

## DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

### Jacob Becomes Strong Only By Pairing With God's Sovereignty

There are a lot of, should we call them, "double entendres" or double- or triple- or quadruple- meanings in the Bible and its stories. The place-name "Mahanaim" we encountered at the end of last-week's Parasha continues to be explicated at the beginning of this week's. Mahanaim is understood as meaning "double-encampments." The city or twin-city or area known as Mahanaim seems to have been a major capital or holy city in the northern trans-Jordanian region. That general region was referred to as Gilead, a name which seems to be explained as "mound of witness," referring to the mound upon which Laban and Jacob made their peace-treaty, near some Jabbok River fords. The dispute and peace-treaty there between Laban and Jacob may have been seen as symbolic of later wars with Syria in which Syria claimed and took the Gilead region. Mahanaim seems to be explicated first as an encampment of Divine Angels opposite Jacob's camp. Perhaps the "two camps" were also symbolic of the peace-treaty of Laban's Syrian camp opposite Jacob's Israelite camp. Then Jacob sends messengers to Esau telling his brother that he was returning from Aram southward, in Esau's direction. When Jacob is told that Esau has marched towards him accompanied by 400 men, Jacob strategically then divides his own entourage into two camps for protection, so that if one camp was attacked the other would survive. Hence this division of his own camp in two also seems to be explaining the "Mahanaim" name, as the place where Jacob split his camp. Then, in Jacob's statement to Esau in 32:10, Jacob gratefully acknowledges that although he had fled Canaan and crossed the Jordan with no entourage whatsoever, he has now returned with two-camps-worth of an entourage, i.e., he has received a "double-portion of blessing." This too also seems to be explicating "Mahanaim." In Verse 21, we are told that Jacob's tributary gift "crossed over" before him, but that he stayed in the "camp." In 22, Jacob and his family ford the Jabbok, although we are told in Verse 23 that Jacob again brings his family and possessions across the Jabbok. Considering that Jacob has been by these fords of the Jabbok since he met Laban, how many times does he cross? Perhaps he has to cross several times to get them all across; that is what Rashi and the Midrash assume. But then, despite having seemingly crossed with his family and possessions, how is it that we are told that Jacob is left alone afterwards for the night to wrestle with the angel? And then we are given a new place-name for that place: Penuel or Peniel, where Jacob, now renamed Israel, met God "face-to-face." You need two to meet "face-to-face;" that too indicates a pair. Penuel became in later Israelite history a capital and possibly a holy site. Since Penuel could not be far from Mahanaim, archaeologists have speculated that Mahanaim and Penuel were twin-cities on strategic mounds on opposite sides of sharp bends of the Jabbok, and that too might explain Mahanaim as "paired encampments." Perhaps the sharp bends of the river might explain the fording back and forth.

The name Israel also seems to have double entendres, if not more than double: Our text seems to explain it as "he wrestled with God." But it can also mean "God rules." Indeed, while the verse says that Jacob wrestled with God and won, Jacob sustains lasting injury and it seems in many respects that the angel, representing God, has actually won. The match is perhaps closer to a draw. Jacob has stood his ground, but at great cost. Later in 33:20 another origin of the name Israel is given, as the site of the altar in Shekhem is called "God, God of Israel." Indeed, the entire religion of "Israel" expresses that it is only God who is the true Ruler, the True Sovereign.

Such is the ambiguity and many meanings of Israel's existence: Israel indeed is strong, but his strength derives though his acceptance that only God truly rules, that only God is truly Sovereign. Jacob must prepare himself for conflict practically, dividing his camp in two, but also know that if the strategy works it is only because it was Divinely granted and inspired, through the double-portion of blessing granted to him by God and through the double fortification of not one but two camps of angels. Jacob knows that he lives only through constantly facing God's Presence, which can also be called "Peniel." Jacob indeed has descendants who indeed later divide into two camps, Israel and Judah. But ultimately Jacob/Israel, born as a twin, succeeds only through pairing whatever strength he has, often at great cost and sacrifice, with the Rule of God.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Vayishlah

December 1-2, 2023 | 19 Kislev, 5784

### SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 154 | Haftarah: p. 1078

Hertz: p. 122 | Haftarah: p. 137

**Candle Lighting** | 4:11 pm

**Friday Evening Services** | 4:15 pm | Main Sanctuary

**Friday Night Lights will return next week.**

**Zemirot** | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

**Seminar** | At Morning Services | Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern | "Angels and Demons: Jacob's Battle with Destiny"

**Tot Shabbat** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

**Youth Groups** | 10:00 am | Elias Room | Led this week by Adams Kornblum

**Junior Congregation** | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

**Kiddush** | following Services

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern | "Diary of a Spunky Kid: Sparks from the Travelogue of Giuseppe Luzzato"

**Evening Services** | 4:10 pm

**Habdala** | 4:56 pm

### Weekday Service Times

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

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

*Hanukkah begins on Thursday night. Join us to view the lighting of our colonial era hanukkiyah, which has been in use since the 1730s. Hanukkah alegre!*

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | [www.shearithisrael.org](http://www.shearithisrael.org)

## THIS WEEK

For details and signup, go to [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)

### PREMIERE: Sunday Morning Mishna Class

*In memory of Sgt. First Class Yosef Malachi Guedalia, HYD*

In Person | Sundays, starting THIS Sunday, December 3

9:00 am (following 8:05 am Services)

*This week led by Rev. Zachary Edinger*

This is more than a class; it's an opportunity to connect, reflect, and grow together in a communal setting. Through collective study, we honor the memory of Yosef Guedalia, a grandson of the Guedalia & Bendheim families of our congregation, who was killed defending Israel on October 7.

### CSI YOUTH: HanukkahQuest!

Treasure hunt, design your own Maccabee shield, waffles, & music!

December 3 | 10:30 am-12:30 pm | *with Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern,*

*Rabbi Robde and guest musicians, Adams Kornblum and Roni Shitrit*

### Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

*All proceeds will be donated to Friends of the IDF*

Sign up for all three films: \$50.00 | Individual films: \$18.00 each

*Link to each film will be sent in advance for viewing at your leisure*

*Film discussion with host Emanuel Cohn will take place on Zoom*

NEXT FILM DISCUSSION: THIS Sunday, December 3 | 4:00 pm

"Fill the Void"

*Congregation Shearith Israel and the K3 Council at Japan Society present*

### A Story of Moral Clarity and Courage:

**The Incredible Japanese Tale of Setsuzo Kotsuji,**

**Protector of Jews, Convert to Judaism**

*With Rabbi Soloveichik & Special Guests*

THIS Monday, December 4 | 7:00 pm | At Shearith Israel

*Featuring: Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, Ambassador Mikio Mori, Consul General of Japan in New York, & Dr. Joshua W. Walker, President and CEO of Japan Society*

### Young Professionals Shabbat Hanukkah Dinner

Friday night, December 8

Following 4:00 pm Evening Services & *Friday Night Lights*

10% of all proceeds will be donated to UJA Federation's Israel fund!

## COMING UP

For details, signup, and sponsorship, go to [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)

### NEW: Weekly Parasha Class

Wednesdays | In Person, following Evening Services

*With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern*

### NEW: Around the (Jewish) World in 20 Days: A 20-Session Series

Thursdays | In Person, following Evening Services

*With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern*

### Parent-Child Learning

On Select Saturday Nights | 1 hour after Habdala

Next session, with Rabbi Soloveichik: December 16 | 6:00 pm

### Last Call: BECOME A SECURITY VOLUNTEER

We are offering the following opportunities:

1. Interested in joining a Shearith Israel team of security volunteers? **Community Security Service (CSS)** will provide our participants with the training, guidance, and resources needed to stand ready as volunteers to protect our *kehillah*.
2. Interested in learning security basics as a way to skillfully recognize and report security or safety threats to your community? Participate in **Entry Point**, a one-hour standalone session delivered virtually by a certified CSS instructor.

*Express your interest at [shearithisrael.sbulcloud.com/form/css-volunteer](http://shearithisrael.sbulcloud.com/form/css-volunteer)*

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rachel Brody & Michael Lustig are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter, **Julia**, to Jacob Ungar.

Mazal tob to **Sondra & Arnold Rosen**, upon the marriage of their son, Kenny Rosen, to Zaloo Adisu, in Ness Ziona, Israel this past Monday

Congratulations to **SM Rosenberg**, our Communications Associate & Programs Coordinator, upon the publication of her new book, *Millennial Quarter-Life Crisis: A Mosaic of Thinky Thoughts*, now available on Amazon.

We are pleased to share that our letters to IDF soldiers have been very well-received at the Nachshonim army base. Drop off more cards or letters and we'll send more!

Thank you to the **Sisterhood** for coordinating this important morale booster.

**In the Press** - Visit [shearithisrael.org/resources/press](http://shearithisrael.org/resources/press)

CBS New York covered our interfaith hunger alleviation Pack-A-Thon as well as Rabbi Soloveichik's Thanksgiving address.

Rabbi Soloveichik was recently interviewed in the Wall Street Journal about his new book, *Providence and Power: Ten Portraits in Jewish Statesmanship*.