

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

“Cracking the Code” of the Case, “Solving” the Psychological “Riddle”

This year we read the rarely-read haftarah for Mikketz. It is rarely read because most years Shabbat Hanukkah falls out on Parashat Mikketz, so that haftarah is superseded by the Hanukkah haftarah. This year, however, Hanukkah falls out on the preceding Parasha, leaving us with the famous “split the baby in half” judgment of Solomon and the two harlots. But how does this story connect to the story of Joseph and Pharaoh and his brothers?

Obviously, both Joseph and Pharaoh rule with wisdom, indeed, a Divine Wisdom, in administering their kingdoms. Both acknowledge that this wisdom comes from God, that it is knowledge which is prophetic in character. We start our haftarah with verse 15, about Solomon waking up from a dream. Some commentators say based upon this that the whole story of splitting the baby was a dream/parable of Solomon’s and didn’t actually occur. Literally this first verse seems to refer to the preceding passage where Solomon in a prophetic dream asked for and was granted extraordinary wisdom in judgment and rulership, as evidenced in this real “split the baby” story. Real or not, however, we see that all of Solomon’s wisdom he attributes to the gift given in this dream, so in this way he is like Joseph, who attributes his wisdom in administering Egypt to prophetic dreams.

And even Pharaoh himself is wise in heeding the great wisdom contained in his own prophetic dreams (as interpreted by Joseph) and in heeding what seems to be Joseph’s Divinely-prophetic wisdom in “solving” the problems posed by the dream. Pharaoh’s dream is understood to be a Divine message conveyed in a “code” which must be “cracked.” In studying the context of our haftarah in I Kings 3, I noted that the chapter actually begins (3:1) with Solomon marrying the daughter of Pharaoh. And although at some points there seems some criticism of Solomon’s numerous foreign wives, our chapter seems to treat this alliance as a great thing. And right after, 3:2) goes into the beseeching of wisdom. Hence our Bible does seem to see the culture of the Pharaohs of Egypt as (of course, with exceptions) associated with great wisdom. The Pharaohs were noted for the “wise men” and sorcerers/diviners with whom they surrounded themselves for consultation. So the connection to Pharaohs noted famously for their administrative wisdom is something else the stories have in common.

Even more, perhaps it is not too much to suggest that Joseph as well as Solomon are “solving” something which Egypt was especially known for: riddles. Both the case of the two harlots as well as the dreams of Pharaoh can be seen as classic “riddles.” This is why the verb “solve” is used when Pharaoh’s dream is brought to Joseph. Egyptian/Ethiopian thought was known among the Greeks as conceiving things as “riddles” or problems to be solved, and our Bible also elsewhere, in the story of Samson, seems to have adopted this “riddle” conception. Egypt was also known for its hieroglyphic writing system, which also functioned as a kind of encoded message which required cracking the code and interpreting to define what exactly it meant. Joseph is indeed given a name Tsafnat-Pa’aneah which comes to mean “Decoder of the Hidden” or “Code-Cracker.” Joseph, then, and Solomon, are called upon to solve, to “crack,” through Divine help, a “riddle” case which eluded normative logical solution, since it was illogical that skinny cows eat fat cows and yet remain skinny, and without witnesses it was impossible to tell who was the true mother – it was just one woman’s word against the other’s in unavoidable contradiction. *(continued inside)*



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Mikketz

December 15-16, 2023 | 4 Tebet, 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 200 | Haftarah: p. 1084

Hertz: p. 155 | Haftarah: p. 167

Candle Lighting | 4:12 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:15 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | Following Services | Main Sanctuary | *5784 Season of Friday Night Lights is sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am / **Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Rabbi Soloveichik’s Lecture | At Morning Services

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 4:05 pm

Habdala | 4:56 pm

Parent-Child Learning | 6:00 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Elias Room

The Fast of the 10th of Tebet is next Friday, December 22.

Weekday Service Times

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

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

Fast of Tebet (Friday, December 22)

Dawn (Fast Begins): 6:21 am | Morning Service: 7:05 am

Minha (with tefillin) & Shabbat Arbit: 3:45 pm

Candle Lighting: 4:14 pm | End of Fast: at sunset, 4:32 pm

THIS SATURDAY NIGHT

Grandparents, parents, and kids are invited to bond at

Parent-Child Learning

On Select Saturday Nights | 1 hour after Habdala

Next session with Rabbi Soloveichik:

THIS Saturday night, December 16 | 6:00 pm

Please register so we'll be sure to have enough pizza!

Bring your friends -- members and non-members welcome!

View the full schedule and sign up for upcoming sessions at shearithisrael.org

NEW CLASSES

For details & to sponsor one of the classes below, go to shearithisrael.org

Weekly Teen Class

Shabbat Afternoons | 3:30 pm | *With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern*

Beginning this Shabbat, Baruch-Lev will give a class for Teens in the Elias room.

Expect snacks and socializing — a perfect opportunity to connect with like-minded peers in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

Weekly Parasha Class

Wednesdays | following Evening Services

With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern

Around the (Jewish) World in 20 Days

Thursdays | following Evening Services

With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern

Join Baruch-Lev on a tour of the Jewish world all from the comfort of the Elias Room. Each session will focus on an individual Jewish community (e.g., Kaifeng, Odessa, Cordoba, etc.), spotlighting its unique heroes & customs, with the overarching goal of discovering Judaism's most central features.

Sunday Morning Mishna Class

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

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

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.

(continued from back panel) But perhaps the most notable parallel in the two stories is that they are parallel tales of psychological “testing.” I am referring not to Joseph’s interactions with Pharaoh but rather to his interactions with his brothers. Perhaps the “psychological test” or dilemma should also be considered a form of sphinxlike “riddle.” In Joseph’s “speaking harshly” to his brothers, Joseph could be seen as taking on the role of the reportedly-cruel “sphinx.” Every “riddle” is, in some sense, a test, but this one is psychological: Will the eleven remaining sons of Israel forfeit the life of one of their brothers, as they once did with Joseph? And indeed, will they out of rivalry or simply out of utility, ease, hopelessness, and lack of fortitude be willing to give up on Jacob’s current favorite, Joseph’s closest relation? Our Parasha ends with this cliffhanger, with this psychological “riddle.” Joseph must solve this riddle before he is ready to fully reunite with his brothers. Solomon must, with Divine help, “crack” similar “cases”/ riddles of love and true loyalty to kith and kin if he is to be the wise ruler of a united Israel.

COMING UP

For details & registration, go to shearithisrael.org

EARLY BIRD DEADLINE: Thursday, December 21

Community Shabbat Dinner

The Return of Magevet, Yale's premier Jewish acapella group
Friday Night, January 5 | after Friday Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

All ages welcome!

Preferred Pricing for Young Professionals & Families

with supervised play for children

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

All proceeds will be donated to Friends of the IDF

Individual films: \$18.00 each

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

Film discussion with host Emanuel Cohn will take place on Zoom

FINAL FILM DISCUSSION: Sunday, January 7 | 4:00 pm | "Footnote"

UPCOMING – STAY TUNED FOR DETAILS

Coney Island Polar Bear Club New Year's Day Plunge

Shearith Israel participants led by Rabbi Rohde

Monday, January 1

This annual New Year's Day Plunge welcomes thousands of BRrave souls from NY to Paris and everywhere in between to check off one of the "coolest" events on their bucket list! Bring your towels and head to Coney Island with Rabbi Rohde for this chilly adventure — and, for the fainter of heart, the aquarium.

Let Rabbi Rohde know if you're interested!