

## Multiplicity as Key to Seeking Goodwill

As Jacob returns to the Promised Land, he must face his twin brother Esau/Edom, before whom Jacob had originally fled when he left. Esau had by this time been settled in the territory of Seir -Edom - not exactly the Promised Land, per se, but on its border, in what is now the region of southwest Jordan and northeast Saudi Arabia, with perhaps some extension of their territory and grazing grounds into the west side of the Rift Valley into the Arabah and the Negeb. Why was it Esau chose to settle there? Well, for one thing, Esau's father Isaac was still alive. He certainly was not going to be accused of usurping the Birthright before his father died. And anyway, Isaac had said that Jacob was to be given the Birthright to Canaan. Isaac had said that decision was final and irreversible, despite Esau's pleas. Had Esau in some sense accepted that decision? Further, Esau had taken to wife a daughter of Ishmael, a relative, seemingly seeking a "compromise" with his parents. Did he realize that his own position was in fact quite similar to his uncle Ishmael? Ishmael had established himself in Arabia, and Esau's home base was on Arabia's border. Further, Esau really never showed a craving for the settled agricultural life, preferring hunting and herding, so Canaan with its settled agriculture at the crossroads of civilizations might not have appealed to him. This was especially so since Jacob's descendants would have to wage war to acquire and defend it. By establishing himself in his little wilderness corner on the borders of settled territory, Esau, although he too was warlike, could have kings who built an independent polity, generations before Israel would be able to do so.

Jacob's message to his brother starts by saying that he had stayed away with Laban for all these years. Perhaps Jacob was implying that during all this time Esau could have made a counterclaim to the Land, but had not. Why does Jacob tell his brother about all the possessions Jacob had accumulated? Well, perhaps it is Jacob's excuse for needing to return: He now needed the space, where perhaps Esau did not. Or else perhaps even here Jacob is implying an offer to share some of his wealth as a present to his brother, implying that there certainly was enough wealth to go around between the two of them. But Jacob then receives word that Esau in response is heading towards him with a contingent of 400 men. Jacob's next response is to divide his camp in two, so that at least one half might survive an attack. Jacob prays to God for salvation. Afterwards he separates a major portion of his herds and flocks as a gift to his brother, in order to propitiate him and seek Esau's goodwill and conciliation. Jacob sends this gift in front of himself and his family, who tarry behind. Curiously, Jacob divides this gift into many separate herds, each herd separated by a certain distance from the next one. Esau would meet each herd separately. Each herd or flock had its own herdsman or shepherd, who was to deliver the exact same message to Esau: "Look, your servant Jacob is right behind us. For he has said, I will appease Esau with the gift that is going before me. Afterwards I will see his face, and perhaps he will accept me (32:20)." It's not clear how much of that quote was to be included in the herdsmen's messages. I would argue that the whole quote was to be included in the message (although that's not the consensus of most translations and commentaries). But clearly Esau was to understand that this was a kind of "peace offering" gift from Jacob.

Why the separation of the gift into separate portions, the spacing, and the several herdsmen bearing the exact same message? Rashi writes that by spreading them out - one drove before the other at a distance as far as the eye can see - it made Jacob's gift to his brother look bigger and more impressive, glutting Esau's desire for wealth. However, I would rather agree with Rashbam, who writes that the purpose was to multiply the number of gifts, each one appearing as a separate token of Jacob's respect. As Rashbam says, When someone receives a number of gifts at intervals he appreciates them all the more. Jacob made each flock a separate goodwill offering, each with its own emissary, reinforcing the message of goodwill. It was important to space smaller gifts out, to allow each gift and entreaty to sink in, and give Esau "space" for his emotions, without provoking rejection of the whole thing. But bit by bit, Jacob would seek to soften his brother's anger and conciliate him into acceptance. We can learn from this the power of multiplicity and perseverance in seeking the goodwill of others and of God. The halakhot of repentance teach us that when we seek forgiveness from our brother and it is not granted, we must go and come back to ask time and time again Little by little, gift upon gift, entreaty upon entreaty, we can conciliate others, and that is what Jacob teaches us - the secret of multiplicity as key to seeking goodwill.



## Shabbat Vayishlah

December 13-14, 2024 | 13 Kislev, 5785

### SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 122 | Haftarah: p. 137 / Kaplan: p. 154 | Haftarah: p. 1078

**Reminder:** Due to *Year of Hope* carpet renovations, on every Shabbat through the end of the year, Services will be held in the **Levy Auditorium**, and Kiddush will be held in the **Elias Room**. There is no access to the Main Sanctuary.

**Candle Lighting** | 4:11 pm

**Evening Services** | 4:15 pm | Levy Auditorium

**Friday Night Lights** | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family*

**Zemiroth** | 8:15 am | Levy Auditorium

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Levy Auditorium

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

**Youth Groups & Junior Congregation** | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

**Rabbi Soloveichik's Special Shabbat Morning Shiur** | following services | Levy Auditorium | *Sponsored by Raquel & Steve Herz in honor of Rabbi Soloveichik; Contributor: Tikva Ostrega in memory of her father, Ezra Meir Shobet, on the occasion of his nabala*

**Kiddush** | following Special Shiur | Elias Room

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

**Teen Shiur** | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

**Evening Services** | 4:05 pm

**Habdala** | 4:56 pm

*There is no choir this week.*

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings

Sun | 8:05 am / Mon-Friday | 7:05 am

#### Evenings

**Sunday (Minha & Arbit) | 4:15 pm / Monday-Thursday (Arbit Only) | 6:30 pm**

## THIS SHABBAT

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### Special Shabbat Morning Shiur with Rabbi Soloveichik

THIS Shabbat Morning, December 14

Following Shabbat Morning Services | Kiddush to follow

The Angels Within:

Jacob's Struggle and Ours

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### Parent-Child Learning

Next session: THIS Motzei Shabbat, December 14 | 6:00 pm

*Led by Rabbi Soloveichik*

January 4 | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Ira Rohde

February 8 | 7:00 pm | Dr. Pasha Kletenek, Head of School, MDS

March 8 | 7:30 pm | Ellin Cooper, Yoetzet Halakha

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## COMING UP

*If registration required, sign up at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*

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### Sisterhood Jewelry-Making Workshop

Sunday, December 15 | 4:00 pm | If you'd still like to join, contact [rlsvet@gmail.com](mailto:rlsvet@gmail.com)

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NOTE DATE: Wednesday, December 18

*Co-sponsored with the Jewish Museum*

### Rabbi Soloveichik Presents: The Tel Dan Stele

*An Exclusive Exhibition at the Jewish Museum*

7:00 pm | At the Jewish Museum

*With a wine and cheese reception*

See and hear about the Tel Dan Stele, a 9th century BCE stone monument fragment, containing the earliest mention of the royal House of David outside of the Bible.

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### (Virtual) Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

*All proceeds will be donated to help families of Israeli soldiers*

Single film: \$10.00 | All films: \$21.00

Film Discussions: Sundays | 4:00 pm | on Zoom

December 22 | Time of Favor (2000)

January 26 | Walk on Water (2004)

*A link is sent to registrants to watch the film a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom.*

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### Scholar-In-Residence: Raizi Chechik

NEXT Shabbat Vayesheb, December 20-21

Raizi Chechik, a Judaics scholar and dynamic sought-after speaker, will address the congregation with two timely talks:

*Friday Night Lights, Pre-Hanukkah Edition:*

Chanukah Lights: Joseph's Journey to Leadership

*Shabbat Lecture, following morning services:*

Of Life and Legacy: Cultivating Spirituality in our Children and Grandchildren (And Ourselves!)

Ms. Chechik, an innovative and inspiring teacher of Jewish texts, serves as the Community Scholar at the Jewish Center of Manhattan and has been an invited guest scholar at over 100 institutions and communities around the world. She has developed curricula for the Sephardic Studies Institute at CUNY. She is a Fellow at the Center for Israel Studies at YU, where she is completing doctoral work in Jewish History, and mentors Heads of School worldwide on behalf of the Israel Ministry of Diaspora Affairs.

To sponsor these talks or kiddush in honor of our guest, visit [shearithisrael.org/raizi-chechik](http://shearithisrael.org/raizi-chechik).

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## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Mazal tob to **Julia Lustig**, upon her marriage to Jacob Ungar. Congratulations as well to her parents, **Rachel Brody & Michael Lustig (Segan)** and the entire Lustig family.

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### In the Press

Rabbi Soloveichik writes in the Wall Street Journal about his conversation with Jordan Peterson. They discussed Dr. Peterson's new book on religion in the modern age, *We Who Wrestle With God*. You can read it on our Press page at [shearithisrael.org/press](http://shearithisrael.org/press).