

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Perpetually Seeking Good Without Being Able to Perpetuate It

In the story of the Garden of Eden, God does not prohibit Man from eating of the Tree of Life. It's only the Tree of Knowledge which God prohibits to Adam. Indeed, God invites Adam to eat from all of the trees of the Garden excepting only the Tree of Knowledge: So it seems that the Tree of Life God includes among the trees of whose fruit Adam is invited to eat. Of course, the Tree of Life's power to make man immortal is not explained at this point in the story - we are only told that it potentially had that power after Man eats of the Tree of Knowledge. Man may not have been created as immortal, but Man is invited to potentially make himself immortal by eating of all the fruits of the trees of the Garden including those of the Tree of Life, which he eventually would have gotten around to eating, even though he was unaware of its power. But God warns Man that he will definitely make himself mortal, that he will die, if he eats of the prohibited fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. When the Woman and Man first eat of the Tree of Knowledge, there seems a chance that Man might still make himself immortal; after all, to Eve's surprise, she and Adam don't die right away. At that point, it seems, she and Adam could have eaten from the Tree of Life and become immortal. But the possibility that Man might eat of the Tree of Life has become problematic after Man eats of the Tree of Knowledge. The possibility of Man's eating of the Tree of Life is only definitively ruled out by God's driving Man out of Eden and appointing the Cherubim and the flipping sword-blade to guard the Way to the Tree of Life, to keep Man out.

How did human knowledge of Good and Evil make eating of the Tree of Life problematic? What did God mean when He told Man "for on the day that you eat of it you will die" if, as the story goes, neither Eve nor Adam die right away, and indeed go on to live comparatively long lives? Why did the possibility of Human immortality seem to pose definitive problems for God only after Man knows Good and Evil? Was this perhaps because, not knowing about the Tree of Life's immortality-granting power, or not knowing whether Eternal Life was a good thing or a bad thing, Man might not have cared about it, or only eaten of it accidentally and occasionally?

The parable of this Tree of Life remains enigmatic, but contemplating its possible messages can yield a number of insights. Human Knowledge of Good and Evil is problematic, especially when mixed with the possibility of Human Immortality. I have given the interpretation previously that Human knowledge of Bad and Good gives the possibility for man to act as Judge and Ruler. The World can only have one Immortal King. A Human with the power to judge and rule who is given Everlasting Rule would compete with God and would wind up inevitably using that power for Evil. That is why Man's Rulership and Dynasty must be subject to "term limits."

Other insights are possible: The keys to immortality are often best left entrusted in God's hands and not consciously sought after. Man has the power to seek the Good and avoid/eliminate the Bad, and Man knows that it is the Good in life which he should choose to seek after. But in our mixed world of Good and Evil, trying to preserve that Good Eternally is in vain.

Yet a further insight: Having chosen to know Good and Evil, Man must constantly and repeatedly be alert and careful to choose the best in Man's changing world situation. Having chosen to know what is Good and what is Evil, Man is sentenced to never let the struggle for Good rest. Good for Man will not live on in Perpetuity. Adam is sentenced to seek good perpetually but cannot perpetuate it. And yet in perpetually struggling for Good and to eliminate Evil, Man does God's Work and, in some sense, lives on perpetually. As Ecclesiastes (Chap. 12:13-14) concludes: "13 The end of the matter, when all has been heard, is: Fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the whole [duty] of Adam. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, along with every hidden thing, whether good or evil."



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Bereshit

October 13-14, 2023 | 29 Tishrei 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 2 | Haftarah: p. 1262

Hertz: p. 2 | Haftarah: p. 948

Candle Lighting | 6:01 pm

Friday Evening Services with Tenu Shebaha | 6:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

Hatanim Luncheon | following services | Levy Auditorium | *For registered guests*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 5:10 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Evening Services | 5:55 pm

Habdala | 6:49 pm

Rosh Hodesh Marbeshvan begins on Saturday night.

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Minha & Arbit: **6:00 pm (note new time)**

COMING UP

Shabbat of Hope

NEXT Shabbat, Shabbat Noah, October 20-21

- A very special season premiere of Rabbi Soloveichik's *Friday Night Lights*
- An exhibition of our three sets of historic *rimonim* crafted by famed colonial silversmith Myer Myers
- A major lecture from Rabbi Soloveichik on Shabbat morning

Support this fundraiser at shearthisrael.org/events/shabbat-of-hope

How To Save The World In Six (Not So Easy) Steps:

Bringing Out The Best In Nonprofits

An Informative Book Event with Author David Schizer

Interviewed by Shearith Israel's Beth Goldman

Thursday, November 2 | 6:30 pm

Register to reserve your complimentary copy of the book (courtesy of the Columbia Center for Israeli Legal Studies) at shearthisrael.org/events/schizer.

Meet & Greet With Our Yoetzet Halakha, Ellin Cooper

Shabbat, October 28 | At Kiddush

Come chat with Yoetzet Cooper and see for yourself what a delightful resource she is.

SAVE THE DATE: Friday Night, November 10

CSI Young Professionals and Shearith Israel present:

Dinner with Guest Speaker Jordan Gorfinkel

author of the Graphic Novel Haggadah & Graphic Novel Megillat Esther

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We mourn the passing of **Yosef Malachi Guedalia**, 7"יז who fell defending Israel, our homeland. Yosef is the son of David & Dina Guedalia of Bet Shemesh; grandson of **Rabbi Harris Guedalia** (our former assistant minister) and the late **Judi (Bendheim) Guedalia** ז"ל, and great-nephew of our members **Rose (Henry) Edinger** and **Aviva (Marvin) Sussman**. Our condolences go out to the entire Guedalia family and their relatives.

Mazal tob to our friends in the Parsonage, Rabbi Danny & Tamara Stein of UWS Base, upon the birth of a baby girl, Ruthie.

In the Press

Rabbi Soloveichik makes the case that the strength of the Jewish community is its capacity to remember and come together in the face of evil.
Read it at shearthisrael.org/resources/press.

WE STAND WITH ISRAEL

We are gratified to see that there are many community programs, activities, and services emerging in response to the dire situation in Israel, and we encourage our congregants to join in as many of these opportunities as they can to show their support.

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW:

Financial Support for Israel

- We have set up a special Israel Emergency Fund through the Rabbis Discretionary Fund - to contribute as a kehillah, go to shearthisrael.org/giving/rdf.
 - We've assembled an easily-shareable webpage of a few trusted organizations to which you can give directly - go to shearthisrael.org/giving/israel-crisis.
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CSI Sends Letters of Encouragement to Active Soldiers in the IDF

Let's send as many letters and cards as we can. Children, teens, and adults: please prepare a letter or card, put it in an envelope, and drop it off in the collection box at the synagogue.

We'll deliver them to our contact in Israel who will ensure they reach IDF bases.

1st batch: Drop off deadline Tuesday, October 17.

The IDF will be engaged in this fight for a long while.
We'll continue to collect letters and cards and keep sending.

Misheberakh for Our Relatives in the IDF

Members, on Shabbat we will be reciting a *Misheberakh* for the IDF - if you have any relatives who are currently serving, please submit them here so that we can have them in mind.

We are collecting this information privately for our own internal use.

Teen Solidarity: Together UWS Israel
Candlelight Vigil & Hearing from Former Israeli Soldiers
THIS Motzei Shabbat | October 14 | 8:00 pm
At Lincoln Square Synagogue

Members, do you have an Israel initiative you'd like to organize for our community??

Let us know!

עם ישראל חי!