

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Isaac, Cultivator of God's Blessing

When a famine comes, Isaac doesn't completely leave Canaan, but settles in Gerar, in Philistine-controlled territory a bit inland from the city of Gaza. In the south of the country, the areas closer to the coastal plain had a little more precipitation, and moreover the several tributary wadi-valleys, the branches of the Nahal Besor (also called Wadi Gaza) which flowed down from the plateau, would be a likely source for reliable ground water. The Philistines had settled on the southern coast but had also penetrated and settled up the tributary Gerar or El-Sharia wadi for some distance, and we had already seen Abraham moving to that Philistine city (likely also a drought-related relocation) and dealing with its king, making a treaty with him.

Abraham had dug wells in the wadi upstream from Gerar, and the treaty with King Abimelekh (Abimelekh seems to have been used as a general appellation of the city-monarchs of that area) had confirmed Abraham's rights, particularly his water-rights, in that valley. Isaac settled in Gerar as Abraham had done before him. And like Abraham, Isaac took the precaution of lying about his wife, saying she was his sister, a ruse which is discovered, to this second Abimelekh's annoyance. What makes Isaac move away from the City of Gerar is the Philistines' jealousy of Isaac's Divine Blessing of success in his crops in the surrounding valley-fields. Isaac moves out of Gerar City up the valley, digging and re-digging wells in areas originally dug by Abraham but many of which had been stopped up by Philistines, presumably to mark what they considered the outer boundaries of their land-claim. God continues blessing Isaac with success in both his crops as well as in digging wells for water, although the ownership of most of his first successful wells is contested (presumably by force) by the Philistines, forcing Isaac to move upstream in the surrounding wadis several times. Finally, Isaac digs uncontested valley wells, first in Rehobot, and then later in what was called Beer-Sheba. All along, God grants Isaac the blessings of good crops and livestock growth, and Isaac grows wealthy, requiring the expanding of his accompanying entourage of workmen and shepherds until they were a force to be reckoned with.

Although Abimelekh and the Philistines originally expelled Isaac from their cities and their areas, eventually Abimelekh and his army-commander press Isaac for a formal peace treaty and alliance. When Isaac asks Abimelekh why he suddenly wants a treaty after so much enmity and jealousy, Abimelekh replies that "we have seen that God is with you," that God has blessed Isaac with wealth and power. Now the Philistine king wants a treaty, lest Isaac's men "should do any harm to us, when we have not touched you, and when we have only done good with you, sending you off in peace." [This is more than a bit of an exaggeration, considering what were probably forceful confrontations of their husbandmen and shepherds in all the water-rights controversies.] The way Abimelekh's entreaty begins, "lest you do harm to us," as well as the false claim to have had only peaceful intentions, it is clear that it is this blessing of success which God has given Isaac which has frightened Abimelekh into wanting a pledge of non-aggression from a neighbor. Isaac is now seen as a potent possible adversary, considering that there have been major grievances between them in the past. Abimelekh now rushes in fear to Isaac to bury the hatchet. Abimelekh uses this phrase "you are now blessed of the Lord," recognizing the wealth and power God has given Isaac, but which also carries the meaning that violation of the treaty, sworn by such an oath invoking God's Name and Blessing, would mean that either side would be accursed. Isaac of all the Patriarchs is the one who is most explicitly associated with the term for blessing: God's blessing with crops, wealth, and power, as well as peace and good welfare, and Isaac's blessings of his sons, which the plot revolves mainly around. Similarly, the Haftarah from Malachi revolves around the Tribe of Levi, the Priestly Tribe, the tribe through which the blessings of good welfare and peace are bestowed. Isaac is the farmer, the planter, who reaps his crop one-hundredfold. Even when famine strikes, he never completely leaves his land, but instead resourcefully, using the valleys as a guide, seeks water wherever he might find it. It is through his hard work, persistence, and patience, devoted to his land and never leaving it, that we learn how to cultivate God's Blessing.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Toledoth

November 21-22, 2025 | 2 Kislev, 5786

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: Parasha: 116 | Haftarah: 1070

Hertz: Parasha: 93 | Haftarah: 102

Candle Lighting | 4:16 pm

Evening Services | 4:15 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | Following Services | Rabbi Soloveichik | *5786 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Rabbi Soloveichik's Special Semiquincentennial Lecture | following services
Kiddush | following the lecture | *Slivovitz sponsor: Laury Frieber, in memory of Arthur A. Frieber (Alter Avraham b. Chaim)*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

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

Evening Services | 4:10 pm

Habdala | 5:01 pm

The choir will return next week.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Wednesday & Friday: 7:05 am

Thursday (Thanksgiving): **7:30 am**

Evenings:

Sunday: **4:15 pm**

Monday & Tuesday: 6:30 pm

Wednesday & Thursday (Thanksgiving): **4:15 pm**

IN CELEBRATION OF THE US SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

And 250 Years of Jewish Life in the United States



Rabbi Soloveichik's Major Lecture Series

THIS Shabbat

After Morning Services

"The Rabbi, The Minister,
and the Battle of Bunker Hill"

These lectures highlight Shearith Israel's historic personalities central to the founding and formation of our American democracy.

Next Lecture: December 6

Stay up to date at shearithisrael.org/us-250.

NEXT WEEK

Thanksgiving at Shearith Israel

Thursday Morning, November 27

Register at shearithisrael.org/thanksgiving2025

- 7:30-8:15 am | Morning Services including Special Thanksgiving Hallel
- Following Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik's Thanksgiving Address in the Main Sanctuary
- 8:30-11:00 am | Children's Parade Viewing on the Portico
- 9:00-11:00 am | Pack-A-Thon on Paved Paradise

Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon

We are proud to once again join with our community faith partners, **The Jewish Center, West End Church,** and the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, to celebrate Thanksgiving in the true spirit of the day – by giving to others.

Help us feed thousands of struggling families!

Again this year, all contributions (up to \$10,000) will be matched.

Help us reach this year's goal of \$30,000!

Children's Parade Viewing

Our Portico provides one of the best Thanksgiving Parade views in the city. But it's not that big. In order to avoid crowding on the Portico, **parade viewing is for children.**

COMING UP

Details and registration at shearithisrael.org

A Snubbed Enlightenment:

Jewish Acculturation & Revolution in Eastern Europe

Led by Baruch-Lev Kelman

Tuesdays through December | 7:00 pm (after 6:30 pm Evening Services)

The *Haskala* promised a route to emancipation, acceptance, and prosperity—a vision derailed by the entrenched anti-semitism of Eastern Europe. Out of this “snub,” *maskilim* turned inward, resolving to seek out avenues of renewal. Some turned to Zion, others to Socialism, some to the idol of history. A powder keg is lit, and the Tsar ducks for cover. Who will rue the day, and who will endure it all?

Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

Film Discussions on Select Sundays

Sunday, December 7 | 4:00 pm | Ushpizin (2004)

Sunday, January 11 | 4:00 pm | Norman (2006)

Sunday, February 8 | 4:00 pm | The Testament (2017)

YOUTH CORNER

Parasha Riddle

Kids: to win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find our Youth Directors, Dاليا & Jake, and tell them the answer to this riddle:

*I am small and round, but also have an oval shape.
I am a legume, but not a pea, and I can bring you good fortune.
What am I?*

Return of Parent-Child Learning

Bonding time for children and (grand)parents on select Saturday nights

December 6 | 6:00 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

January 10 | 6:15 pm | Dاليا & Jake

February 7 | 7:00 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Esther Wagner & Eric Lunzer**, upon the birth of a baby boy. Congratulations as well to the grandparents, **Lauren & David Lunzer** of Los Angeles, and to sister **Elizabeth Lunzer**.