



Kol Sholom

BI-MONTHLY BULLETIN OF
CONGREGATION ANSHE SHOLOM



VOICE OF PEACE ■ JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024 ■ TEVET/SHVAT/ADAR ■ 5784



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SAVE THESE DATES

- Communal Shabbat Dinner Jan. 12th
- Tu B'Shevat Seder Jan. 25th
- Shabbat Across America Mar. 1st-2nd



ט"ו בשבט
חג האילנות

HAPPY
TU B'SHEVAT



FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY



Dear friends,

Even in these troubled times, we are nonetheless allowed to enjoy life and its special occasions. In December, we had two very memorable events at Anshe Sholom. The first was Naveh Feldman's Bar Mitzvah. I had been eagerly anticipating hearing Naveh read Parshat Vayishlach ever since he first told me about it two and a half years ago. Mazal Tov to Meitav & Yochai, and we thank you for including the entire congregation in your celebration. The next event was the annual Chanukah party. It was loads of fun. We thank everyone who helped arrange the party. Each year it gets better and better.

2024 is an important election year. Synagogues, as non-profit organizations, are strictly forbidden to endorse candidates for public office. However, a synagogue, like any other voluntary civic organization, is permitted (and should) encourage its members to engage in the electoral process. To that end, shuls across Westchester in conjunction with Teach NYS and other Jewish advocacy groups, are engaged in a grassroots effort to register all legally eligible Jewish voters. Re-registration is available for those who would like to switch party affiliation in advance of the primaries. I strongly encourage you to make sure that you are officially eligible to cast the ballot you wish to cast on primary day and in the general election in November. Moreover, I encourage you to educate yourselves on the redistricting issue and to make your preferences known to the elected officials who are overseeing the process. The Jewish community of Westchester must be civically engaged if we hope to retain our political strength.

In late December, I spent some time in the shul library rearranging the books and organizing the shelves. I have two requests, one negative and one positive: 1) Please do not drop off bags or boxes of unwanted books at the shul without first consulting with me. While the shul might be interested in a few select items from your private collections, it is more than likely we do not want or have space for most of those books. 2) Please do borrow books from the library. I encourage you to expand your Judaic literary horizons. The shelves on the right side (northern wall) contain many fascinating history books from my personal collection. If you do borrow a book, please email me the title.

I want to thank those who volunteered to read their Bar Mitzvah parshahs. It's always nice to hear someone else read the Torah. If there is a particular parshah or aliyot that you wish to read, please let me know. If you would like me to teach you how to read or for me to make a recording of a particular Aliyah, I am happy to do so.

And now for some mild rebuke (which I hardly ever offer, so please take it to heart): 1) For those who drive to shul on Friday night with intent to leave their vehicles -- for the duration of Shabbos -- in the shul lot or on the street nearby, please make sure to arrive before sunset. While it is understandable that, during the winter, you might need the last eighteen minutes before sunset to complete your final preparations, sunset is the absolute deadline for non-Shabbos activities. BE AWARE OF THE CLOCK. 2) Let's do our best to keep the talking to a minimum during services. Be mindful of your surroundings. There are others trying to concentrate on prayer and hear the Torah reading. I thank everyone for your cooperation.

Best wishes,

Rabbi Evan Hoffman

If THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR BAR MITZVAH IS APPROACHING AND YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ YOUR Haftarah or Torah PORTION, IT WOULD BE MY PLEASURE TO HELP YOU PREPARE. DON'T BE SHY, YOU CAN DO IT!

SPONSOR • A • KIDDUSH

One of the highlights at Anshe Sholom is spending time together at the kiddush following Shabbat and holiday services. Our kiddush luncheons help us build the connections that make Anshe Sholom a warm and inviting congregation. In order to enhance our Shabbat joy and to maximize our schmoozing opportunities, we would like to provide enhanced kiddushes as frequently as possible, but this can only be done with your help.

By sponsoring a kiddush, you participate in supporting and fostering our sense of community. You may sponsor a kiddush in honor of someone, to remember someone, to celebrate a simcha – or, sponsor a kiddush together with a group of friends or family. You may choose to sponsor the entire kiddush for the shul, or you may help defray the kiddush costs by sponsoring part of a kiddush, or by simply making a donation. No amount is too small.

**If you would like to contribute towards these special kiddushes, please contact:
ASKIDDUSH@gmail.com**

THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



Dear Friends,

Month after month, as I sit down to write this bulletin message, I often find myself reflecting deeply. What meaningful updates should I share? Are there upcoming events or extraordinary happenings that merit mention? Or perhaps, are there any special requests that I should convey?

As I sat before my computer, faced with a blank screen to write this message, my thoughts were consumed not by these questions but by the state of the world around us. As we step into 2024, our Jewish community is navigating a time of profound concern and deep reflection, especially given the ongoing conflict in Israel. This war hits close to home for me, as both my family and Shlomi's are in Israel, as are so many of our friends. Our children's questions about the situation echo in my mind, questions that are difficult to grapple with.

I have heard from many within our community and beyond expressing their disappointment in the reactions to the war and the rise in anti-semitism from 'friends' and colleagues. These are indeed unsettling times, disrupting the relative comfort we have come to know in recent decades. I wish I had unique insights or answers to offer, ways to navigate these challenging times or to address the tough questions our children ask. I, too, feel the sting of disappointment from the world around us.

Yet, in these moments, I am reminded of the incredible strength that comes from our bond as a Jewish community. Our solidarity, our shared understanding and mindset offer us a unique source of support. This is why, now more than ever, Jews around the world are uniting in support of Israel, in defense of Zionism, and in safeguarding our heritage and homeland.

Now is a crucial time to deepen our engagement with the shul. Bring a friend, invite a neighbor, and share the warmth and security of our Anshe Sholom community. Let's extend our embrace to all those seeking the comfort and strength of our congregation.

As we reflect on the past year, let's hold onto the beautiful moments we shared at Anshe Sholom. The joyous celebrations, the shared meals, and the sound of children's voices filling our sanctuary with Adon Olam are the memories that bind us.

Our history, rich with resilience and a relentless zest for life, reminds us of our capacity to grow, connect, and make a significant impact, even in the face of adversity. The true strength of our community shines brightest in challenging times. We must continue

to come together, not only in shared concern but in a spirit of celebration, embracing the warmth and strength of Anshe Sholom. Together, let's look towards the future with hope and unity.

Sincerely,
Yael Schulman
President

**JOIN US for a heimishe
Friday Night Dinner
@ Anshe Sholom
January 12, 2023 - 5:30 PM
\$36 per Adult, \$18 per Child
..... SPONSORS WELCOME**



**Contact the shul office to Sign up
RSVP BY WED. JANUARY 10TH**

SAVE THE DATE!

**"More than Jews have kept Shabbat,
Shabbat has kept the Jews."
— Ahad Ha'am**



**SHABBAT
ACROSS
AMERICA**

March 1st-2nd, 2024

On one special night, tens of thousands of North American Jews will come together in spiritual unison with Jews across the continent and with thousands of years of tradition. This effort encourages Jews of all backgrounds to come together and celebrate what unifies us all: The Shabbat.

**Join us in shul in support of this
admirable annual outreach effort**

A MESSAGE FROM SISTERHOOD



Dear Friends,

Winter began with the start of lengthening days, and now, with Tu B'Shevat on the horizon (January 25) can Spring be far away? However, this year we have the leap month of Adar Sheini, so all the holidays will start later this year than they did last year.

Purim is March 24th and the first Passover Seder will be April 22nd.

Sisterhood is looking forward to renewed engagement with you, our Anshe Sholom family. We want to continue to be active and we want you to always be ready to join activities as happy participants.

There may be some changes in our structure and ways of thinking about how to best offer our services to our community. Of course, we will keep everyone posted.

Please send me your thoughts and suggestions. Enjoy this mild winter weather and be well!

Peace to you all,

Joanne Wiesner-Steiner

Sisterhood President



SUNSHINE CARDS

To Marlene Lerner, Happy Special Birthday, from:
Phyllis & Herman Steinberg and The Sisterhood of
Congregation Anshe Sholom

To Marci Mehler, Happy Birthday wishes, from:
The Sisterhood of Congregation Anshe Sholom

*Mazal Tov to the Feldman family, Yochai, Meitav, Yahav,
Amana, Halleli, and Alma, on Naveh's Bar Mitzvah, from:*
The Sisterhood of Congregation Anshe Sholom

*Mazal Tov Naveh Feldman on the occasion of your Bar
Mitzvah!, from:* The Sisterhood of Congregation Anshe Sholom

*Mazal Tov to the Kracko family on the wedding of Simi Kracko
to Chaim Perlow, from:* Joanne Wiesner-Steiner.

Refuah Shelema to Lily Backer, from:
The Sisterhood of Congregation Anshe Sholom.

SHUL DONATIONS

In Memory

*To Charlotte Lovich, Condolences on the loss of beloved
husband, father and grandfather Jerry, from:*
Marlene & Armand Lerner

In Honor

*To Illissa & Paul Warhit, on the marriage of daughter Natalie,
from:* Honey & Sol Neier

*To Ellen & Elliot Kracko, Mazel Tov on the marriage of
granddaughter Simi to Chaim Perlow, from:*
the Board of Trustees of Congregation Anshe Sholom

*To Zahava & Rabbi Moshe Kracko, Mazel Tov on the marriage
of daughter Simi to Chaim Perlow, from:*
the Board of Trustees of Congregation Anshe Sholom

David Evan Hirsch Library ...

To Marlene Lerner, Happy Special Birthday, from:
Charlotte Lovich, Sharon Struminger, Honey & Sol Neier,
and the Board of Trustees of Congregation Anshe Sholom

TO PURCHASE SUNSHINE OR MEMORIAL CARDS

contact:

Joanne Wiesner-Steiner
joannewiesnersteiner@gmail.com



**\$5
EACH**



**BUY
GIFT CARDS
THROUGH SISTERHOOD**



Some participating well-known retailers are:

- Bed, Bath & Beyond • Starbucks
- Stop & Shop • Shop Rite • Macy's • Staples
- Gap & Old Navy ... and many, many more!

No extra charge to you! Great gift idea!

Anshe Sholom gets the dividend!

**Call Ruth Grayson, 914-632-4555,
or the office, 914-632-9220.**



חנוכה 2023/5784

LOOKING BACK ... A TASTE OF CHANUKAH AT ANSHE SHOLOM





THOUGHTS ON PARASHAT SHEMOT
CLERGY EXEMPTIONS

By Rabbi Evan Hoffman

When Moses and Aaron first approached Pharaoh with a request that the Israelites be permitted a temporary reprieve from their servitude in order to worship God in the wilderness, Pharaoh responded condescendingly about the identity of the Hebrew Deity and his interlocutors' mission. "Moses and Aaron, why do you disturb the people from its work? Go to your burdens (Exodus 5:4)."

Traditional commentators focused on the verse's final word: סבלתיכם "your burdens." What were they? To Ramban, the plain meaning of סבלתיכם is the work imposed by Pharaoh upon the Israelites. Moses and Aaron had arrived at the palace with a large contingent of Hebrew slaves; in ending the meeting abruptly, Pharaoh was simply telling Moses and those followers to get back to work. Rashi, following a Midrashic tradition, understood סבלתיכם to refer instead to Moses and Aaron's personal burdens. In this view, the tribe of Levi was exempted from servitude in Egypt. Two facts supporting this interpretation are that a) the suffix of סבלתיכם, implying that the burdens at issue were specific to Moses and Aaron and were not those shared by the nation as a whole, and b) Moses and Aaron were able to approach Pharaoh frequently and without having to receive permission from a taskmaster to miss work.

Ramban conceded that Rashi's view had merit. He noted that every nation has religio-intellectual leaders who provide the people with moral instruction. Accordingly, Pharaoh exempted the Levites from servitude because they served the Israelites in that leadership capacity.

Hizkuni offered an alternative theory about how the Levites secured an exemption from Egyptian servitude. At first, Pharaoh personally participated in the Egyptian public works projects by contributing his own physical labor. He then encouraged others to do so on a volitional basis. Having lured the Israelites into working, Pharaoh then made the service compulsory. The Levites declined to participate from the very beginning, because they had been told by Jacob that they were destined to carry the Ark of the Covenant and did not wish to demean themselves with mundane work.

The Midrashic basis for the interpretations by these medieval commentators is a statement attributed to Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. He asserted that the Levites were free from the crushing labor imposed on the Israelites in Egypt, and that Pharaoh attributed their untenable request for a religious

holiday in the wilderness to the fact that they were unoccupied and were bored (Exodus Rabbah 5:16).

The claim that Levites did not work in Egypt is among the more widely-known Aggadic embellishments of the Exodus narrative. But it has no real Scriptural basis. The idea rests on several unproven assumptions: a) that סבלתיכם means the private burdens of Moses and Aaron, b) that Egypt extended a clergy exemption to a particular tribe of Hebrews, and c) that the tribe of Levi was serving in an ecclesiastical capacity *before* the Exodus.

Of those three assumptions, the only one with even a modicum of textual support is the claim that Egypt extended a clergy exemption to the Hebrews. When Joseph sold grain to the Egyptians during the famine, he took possession on behalf of the state of all the lands in the country except for those parcels belonging to the Egyptian priests (Genesis 47:22, 26). Those priests were treated quite deferentially, receiving regular allotments of food from the royal silos. Plainly, this does not serve as proof that the Egyptian government extended similar privileges to the priests of despised and enslaved foreign ethno-religious groups residing in Egypt.

The idea that סבלתיכם, "your burdens," ought to be interpreted as "your own personal burdens" is undermined by the next verse. Pharaoh angrily rejected the request by Moses and Aaron by noting the disastrous economic impact that it would have: "Behold, the people of the land are now numerous, and you would have them cease from their burdens סבלתם (Exodus 5:5)!" The commentators make no effort to interpret "their burdens" to mean the private burdens of the Israelite masses. It is perfectly clear that here Pharaoh was referring to the work done by the Israelite slaves for their Egyptian overlords. This is confirmed in the next chapter, when God refers to Himself as the One "Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt סבלות מצרים (6:7)." To interpret "your burdens" (5:4) and "their burdens" (5:5) in radically different ways is artificial. One is induced to wonder what has motivated such a strained reading of the text.

In the Bible, the Levites were not elevated to their position as sacerdotal functionaries until *after* the Exodus and the Sinaitic theophany. Scripture describes the process whereby the Levites replaced the first-born sons of Israel as cultic officiants. (The first-born sons had themselves been elevated to that position only after God spared them during the plague of the first-born in Egypt

(Numbers 3:12-13.) Accordingly, there is no Scriptural basis for the claim that the tribe of Levi had a special religious status *during* the centuries of Egyptian bondage, i.e., *before* the Exodus.

In later centuries, the Levites become the Torah teachers of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:10). Homiletic efforts to retroject that role for the Levites to an earlier phase of Biblical history began as early as the 2nd century BCE. The Book of Jubilees retells the story of Jacob's blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, but replaces those three by instead portraying Isaac blessing Levi and Judah: Concerning the offspring of Levi, Isaac said: "They shall speak the word of the Lord in righteousness, and they shall judge all His judgments. They shall declare My ways to Jacob and My paths to Israel (Jubilees 31:13-15)." Rambam, borrowing from Midrash Hagadol, wrote that Jacob appointed Levi and his descendants to be the teachers of Torah in all generations (Hilkhos Avodah Zarah 1:3).

As an historical matter, in antiquity did non-Jewish authorities confer tax exemptions upon Jewish clergy? Persian King Artaxerxes decreed that the treasurers of the Trans-Euphrates province "have no authority to impose taxes, tribute, or any duty on any of the Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants, or other workers at the House of God (Ezra 7:24)."

In the *post*-Temple era, the sages tried to secure for themselves those material perquisites previously afforded to those who labored in the Temple complex. Expounding upon "tithes, you surely shall tithe (Deuteronomy 14:22)," Rabbi Abba bar Kahana posited an obligation on Jewish entrepreneurs and mercantilists to contribute one tenth of their profits to those who toil in the study of Torah (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 10:10). Rambam advanced the idea that not only is the genealogical caste of Levites to be materially supported, but that scholars and religious workers of *any* background are deserving of support (Hilkhos Shemittah v'Yovel 13:13).

Rabbis in the early centuries of the Common Era became accustomed to receiving tax exemptions, and were sensitive to any effort to strip them of those statutorily-recognized advantages. In 330, Emperor Constantine issued an order to Flavius Ablabius, Praetorian Prefect of the East, exempting "patriarchs and priests of the Jews" from curial service. Such persons who were not already decurions were given perpetual exemption from the decurionate. Those Jewish clerics who were already decurions were granted the privilege of not being assigned to any duties as official escorts (Codex Theodosianus 16.8.2). The purpose of this law was to allow the Jewish "cult" to operate without external meddling. Later that year, Constantine issued an address to "The Priests, Rulers of the Synagogue, Fathers of the Synagogue, and all others who serve in said place" in which he exempted Jewish clergy from "every compulsory service of a corporal nature (C.T.

16.8.4)." The advantages enjoyed by Jewish clergy were, however, considerably diminished by the order of Emperor Gratian in April 383. Gratian criticized the Jews for abusing their privileges. "The order with which men of the Jewish faith flatter themselves and by which they are granted immunity from the compulsory public services of decurions shall be rescinded (12.1.99)." The new law put Jewish clergy on par with their Christian counterparts. Any religious worker who wished to unburden himself of his civic responsibilities had to give away his possessions.

In this light, we can now consider an alternate recension of the Midrashic embellishment of Exodus 5:4. "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: The tribe of Levi was exempt from the liturgies in Egypt (Tanhuma Va'era 4)." The English word "liturgy" refers to the text used in divine worship services. But in the Greco-Roman world, liturgies were forms of compulsory public service, whether in the form of financial contributions to public works projects, public service of a physical nature, or participation in town councils. By claiming that the Levites, the supposed predecessors of the rabbis, were exempt from liturgies, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi created Biblical-era precedent for a then-contemporary arrangement favorable to the rabbinical class.

The rabbis tenaciously fought to retain their tax exemptions. When the Patriarch Rabbi Judah II (mid-3rd century CE) taxed the rabbis, he was met with fiery opposition from Resh Lakish, who mustered a series of Scriptural proofs demonstrating the illegitimacy of Judah II's actions. When Rav Nahman bar Rav Hisda taxed the rabbis, Rav Nahman bar Isaac accused his colleague of violating the Torah, Prophets, and Writings (Baba Batra 7b-8a). Rava permitted rabbis to engage in quasi-dishonesty in order to escape the tax-collector (Nedarim 62b).

The rabbis found being subject to taxation so objectionable that they were willing homiletically to besmirch Biblical heroes in the cause of preserving their tax advantages. Two dramatic examples are:

- a) Why was Abraham punished with having his progeny enslaved for centuries in a foreign land? Because Abraham imposed a tax on Torah scholars (Nedarim 32a). The proof-text cited is: "He armed his disciples who had been born in his house, 318 men, and pursued them as far as Dan (Genesis 14:14)." The verse describes Abraham's mustering of an army to rescue his nephew Lot. Redeeming captives is one of the greatest mitzvot, and yet this very act is here reread in a negative light.
- b) Why was the Judahite King Asa punished? Because he taxed the Torah scholars (Sotah 10a). The proof-text cited

is: “Then King Asa issued an order to all Judah—no one was exempt—and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using there. With them King Asa built up Geba in Benjamin, and also Mizpah (I Kings 15:22). The verse describes Asa’s efforts to fortify and defend the Kingdom of Judah from external enemies. Elsewhere in rabbinic literature, Asa’s actions are lauded and seen as proof that, in times of emergency, there are no exemptions from military conscription (even for a bridegroom). Yet, here, his actions are condemned in an attempt to manufacture Biblical precedent for a ban on taxing Torah scholars.

Clergy exemptions are not especially controversial during times of plenty and economic prosperity. When the economy falters, people begin to wonder why certain privileged individuals and their properties are removed from the tax rolls. The economic situation in 3rd century CE Eretz Yisrael was reaching

a crisis point. The Jewish demographic was in decline because of emigration. The middle class was becoming impoverished and the small number of wealthy Jewish patrons was declining. The Patriarch had little choice but to levy funds from previously exempted classes, including Torah scholars. This action, and similar ones undertaken by temporal Jewish leaders in Babylonia, led to a flurry of (strained) homiletic readings, including the Midrashic account of Pharaoh’s words “Go to your burdens.”

In the United States, clergy are generally afforded certain tax exemptions and other advantages. When, however, those legal advantages are abused, regardless of the particular religious affiliation of the offending clergyman, religion is sullied in the eyes of the public. Responsible rabbis, who are not only religious leaders but also upstanding citizens, are careful to comply with applicable statutes concerning parsonage, income tax, and the like. Ideally, all those claiming to be Jewish “religious workers” will be equally punctilious.

Join us for this wonderful event

Tu B'Shevat Seder & Celebration

Thursday, January 25th
[STAY TUNED FOR DETAILS]



Congregation Anshe Sholom

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THE Shul BY THE Shore

A BIT MORE CHANUKAH 2023/5784 AT ANSHE SHOLOM

