

## DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

### God's Mysterious but Providential Ways

The stories of Parashat Vayesheb contain pre-figurations and allusions to the later history of the Israelite and Judean kingdoms, and this is the proper way to understand them. Joseph and Judah become the major protagonists, succeeding Jacob. Joseph symbolizes the Northern Kingdom whose kings predominantly came from his son Menashe and established capitals in territory belonging to either Ephraim or Menashe. Judah is the predominant tribe of the Southern or Judean Kingdom. Reuben is acknowledged as the actual eldest, and in fact Reuben settles their own piece of Transjordanian territory before the other tribes conquer theirs. Reuben is said to have had good intentions, but his territory is remote from the rest of the tribes and he is absent and unaccounted for during much of the rest of the remaining brothers' struggles, just as he is inexplicably absent when they decide to sell Joseph. The jealousy over Joseph's dreams and ambitions of leadership over all of Israel clearly reflects the Judea/Israel split, although here it is most of the tribes against Joseph, whereas later Israel will have most of the tribes on Menashe's side. In Reuben's apparent absence, Judah takes the lead, still pursuing a divisive path against Joseph, selling him into slavery, but being conciliatory in that Joseph's life will at least be spared and vindicating the brothers from having actual blood-guilt upon their hands.

The text then continues with Judah, prefiguring aspects of the saga of the Judean Kingdom. The Judah and Tamar story parallels aspects of the David and Bathsheba narrative which established the ruling lineage of the House of David. Judah's liaison with Tamar brushes with scandalous innuendo, as does David's liaison with Bathsheba. Something I had not noted before is that it was Judah himself who contracted Tamar in the first place to marry Er, his eldest: This was not a marriage of his son's choosing! And we are basically told in no uncertain terms that Onan did not want Tamar. So this parentally-arranged match flops miserably, unlike anything we have seen previously! It was Judah himself who had arranged the continuation of his dynastic lineage through Tamar. Now normally in levirate marriage the father of the deceased son is not held responsible, and certainly not through the questionable way Tamar entices Judah to hold him accountable. But as it was Judah himself who had contracted the match for his firstborn originally, it gives Tamar more justification in holding her father-in-law himself responsible. And, of course, she is justified by Judah's abrogated promise that he would give Tamar his third son Shelah. And it is further (scandalously) implied from Tamar's seductive success, as well as the original matchmaking deal, that Judah himself had found this girl he arranged to be his daughter-in-law attractive from the outset! Thus Tamar's relationship to Judah, not quite illegitimate but brushed by scandal, is a pre-figuration of Bathsheba's relationship with David.

There are further pre-figurations and associations between the characters and stories: For one, it is Tamar's son Peretz who becomes the ancestor of King David. Now Peretz is not actually the eldest of his brothers – Shelah is of course older and even Zerah, Peretz's twin, could claim to have “peeped” out of the womb first, although Peretz gets his name from the fact that he managed to “bust out” before his brother could. But with the actual firstborn dead and Tamar's levirate claim that her eldest should inherit Er, Peretz could claim the Judean birthright. David is not the firstborn, and neither is Solomon. But many of Solomon's eldest brothers have died, the most important of them, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, under the taint of evil sexual and political scandal, as Er and Onan had, as well. It is Tamar's “scandalous” assertion of Judah's original promises as well as tokens of what Judah owed her as hire for her prostitution which gained her son Peretz the birthright as his rightful due. Similarly, it is Bathsheba's “scandalous” assertion of her rights to an apparent preferential love-vow which gains the royal birthright for her son Solomon. For Tamar also, it is clearly a royal-like patrimony which she seeks, for what she requests of Judah is his seal and staff, distinctive items which the nobles used as symbols of power, possession, and authority. It's not certain how the third item, the cord, ribbon or tassel, was used, but we can infer from tzitzit that such a piece would often be dyed with royal blue and that this too was an accoutrement of the nobility.

God's ways in these stories can be mysterious but providential. Simon and Levi's massacre of Shekhem is seemingly wrong, but it does have justification, and it is eventually vindicated for its deterrent effect: Jacob's family are not harassed by their Canaanite neighbors ever again. The stories can seem to be in scandalous violation and against the grain of the norms we would expect, and yet they can be justified: They are not-completely-wrong, and their eventual rightness and providentially-earned validation and vindication will come to be shown. Jacob and Israel have a difficult path ahead of them, full of surprising twists and turns, some of them quite torturous and seemingly wrong, but also surprisingly and amazingly providential.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Vayesheb

December 20-21, 2024 | 20 Kislev, 5785

### SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 141 | Haftarah: p. 152 / Kaplan: p. 182 | Haftarah: p. 1082

**Reminder:** Due to carpet installation in the Main Sanctuary, 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** | 4:14 pm

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

**Friday Night Lights: Pre-Hanukkah Edition** | Scholar in Residence

Raizi Chechik (*see inside for details*) | 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

**Special Lecture** | Scholar in Residence Raizi Chechik (*see inside for details*) | following services | Levy Auditorium

**Kiddush** | following shiur | Elias Room

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

**Teen Shiur will return next week.**

**Evening Services** | 4:10 pm

**Habdala** | 4:58 pm

*Hanukkah begins Wednesday night, December 25.*

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings:

Sunday & Wednesday (Dec. 25): 8:05 am

Monday-Tuesday & Thursday-Friday: 7:05 am

#### Evenings:

**Sunday-Thursday (Minha & Arbit): 4:15 pm**

## THIS SHABBAT

### Scholar-In-Residence: Raizi Chechik

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.

## SAVE THE DATE

### Community Shabbat Dinner: Magevet Returns!

**Friday Night, Shabbat Shira, February 7**

Enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by Magevet, Yale University's Jewish, Hebrew, and Israeli acapella group. Registration coming soon!

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Susan & Marlon Portes**, upon the birth of a grandson, Raphael Morris, born to Jacob and Rikki Portes.

Mazal tob to **Gustave Rieu**, upon the marriage of his son, Jonathan, to Paola A. Lema.

Hazak u'Barukh to the **Morning Zoom study group** on completing the Book of Ezekiel. They will be starting Hosea on Monday, so this is a perfect time to join.

Contact Rev. Edinger at [zedinger@shearithisrael.org](mailto:zedinger@shearithisrael.org) for the Zoom link.

Condolences to **Rachel Brody & Michael Lustig** on the passing of Rachel's devoted aunt and our former member, **Estelle Guzik**.

## THIS SUNDAY

*Sign up at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*

### (Virtual) Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

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

#### NEXT FILM DISCUSSION:

**THIS Sunday, December 22 | 4 pm | Time of Favor (2000)**

**Final Film Discussion: 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.*

## HANUKKAH AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

### Hanukkah Candle Lighting Times

**Wednesday night, December 25-Wednesday, January 1**

Join us at 4:15 pm Evening Services to view the lighting of our colonial era Hanukkiah (c. 1730). If you are lighting at home, refer to the chart below for the lighting times.

(Candles should be lit no earlier than the time listed.)

Date:	NYC lighting time, after sunset:
1 — Wednesday, December 25	4:35 pm
2 — Thursday, December 26	4:35 pm
3 — Shabbat & Candle Lighting, Friday, December 27	4:18 pm (Hanukkah candles should be lit first)
4 — Habdala & Candle Lighting, Saturday, December 28	5:03 pm (Habdala should be recited first)
5 — Sunday, December 29	4:37 pm
6 — Monday, December 30	4:38 pm
7 — Tuesday December 31	4:39 pm
8 — Wednesday, January 1	4:40 pm

### CSI YOUTH: HanukkahQuest!

**Sunday, December 29 | 10:30 am | with Baruch-Lev Kelman**

This Hanukkah, join Baruch-Lev and his merry band of Maccabees as they set off in search of waffles, treasure, and the spirit of Hanukkah. Get ready to make your own Maccabee tunic and crown. Expect music, dancing, and more waffles!

**And don't forget to bring an old bedsheet - and your friends!**

Register now at [shearithisrael.org/events/hanukkahquest5785](http://shearithisrael.org/events/hanukkahquest5785).