what is coming next and what is allowed, and this opens the door to major sins.

Secondly, from an educational perspective, this section of the Torah teaches us that what you show your children for years, such as keeping mizvot, Shabbat, or the experience of Pesah (Passover) cleaning, is what will stay deep in their mind and will impact their actions even many years later. If bad habits like idolatry can become instinctual due to constant exposure, so too can good habits like proper religious observance.
PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Send Mishloah Manot to a Member
ORDERING DEADLINE: MARCH 1 AT 11:00 PM
Take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to send special Purim greetings and to reach out to our Shearith Israel community. This project will support the Sisterhood’s many projects. More information has been sent out via email—if you haven’t seen it, check your spam folder! For questions, please contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com or Mrs. Carla Schein at scheinc6@gmail.com.

Participate in Our Annual Women’s Megillah Reading
2 rehearsals: THIS Sunday, February 24 | 7:00 pm
Sunday, March 10 | 7:00 pm
This year, our Annual Women’s Megillah Reading falls on Thursday morning, March 21. Services start at 7:15 am and Megillah is scheduled for 8:00 am.
Any woman or girl who has passed their 12th birthday is eligible to participate! Assignments can be as short as 3 verses, and audio is available on the synagogue website to study on the go, so don’t be afraid to give it a try.
Anyone who wants to participate should contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com as soon as possible for an assignment.

Meggillat Esther Puppet Show
Wednesday, March 20 | Arrive at 7:00 pm
We welcome back The Talking Hands Theatre puppet show during the reading of the Megillah this year! All children are invited for Anna Sobel and her cast of Purim characters to entertain them with an interactive Purim puppet show featuring big, colorful, Carnivale-inspired puppets. The audience is invited to sing, dance, learn a Middle Eastern rhythm, play ”Haman Says,” and get to know the characters of the Purim story.
Liz will oversee childcare for the younger children (children below two years old must be accompanied by their own caregiver) while Nat will be supervising the older kids.

Minyan Schedule Alert: Sunday Evening Services
Sunday evening services in February include both Minha and Aravit. Please note the following new Sunday evening service times:
This Sunday, February 24 evening services at 5:15 pm
Regular weekday evening services (Monday – Thursday) will remain at 6:30 pm for Arvit only.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Major History Lecture
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik
Monday, February 25 | 7:00 pm (following 6:30 pm Arvit)
"Israel and the Vatican: Jews, Catholics, and 25 Years of Diplomatic Relations"

Judaica Appraisal Day
With Jonathan Greenstein, Judaica Expert
Sunday, March 10 | 2:00 pm-5:00 pm
Presented by The Sisterhood of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue with contributions from the Shearith Israel League
Jonathan Greenstein, a noted antique Judaica authentication expert, will enlighten us about the field of antique Judaica. Some of Shearith Israel’s treasured objects will also be highlighted. Mr. Greenstein will then evaluate and discuss pieces brought by the attendees at this event (our own kind of “Antiques Road Show”).
So bring your menorahs, kiddush cups, spice boxes, etrog cases, megillot or any other Judaica articles of interest you may want to share. Limit two items per person. Mr. Greenstein will talk about as many items as possible in the time allotted. Given the history and diversity of our congregation, this should be a fascinating event!
$18.00 preregistered or $25.00 at the door
$100 Sponsor (includes 2 tickets and a listing)
To register, visit shearithisrael.org/judaica.

UPCOMING YOUTH EVENTS

Mitzvot Workshops with Shamash, Z. Edinger
For Children Aged 5-12
Select Sunday Mornings at 10:00 am
Next Sunday, March 3 | Sunday, April 14
These Mitzvot Workshops are a wonderful opportunity for our elementary school age youth - both boys and girls - to learn to sing the melodies of selected prayers from the Shabbat and holiday services as well as learn about the parts of the Torah service, and receive training in the hands-on parts of the service. Sign up for March 3 (it’s FREE!) at shearithisrael.org/mitzvot-workshop.

Brunch & Learn with Rabbi Soloveichik
For Elementary School Aged Children & Their Parents
Sundays, 10:30 am - 12:00 pm
Final Session of the School Year: March 10
On several Sundays over the course of the year, children and their parents start the day together with morning services after which they will proceed to a topical “Brunch and Learn” with Rabbi Soloveichik.
Register at shearithisrael.org/brunch-learn.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal Tov to Col. Jonathan de Sola Mendez, the live the Mission honoree at the 8th Annual Sephardic Academy of Manhattan masquerade gala. The gala will be held at Moise Safra Center on Monday, April 8. To attend or sponsor, visit sephardicacademy.org/gala.

Mazal Tov to Dr. Lu Steinberg, the Distinguished Alumna of the Year at the Ferkauf Graduate School’s 2019 Alumni Dinner. The dinner will be held at Lincoln Square Synagogue on Thursday, March 28. To attend or sponsor, visit tinyurl.com/lu-alumna.

Public Tours
Our next public tour is
Wednesday, March 13, at 11:00 AM
Parnas Office Hours
Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearithisrael.org.