The Priest’s Direction
— HAZZAN RABBI IRA ROHDE

“This is the direction concerning the beast and the food and all the living animal which is within in the water, and for every animal which crawls upon the earth, to distinguish between the defiled and the pure, and between the animal which is eaten and an animal which may not be eaten” (Lev. 11:46-47). “This shall be the direction (concerning) the keeper on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the priest” (Lev. 14:23). This is the direction (concerning) purification of one whose hand doesn’t obtain, in whom there is a leprous lesion” (Lev. 14:32).

The prominence, as the eighth word of Parashat Metzora, of a form of our word “Torah,” which I translated above as “direction,” gave me pause to meditate once more on the meaning of this very important word. As Ezekiel are reported to have several terms for snow, we Jews have a bunch of words for “Law,” and none of them is as prominent and common yet elusive to define as our word מִדְרֶשׁ. According to the best Biblical etymologists, the word derives or shares a stem with the Biblical verb מָדַר, meaning to “shoot,” commonly with arrows as the object, but also used for rocks or other missiles. Our word מִדְרֶשׁ derives from a particular sense of the causative “Hif’il” verb מָדַר, meaning to aim, point, or “direct” the arrow, and in that way cause the arrow to be shot. “Shooting” always involves intentional directing, as opposed to just throwing or tossing. So our word מִדְרֶשׁ, usually translated as “instruction,” might more literally be translated as “direction.” And the causative verb מָדַר, usually translated as “instruct,” is actually used in giving place “direction,” or pointing the direction, as in Gen. 46:28 “to point the direction to Caaneth.”

So in Parasha, more than meaning “Law,” our term מִדְרֶשׁ is telling us the “directions” to be followed regarding the leper and his affliction. The priest has to “point out” with his hands and differentiate the particular lesion which is defiled and that which can be considered for purification, and then the priest must give directions and direct the purification process. More than just stating a “law,” the section dealing with unclean animals earlier in Parashat Shemini (which immediately precedes the laws of leprosy) imply a “pointing out” or pointing of the different species of animals. One last note, but common use of these terms which has always intrigued me is R. Jacob b. Asher’s elaboration of one quarter of his great law-code יִדְרֶשׁ—Instructing Knowledge.” R. Jacob b. Asher’s plan of organization intentionally tried to be less philosophical and more biblical. Commonly, Ashkenazi and Sephardic rabbinical students who focus on this section are taught that the category of laws included are the guidelines for יִדְרֶשׁ—permissibility and impermissibility. But the sense of the term even here is a bit wider, more vague, and deliberately so: These are areas of law in which general ethical rules alone can’t teach: Things have to be “pointed out” and “directed,” and much more concrete, specific types of rulings have to be given and followed. That’s why these particular matters are dealt with here in Leviticus. They require a human leader like a priest to point out and issue “directions,” it seems, with his very hands. And just like directing the shooting of arrow causes us to reach our goal, when our arrow misses, it is because we have “misdirected” or “aimed.” But these cannot simply be general laws and instructions. It is precisely that “human touch, that somewhat-vague sense of pointing “directions” and instructing with the very human hand, which our term “Torah” aims to preserve.
PREPARE FOR PESAH

Pesah Kiddush Sponsorship Opportunities
Don’t let Pesah keep you from sponsoring a kiddush!
• Each of the first and last days of the holiday will be accompanied by a kiddush, and sponsors are always welcome. Go to shearithisrael.org/kiddushfund to contribute.
• On the last day of Pesah, our congregation’s teen girls will be reading Shir HaShirim, with a kiddush in their honor. To sponsor or contribute to this kiddush in support of our teen girls and their continuing involvement in our community, visit shearithisrael.org/teen-girls-shir-hashirim-2019.

CSI YOUTH DOUBLE HEADER
Mitzvot Workshop with Shamash, Z. Edinger & Matzah Baking
For Children Aged 5-12 | THIS Sunday, April 14 | 10:00 am
In this last workshop of the year, Z. will prepare our children for the special Shearith Israel Pesah traditions. Following this Pesah Workshop, we will have our annual hands-on matzah baking workshop! Make sure to sign up so we can have the appropriate amount of supplies. Sign up for both free activities at shearithisrael.org/mitzvot-workshop.

Selling Hametz & Maot Hittim
Rabbi Soloveichik will be selling our community’s hametz before Pesah. You can authorize him to sell hametz on your behalf using our convenient online form until April 18. Visit shearithisrael.org/pesah5779 for more details.

While you’re there, take the time to think of those less fortunate and fulfill the mitzvah of Maot Hittim by donating through the Rabbi’s Discretionary Fund. You can submit online or by check made out exactly to “Congregation Shearith Israel Rabbis Discretionary Fund” (indicate “maot hittim” in the memo). To donate, please go to shearithisrael.org/pesah5779.

Shabbat HaGadol—Consecration Shabbat
Shabbat HaGadol, the “Great Sabbath,” is the designation used for the Sabbath preceding Passover. The Haftarah, taken from Malachi, includes the verse: “Beold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.” Shabbat HaGadol is traditionally an occasion for a “great” sage to exhort the congregation concerning the upcoming Passover holiday.

At Shearith Israel, Shabbat HaGadol is the anniversary of the consecration of the 2nd Mill St. Synagogue Building, which was completed and dedicated just in time for Passover 1818. We commemorate the consecration of our synagogues with a semi-festive service. The Ark is open during much of the service and the Torah scrolls are dressed in festive colors. The beautiful poem Todot EZ (p. 342) is sung before Nishmat, and special blessings and memorial prayers are recited before the reading of the Torah.

SAVE THE DATE
Chatham Square Cemetery Memorial Event Honoring the Patriotic Service rendered by our Members Sunday, May 19 | 10:30 am
Chatham Square Cemetery | 55 St James Place
Please join us for our annual Memorial Service to honor the patriotic service rendered by the members of our congregation and to decorate the graves of 19 veterans of the American Revolution. This year’s ceremony includes special presentations by Colonel Jonathan de Sola Mendes, USMC, Retired, and by Lieutenant Arthur Goldberg, USN, Retired. This truly special ceremony features the participation of a color guard and field music and is both enjoyable and moving. All attendees this year will receive a special commemorative booklet which will include a newly updated Congregational Honor Roll.

If you are a current or former member of Shearith Israel who has served in the military or in any of the uniformed services of the United States, please let us know at shearithisrael.org/chatham-memorial-2019.

The booklet will also contain a special Veterains Tribute List to honor the military service of family and friends who are or were not members of our congregation. If you would like to add a listing in honor or in memory of a veteran, visit shearithisrael.org/chatham-memorial-2019. Suggested donation is $18 per name.

This program is one of our many Year of Years, 365th Anniversary events, showcasing the extraordinary historical roots and uniquely American history of our congregation and community.

IMPORTANT PRE-PESAH TIMES
• Bedikat Hametz—Thursday Evening, April 18, after sunset, 7:38 pm
• Fast of First Born—begins Friday Morning, April 19, 4:44 am
• Shahrit & Shacharit at 7:15 am
• Stop eating hametz—Friday, April 19, by 10:41 am
• Dispose of any remaining hametz—Friday, April 19, by 11:48 am
• Candle Lighting—Friday, April 19, 7:21 pm

FROM THE SISTERHOOD
Kinderrtransport:
Rescuing Children on the Brink of War
A private tour and luncheon with remarks from survivor, Anne Kemlen
The Center For Jewish History | 15 W 16th Street
Sunday, May 12 | 11:30 am
Join the Sisterhood for a multigenerational tour of the Yeshiva University Museum/Leo Baeck Institute exhibit that tells the story through narrative, artifacts, and multimedia of the Kinderrtransport - the rescue of thousands of Jewish children from the clutches of Nazi Germany to the relative safety of Great Britain.

In addition to an exclusive tour, we will be joined by Anne Kemlen, who left Vienna on the Kinderrtransport at the age of 14. She will speak to our group to tell her remarkable and moving story at a private luncheon after the tour.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/kinderrtransport.

FROM THE HEBRA HASED VA’AMET
Cemetery Cleanup Day
Sunday, May 5 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm
Chatham Square Cemetery, 55 St. James Place

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS
Mazal Tov to Debbie & David Sable, on the birth of a granddaughter to Elianna and Yool Kaye. She will be named this Shabbat. Mazal tov as well to the big sister, Goldy Elissa.

Mazal Tov to Judy & Joel Schreiber, on the birth of a great-granddaughter to their grandchildren, Jordan and Kyra Schreiber.

Condolences to Mindy Lamm, on the passing of her sister, Gloria Mehler.

Public Tours
Our next public tour is this Wednesday, May 8, at 11:00 AM

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