

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

The Designated Royal Heirs Among the Tribal Princes of a Noble Nation

Genesis concludes with the tales of both Judah and Joseph being designated as the Royal Heir-Successors of Israel. Judah “stepped up” in the previous Parashiyot to reconcile the family. Joseph previously was the savior of the family from famine, and in this Parasha, the different blessings given Joseph’s sons clearly mark him out as the designated successor, having been given “first-born-like” rights of inheritance. Joseph’s sons are each blessed as if they were not grandsons of Jacob, but rather like sons of Jacob in their own right, so that Ephraim and Menasseh are treated as if they each had the equivalent status of Reuben and Simeon (48:5). This marks them as destined to become separate tribes, in the same way that each of the other brothers of Joseph is counted as a separate tribe. As 48:22 implies, Joseph is being given an “extra” inheritance portion of land in comparison to the portions of each of his brothers. Joseph’s sons each being given portions anticipates the later Israelite inheritance law whereby the firstborn is given a “double portion.”

Of Joseph’s two “adopted sons,” Ephraim is explicitly given “first-born-like” succession rights, so that he too is designated as next in the Royal Line. The fact that Menasseh is actually older than Ephraim but Ephraim is designated for the “first-born” inheritance blessing is consistent with what we’ve seen previously in Genesis, that “first-born-like” succession rights go to the chosen, designated successor rather than to the actual first-born. Indeed Joseph himself as successor is not the actual first-born of his father (although he is of his mother). Hence we are left wondering why Joseph at all protests the designation of his younger son Ephraim as preferred in the line of succession over his older son Menasseh. The best explanation seems to be that this alludes to Menasseh’s descendants who themselves are referred as having split into “half-tribes,” thus receiving a “double portion” of tracts of inherited land, with one “half-tribe of Menasseh” settled upon a vast tract of land in northern Trans-Jordan and the Golan Heights, and a second “half-tribe” being given a large tract in Samaria. These two separate tracts of Menasseh dwarf the tract given to Ephraim. Also, it does seem that more Israelite leaders did come from Menasseh rather than Ephraim. Verse 50:23 oddly refers to Joseph’s grandsons through Makhir, the son of Menasseh, as seeming to be “of Ephraim,” so there does seem to have been some legitimate dispute as to which was truly the first-born of Joseph. The Makhirite territory in particular was a huge chunk of land in the Golan Heights, and one of the first settled, so it makes sense that Joseph would have recognized them early. But overall, Ephraimite territory was more centrally located, was closer to the “core” territory of Benjamin and Judah, and contained the ancient cities of Shekhem, Shiloh, and Beth-El, whereas some of Menasseh’s territory was quite remote. And indeed, the text seems to be referencing the place-name Shekhem, which also was captured and settled by Israelites extremely early. Later, because of its proximity to Judea, and through Judean aid, some of the tribe of Ephraim seems to have survived the Assyrian onslaught and parts of southern Ephraim were annexed to Judea. These factors seem to lie in the background of the dispute as to “first-born” succession rights of Ephraim and Menasseh.

Joseph himself, however, is crowned successor to Jacob/Israel, and this alludes to the dominance of both Ephraim and Menasseh in the leadership and Royal Line of the large Northern Kingdom referred to by the name “Israel.” Most, if not all, of the Israelite capital cities and sanctuaries are in their territory. It is in this light that we are to understand the peculiar blessing given to Joseph in 49:23-26: The language of these blessings is that used to bless a first-born, as when Jacob himself was blessed in 28:28, or even in the blessing of Esau in 27:39. Thus the first-born is blessed with the “rain and dew of heaven” and great fertility. Joseph is to become a powerful warrior, the “mighty one of Jacob,” the “rock of Israel.” Joseph is clearly the “benighted” “head” of his brethren in 49:26. That verse explicitly refers to “the blessings of my parents” in blessing Joseph with all that could be desired, so it’s referencing Jacob’s designating Joseph as his successor just as Isaac had blessed Jacob as his “first-born” successor. Even the last part of the narrative, when the brothers worry that Joseph may mete out revenge for their sale of him, is typical of royal succession narratives, where the succeeding heir may wipe out all the rival claimants among his brethren. But in this case Joseph leaves the families of the Israelite Princes intact.

But also to Judah is vouchsafed the leadership of a Royal House: “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you...The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come; and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Gen. 49:8-10).” Thus Joseph and Judah, the Royal Successors among a large and full Israelite Royal Family, are designated, and so, at the end of Genesis, we have the full Noble Royal Lineages out of which the Kingdoms, Royal Houses and Tribal Princes of Israel and Judah are destined to derive.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayhi

January 6-7, 2023 | 14 Tebeth 5783

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 180 | Haftarah: p. 191

Kaplan: p. 240 | Haftarah: p. 1090

Candle Lighting | 4:26 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | following services | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Special Morning Lecture | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | "The Mummy:

An Amazing Tomb from Ancient Egypt and its Connection to Genesis and Joseph"

Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush sponsored by Karen & Jack Daar*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Evening Services | 4:20 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 5:12 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

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

Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: 4:30 pm

The earlier time means a harder time making a minyan. If you can help out and attend minyan, morning or evening, please contact Z. Edinger.

THIS SUNDAY

West Side Youth Ice Skating Outing

THIS Sunday, January 8 | 1:45 pm
at Bryant Park

CSI Youth joins the West Side Institutional Synagogue Kidzone, Ohab Zedek, and Lincoln Square Synagogue for a community-wide ice skating trip! Tweens, teens, and families with kids of all ages are welcome.

Details & registration at wsisny.org.

FINALE:

Sisterhood Sunday Matinee Film Festival

Final Film Discussion: Sunday, January 8 | 4:00 pm

Film provided in advance to registrants | Price: \$10

Discussion on Zoom with filmmaker & actor Emanuel Cohn on Jan 8

THE LITTLE DICTATOR

Starring: Emanuel Cohn, Iris Penn, and Ruth Geller

A history professor, Yossi Kleinmann, an expert on the political leaders of totalitarian regimes, feels unappreciated both by his students and his domineering wife. At the 90th birthday party of his wife's grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, Yossi finds himself in an unexpected situation that forces him to face up to history, to his family, and to himself.

Registration and details at shearithisrael.org/events/sisterhood-film-fest.

A link will be sent to you to watch the film, a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom. For questions, contact rgedinger@gmail.com.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Ahron & Jessica Herring**, upon the birth of a baby girl, Judith Lilly, born December 20th, 2022.

We mourn the loss of **Leon Hyman**.

Condolences to his wife, Adah, and his children, Ilana, Adam, and Ariella Hyman.

IN MEMORIAM

Shearith Israel mourns the loss of **Maestro Leon Hyman**,
Conductor of Shearith Israel from 1955-2021.

In tribute to Maestro Hyman, our choir will perform several of his compositions at Shabbat services this week.

If you would like to honor the memory of Leon Hyman with a donation to Shearith Israel, please visit shearithisrael.org.

DEADLINE APPROACHING

DON'T DELAY - PRE-PAY!

Membership Pre-Payment Offer

Deadline: Sunday, January 15

Members, remember that you can pre-pay your July 2023-June 2024 dues now at this membership year's rates. See our emails for the link.

COMING UP

Sign up now for Early Bird Pricing!

A Community Shabbat Dinner with *Magevet*,

Yale's Jewish Acapella Group

Friday Evening, Shabbat Shira, February 3

Following Evening Services & *Friday Night Lights*

What better way to enjoy Shabbat Shira than with *shira*, song? Following our Friday evening services – always musically exquisite – registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by *Magevet*, Yale University's Jewish, Hebrew, and Israeli acapella group. A co-ed ensemble, comprised of talented undergraduate students at Yale University, *Magevet* is known for its sweet blend of voices, unique arrangements, and lighthearted sense of humor, and is one of the nation's premiere Jewish acapella singing groups.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/events/magevet-dinner.

PRICING (Early Bird through January 12)

Member Adult - **Early Bird \$48** (Regular \$52)

Non-member Adult - **Early Bird \$52** (Regular \$56)

Child - **Early Bird \$35** (Regular \$35)

Sponsorship opportunities available