

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Exalting the High Throwing Arm of God

A conspicuous but easily-missed Hebrew word-play caught my attention this year. I have been preparing to read Torah on Parashat BeShallah, the narrative of the escape of Israel and the drowning of the Egyptians at the Sea, which prominently features the famous “Song of the Sea.” I end the 1st Aliyah, which I read during the week (for those who have the interest, you can hear me read the 1st Aliyah of the Torah portion and support our minyan by coming to our morning services on Mondays and Thursdays) quite sonorously and elevatingly (raising the final pitch by a half-step in the traditional ending of the Spanish & Portuguese Torah Reading’s “high-melody”) with the word “רמה” “ramáh.” In the introductory narration there (preceding the Song), the term means “high:” “And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the Children of Israel, as the Children of Israel went out with a **high** hand (Ex. 14:8). There is an emphasis upon the “high-handedness” with which Israel left Egypt, i.e., victoriously, having the “upper hand” enabling them to be daring, which makes this an epic pause-point. It is true that the pursuit of the Egyptians continues in the following verse, and hence some translations put only a semicolon here and end the sentence with Verse 9, after the location of this episode (beside Pi-HaHiroth, in front of Baal-Tzephon) is given. There seems to be some deliberate ambiguity as to whose hand this is which is high or raised: Ostensibly this seems to be referring to Israel’s having gained the advantage or upper hand, for the incapacitation of the Plagues enabled Israel to get away before Egypt could mobilize a response. But previous references to the LORD’s “Strong Hand and Outstretched Arm,” as well as the LORD’s having brought about this predicament through God’s “hardening Pharaoh’s heart” connotes that this is the High Hand of God which has been raised to give Israel the upper hand. Our tradition’s pausing here reinforces the emphasis upon the Raised Hand of God.

Homophonous with this feminine form of the Hebrew adjective meaning “high” is a Hebrew verb from a different root meaning “throwing” or “hurling” which is used at the beginning of the Song - “...sing to the LORD for He has Gloriously Gloried [Himself]; horse and its rider He has **thrown** into the sea (Ex. 15:1).” This same phrase is repeated by Miriam. The masculine verb “רמה” “ramáh,” here speaking of God’s throwing, casting, or hurling of the Egyptian horses and their riders has all three letters as part of the root [רמה]; the previously-mentioned feminine (modifying “hand,” which is feminine) adjective meaning “high” has the root [רום] “rum.” The two words have exactly the same Hebrew spellings, with the same consonants and vowels, and are accented similarly. The terms ostensibly come from different stems with different meanings, but our text is clearly connecting them through word-play. Indeed, the very next verse, Ex. 15:2 uses a different form of the root meaning “high” as a verb “וארמנהו” meaning “and I will exalt him.”

“Throwing,” as any baseball pitcher can tell you, usually involves some height. The pull of gravity means you have to aim your throw many times higher than your goal. And throwing is a high-handed technique, involving lifting and extending the arm and hand up high. In fact, it’s difficult to imagine “throwing” something as heavy as a horse or a chariot or a human being up in the air. Then again, bodies of water are usually found at lower elevations than land and little elevation is needed to hurl something into their depths. And in martial arts we speak of a “throw” whenever there is some uprooting and lifting of the opponent off his standing base of support. In rushing water and mud, such a standing base is cut off, and the rushing waves hurl one to and fro to drown and sink into the depths. But calling this a “throwing” is to emphasize its power and high-handedness.

The upraised arm used in throwing is the symbol of strength. As I have learned in my sword-handling and stick-handling classes, all weapons are called “arms” and they properly are used as extensions of our own arm’s and hand’s strength and energy. And to lift one’s arm and project that energy into a projectile flung far away from the arm is even more a measure of the arm’s strength, and is for me part of the appeal of a sport like baseball. God, too, has an amazing pitching arm, able to raise His Hand up on High and project his energy away from him, throwing and hurling it to the furthest points. For that He fully deserves our exaltation.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue Shabbat Beshallah-Shira

January 30-31, 2026 | 13 Shebat, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 265 | Haftarah: 283
Kaplan: Parasha: 320 | Haftarah: 1108

Candle Lighting | 4:53 pm

Evening Services | 5:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

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

Magevet Dinner | *for registered guests* | Levy Auditorium

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

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:05 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 4:05 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 4:50 pm

Habdala | 5:41 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: 5:00 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:

THIS Shabbat, January 31

After Morning Services

The Jewish Privateer of the American Revolution:

A Fascinating Story of Judaism and Patriotism

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

Faith for Food

The Masbia UWS Food Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel

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

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@masbiarelieff.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:

*In the desert they walked, with no food to plan,
Hashem sent them breakfast right onto the sand.
It fell every morning, white and small,
What was this food that fed them all?*

CSI Youth Tu B'Shebat Seder with Dalya & Jake

THIS Sunday, February 1 | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Join Dalya & Jake for homemade "dirt cakes," Tu B'shebat trivia, and the seven species!

Parent-Child Learning

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

Next session: Saturday night, February 7 | 7:00 pm | with Baruch-Lev

Sign up now at shearithisrael.org/pcl-5786.

COMING UP

Register at shearithisrael.org

Tu B'Shebat Seder with Baruch-Lev Kelman

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

Celebrate the renewal of the Jewish spirit, through the lens of educator Rabbi Zev Yaavetz, who helped revive the very idea of planting trees as a modern mitzvah. Together we'll explore his spiritual vision: the messianic rooting of Judaism's mysterious "rootless tree."

2nd Annual Sisterhood Culinary Continuity: BOUREKAS!

Sunday, February 8 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm | At Shearith Israel | \$25

Join us to learn about the dish common to all Sephardic kitchens from Greece, Morocco, Italy, Syria, to Turkey. Sephardic savory pastry aficionado Ruth Altchek will give us a history of the boureka as well as a hands-on demonstration on how to make them.

We will get to eat them too!

Shearith Israel League Super Bowl Party

Sunday, February 8 | 6:00 pm | At Shearith Israel | \$12

Sunday Matinee Virtual Film Festival with Sisterhood

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

Special Presentation from the Sisterhood & Shearith Israel League

Cinematic Memorial Event: Arthur Cohn

Sunday, February 22 | 2:00 pm | \$20

We will host a cinematic memorial lecture by Arthur's son, Emanuel Cohn, who will celebrate his father's Academy-Award-winning legacy with a talk on his life and work, including a selection of clips from his films.

Cost: \$20 per person | *A donation will be made to: The Brothers For Life, injured soldiers helping injured soldiers, in memory of Arthur Cohn (z"l)*

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Melissa Epstein & Adam Jackson** on the birth of twin great nephews, Levi Adir and Naor Betzalel, born to Rachel Jackson and Jackson Mercer.

Congratulations to the proud grandparents, Daniel Jackson and Claudia Marbach, and the entire Jackson, Marbach, and Mercer family.

Mazal tob to our PTTs tutor **Lauren Schneider & Sam Flaks**, upon the birth of a baby boy.