

God's Love of the Underdog

Why is it that God saw that Leah was less-loved or “hated,” (not that Jacob had an aversion to her, but that he preferred Rachel, because of her beauty and because he knew her earlier and better) and hence gave Leah offspring, indeed many more offspring, long before her younger sister Rachel? It wasn't Rachel's fault, after all, that Laban insisted upon giving away the less-attractive older daughter first, (i.e., Laban made it a “package deal” so he wouldn't be stuck with the less-desirable older inventory of goods). Perhaps it was customary; perhaps it was Laban's attempt to off-load the second-class goods - but it certainly wasn't Rachel's fault. Was it fair, after all, to Rachel to have to wait to have her first child so late, after all, and then to die while giving birth to her second child? And why is it that Rachel only has her first child Joseph after the neglect of Rachel becomes so lopsided and blatant that God takes note of the unfairness and rebalances it by finally giving Rachel children? What is this in Biblical thought that these seemingly minor injustices become so important? What is this business in Judaism about God's favoring the underdog?

We saw some of this already in the very birth of Jacob, where he is originally the less-favored, less-strong younger of the twins. Then again, Isaac's blessing to Esau seems to be saying that at times Esau shall be able to revolt against Jacob when Jacob's over-lordship becomes too oppressive, i.e., when Esau in turn becomes the underdog! God's blessing, again and again, is shown to most likely accrue to those whose case for God's attention has been acquired due to the merit or worthiness gained through their suffering.

This is an important point of view, a theme emphasized over and over emphasized in the Prophetic literature. Always pay attention to those treated unfairly or unjustly, for one day the tables will be turned: Those who suffer injustice will eventually merit God's Blessing and Grace. The Underdog always enjoys a certain Divine Favor, Sympathy, and Advantage stemming from God's Justice. Over and over again in this Parashah we see the struggle between the two wives as well as Jacob's struggles with Laban and their successes in terms of the relative strengths of the justice of their claims. Jacob merits the flocks he acquires through the injustice of Laban's mistreatment and underpaying of him and God's consequent recognizing the justice of Jacob's claim upon Laban's flocks. He is owed those flocks through his labor and travail in attending to them throughout “the dry heat of the day and the icy cold of the night, banishing sleep from his eyes.” Jacob merits to have a powerful, large family through the pain of Laban's obliging him to marry the older daughter in addition to the younger, which leads to consequent rivalries and jealousies that winds up foisting the burden of two more unasked-for wives upon him. Later on in the Torah we find God's reward vouchsafed to those who seek to right the cause of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the downtrodden.

Of course, just because one may suffer doesn't always mean one merits God's favor. Unjust suffering of the righteous is one of God's mysteries, and we may never understand because we are not always privy to God's ways and often-inscrutable intentions. And there will be many times when the sufferer through his sins indeed deserves his suffering. But even when he does, that cannot be just assumed: The sufferer deserves an investigation of his suffering and a fair hearing. All of this sympathy with the suffering of the underdog can be found in worldwide thought and culture. Indian thought has the conception of karma which accrues through unjust suffering. Bearing suffering develops strength, fortitude, endurance, and discipline. Jacob and Israel mature through suffering: that's quite clear. But I have always felt that the Judeo-Christian tradition of Western thought inherits through our Bible this special and somewhat problematic emphasis upon sympathy for the underdog and the sufferer, whose cause is always presumed righteous until proved otherwise, and whose suffering merits just compensation and reward.



Shabbat Vayetse

November 28-29, 2025 | 9 Kislev, 5786

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: Parasha: 130 Haftarah: 1430 (see insert)
Hertz: Parasha: 106 Haftarah: 135

Candle Lighting | 4:12 pm

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

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services | *Sponsored by the Nathan family, in honor of Benjamin's Shabbat Hatan, and by Amanda & Alexander Levi and family, in memory of Dr. Roberto Levi*

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

Teen Shiur will return next week.

Evening Services | 4:10 pm

Habdala | 4:57 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: **4:15 pm**

Monday-Thursday: 6:30 pm

IN CELEBRATION OF THE US SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

And 250 Years of Jewish Life in the United States



Rabbi Soloveichik's

Major Lectures

Next Installment:

Shabbat, December 6

After Morning Services

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

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

EARLY BIRD PRICING UNTIL DECEMBER 15

A Musical Shabbat Shira Dinner

Featuring Magevet, Yale's premier Jewish a capella group

Friday night, Shabbat Shira, January 30

Following Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Preferred pricing for Families and Young Professionals

Following our Friday evening services – always musically exquisite – registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by Magevet, Yale University's co-ed Jewish a capella group. Magevet is known for its sweet blend of voices, unique arrangements, and lighthearted sense of humor, and is one of the nation's top Jewish a capella singing groups. This year, as part of our Semi-quincentennial celebrations, Magevet will be including a selection of Americana.

Register and sponsor at shearithisrael.org.

COMING UP

Details and registration at shearithisrael.org

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)

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?

YOUTH CORNER

Parasha Riddle

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

*I stand tall when you need to rise,
With steady rungs to meet the skies,
Climb me slowly, step by step—
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 | Darya & Jake

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

SAVE THE DATES

Sunday, December 14 — The Great Hanukkah Spin-Off

Sunday, February 1 — Tu B'Shevat Seder

Monday, March 2 — Purim-Palooza!

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Olivia Rebecca Bourkoff** on her recent marriage to David Yonatan Kayman. Mazal tob to her parents, **Elana & Aryeh Bourkoff** as well as her grandparents, **Vivienne Roumani-Denn & Morton Denn**.