

OFF-RAMP TORAH

A JUDICIOUS DEPARTURE FROM
THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

March 28, 2026



אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה:

TO START: Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: Tzav Leviticus 6:1-8:36

Sequence in Torah cycle: 25th of 54

Sequence in Leviticus: 2nd of 10



WHERE WE'RE GOING INSTEAD, and why

Afield, and Abroad

Context: *This is the second weekly portion in Leviticus, a section of the Torah dealing primarily with the rituals that will bring holiness to— and, fully as important, the ethical principles that will lend dignity and meaning to— life in the national homeland to which our Israelite forebears are journeying. The latter part of Leviticus broaches, and the subsequent two Books of the Torah echo and amplify upon, the prospect of **expulsion from that Homeland, if we do not prove true to our faith and our values.***

*The poignant irony of which is, that it is precisely because **of** our deep devotion to our faith and our values that we have so often been persecuted, throughout the **many long centuries of Jewish wandering in exile.***

All of which finds a focus on this Shabbat, since next Tuesday marks the anniversary of a catastrophic Jewish expulsion rivaled only by the displacement that followed the first-century destruction of Jerusalem: *The Alhambra Decree of 1492.*

A) **Leviticus** 26:14, 26:16a, 26:33 -

וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ לִי . . . לְהַפְרֹכֶם
אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲף אֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה זֹאת
לָכֶם

But if you will not hearken to Me . . . so
as to break My Covenant, then I, in turn,
will do this to you:

וְאֶתְכֶם אֲזַרֶה בְּגוֹיִם . . .
I will scatter you among the nations.

B) **Deuteronomy** 28:15, 28:64-66 -

וְהָיָה אִם לֹא תִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ . . .

But if you will not hearken to the Voice
of The Eternal One, your God, . . .

וְהִפִּיצְךָ יְהוָה בְּכָל הָעַמִּים . . .
מִמְקַצֵּה הָאָרֶץ וְעַד-קִצֵּה הָאָרֶץ

Then **The Eternal One will disperse
you** among all the nations, from one of
the earth to the other.

C) Abraham Leon Sachar (1899-1993), *A History of the Jews* - Jews had been settled in Spain at least as early as the Carthaginian days. Traders, merchants, artisans, exiles, and adventurers found their way to the pillar of Hercules in the wake of the Romans, the Suevi, the Alans, the vandals, the Visigoths, and the other Gothic tribes who had successively flooded the country and helped to form its racial character. **They lived as quietly as the troubled times allowed**, suffering few hardships for their faith among either pagans or Arians [heretical Christians].



In 589 the tide turned sharply when the politic Visigothic king Reccared I, hoping to strengthen his throne, accepted the Catholic faith. Thereafter for more than a century, until the Muslim conquest of 711, **the Jews— along with other heretics— were constantly in the shadow of persecution.**

For the Jewish population in Spain, the Berber invasion was a godsend. The Muslim was more concerned about poll taxes than about converts, and therefore most of the old restrictions disappeared. Jews entered fully into the life of the country, and **soon rose to wealth and power.**

Over the ensuing centuries the long series of wars against the Moors continued, and step by step the Peninsula was reclaimed for the Cross. **But the little kingdoms that emerged with each Christian victory showed little animosity toward their Jewish inhabitants.** The kings were usually men of tolerance, and were statesmanlike enough to appreciate the stupidity of driving **an important commercial element** into the arms of the still powerful Moorish enemies.



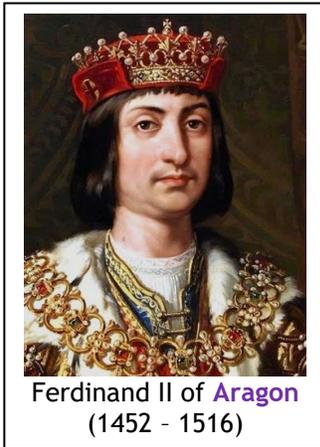
Those halcyon days were interrupted and ended towards the close of the 13th century, when French conquest of Navarre **subjected Jews to the restrictions** endured by their co-religionists on the other side of the Pyrenees. By 1328 there had been massacres in the large centers of Navarre in which more than six thousand Jews lost their lives. **Clergy agitators helped to bring Aragon into line** with Navarre, and soon **only Castile remained fairly faithful to its tradition of tolerance.** When the Black Death itself[– which in 1346-1350 prompted attacks on Jews, and in some cases the total destruction of entire Jewish communities, elsewhere on the continent–] evoked no outrages, the Jews of Castile congratulated themselves that there was at least one spot in Europe where freedom was not crushed out by bigotry.



...until *Pedro el Cruel* (Peter I of Castile, 1334–1369)

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- Decree of the Alhambra, Edict of Granada -



Ferdinand II of Aragon
(1452 - 1516)

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella— by the grace of God, King and Queen of **Castile, León, Aragon, Sicily, Granada**, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, **Seville**, Sardinia, **Cordobá**, Corsica, Murcia, **Jaen**, the Algarve, Algeciras, **Gibraltar**, and the Canary Islands; count and countess of Barcelona and lords of Biscay and Molina; dukes of Athens and Neopatria; counts of Rousillon and Cerdana; marquises of Oristan and of Gociano—



Isabella I of Castile
(1474 - 1504)

| Spanish municipalities: |
|-------------------------|
| ▪ Algeciras |
| ▪ Barcelona |
| ▪ Cordobá |
| ▪ Granada |
| ▪ Gibraltar |
| ▪ Jaen |
| ▪ Seville |
| ▪ Toledo |
| ▪ Valencia |

| Spanish regions or districts; |
|-------------------------------|
| ▪ Aragon [Ferdinand] |
| ▪ Castile [Isabella] |
| ▪ Leon [“ “] |
| ▪ Balearic Islands |
| ▪ Biscay |
| ▪ Canary Islands |
| ▪ Cerdana |
| ▪ Galicia |
| ▪ Molina |
| ▪ Murcia |

| Foreign territories: |
|----------------------|
| ▪ Algarve [Portugal] |
| ▪ Rousillon [France] |
| ▪ Gociano [“ “] |
| ▪ Corsica [“ “] |
| ▪ Naples [Italy] |
| ▪ Sicily [“ “] |
| ▪ Oristan [“ “] |
| ▪ Sardinia [“ “] |
| ▪ Athens [Greece] |
| ▪ Neopatria [“ “] |

to the prince Lord Juan (our very dear and much-loved son [1478-1497 - having been engendered by both monarchs, was their heir as well as the Prince of Asturias and Girona), and to the other royal children, prelates, dukes, marquees, counts, masters of military orders, priors, grandees, knights commander, and governors of castles and fortified places of our kingdoms and lordships;

and to councils, magistrates, mayors, constables, district judges, knights, official squires, and all good men of **the noble and loyal city of Burgos** and other cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric;

and of other archbishoprics, bishoprics, and dioceses of our kingdom and various lordships;

and to the juderías [designated Jewish quarters] of the said city of Burgos— and of all the aforesaid cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric, **and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our aforementioned kingdoms and lordships**— and to all Jews (and to all individual Jews) of those places;



and to barons and women, of whatever age they may be;

and to all other persons (of whatever law, estate, dignity, pre-eminence, and condition they may be);

and to all to whom the matter contained in this charter pertains or may pertain: *Saludos y gracia* [salutations and grace].

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You know well (or ought to know), that whereas we had been informed that in these our kingdoms there were some **wicked Christians who Judaized and apostatized from our holy Catholic faith**— the great cause of which being **the free intercourse between the Jews and these Christians**— in the courts which we held in the city of Toledo **in the past year of 1480 we ordered the separation of the said Jews** in all the cities, towns and villages of our kingdoms and lordships, **commanding that they be given distinct and separate Jewish quarters in which to live**, in the hope that **by this segregation the situation would remedy itself**.

Furthermore, we procured and gave orders that inquiry should be made [by The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, established in Seville in 1480], in our aforementioned kingships and lordships (which inquiry, as you know, has for twelve years been made, and is being made still), **whereby many guilty persons have been discovered**, as is very well known. We have been informed by the inquisitors (and by many other devout persons, ecclesiastical and secular) that great injury has resulted (and still results) from the [spuriously converted Jewish] Christians having engaged in (and continuing to engage in) social intercourse and communication. They have had means and ways to subvert and **to steal faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith, separating them from it and drawing them to themselves by subverting them to their own wicked belief and convictions:**



- instructing them in the ceremonies and observances of their Torah;
- holding meetings at which they read and teach that which people must hold and believe, according to their Torah;
- achieving that the Christians and their children be circumcised;
- furnishing them books from which they may read their prayers;
- declaring to them the fasts that they must keep;
- joining with them to read and teach them the history of their Torah;
- indicating to them the festivals before they occur;
- advising them of what therein they are to hold and observe;
- carrying to them, and furnishing them from their own houses, **unleavened bread and meats ritually slaughtered;**
- instructing them about the things from which they must refrain— as much in eating, as in other things in order to observe their Torah;

and **persuading them as much as they can to hold and observe the Torah of Moses, convincing them that there is no other law or truth except for that one**— all of which has been documented by many statements and confessions, both from these same Jews and from those who have been perverted and enticed by them— which has redounded to the great injury; detriment, and opprobrium of our holy Catholic faith.

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Notwithstanding that we were informed of the great part of this before now— and that we knew that **the only true remedy for all these injuries and inconveniences would be to**



prohibit all intercourse between the said Jews and Christians, and to banish them from all our kingdoms— we desired to content ourselves with commanding them to leave all cities, towns, and villages of Andalusia— where, it appears that they have done the greatest injury— believing that that would be sufficient so that those of other cities, towns, and villages of our kingdoms and lordships would cease to do and to commit the aforesaid acts.

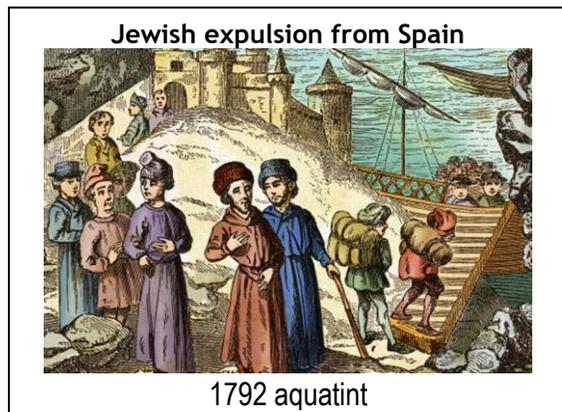
Yet we are subsequently informed that **neither that step, nor the passing of sentence of condemnation against the said Jews who have been most guilty of the said crimes and delicts against our holy Catholic faith, has been sufficient as a complete remedy to obviate and correct so great an opprobrium and offense to the faith and the Christian religion, because every day it is found and appears that the said Jews increase in continuing their evil and wicked purpose wherever they live and congregate.**

It is therefore most clear that **there must not be any place where they may further be allowed to offend our holy faith, and to corrupt those whom God has until now most desired to preserve** (as well as those who had fallen but amended and returned to Holy Mother Church), the which— according to the weakness of our humanity, and **by diabolical astuteness and suggestion that continually wages war against us—** may easily occur **unless the principal cause of it be removed, which is to banish the said Jews from our kingdoms.**

Because whenever any grave and detestable crime is committed by members of any organization or corporation, it is reasonable that such an organization or corporation should be dissolved and annihilated, and that the lesser members (as well as the greater and everyone else) be punished. [And it is reasonable, as well,] that **those who perturb the good and honest life of cities and towns—** and who, by contagion, can injure others— **should be expelled from those places.** This being the case even for lighter causes, that may be injurious to the Republic, how much more for those greater— and most dangerous, and most contagious!— crimes such as this.

Therefore, we— with the counsel and advice of prelates; great noblemen of our kingdoms; and other persons of learning and wisdom of our Council, having taken deliberation about this matter— **resolve to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart, and never to return or come back to any of them.**

And concerning this we command this our charter to be given, by which we order **all Jews and Jewesses of whatever age they may be,**



who live, reside, and exist in our said kingdoms and lordships— as much those who are natives as those who are not, who by whatever manner or whatever cause have come to live and reside therein— that **by the end of the month of July next of the present year, they depart from all of these our said realms and lordships**, along with their sons and daughters; menservants and maidservants; Jewish familiars— those who are great as well as the lesser folk, of whatever age they may be.

Neither shall they dare to return to those places— nor to reside in them; nor to live in any part of them, neither temporarily on the way to somewhere else, nor in any other manner— under pain that **if they do not perform and comply with this command, and should be found in our said kingdom** and lordships, and should in any manner live in them, **they incur the penalty of death and the confiscation of all their possessions** by our Chamber of Finance, **incurring these penalties by the act itself, without further trial; sentence; or declaration.**

And we command and forbid that **any person or persons** of the said kingdoms— of whatever estate, condition, or dignity that they may be— **shall not dare to receive, protect, defend, nor hold publicly or secretly any Jew or Jewess beyond the date of the end of July (and from henceforth forever)** in their lands, houses, or in other parts of any of our said kingdoms and lordships, under pain of losing all their possessions, vassals, fortified places, and other inheritances— and, moreover, of losing whatever financial grants they hold from us by our Chamber of Finance.

And so that the said Jews and Jewesses (during the stated period of time until the end of the said month of July) **may be better able to dispose of themselves, and their possession, and their estates, for the present** we take and receive them under our Security, protection, and royal safeguard, and **we secure to them and to their**

Polish farmer hiding a Jew from the Nazi occupiers



possessions that, for the duration of the said time until the said last day of the said month of July, they may travel and be safe; they may enter, sell, trade, and alienate all their movable and rooted possessions, and **dispose of them freely and at their will**; and that during the said time, no one shall harm them, nor injure them, nor do any wrong to them against justice— in their persons or in their possessions— under the penalty which falls on (and is incurred by) those who violate the



royal safeguard. And we likewise give license and faculty to those said Jews and Jewesses that **they be able to export their goods and estates** out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land, **so long as they do not export gold; silver; coined money;** nor any other things prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms, **allowing only merchandise** and things that are not prohibited.



And we command all councils, justices, magistrates, knights, squires, officials, and all good men of the said city of Burgos and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our said kingdoms and lordships and all our new vassals, subjects, and natives that they preserve and comply with

this our charter and all that is contained in it, and to give (and to cause to be given) all assistance and favor in its application, under penalty of being at our mercy and the confiscation of all their possessions and offices by our Chamber of Finance.

And because **this must be brought to the notice of all, so that no one may pretend ignorance**, we command that this— our charter— be posted in the customary plazas and places of the said city (and of the principal cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric) as an announcement and as a public document. Neither may anyone deface it, in any manner, under penalty of being at our mercy and the deprivation of their offices and the confiscation of their possessions, which will happen to each one who might do this.

Moreover, we command that whosoever posts this our charter subsequently summon any who act against it to appear before us at our court wherever we may be, on the day that they are summoned (within the fifteen days following the crime)under the said penalty, under which we command whichever public scribe who would be called for the purpose of reading this our charter that the signed charter with its seal should be shown to you all so that we may know that our command is carried out.



Given in our city of Granada, the XXXI day of the month of March, the year of the birth of our lord Jesus Christ one thousand four hundred and ninety-two years.

Royal seal of the joint kingdoms of Aragon (Ferdinand) and Castile (Isabella)

□ Alhambra Decree – notice is served:

March 31, 1492 [Julian] = [New Years Eve]
= Saturday, 12 Adar II, 5252
eve of Purim; the m'gillah was read that night

□ deadline to leave Spain:

July 31, 1492 [Julian]
= Tuesday, 15 Tammuz, 5252
day before eve of 17th of Tammuz.
[Columbus set sail 4 days later, Aug 03]

“How can you credit Ferdinand as a prudent monarch, when he impoverishes his own dominion, and enriches mine?”

Bayezid II
sultan of Turkey
1481 to 1512



- more over



D) Henry Abramson (1963-), “When Jews Were ‘Illegals’, They Took Away Our Children” - in *Jewish Forward* July 19, 2018 - We don’t know how exactly many Jews were forced out of Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella’s cruel Edict of Expulsion in 1492, but **conservative estimates put the number of refugees somewhere between 100,000 and 160,000**. We climbed the northern mountains to escape into Navarre, and from there we took to the sea, hoping to find refuge in Mediterranean ports. Some of us even braved the Atlantic hoping to make a home in the New World.

Our largest group, well over 50,000 Jews, sought asylum in neighboring Portugal — a country famed for its freedom of worship, sheltering Jews who fled the violence of 1391 and the recent persecutions of the Spanish Inquisition. At first, we tried to cross the long land border into Portugal in an orderly and legal fashion. We sent a representative to King João II of Portugal and secured his agreement to allow temporary-resident permits for 600 families, and the privilege of purchasing transit visas for everyone else. The price was crippling: eight gold *cruzados* [= total of .91 troy ounces of gold = \$4,100] for each Jewish man, woman, and child.



For every Jew who could manage the payment, perhaps four others were forced to enter Portugal illegally, under the cover of night along the loosely guarded land border. **The only alternative was to accept a Christian baptism and return to our devastated homes in Spain.**



Many Jews did so, thinking perhaps that they could continue to practice Judaism in secret. Those who did so were known by the derogatory term *Marranos* [“swine”]; **tens of thousands of these Jews and their descendants were mercilessly pursued by the Inquisition** and ultimately murdered in public burnings.

By April 1493, many of us who entered Portugal

- continued

had found sea passage to other destinations. Others, especially those who paid for the transit visas, **remained in government detention facilities; most lived quietly as illegal aliens** in smaller communities throughout Portugal, **trying to escape the notice of the authorities**. King João II then adopted a zero-tolerance policy: **any undocumented Jews**, including those with now-expired transit visas, **were to be arrested and sold as slaves**.

2,000 Jewish children aged two to twelve were **forcibly separated from their parents**. In



a chilling act of incomprehensible cruelty, João shipped them off to the uninhabited **equatorial island of São Tomé** off the coast of west Africa and abandoned them on shore. Later Por-

tuguese expeditions would reveal that **only some 600 survived**. Many of the others, according to the 16th-century historian Samuel Usque, had been eaten by the huge lizards [Nile monitors, 6 to 7 feet long] that are indigenous to the island.



João's cruelty did not extend to Portuguese-born Jews, but we and our children were not safe from his successor, Manuel I. In late 1496 the new king, determined to follow the Spanish example, ordered Portuguese Jews to choose between expulsion or baptism. He recognized, however, that **the Portuguese economy would benefit if the Jews would remain in the country**, so he put into place another **child-separation policy to coerce us to choose baptism over exile**.

On the eve of Passover in 1497, Portuguese authorities raided Jewish communities, **seized all Jewish children below the age of fourteen, and baptized them as Christians**. Eliyahu Capsali, a contemporary historian, wrote that “when the Jews were searching for *chametz* in all the nooks and crannies of their homes, the Portuguese came with torches and searched them for our precious children.” Parents were **given the option of reunification with their offspring if they would but accept baptism**. (As in Spain, many did; and many lost their lives, when the Inquisition crossed the border into Portugal 30 years later). In some cases, however, the children were simply lost; **the government did not have a serious plan in place to reunite the families, and the children were never found again**. In some cases, distraught Jewish parents committed suicide within the churches where they were to be baptized.

E) Paola Tartakoff (1978-), *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* - History weighs on us heavily, amid the Alhambra's dazzling architecture, graceful water fountains, and rose-filled courtyards. This magnificent Nasrid fortress was bitterly surrendered to the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, on January 2, 1492, and thereafter, Muslims remaining in Spain were forcibly converted to Christianity. Only a few months later, on March 31 of that same year, the Alhambra's resplendent *Patio de las Doncellas* (Hall of the Ambassadors) is where Ferdinand and Isabella signed an edict expelling the Jews from Spain. This document gave Spanish Jews four months— until July 31— **to choose between abandoning their religion or leaving the land where their families had lived for over a thousand years**.

- more over

Medieval Spain is sometimes remembered as an interfaith utopia, a land where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in peace. All alike experienced periods of economic prosperity and cultural flourishing; members of all three communities collaborated intellectually, artistically, politically, and financially; and all three cultures shaped one another. Spectacular architecture— including Granada’s Alhambra— and literary, legal, and scientific masterpieces in Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and Spanish are among the fruits of these dynamics that survive to this day.



What can we learn from these two medieval Spains— on the one hand, a land of religious pluralism; on the other, the epitome of religious intolerance?

Recalling the pivotal events of 1492 in Spain compels us to **recognize the complexity of patterns of hate** and the urgency of addressing them.

It reminds us that **mass violence does not emerge out of the blue**. Instead, it is propelled by a **multiplicity of factors**, including **deep histories of prejudice and bigotry**.

It also reminds us that **societal animosities seldom target only one group**. In late medieval Spain, Jews and Muslims both endured forced conversion and exile. In fact, the edict of 1492 later served as a model for regional charters expelling converted Muslims.



“The Moor’s Last Sigh”

by Alfred Dehodencq, c. 1870

The last Nasrid king of Spain, Boabdil (Emir Abu Abd-ullah Muhammad XII) looks back from the pass over the Sierra Nevada Mountains for a final glimpse at his lost city of Granada