

(continued from back panel):

Rebekah, too, suffers grave consequences for her deceitful scheme. Immediately following the theft of the Esau's blessing, Rebekah fears for Jacob's life on account of Esau's anger. *"Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides—until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!"* (27: 43-45). Rebekah's punishment for her immoral deceit is that she must send her beloved son away.

Furthermore, after this parting from her beloved son, Rebekah is never heard from again. She disappears from the biblical narrative. Significantly, she is the only one of the Patriarchs or Matriarchs whose death and burial is not recorded—we never learn where or when she dies. Presumably, she dies without ever reuniting with her beloved son Jacob. In Chapter 35, when Jacob is returning home, we would expect a reunion to occur between mother and son, but this never happens. Instead we are told that Rebekah's nursemaid, Deborah, dies and Jacob mourns her loss (35:8) but not a word is said about Rebekah herself. Her conspicuous absence, even in death, implies a strong criticism of her prior actions (see G. Rendsburg, and U. Cassuto.)

Despite the explanations offered by the midrashic tradition to exonerate the actions of Jacob and Rebekah, a close reading of the Torah itself indicates that their behavior was improper and had terrible consequences for them both, a lesson to us today to avoid deception, even when well intentioned, because the ends do not always justify the means.

SAVE THE DATE: Annual Ski and Snowboard Trip

Monday, December 25

Are you between the ages of 7 and 107? Do you like winter sports? Well, you're in luck!

Shearith Israel and The Jewish Center are joining forces again this year for a fun day of skiing and snowboarding! All are welcome—teens, singles, couples, families, first-timers, black diamond skiers, and more.

Registration details coming soon.

CARING CONNECTION & THE LEAGUE PRESENT:

Upper West Side Blood Drive

The Esther Goldfarb Memorial Blood Drive

January 7, 2018 | 10:00 am-4:00 pm

The Jewish Center, 131 W 86 St

Kick off the new year by giving the gift of life—be a blood donor.

This year, to maximize our impact, we are partnering with numerous congregations on the Upper West Side, so far including: Darkhei Noam, The Jewish Center, Lincoln Square Synagogue, Congregation Shaare Zedek, and Young Israel of the Upper West Side.

Our next public tour is **Wednesday, December 13**

Parnas Office Hours
Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearithisrael.org.

DEBAR TORAH: STEALING ESAU'S BLESSING

— BY Z. EDINGER —

The story of Rebekah and Jacob's deception of Isaac in order to steal Esau's blessing is morally problematic. As recounted in Chapter 27 of Genesis, the blind and aged Isaac wishes to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes to hunt for his father, Rebekah dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goat skin, and prepares a meaty dish. Following the scheme of his mother, Jacob then impersonates Esau and thereby receives Isaac's blessings for *"the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land"* and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns, the deception is revealed. Isaac trembles and Esau weeps. Isaac then gives a blessing to Esau that although he will also enjoy the fat of the land, he will have to live by the sword and serve his younger brother—clearly, a lesser blessing than the one originally intended.

Ancient interpretations, such as those found in the book of Jubilees (c. 150 BCE), Philo (c. 25 CE), and midrashic literature (c. 250 CE), take two distinct tracks in attempting to justify the actions of Rebekah and Jacob. But the actual text of the *Tanakh* seems to condemn their actions.

The ancient interpretations found in Jubilees and elsewhere explain that Rebekah and Jacob's scheme was actually perfectly moral and correct. They portray Jacob as being wholly good and Esau as wholly evil, and therefore it was entirely proper for Jacob to receive Esau's blessing. Rebekah's decision to deceive Isaac is justified because of the prophecy she was given in chapter 25—that the *"older will serve the younger."* As such, her actions were not immoral; rather, she made the correct decision to intervene in order to fulfill the word of God and to prevent Isaac from making the mistake of giving a blessing to an unworthy recipient. Jacob is even described as having been careful not to lie to his father, despite his father's obvious confusion as to who was in front of him. (See Rashi on 27:19, cf. Jubilees 26:19 *"And he said: 'Art thou my son Esau?' and he said: 'I am thy son.'"*) In this way, the rabbis interpreted the actions of Jacob and Rebekah as having been morally appropriate.

Alternatively, some ancient interpreters thought that the actions of Rebekah and Jacob were, in fact, deceitful; they were nevertheless ordained by God and therefore part of the Divine plan. (Jubilees makes God an active participant in the deception of Isaac: *"And he discerned him not, because it was a dispensation from heaven to remove his power of perception and Isaac discerned not"*—Jubilees: 26:18.) Similar divinely-inspired deceit occurs when Moses tells Pharaoh that the Hebrews needed to worship in the desert for three days, hiding their true intent to flee Egypt (Exodus 3:18, 5:3), and when Samuel tells Saul that he came to Bethlehem to sacrifice to God rather than revealing his true intent to anoint David (1 Samuel, 16). Seen in this light, the actions of Jacob and Rebekah, although deceitful, were part of a larger divine plan to bestow the correct blessing on Jacob. In other words, sometimes deceit is a divinely sanctioned action.

In contrast, the *Tanakh* itself appears to indicate a moral judgment critical of both Jacob and Rebekah. Explicit criticism of Jacob is found in Hosea (12:3-4, 13; *"[The Lord] will punish Jacob according to his ways, according to his doings will He recompense him. In the womb he took his brother by the heel...And Jacob fled into the field of Aram, and Israel served for a wife"*) and also in Jeremiah (9:3; *"trust ye not in any brother; for every brother acteth subtly יַעֲקֹב אָחֻזְרָא עֵקֶב"*.) In addition to these, criticism of Rebekah and Jacob is implied within the biblical narrative itself.

The emotional verses of Genesis 27:34-35 certainly imply a highly critical view of Jacob's actions: *"When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into great and bitter sobbing, and said to his father, 'Bless me too, Father!' But he answered, 'Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing.'" Jacob then flees to Laban to escape the wrath of Esau (chapters 28-29), where he is implicitly condemned for his actions by Laban. When Jacob discovers that Laban tricked him into marrying Leah, he asks: "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" Laban replies, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older" (29:25-26). Laban's switch of Leah in place of her younger sister is a perfect comeuppance for Jacob's deceitful supplanting of himself in place of his older brother. The implied criticism is clear. Moreover, it appears that the blessing that Jacob co-opted from Esau was never fulfilled—rather the opposite occurs: Jacob is the one who bows down to Esau (33:3) and Jacob even gives the "blessing" back to Esau (33:11: *"קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּרַכְתִּי"*). Clearly the attempt to steal Esau's blessing had negative consequences for Jacob throughout his life. *(continued on side panel)**



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Toledoth-Mahar Hodesh

November 17-18, 2017

Hertz Pentateuch: p. 93; Haftarah p. 948
Kaplan Living Torah: p. 116; Haftarah p. 1262

CANDLE LIGHTING | 4:18 pm

MINHAH & ARBIT | 4:15 pm | Main Sanctuary

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | "A Civil War Sabbath" | 2017-18 season sponsored by the Julis family.

ZEMIROT | 8:15 am

SHAHARIT (NISHMAT) | 9:00 am

TOT SHABBAT WITH LIZ AND SHANADE | Ages 0-4 | 10:00 am | Levy Auditorium

YOUTH GROUPS WITH RACHEL | Ages 5-12 | 10:00 am | Elias Room

JUNIOR CONGREGATION | Ages 5-12 | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

LECTURE | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | "Miracle at the United Nations: The 70th Anniversary of the Partition Vote"

KIDDUSH | Levy Auditorium | *Sponsored in memory of Irma Cardozo by her daughters, Deborah Cardozo Smith and Judith Cardozo Tenenbaum.*

SEUDA SHELISHIT & SHABBAT AFTERNOON PIRKEI ABOT SHIUR | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | 3:30 pm | Levy Auditorium | *Class sponsored by Laury Frieber, in memory of her father, Arthur A. Frieber. Fall semester sponsored by Scott Shay, in memory of Chana Razel bat Aaron v'Sarah.*

MINHAH & ARBIT | 4:10 pm

HABDALAH | 5:03 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings: Sunday: 8:00 am

Monday–Wednesday, & Friday: 7:15 am

Thursday (Thanksgiving Day): 7:45 am

Evenings (Arbit Only): Sunday - Thursday: 6:30 pm

Hebra Hased Va'Amet Screening of
No. 17 is Anonymous

THIS Sunday, November 19 | 4:00 pm
with opening remarks by Rabbi Soloveichik
Follow-up discussion led by psychiatrist and Shearith
Israel member, Dr. Rebecca Chaplan (Nathan)

Join the Hebra for this special screening of this Israeli
documentary, set in the aftermath of a suicide bombing that
killed 17 on a bus, in which all but one of the victims were
identified. The filmmakers document the search to identify the
man no one had reported missing. *The film runs 75 minutes, and
is in Hebrew with English subtitles.*

Light refreshments will be served. This event is FREE thanks to
the Hebra's sponsorship, though registration is
encouraged. Donations to the Hebra are welcome.
Visit shearithisrael.org/Anonymous17 to sign up.

SAVE THE DATE: Sisterhood Pre-Hanukkah Hands-On
Jewelry Making Workshop
Sunday, December 3 | 4:00 pm

Please join the Sisterhood for a family-friendly workshop with
handcrafted jewelry designer Ofra. For adults and
children 5 and older. Registration details to follow.

EARLY BIRD PRICING ENDS THIS MONDAY, NOV 20

Shabbat Luncheon Featuring A Conversation Between
Rabbi Soloveichik and Historian Andrew Porwancher
The Jewish Friends and Clients of Alexander Hamilton
Saturday, December 9 | Following Morning Services

This extraordinary event will reveal incredible, little known
details about Alexander Hamilton's relationships with Jews in
New York, mostly members of Shearith Israel. We will discuss
fascinating court cases in which Alexander Hamilton represented
Jews, and the story of Jews at Columbia College, Hamilton's
alma mater. Questions to be addressed include: How friendly
was Alexander Hamilton with New York's Jews? How did his
Jewish friends help form his own views about the future of the
United States? Most tantalizingly, what do these relationships
tell us about Jewish links in Hamilton's own past?

*Andrew Porwancher is the author of the forthcoming
The Jewish Founding Father: The Secret Life of Alexander Hamilton, to be
published by Harvard University Press. He is a visiting scholar at the
Straus Center's Program on Early America and the Jews.*

THANKSGIVING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2017

Morning Services with our Special Thanksgiving Hallel |
Main Sanctuary | 7:45 am

Rabbi Soloveichik's Address | Main Sanctuary | 8:30 am
Children's Hesed Craft Activity (during the Rabbi's
Address and Pack-a-thon) | Levy Auditorium | starting 8:30 am

Hot Cocoa & Refreshments | Elias Room | 9:00–11:00 am
Parade Viewing for Youth | Portico

Hunger Alleviation Pack-a-thon (registration required)
9:30–11:30 am | Levy Auditorium

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25

Young Couples and Families Thanksgiving Luncheon
See back panel for details.

Would You Like To Sponsor Our Thanksgiving Festivities?
Visit shearithisrael.org/thanksgiving.

THIRD ANNUAL THANKSGIVING
PACK-A-THON

This Thursday, November 23, 9:30 am | Levy Auditorium

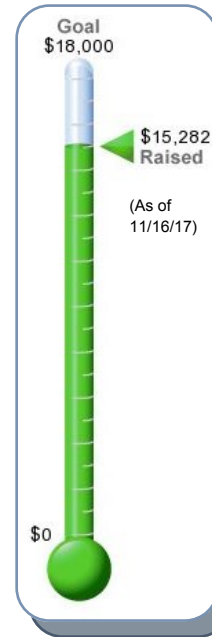
*Co-Sponsored by West End Collegiate
Church, The Jewish Center,
and the Church of Latter-Day Saints.*

Together, we will pack 2,000 meals for
hungry New Yorkers.

Thanks to a generous 3-for-1 matching
grant, we are approaching our \$18,000
goal, with less than \$3,000 to go.

Register to participate or donate at
shearithisrael.org/pack-a-thon-2017.

Special Thanks to our Event Chairs:
Jennifer Ash, Karen Daar, Zoya Raynes,
Alessandra Rovati, Marlene Sperling,
Michael Sperling, and Adina Wagman.



A FEW IMPORTANT THANKSGIVING REMINDERS:

- There are barriers and police presence on our block during the parade. Please arrive early (in time for services) in order to ensure access to our facility. If arriving by subway, check for transit alerts. The B/C train subway exit at our corner may be closed. The 1/2/3 train at 72nd street and Broadway may be preferable.
- Our Portico offers a perfect perch for viewing the parade. It is, however, far too small to comfortably accommodate everyone who would like to be there. We therefore respectfully ask you to understand that the portico is designated for the **children** of our members, PTTS students, and Toddlers. Adults must be accompanied by a **young** child.
- In order to give as many children as possible an opportunity to get a good view, our staff will be asking people to rotate on and off the Portico. Please cooperate with them.
- Please also note, our office will be closed on Thursday and Friday, and there will be NO Hebrew School on Thursday or Sunday. For funeral arrangements, contact Zachary Edinger at 917-584-3787.
- Finally, we may be able to accept walk-ins at our Pack-A-Thon. If interested, please register outside of Levy auditorium at 9:30 AM. You will be able to make your donation (\$18 suggested minimum) by cash, check, or credit card.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE THIS MONDAY, NOV 20

Young Couples and Families Luncheon
Shabbat, November 25 | Following Morning Services
Young couples and families are invited to a Thanksgiving
Weekend Shabbat Lunch with Rabbi and Layalza
Soloveichik & Co. Join us for a family-friendly afternoon of
Torah and good company. For registration and sponsorship
details, visit shearithisrael.org/thanksgiving-luncheon

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome new members Caryl & Israel Englander to the
Shearith Israel family.
Congratulations to our members Sam Cohen and Mel Neumark on
celebrating a special birthday. We wish both of them many more
happy and healthy years.