

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Isaac's Birkat HaMazon, His Blessing Over Food

If we read the story of Isaac's blessing of his sons literally, then from Isaac's perspective the whole story of who gets the blessing revolves around one thing: Food! At first glance, Isaac comes off as a glutton with a taste for meat, specifically for the wild game hunted by Esau, and whoever gets Isaac food the fastest is the one who gets the birthright. Isaac's perspective on this seems rather crass, to put it mildly! Rebecca engages in deception, to be sure, but it's based upon her keen awareness of Esau's unsuitability to carry on Isaac's legacy, whether or not she was aware of the earlier incident of Esau spurning the birthright. Rebecca, at least, seems to have logical criteria in mind for who is to receive the blessing. By contrast, Isaac's having the blessing revolve around eating seems like a pretty dense way of designating his heir! Why should Esau have to bring food before Isaac could bestow his blessing? Why does the appointing of an heir have to wait until Isaac eats?

In pondering this, I'm reminded of how many blessings pronounced in Jewish tradition revolve around food. Food which sustains life is, par excellence, the greatest gift from God, other than life itself. It is thus the gift which most merits the receiver's giving thanks and blessing back to the givers in recompense. Most of the other blessings we recite are not "de-Oraita," not specifically called for by the Torah. But the Torah states specifically "...you shall eat, and be satisfied, and you shall bless the Lord your God, upon the goodly Land which He has given you." Eating a gift of sustaining food obliges gratitude and necessitates blessing in recompense in ways other things do not. Isaac's full and wholehearted blessing seems to have required inducement by obliging it in this way. A certain mood needed to be set for the blessing to flow freely and naturally, and required the catalyst of gratitude and satisfaction from the gift of a meal.

But perhaps something else is going on, as well. Success is itself a sign of God's blessing, and tends to bring along more blessing in its wake. Blessing and praise flow most naturally to those who are most blessed, talented and praiseworthy. Isaac's duty is to pass along the blessing and mission of his father Abraham to the twin who is most likely to succeed. Success in that mission requires a level of material success. Up to this point Isaac saw Esau as the most likely to succeed of his sons. Esau, after all, puts good food, prize food, on the table. Even Esau's smell was of the fields of bounty. Isaac needed to taste, feel, and smell a token of his son's material success in order to assure his confidence in his son and put Isaac in the frame of mind to bring on the full prophecy of blessing. Now, the strength and success of the valiant hunter is much more noticeable than that of the patient, struggling farmer and shepherd. The hunter's return on the pittance of his investment, with a little luck, is relatively quick. His earnings are pure profit – easy money. He prides himself upon on his own valor and skill at the chase, which enables him to dash off to the field and usually run back fast, bearing his prize. He may require some temporary patience in stalking his prey, but nowhere near that of the farmer and shepherd. However, the hunter's catch relies upon chance circumstance, and is not nearly as certain and ready-at-hand as the farmer's food supply. The agriculturalist, on the other hand, epitomizes the saying that "slow and steady wins the race." When Isaac finds that the slower but more reliable success of his shepherd son Jacob could beat Esau to the punch, he realizes which one of his sons is actually most likely to succeed, and that draws forth Isaac's praise and blessing accordingly.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Toledot

November 5-6, 2021

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 5:29 pm

Friday Evening Services | 5:30 pm

Friday Night Lights | following services | *2021-22 season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family | Sponsored anonymously, in memory of Ezra b. Yitzhak*

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | Led by Teen Leaders & Rabbi Rohde | following services (approx. 10:45 am)

Grab & Go Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush contributor: Joshua de Sola Mendes in honor of his father, Jonathan de Sola Mendes, on his 101st birthday*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:45 pm | Paved Paradise | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik *open to fully vaccinated individuals only*

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 5:30 pm

Shabbat Ends | 6:15 pm

Virtual Habdala Service | Rev. Z. Edinger | 6:30 pm

Weekday Service Times

Remember to turn your clocks back one hour on Saturday night.

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday (Minha/Arbit): **4:30 pm** | Monday-Thursdays (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

Reminder: *If you choose not to wear a mask when permissible, you represent and warrant that you are fully vaccinated (+ 14 days). If requested, you must wear a well-fitted mask wherever and whenever required.*

If you're eligible for the vaccine booster, we encourage it, and if your child is eligible to be vaccinated, we encourage that too. Once you've been boosted/vaccinated, please send vaccination proof to info@shearithisrael.org.

THIS SHABBAT

Friday Night Lights

IN PERSON, Fridays | Following Evening Services

*2021-22 season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family
This session sponsored anonymously, in memory of Ezra b. Yitzhak*

To sponsor a future session, visit shearithisrael.org/fnl5782.

ONGOING

The Temple: A Hanukkah Tour Through Time

A 7-Part Series Leading Up to Hanukkah

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Tuesdays | 7:30 pm | via conference call

To register or sponsor, visit shearithisrael.org/banukkah-series5782.

PTTS Hebrew School One-on-One Tutoring

Virtual or In Person

PTTS is now facilitating highly subsidized one-on-one tutoring customized to your child's needs, schedule, and even from the comfort of your child's computer screen, if preferred or necessary.

For details on the program, our available tutors, and to sign up, visit shearithisrael.org/ptts-tutoring.

PRESERVING PAVED PARADISE

We hope you have had the pleasure of experiencing our beautiful, safe and accessible outdoor pavilion, "Paved Paradise." If not, you must.

Louis Solomon recently announced the launch of our second phase of fundraising, which will enable us to preserve and maintain this wonderful outdoor space.

Our Phase 2 Fundraising Goal: \$150,000

Please help us make the necessary investments to ensure the ongoing maintenance and beautification of this valuable outdoor space, "Paved

Paradise," so we can enjoy it now and for years to come.

To donate, visit shearithisrael.org/preserving-paved-paradise.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Happy 101st birthday to our honorary trustee, **Col. Jonathan de Sola Mendes!**

THANKSGIVING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Annual Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon

A Hunger Alleviation Event in Support of MASBIA

Thursday, November 25 | 9:30 am

IN PERSON, Outdoors on Paved Paradise

Register & Donate at shearithisrael.org/packathon2021

We are proud to once again join with our community faith partners, The Jewish Center, West End Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to celebrate Thanksgiving in the true spirit of the day - by giving to others.

This year's Pack-A-Thon will be in person, in our beautiful, COVID-safe outdoor pavilion, Paved Paradise. We will pack nutritious food packages for those in need, and MASBIA will distribute them.

Help us feed hundreds of struggling families!

Again this year, thanks to an anonymous donor, all contributions (up to \$10,000) will be matched. Together, we can reach our goal of \$18,000!

Thanksgiving Parade Viewing for Youth

Thanksgiving Day, November 25

Our Portico provides one of the best Thanksgiving Parade views in the city. This year, in order to avoid crowding on the Portico, the parade viewing is for school-aged children who do not need an adult by their side. Sorry, adults and very young children cannot be accommodated on the Portico steps this year.

To register your child, visit shearithisrael.org/parade2021.

2021 Hanukkah Film Festival

Begins on the first night of Hanukkah, November 28

Use our code "CSINYC" to get a 25% discount!

Celebrate the Hanukkah season with 8 nights of award-winning new films, available to view from the comfort of your home!

A new film will be released each night of Hanukkah for registered participants to view, and will remain available for the rest of the holiday in case you miss them.

Visit www.HanukkahFilmFestival.com for details on all the films, and don't forget to sign up with our CSINYC discount code!