

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Religious Models for Our Interactions with Our Fellow Men

"And Jacob said: 'Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favor in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my gift that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything.' And he urged him, and he took it" (Gen. 33:10-11)

"The phrase 'to see the face' expresses the idea of being favorably received. Jacob accordingly means, 'I have been graciously pardoned by you, as I would have received forgiveness from God, had I appeared before Him in the humble spirit and with the tokens of contrition wherewith I approach you. Regard, then, my gifts as a mincha, an offering'" (Dr. J. H. Hertz Commentary ad loc)

Why and how does Jacob insist that Esau accept his gift, after Esau had first refused? Rabbi Hertz points out that the language and tone Jacob uses to "entreat" Esau is the language used in pleading for pardon of an offense to God. Jacob bows down seven times as a sign of humility, as one would prostrate oneself in worship. "Seeing the face" or "lifting up the face" indicates atonement and forgiveness, a restoration of goodwill and blessing, Jacob treats Esau with the contrition and courtesy usually reserved for God. Accordingly, Jacob insists upon "entreating" Esau to take his gift as the worshipper pleads with God to accept a sacrificial offering. Hertz notes that Jacob says "because I have everything," which goes beyond Esau's earlier refusal because he has "plenty." Jacob implies that his offering to his brother is like an offering of thanksgiving to God that one gives out of joy for all the abundance with which God sustains him. Of course, Esau, unlike God, is not the one who gave Jacob this abundance. But Jacob is entreating Esau to accept, saying that he has no need, saying that God has given him everything he needs. Offerings of thanksgiving are given out of pure joy and goodwill, and the giver doesn't miss them at all. Jacob persistently entreats, urges, and insists that Esau accept the gift as a token of goodwill the way one would plea, pray, and beg to God to accept an offering for forgiveness, thanks, and goodwill. And Esau eventually accepts.

The ideal protocols, etiquette, and modes of address with which we approach God are supposed to serve as models for our interactions with our fellow human beings. In our day and age, with our society's insistence upon self-defense of each person's respective "rights," this humbling, confessing and begging and praying for forgiveness, insisting upon a restoration of favor, seems exaggerated and phony. What makes it especially noticeable in this story is that, after all, Jacob has in actuality never really done anything fully "wrong" to Esau. Jacob may have taken advantage of Esau's hunger to give up the birthright. He may have deceived his father in receiving the blessing. But Esau willingly gave up that birthright very easily, without asking for much in return. Moreover, it had long ago been predicted that Jacob would receive the birthright. Besides, the ruse of dressing up to gain Isaac's birthright blessing was suggested at the command of Jacob's mother. Neither one was fully a "sin," and really no such "forgiveness" or presents or currying favor was strictly required from Jacob. Perhaps one could say that Jacob's expressions here were not fully sincere, that Jacob was just trying to appease his brother and prevent an attack by all these skillful "diplomatic" expressions. But pressing Esau until he accepted as well as these extreme statements of contrition from Jacob seem too extreme to be just a game of skillful diplomacy. Had Jacob intended to be merely diplomatic with his brother, he could have just sent emissaries. Indeed, Jacob exposes himself and his family to great danger in presenting themselves to Esau, even if it's half his family at a time. Jacob risks the lives of himself and his family to seek the sincerest of reconciliations with his brother. Jacob here willingly and sincerely takes upon himself the burden of blame, and sincerely begs for reconciliation and forgiveness, even when there really was no need. And Esau is clearly and sincerely touched.

I have often said that we are supposed to learn from the Torah ideal ways of acting and expressing ourselves. Our ideal etiquette should be based upon Jacob's model of humbling himself and entreating and praying for forgiveness from God, but we are to learn to apply these modes of expression to our fellow men, even – as Jacob does in this instance – to our rival and potential enemy. Although at times such modalities may be seen as weakness or insincere diplomatic flattery, reviewing and practicing them by studying the Torah and repeating them in our liturgy and worship of God are supposed to teach us the proper and ideal models for our interactions with our fellow men.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayishlah

December 5-6, 2025 | 16 Kislev, 5786

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: Parasha: 154 | Haftarah: 1078

Hertz: Parasha: 122 | Haftarah: 137

Candle Lighting | 4:11 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 Luncheon | following services | *Kiddush luncheon and wine sponsored by Juan Mesa-Freydell, in honor of our office team: Barbara Reiss, Bonnie Barest, Ruth Yasky, Sarah Gross, and Sarah Meira Rosenberg*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

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

Evening Services | 4:10 pm

Habdala | 4:55 pm

Parent-Child Learning | 6:00 pm | *for children & (grand)parents* | Rabbi Soloveichik

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

THIS Shabbat, December 6

After Morning Services

“Benedict Arnold, The Founding Fathers,
and David Salisbury Franks: A Forgotten
Chapter of an Infamous Episode”

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. This year, as part of our Semi- quinentennial
celebrations, Magevet will be including a selection of Americana.

Register and sponsor at shearithisrael.org.

ANNOUNCING “FAITH FOR FOOD” | As Seen on CNN

Learn more at shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food

At this year's annual Pack-a-thon, we announced the launch of **Faith for Food, Masbia's
UWS Food Annex at Shearith Israel**. Fueled by volunteers and aided by Masbia's
experience and expertise, this **year-round weekly kosher food pantry** will deliver ample
and nutritious grocery staples to our neighbors.

We are pleased to announce the soft launch will start **THIS Tuesday, December 9**.
*If you have a neighbor in Manhattan who might benefit from this food delivery program, email
CSAnnex@masbiarelieff.org with their name and cell phone number. A trained Masbia
representative will reach out to them to get them enrolled.*

This project requires over \$50,000 in financial support per year. To contribute, visit our
website. Information for volunteering will be available over the next few weeks. Stay tuned to
learn about ways to get involved.

COMING UP

Details and registration at shearithisrael.org

Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

Film Discussions on Select Sundays

THIS 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)

Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

Next Tour: THIS Wednesday, December 10 | 5:45 pm

Individuals and groups are welcome to attend a free, guided tour on the second Wednesday of
every month at 5:45 pm (prior to Evening Services), led by Rev. Z. Edinger.

Suggested donation of \$5 per person; any amount appreciated. Tours generally last 45 minutes.

KIDS KORNER

Parasha Riddle

Kids: to win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake, and answer this riddle:

*I'm a joint in your body that helps you sway,
I hope you stand up and run in the day,
I'm where your leg starts in a strong, steady clip
What am I?*

The Great Hanukkah Spin Off

Sunday, December 14 | 10:00 am

Free, but make sure to register so we can have enough snacks and supplies!

The ultimate dreidel competition with custom dreidels made by you! Come dressed in your
favorite Hanukkah gear and enjoy waffles, Rabbi Rohde's accordion music, and more.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to **Mitch Julis**, who will be honored this Sunday with the Service to
Humanity Award at the International Sephardic Community Gala at The Museum of
Jewish Heritage.

Mazal tob to **Nicole & Raanan Agus**, upon the birth of a grandson, born to their children
Temmy & Elan Agus of Ramat Beit Shemesh. Congratulations as well to the delighted
great-grandparents, **Renee & Avie Schreiber**.

Mazal tob to **Nicole & Raanan Agus**, upon the birth of a granddaughter born to their
children Elianna & Alex Agus. Congratulations as well to the delighted great-grandparents,
Renee & Avie Schreiber.

Mazal tob to **Vicki Bengualid & Gabe Goldstein**, upon the birth of a grandson born to
Tova Goldstein and Yishai Chamudot in Jerusalem. Congratulations as well to the proud
great-grandfather, **Henri Bengualid**.