

DEBAR TORAH *by RABBI ROHDE*

Jacob's Laudation of the Children of Israel

I have written previously that Jacob's final address to his children partakes of the character of prophecy and blessing. But it also partakes of the character of praise, poetry, and song. We had a discussion of this point over breakfast: Baruch-Lev said that the address consists of curses, to which I agreed, but I explained that that I included curses under the category of blessings, for curses are, like blessings, invocations about the future regarding the favorability of Divine reception. Curses are "blessings in reverse." But I explained that Jacob's address also includes lyrical praise of his sons, to which someone responded "and put-downs," and Dr. Harry Engel interjected "back-handed compliments" and I responded that praise and denigration belong in this category of expressions of approval or disapproval of qualities in the present. I gave the example of Jacob's praise of Issachar as a "strong-boned ass, crouching among the sheepfolds," who evidently likes lying there so much that he gets lazy and ends up submitting to servitude. And Reuben is clearly lauded for his strength, even though that too at the end turns into disparagement of his arrogance. Of course, both strength and arrogance are included in the meaning of the Hebrew term Jacob uses here for strength, "עַז". So Jacob's address is clearly intended as lyrical praise and laudation of the Tribes of Israel, even if also some lyrical disparagement and denigration is off-handedly included.

What is the point of such praise and poetry? This is a question I have been asking myself lately, as I have returned to my Jingle Bell Holiday Season practice of writing jingles to draw attendance at minyan, such as: "7:05 Shahrit today; Minha at 4:30; Your attendance at minyan helps keep our congregation sturdy!" One acquaintance of mine responded: "Let's face it, Walt Whitman you're not. Why not try a direct marketing approach?" To which I responded, "Marketing shmarketing, my approach has much more flair. Mundane expressions must be banished when it comes to prayer." My friend responded "It may have more flair, but does it bring in the crowds? How long did it take you to work out the rhyme for this last epistle?"

But this and other conversations with congregants in talking about minyan brings me to this very point, for our "prayers" are filled with little but lyrical laudations and praises, in high poetic style. The mystical power of lyrical words, in praise as well as mixed with some denigration, to bring out the best in the world we know is part of the whole point of the exercise. And it was to bring about the best in his sons' characters, that Jacob on his deathbed lauded to the Children of Israel.



CONGREGATION SHEarith ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayhee

January 2-3, 2026 | 14 Tebet, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 180 | Haftarah: 191

Kaplan: Parasha: 240 | Haftarah: 1090

Candle Lighting | 4:22 pm

Evening Services | 4:30 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

At the conclusion of the last word of the parasha, the congregation says:

חִזְקָה וּנְתַחְזֵק - חִזְקָה וּנְתַחְזֵק לְבָבְכֶם כָּל הַמִּיחָלִים לְה'

*Be Strong and let us be Strengthened - Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
All ye that hope for the LORD.*

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:35 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 3:35 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 4:20 pm

Habdala | 5:08 pm

The choir will return on January 9-10.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: 4:30 pm

Monday-Thursday (**Arbit only**): **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, January 17

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.

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, 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.

FAITH FOR FOOD

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

This year-round weekly (on Tuesdays) kosher food pantry will provide ample & nutritious grocery staples to our neighbors.

To Help Someone with Food Insecurity

If you have a neighbor in Manhattan who might benefit from this food delivery program, email CSIAnnex@masbiarelief.org with their name and cell phone number. A trained Masbia representative will reach out to them to get them enrolled.

To Get Involved

FUNDING

This project requires over \$50,000 in financial support per year.

Visit the webpage to contribute and to view our growing list of supporters.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Information for volunteering will be available over the next few weeks.

Stay tuned to learn about ways to get involved.

COMING UP

Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

Film Discussions on Select Sundays | Registration at shearithisrael.org

Sunday, January 18 | 4:00 pm | Norman (2016)

PLEASE NOTE: January 11 date has been rescheduled for **January 18 at 4:00 pm**, as Emanuel Cohn will be observing Shloshim for his father on January 11. Arthur Cohn, described by Emanuel as a man who loved to help people and make them happy, was an independent film producer and a six-time Academy Award winner, most recently living in Jerusalem.

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

Bedeck HaBayit Day with Rev. Z. Edinger

Sunday, January 25 | RSVP to Rev. Edinger: zedinger@shearithisrael.org

Join for a special hands-on volunteer opportunity to care for our Synagogue in advance of the spring holidays. We'll polish ritual silver, reattach bells to Rimonim, mend prayerbooks, and more. No experience needed – just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to help.

The Shearith Israel League is co-sponsoring with The American Sephardi Federation

Salud i Beraha: The 9th Annual NY Ladino Day

Sunday, January 11 | 2 pm | The Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th St

Tickets can be purchased at programs.cjh.org/event/ladino-day-2026-01-11

SAVE THE DATES

Tu B'Shebat Seder with Baruch-Lev Kelman

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

Registration coming soon!

Sunday, February 8 — Shearith Israel League Super Bowl Party

Stay tuned for registration & details!

KIDS KORNER

Parent-Child Learning

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

Next session: January 10 | 6:15 pm | with Dalya & Jake

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences to our former Associate Minister, **Rabbi Joel Finkelstein**, upon the passing of his mother, Carolyn Finkelstein.

Early Bird Offer: Pre-Pay Next Year's Dues at This Year's Rates!

Members, remember that **until January 15**, you can pre-pay your July 2026-June 2027 dues at this membership year's rates. Refer to our emails for instructions.