

## Musing on Spring, Purity, and Holiness

Biblical Critical scholars have labeled the source for our Book of Leviticus the “Holiness Code,” and indeed the name “Holiness Code” is an appropriate name for Vayikra in general. The narrator voice in Vayikra seems to see all the book’s various laws as aiming to promote “holiness.” We see, however, if only from the breadth of the topics the book takes up, that this goal of “being holy” and “Holiness” is no simple matter to pursue or even define as a concept.

One key for me to understanding “holiness” in Leviticus comes from asking about what might be considered an irrelevant procedural detail: Why is it that we always read the Book of Leviticus in the Spring, around the time of the Passover holiday? One answer is that Spring brings the new crops and new animals to be consecrated as sacrifices. But the other has to do with the strength and potency of a purified nature which Spring embodies. The late Summer and much of the Autumn is the season of death for the plant world. The Winter finishes off and tramples much of the dead plant-life to the earth to rot away. Winter precipitation brings rot, but it also cleanses and purifies, as well as providing clean, nourishing water which will allow life to begin once again. Winter is also the season during which the animal herd is gradually consumed. But then in Spring the potency and fertility of Nature is revealed anew, in all its strength and glory. But that newly-reborn strength and virgin potency must be carefully kept from pollution and the contamination of death, or it will die long before its season.

It occurred to me that last week’s Torah and haftarah readings actually led some direction to defining holiness or “sanctity.” At the end of last week’s reading the text states: *“I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy”* (Lev. 11:44-45). This imperative to “be holy” occurs several times in the book, but the context there is to preserve cleanliness and purity and avoid contamination. Contact is proscribed with any dead animal which dies by itself (presumably out of fear that it may have had a contaminant or contagion), and there is a proscription of eating most types of “creeping and crawling things,” such as rodents and insects and lower forms of life which often spread contagion. There is also a proscription of eating predatory animals as well as many other types of other animals which were considered “impure.” A commandment to be holy thus means to become pure and clean and go to great lengths to avoid potential contamination. At least that’s what it means for Israelites. But what does the repeated statement that we should be holy because God himself is holy mean? Of course God is far exalted above our world! In what sense is He “pure” and does He avoid “contamination?”

Leaving that question in abeyance for the moment, we look at a portion of last week’s haftarah, Ezekiel 36:16-23. Here there is an emphasis upon God “sanctifying His Great Name” by redeeming Israel. God’s Name and His Reputation has become sullied and spoiled through His People Israel’s disgrace in being defeated and scattered among the Nations. This disgrace and defeat was caused, in turn, by Israel’s allowing itself to be defiled, not keeping clean and pure. Israel’s contamination and defilement must be scourged, scoured, and cleansed. A desolate, cold Winter is upon Israel, but ultimately God won’t allow His reputation to be forever sullied and spoiled. One way or another, Israel will ultimately be redeemed and restored. Thus “I am Holy” means that God’s Strength and the Reputation of His Power are strong and unsullied by any intimation or even insinuation of weakness or contamination.

There is a strong connotation of sexuality and sexual/reproductive purity whenever the word for “holiness” is used and laws of “holiness” are discussed. The beginning of Parashat Tazria, which deals with reproductive purity in the sense of purification after giving birth, is not unusual in this regard. Eating, contact and reproduction are necessary to nourish and preserve Man’s strength, but each of these areas pose risks of contamination and contagion, which can lead to great weakness. God’s involvement in Wordly affairs by choosing Israel to rescue from Egypt to be His people manifested God’s Great Strength and Power as well as magnified and glorified God’s Reputation. But at the same time, for both God and Israel, these great manifestations of strength expose them to contagion by the filth and impurity of this world. Hence that potential for contamination and loss of strength and potency or loss of reputation for strength and potency must be managed very carefully. This Shabbat we begin both the Month and Season of Renewal and Spring post-epidemic, as God gives us a new and purified potent strength and energy. God’s redeeming Power and Saving Strength in Releasing us from Bondage and Death are revealed anew. Let us resolve to treasure the purity of that Strength and guard our new shoots from pollution and diversion into early death.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Tazria-Rosh Hodesh-HaHodesh

*April 1-2, 2022 | 1 Nisan, 5782*

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### SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 460 | Haftarah: p. 1002 | Rosh Hodesh: p. 695 | HaHodesh: p. 253

Kaplan: p. 556 | Haftarah: p. 1284 | Rosh Hodesh: p. 814 | HaHodesh: p. 308

**Candle Lighting** | 7:03 pm

**Friday Evening Services** | 7:00 pm

**Zemirot** | 8:30 am

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am

**Youth Groups** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room | *Led by our new Youth Directors, Gabi & Raph!*

**Jr. Congregation** | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

**Kiddush** | Levy | following services

**Shabbat Afternoon Class will return next week.**

**Shabbat Afternoon Services** | 7:00 pm

**Habdala** | 7:58 pm

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### Weekday Service Times

**Morning Services**

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

**Evening Services**

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 6:30 pm

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## WELCOME TO OUR YOUTH DIRECTORS!

**Gabi Chutter-Alcabas & Raphael Alcabas are so excited to join Congregation Shearith Israel as your new Youth Directors!**



**Gabi** was born and bred on the Upper West Side, her Romaniote heritage roots trace back to Greece, more specifically, the community of Ioannina. Gabi grew up cooking with her dad, which inspired her to now run her own small-time catering company, and exploring botany with her mom, which cultivated her love for the outdoors. Gabi spends her days at SAR High school, working with the 11th grade, and coaching the Track team on the side.

Gabi has worked with many Jewish institutions and their youth, most recently, the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, Westchester Summer Day Camp, and Sephardic Adventure Camp. Gabi is already planning some amazing upcoming events for CSI!

**Raphael** grew up in the Turkish and Rhodesli community of Seattle and has spent every summer at Sephardic Adventure Camp. For 2 years post-high school, he attended Yeshivat Migdal HaTorah, where he learned how to read a Gemara and drink chocolate milk out of a bag. Now in his final semester of studying Math, English, and Physics at Yeshiva University, he's geared up to become a teacher in the Fall. Raph can't wait to combine his passions for Sephardic culture, Jewish education, and shenanigans in his new role at Shearith Israel.

When not in Synagogue, Gabi & Raph can be found hiking, doing various art activities, or playing with their three cats, Morrie, Dipper and Suki.

**Bring your kids (around ages 5-12) to meet Gabi & Raph at Youth Groups starting at 10 am this Shabbat, followed by Jr. Congregation with our teen leaders and Mrs. Lisa Rohde. Following services, please join in welcoming and getting to know Gabi and Raph at Kiddush!**

*Got an idea for a youth activity? Want to welcome Gabi & Raph to the Shearith Israel family? Contact them at [youth@shearithisrael.org](mailto:youth@shearithisrael.org)!*

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## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Judy & Joel Schreiber**, upon the birth of a great-granddaughter, born to their grandchildren, Ariel & Sara Bluma Fein, in Israel.

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## THIS SUNDAY

*Lincoln Square Synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel, and Congregation Ohav Zedek join together for*

### UWS Community Clothing Drive

**THIS Sunday, April 3 | 9 am-1 pm | At Lincoln Square Synagogue  
(180 Amsterdam Avenue)**

Seeking gently-used men's, women's, and children's of all ages clothing and shoes, to will be shipped to Israel and distributed to Israel's neediest, including recent immigrants from Ukraine, by an organization called Yad Leah. Nothing with holes, stains, tears, please. Please only donate clothing that you would feel comfortable handing to the recipients in person.

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## COMING UP

### NEW OPPORTUNITY: Shearith Israel Chorale

**Wednesdays, beginning THIS week, April 6 | 7:00-8:15 pm**

*Led by Hazzan Eliot Alderman*

Please join us on Wednesday evenings for a new and exciting musical opportunity. Learn to sing pieces from our congregation's musical heritage and beyond. Led by hazzan & choirmaster Mr. Eliot Alderman of the UK, this new offering is open to anyone with an interest in singing and learning our musical tradition. Sessions are open to all, and last about 75 minutes, with a short break. The ability to read music is a plus but is not required. Performance opportunities will be determined by the progress and wishes of the chorale.

*Suggested donation is \$15 per session (or as you are able). Register at [shearithisrael.org/chorale](http://shearithisrael.org/chorale).*

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### Mets Game Outing

*Sponsored by the Lewin Family*

**Sunday, May 15 | 1:00 pm | Citi Field**

Now that the baseball season is back on schedule, Shearith Israel youth and their families are invited on this highly subsidized trip to watch the Mets play the Mariners – only \$15 a ticket (actual ticket price: \$40)! First come, first served, with priority given to members, while supplies last.

*Registration now open at [shearithisrael.org/mets](http://shearithisrael.org/mets).*

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## PESAH AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Check out [shearithisrael.org/pesah5782](http://shearithisrael.org/pesah5782) for all our Pesah offerings, including

- Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat HaGadol Derasha
- Sale of Hametz
- Maot Hittim
- Our full Passover schedule
- ...and more!