

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Impossibly-Impeccable Standards & Ideals Earn Public Trust & Loyalty

The degree of Leviticus' concern that the Divine service must be absolutely impeccable in character is rather astounding. Everything associated with Divine Service must be in its ideal, purest, and unblemished state. I could say "as far as possible," since there do seem to be occasional "allowances," but the truth is that the requirements for the most ideal usually push the very boundaries of possibility to the extreme. How it was possible to keep things and people so pure and so clean, and so unblemished by any defect or fault really boggles the mind! I mean, our Parasha doesn't deal with the Red Heifer, which has to be so completely red, without the slightest hair of any other color, that there could only be a handful of candidates in a generation! But the requirements to keep free of the slightest blemish or contamination or fault among the Priests and in carrying out their duties similarly sets a nearly impossible standard to meet.

And yet this high bar of idealism which Judaism sets, here expressed in the ritual sphere, is also what makes Judaism compelling, at least for me. Of course, I am a Platonist philosopher who believes in the reality of ideal forms in the mind of God, reflected to a great extent in our world, which are fundamental to our world. Ideals such as these often needed to be expressed in society in the political, religious, and social spheres in order to earn and attract the trust and loyalty of the public. In some ancient societies, the political and religious sphere were completely merged, but in others, such as among the Israelites, the political sphere was separated from the religious, with the idealism being even more concentrated in the religious sphere. In order to trust a government and a societal order, the people must believe that they reflect ideals of justice. They also must believe that they reflect ideals of strength. The people must believe that the law will treat everyone fairly, native citizen as well as resident alien, or else there will be social unrest. That is what the end of our Parashah promises. The people must be prepared to vow fealty and loyalty to the state and its political/religious institutions, and that is why, right near the end of the reading, the opposite behavior, cursing God, must be severely punished, among citizen and resident alien alike. The public, if they are to garner a high state of loyalty, must be satisfied with the cleanliness and lack of contamination among the society's institutions. Public servants must be impeccable, and their service must be impeccable, conforming to the highest standards, as well. Judaism shifts the idealization from the political to the religious sphere, which allows for a bit more realpolitik in politics, while preserving public trust through the religious idealization. Of course, the ancient Judean Israelites, as a small mountain people caught between the great empires, struggling to maintain their nation, required an extreme degree of loyalty to ensure their cohesion, and perhaps this is why they developed and maintained such ideals, so that they maintained the people's trust. The holiday communal services and sacrifices also drew the people together as a public, with sacrifices and procedures being offered up in the name of a corporate "public" entity. Offering sacrifices publicly was also a way of cultivating appreciation and gratitude for the society's institutions, which again helped to cement cohesion.

I know of no other people, belief or doctrine which is as idealistic as Jews and their Judaism. Indeed, Jewish iconoclasm itself seems to be have been the product of its idealism, in its purification of its conception of God from being contaminated by any image. While Jewish idealism can backfire and produce renegades, for the most part it produces a degree of loyalty and trust which few societies can emulate, leading Jews at time to think of themselves as part of "one family." These standards of impeccability are near-impossibly high, and perhaps with good reason may be seen as uselessly unproductive and fruitless. After all, what is the point of laws which are so idealized that they may be ineffective to actually administer? I do not think Islam has anywhere as idealized laws as Judaism. Christianity has an idealized "religious" sphere, but it can be completely separated from any trust in society as a whole and its institutions. But it has been Judaism and its Bible, even in articulating these astoundingly-high ideals and indeed through the very height of the standards which they mandate, which time and again has been marshaled to earn the public's trust and loyalty.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Emor

May 17-18, 2024 | 10 Iyar, 5784

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 610 | Haftarah: p. 1172 // Hertz: p. 513 | Haftarah: p. 528

Candle Lighting | 7:50 pm

Evening Services | 7:00 pm

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat Morning Talk | At Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:00 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary

No Teen Shiur this week.

Evening Services | 7:45 pm

Habdala | 8:50 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (Minha & Arbit): 6:30 pm

**ANNUAL SPRING FUNDRAISER
VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES**

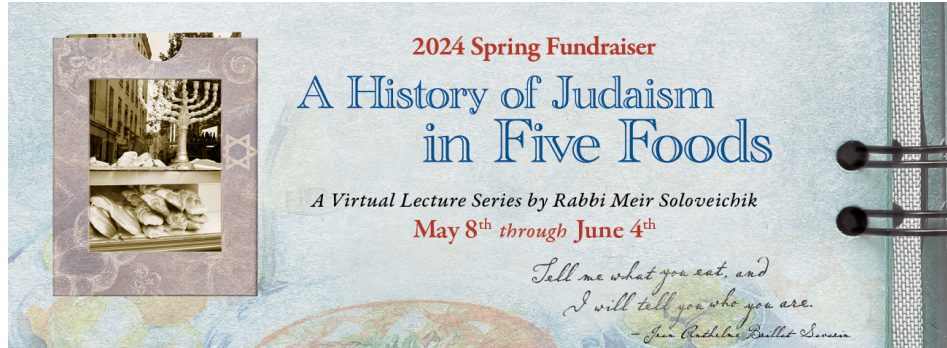
Next Session: THIS TUESDAY – You can still sign up!

"A History of Judaism in Five Foods"

A Virtual Lecture Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

May 8-June 4

Sign up and sponsor at shearithisrael.org/spring-fundraiser2024



**Register & Sponsor now to access
the upcoming livestreams on Zoom at 7:30 pm!**

Tuesday, May 21	Boureka, Latkeh, Knish: How the Humble Potato Changed Jewish Life Forever
Tuesday, May 28	Arbes to Hummus: A Little Legume, Jewish History, and the Future of Israeli Cuisine
Tuesday, June 4	A Talmudic Fisherman, Chagall's Herring, and Rabbinic Sushi: The Jewish Affection for Fish from Egypt to Today

All sponsors and underwriters will be recognized in a beautiful content-rich commemorative booklet.

For Sponsors of \$360 & above: You will be invited to attend **live culinary** “edutainment” experiences with Rabbi Soloveichik.

Bonus update for sponsors of \$1,800 and above: On **June 2**, be part of a small **live studio audience** for a pre-recording of the final session, followed by a “l’chaim” with Rabbi Soloveichik, featuring a wide variety of high quality herrings and beverages. Time and location details are being sent via email invitation.

For Series Underwriters (\$3,600 & above): You will receive access to **recordings** of the lectures after the series has concluded.

COMING UP

Registration & additional details at shearithisrael.org

Sign Up to Be A Girls' Book of Ruth Reader

First Rehearsal: THIS Sunday, May 19 | 10 am | Main Sanctuary

Reading on Wednesday, Shabuot I, June 12

Interested? Contact Mrs. Lisa Robde at lrohde-csi@yahoo.com to sign up.

Presented by Shearith Israel's Caring Connection

6th Annual Smash the Stigma Event:

A Jewish Communal Conversation on Mental Health

This year highlighting our trauma triggered by Oct 7

Wednesday, May 22 | 7:00 pm, Following 6:30 pm Evening Services

This Year's Panelists:

**Sarri Singer of *Strength to Strength* and Asher Lovy of *Zaakah*
Moderated by Dr. Nava Silton, *Developmental Psychologist & Director of
Community Outreach at the Jewish Center***

Event Committee: Victoria Bengualid, Zoya Raynes, and Suzanne Stern

Stitch & Fix Has Returned!

Alternating Tuesdays, May 21, June 4 & 18 | 1 pm-3 pm | Elias Room

Sponsored by the Sisterhood. RSVP to Rose Edinger at rgedinger@gmail.com.

Memorial Day at Chatham Square Cemetery

Monday, May 27 | 10:30 am

Chatham Square Cemetery, 55 St. James Place

Celebrate Israel Parade: Sunday, June 2

Would You Like A Spot on the Sephardic Float?

LIMITED SPOTS AVAILABLE. Request a spot at bit.ly/IsraelParade2024.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thank you to Baruch-Lev Kelman's parents, Rabbi & Rabbiness Kelman, for a surprise treat at the kiddush last week, in honor of Baruch-Lev's birthday.

Happy birthday, **Baruch-Lev!**

We mourn the loss of our member, **Roslyn Mateles**. Condolences to Susan Mateles Spira, Naomi Mateles Karmi, and Sarah Mateles.