



Uphold the Fallen & Sinking or We All Fall & Sink Together

The haftarah for Parashat Mishpatim is taken from a story told in Jeremiah 34:8 and following. That story begins with King Zedekiah making a special covenant with all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to proclaim a freeing of all Hebrew slaves, male and female, among them. All the freemen and all of their officers joined in this covenant, according to our text, setting their servants and slaves free. However, despite the “covenant,” this slave-amnesty was short-lived, for shortly thereafter the masters came back after their slaves and re-subjugated them. Jeremiah reproaches the people for this hypocrisy, and in so doing he reviews our Torah portion’s law requiring setting Hebrew slaves free after six years of servitude. The question I had, though, was: Why did Zedekiah make such a special “covenant” in the first place to set Jewish slaves in Jerusalem free?

Just before this part, 34:6-7 says “Jeremiah spoke all these words to Zedekiah, King of Judah in Jerusalem, when the army of the king of Babylon was waging war against Jerusalem and against the remaining towns of Judah, against Lachish and Azekah, for they were the only fortified towns of Judah that were left.” And before that, Jeremiah tells Zedekiah that Jerusalem will indeed fall and be burnt, with the king himself captured. It seems, then, this “covenant” and proclamation of a “slave amnesty” was part of Zedekiah’s response to the emergency. Of course, it was “too little, too late,” and as the crisis worsened the failing king’s authority waned. With the king’s authority losing ground, it’s no surprise that this agreement was then flouted. But what made Zedekiah think that such an “amnesty” was a proper response to the emergency in the first place?

Hebrew law is geared to maintaining the freedom and land-tenure of all Israelite men, their spouses, and families. Israelite law aims to hinder and deter development of an Egyptian-style permanent slave-society, at least among its native citizenry. If temporary enslavement of fellow Israelites was countenanced, it was largely due to one thing – because they had fallen into poverty and had sunken into debt. A slave-amnesty was thus a debt remission. The reasons for such a moratorium on debt-slavery probably comprised several considerations. First, war itself brought severe impoverishment upon the people. Certainly, cooped up by siege in the Jerusalem vicinity, the city’s agriculturalists could not tend to their outlying fields. Secondly and more importantly, slavery and other forms of oppression and injustice inflicted upon one citizen by his fellow impeded societal cohesion and morale, at a time when such cohesion was desperately needed. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had to bury their differences and pull together for the common good. Every last man was needed on their side of the fight if they were to succeed. Zedekiah knew this but, alas, it was too little and too late for his attempted reform to take hold. Internal dissension, rancor and oppression had already brought the crisis upon them, according to the Prophets.

Many of the laws mentioned in our Torah portion, which begin with this same law limiting the term of slavery of the Israelite, were meant to remedy such undue oppression of one Israelite by another and, by contrast, to foster the cohesion of freemen citizens into a united society. Society has a duty to lift up those among their own who have sunk into oppression. Should society neglect that duty, the resulting lack of cohesion will pull the society apart, leaving only competing individual interests. Unable to cooperate to rise together, their fate will be to fall and sink together. If they do not pull together they will all be pulled down together. After the similar case of mistreating the widow or orphan (who were also likely to be impoverished and oppressed), our text in Exodus reads: “If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me. And My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans (Ex. 22:22-23).” Jeremiah puts the tit-for-tat punishment in yet starker terms: If Israel will not release the slave, God will release Israel to sword, pestilence, and hunger. If the weak and falling fortress of society is not cohesive and strong enough to sustain the poor and downtrodden, then the fortress is likely to be breached and penetrated by every new threat which comes along. A society is only as strong as its weakest links. Jeremiah goes further: In returning the Hebrew slaves who had been freed to re-subjugation as slaves, failing to uphold and value the freedom from slavery granted as all Israel’s birthright at the Exodus and in covenant after covenant, the Jerusalemites demonstrated that they themselves were ripe for the coming Babylonian re-subjugation.

Shabbat Mishpatim

January 28-29, 2022 | Shebat 26-27, 5782

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 4:51 pm

Friday Evening Services | 5:00 pm

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | *Celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of Eliezer Nebot* | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Levy | Led by teen leaders and Mrs. Lisa Rohde

Kiddush in a Box | Outdoors | following services | *Sponsored by the Nebot family, in honor of Eliezer becoming a Bar Mitzvah*

NO Shabbat Afternoon Class this week.

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 4:50 pm

Habdala | 5:38 pm

Virtual Habdala | 6:00 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

Rosh Hodesh Adar I begins on Monday night.

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Thursday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): **5:00 pm**

*Reminder: **WELL-FITTED MASKS REQUIRED INDOORS. KN95 PREFERRED.** If you choose not to wear a mask outdoors when permitted, you represent & warrant that you're fully vaccinated.*

Please send UPDATED vaccination card(s) to info@shearithisrael.org.

Many upcoming activities will require proof of UP-TO-DATE vaccination & boosters.

THIS SUNDAY

The Shearith Israel League, the American Sephardi Federation, the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, and the Sephardic Foundation on Aging proudly present:

Salud i Vida:

The 5th Annual New York Ladino Day!
THIS Sunday, January 30 | 2:00 pm | On Zoom

Featuring:

Scholar: Eliezer Papo

Sephardic Nonagenarians: A Panel by Bryan Kirschen

Estreyikas d'Estambol Children's Choir "Kantiga," a Ladino Short Story
by Jane Mushabac

Trio Sefardi: the Musical Finale!

Refer to our emails for the signup link.

Ladino is a bridge between many cultures. It is a variety of Spanish that has absorbed words from Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, French, Greek, and Portuguese. The mother tongue of Jews in the Ottoman Empire for 500 years, Ladino became the home language of Sephardim worldwide. While the number of Ladino speakers has sharply declined, distinguished Ladino Day programs like ours celebrate and preserve a vibrant language and heritage. These programs are, as Aviya Kushner wrote in the Forward, "Why Ladino Will Rise Again."

COMING UP

Parent-Child Learning - with S'mores!
Next Session: Saturday Night, February 5

This session will be led by Seth Haberman, on the topic of:
"If God Wrote A Comic Book..."

For elementary school children and their parents or grandparents

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782.

COMING UP

RESCHEDULED

Youth Trip to the Tenement Museum: *At Home in 1911*

NEW DATE: Sunday, February 13 | 11:00 am

Meets at the Museum: 97 Orchard Street

Full vaccination required - bring proof!

Our youth are invited on a special tour of the recreated 1910s apartment of an Eastern European Jewish family earning a living in the garment trade. Like the majority of immigrants at the time, the Rogarshevskys faced many challenges – with the added difficulties of raising six children in a three-room NYC tenement. Step into their home and experience what daily life was like for an immigrant family in 1911 – balancing work, family, community, and an evolving cultural identity.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome new members **Jennifer Naggar & Michael Weltz** to our growing Shearith Israel family.

Mazal tob to **Eliezer Nebot**, upon becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations to his parents, **Eleonore & Eric Nebot**. We welcome the many guests who have traveled here to celebrate this special occasion.

Thank you to **Liliane Marks**, for sponsoring last week's *kiddush*, in memory of her husband, Neville Marks.

We mourn the loss of our member, **Edward Lukashok**.

Condolences to his wife, **Ruth**, and their children.

Condolences to **Roy Zuckerberg**, upon the passing of his brother, Mark Zuckerberg.

NEW! Free Covid Tests - Every home in the U.S. can order four free at-home COVID-19 tests. Order today at: covidtests.gov

If you are aged 65+ or immunocompromised, **NYC will send a trained clinician to your home to do a free PCR test.** Available 7 days/week, 9am-7pm.
Call 929-298-9400 to schedule an appointment.