

# DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

## Pharaoh Faces Moses, Answering to a Higher Authority

*And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he shall send the children of Israel out of his land* (Ex. 7:1-2)

The terms with which the Torah refers to Moses and Aaron speaking before Pharaoh, and even before Israel, are striking: Moses is referred to as Pharaoh's "god," and Aaron is referred to as Moses' "prophet." Aaron serves as Moses' "spokesman" and, of course, a "prophet" does serve as a spokesman, a kind of "mouthpiece" for a god. But when he is just repeating what God told Moses to tell him to say, is that really acting as a "prophet?" It is true that Aaron does perform the miracles with the staff. When God informed Aaron that Moses was returning to Egypt, God seems to have spoken to Aaron directly. That combines with Aaron's other functions later on in the Torah, such as his healing and purification capacity, as well as his wearing the breastplate oracle, all of which qualify him to be considered a "prophet" on his own. And, of course, there are those who translate Moses being made "like a god to Pharaoh," but the text literally reads "made thee a god." Calling Moses "god" and Aaron "prophet" seem strong and rather exaggerated terms, when here they are clearly both acting as intermediaries and spokesmen.

I think when our text refers to Moses as Pharaoh's "god," it primarily means that God has appointed Moses as Pharaoh's judge. Of course, Biblical judges were also the executioners of punishment. God wanted Moses to go before Pharaoh to execute judgement upon Pharaoh for his abuse of Israel. And a proper judge sits or stands at the bench or bar and speaks through prosecutors, attorneys, and spokesmen, as Aaron does. In actuality, of course, Moses has to entreat God to carry out the judgment. But to Pharaoh, Moses himself is to be the face of Justice, and God will carry out whatever Moses decrees upon Pharaoh. The text in Verse 4 states similarly "I shall bring forth my legions, My People the Children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments." God gives Moses the authority to be judge over Pharaoh. And even more authority than that of a judge is implied, in calling Moses and Aaron a "god" and a "prophet." The wondrous miracles which they perform with the staff and the plagues which they bring on show that they have both been given some kind of Divine power to change the natural order. Moses and Aaron are being given Divine Authority as judges and rulers over Pharaoh, and God will carry out whatever they decree. Perhaps this is partially what angered Pharaoh and "hardened his heart" further: Moses and Aaron presume to enter the court of Pharaoh, ruler and judge of Egypt, in order to stand in judgement over Pharaoh. Pharaoh, ruler and judge of a mighty nation, who thought himself a kind of god, is answerable to a Higher Authority, before whom he himself must stand trial for his misdeeds.

Couldn't Pharaoh have recognized Israel's God as a Higher Authority to stand in judgment over him without appointing Moses as the judge before whom he must appear? Perhaps, but it might not have been convincing enough to Pharaoh. The Pharaohs thought their authority to be Divine. This is clearly brought out in our haftarah, "who crouches in the midst of his channels, who says 'mine is my Nile and I have made it for myself.'( Ez. 29:3)" Pharaoh, who falsely thought himself a god and his authority as divine, would only be brought to his knees by forcing him to stand in judgment before Moses the Judge and Aaron his prophet, two other men who did not think of themselves as gods, but who were granted authority and power which truly was Divine.



# CONGREGATION SHEarith ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Vaera

January 16-17, 2026 | 28 Tebet, 5786

### SCHEDULE

**Hertz:** Parasha: 232 | Haftarah: 244

**Kaplan:** Parasha: 280 | Haftarah: 1096

**Candle Lighting** | 4:37 pm

**Evening Services** | 4:45 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 Semiquincentennial Lecture** | following services

**Kiddush** | following the lecture | *Kiddush & wine sponsored by Dr. Irene Rosner David, in memory of Dr. Raphael David and David Rosner, on the occasion of their nahalot, and also sponsored by Mitch Julis, in memory of his brother, Richie Julis*

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 3:50 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

**Teen Shiur** | 3:50 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

**Evening Services** | 4:35 pm

**Habdala** | 5:23 pm

*Rosh Hodesh Shebat begins on Sunday night.*

*The choir will return next week.*

### Weekday Service Times

#### **Mornings:**

Sunday & Monday (MLK Day): 8:05 am | Tuesday-Friday: 7:05 am

#### **Evenings:**

Sunday & Monday (MLK Day): 4:45 pm | Tuesday-Thursday (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

*Our office will be closed on Monday for the legal holiday.*

# IN CELEBRATION OF THE US SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

*And 250 Years of Jewish Life in the United States*



## Rabbi Soloveichik's Major Lectures

Next Installment:

Next Shabbat, January 17  
After Morning Services

The Liberty Bell, the Jews of the American Revolution, and the Battle for Political Equality

*Stay up to date at [shearithisrael.org/us-250](http://shearithisrael.org/us-250).*

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: January 25

## 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

Following our Friday evening services, registered guests will enjoy a festive Shabbat dinner enhanced by a musical performance by Magevet, Yale University's Jewish a capella group. This year, as part of our Squintennial celebrations, Magevet will include a selection of Americana.

*Register and sponsor at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org).*

## FAITH FOR FOOD

*Learn more & contribute at [shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food](http://shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food)*

### The Masbia UWS Food Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel

This year-round weekly kosher food pantry provides ample and nutritious grocery staples to our neighbors each Tuesday.

### To Help Someone in Manhattan with Food Insecurity

If someone you know in Manhattan could benefit from this program, email [CSIAnnex@masbiarelief.org](mailto:CSIAnnex@masbiarelief.org) with a name and cell phone number. A trained Masbia representative will reach out regarding enrollment.

*Thank you to our faith partners: The Jewish Center, Masbia, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

## YOUTH CORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*From river we leapt with a splash and a bound,  
Into homes and warm beds, we covered the ground.  
We croaked through the night, a hopping green fog,  
Name this noisy plague...*

## COMING UP

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

### Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

THIS Sunday, January 18 | 4:00 pm | Norman (2016)  
Sunday, February 8 | 4:00 pm | The Testament (2017)

### Bedek HaBayit Day with Rev. Z. Edinger

Sun, Jan 25 | 10 am-12 pm | *RSVP to Rev. Edinger: [zedinger@shearithisrael.org](mailto:zedinger@shearithisrael.org)*

### Tu B'Shebat Seder with Baruch-Lev Kelman

Sunday, February 1 | Following 6:30 pm Evening Services

### CSI Youth Tu B'Shebat Seder with Dalya & Jake

Sunday, February 1 | Registration coming soon!

### 2nd Annual Sisterhood Culinary Continuity: BOUREKAS!

Sunday, February 8 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm | At Shearith Israel

### Shearith Israel League Super Bowl Party

Sunday, February 8 | 6:00 pm | At Shearith Israel

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tov to **Monica & Henry Aboodi**, upon the birth of a granddaughter, Mia Esther Aboodi, born to their children, Jacob & Tamara Aboodi.

Mazal tov to **Maya Kliger & Benjamin J. Nathan** on their recent marriage. Congratulations as well to his parents, **Rebecca Chaplan & David J. Nathan** (Honorary Parnas), brothers **Aaron, Daniel, and Jonathan Nathan**, grandmother, **Ruth Nathan**, and the entire family.

Mazal tov to **Joel Schreiber**, upon the marriage of his granddaughter, Miriam Fein, to Joshua Brody.

### Empower Yourself to Help Protect Our Community

We invite our members to consider CSS's newly launched ROAM initiative, which equips Jewish volunteers with advanced skills in event safety and community protection. For more details, visit [thecss.org/joinroam](http://thecss.org/joinroam).

We also encourage members to join our existing CSS volunteers who assist on major holidays — contact Vicki Bengualid at [vbengualid@gmail.com](mailto:vbengualid@gmail.com).