DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Courage to Risk Following God in the Face of Safer Alternatives

There is an abrupt shift in Genesis as the text narrows its focus from the history of the world to the genealogy leading to Abram, and even more so as our Parasha begins to narrate Abram's life. Yet a few touchstones connect these narratives. The most prominent is the language of blessings and curses, although now used in different ways: "You shall be a blessing," "I shall bless those who bless you," and "they shall be blessed through you" describe new ways God's blessings will be given and distributed. "Those who curse you I will curse" uses the same two familiar terms for the Divine curse "קלל" and "ארר," but this curse is mediated through Abram. These blessings still apply to the entire world, the "families of the Earth," although they are funneled through Abram's line; even the curse applies to whoever curses Abram and his descendants. Unlike Noah, Abram is not initially called "צדיק," meaning "righteous" or "meritorious." Yet in 15:6 we read: "He put his faith in God, and God reckoned it as righteousness [צדקה]." Abram also frequently builds altars, offers sacrifices, and "invokes the Name of the Lord."

In the previous Parasha, Noah mitigates God's curse of Adam, restoring blessing and human authority in the world. But Noah's descendants seem to have failed to keep Divine blessing flowing uniformly to humanity. As I previously wrote, before the Flood, mankind failed to establish an authority structure to maintain law and order. After the Flood, mankind did the opposite, creating power structures at the Tower of Babel so ambitious that they sought to rival God's authority. Following the collapse of that model and humanity's dispersal into linguistic groups across the land, a new political model based on smaller-scale structures—tribes, nations, and cities—would need to develop.

Abram's family journeys are, in a sense, a continuation of the dispersal from Babel. What makes Abram unique is his faithfulness to God: both following explicit commands and trusting Him wherever He leads, even when other choices appear more secure.

Noah, too, had to follow God into dangerous waters. But he had little choice and no viable alternative. His neighbors might have ridiculed his building an Ark and collecting animals, but these actions were probably not dangerous. When the Flood came, Noah was surely grateful for a way to save himself and his family; the only alternative was drowning. Abram, however, courageously follows God into Canaan when better-known and seemingly safer alternatives were available. His nephew Lot provides a contrast, choosing the more secure option only to find himself in far greater danger.

Abram's courage in pursuing justice despite the risks is evident when he fights to rescue Lot from Chedorlaomer. It is also evident when he accepts God's promise that Eliezer will not be his heir and later sends Ishmael away. Trusting in God alone, and following His instructions even when seemingly safer alternatives exist, is the hallmark of Abram's approach. We see this again when Abram forgoes compensation from Melchizedek, avoiding potential entanglement in Canaanite alliances and instead trusting solely in God's promise of the Land. The restoration of blessing to the world will come not through the amassing of power, but through the efforts of a courageous few who, despite safer alternatives, devote themselves wholeheartedly to seeking Divine justice and fulfilling God's Law and Command. In a world where power is divided among many smaller nations and groups, Justice can be pursued, but only through the leadership of a small elite courageous enough to singleheartedly devote themselves to it in the face of seemingly safer, more comfortable, and more available alternatives.

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Lekh-Lekha

October 23-24, 2026 | 13 Marheshvan, 5787

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 45 | Haftarah: 60
Kaplan: Parasha: 52 | Haftarah: 1058

Candle Lighting | 5:46 pm
Evening Services | 5:45 pm | Main Sanctuary
NEW YORK SEASON PREMIERE: **Friday Night Lights** | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5787 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family | This week's session sponsored by Faith Fogelman in memory of her father, Theodore Watkin*

Zemirot | 8:15 am / **Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary
Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room
Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue
Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:55 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik
Teen Shiur | 4:55 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman
Evening Services | 5:40 pm
Habdala | 6:33 pm

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Weekday Service Times

Mornings:
Sunday: 8:05 am
Monday-Friday: 7:05 am
Evenings:
Sunday-Thursday: **5:45 pm**

COMING UP

Learn more at ***shearithisrael.org***

Registration Deadline: THIS Monday!

Shearith Israel Book Club Luncheon | *Between the Wars: Jewish Characters in 1920s & 1930s American Literature*

Shabbat, October 31 | after Morning Services

You don't have to be a book club member to enjoy this congenial luncheon with insights and guided discussion from Professor Shaina Trapedo of Yeshiva University. But if you would like to read any of the 22 books, you can find them on our website. Register now!

Upcoming Scholars-In-Residence:

Professors Lynn & Alexander Kaye

Shabbat Haye Sarah, November 6-7

Dr. Lynn Kaye will speak on *Assessing the Value of Time in Halakha* and *Lay People's Voices & Advocacy in Rabbinic Courts of the Talmud,* and Rabbi Dr. Alexander Kaye will speak on *Halakha and Democracy in Israel.* Give them a warm welcome by sponsoring kiddush!

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood: **6th Annual Virtual Film Festival**

First Film Discussion: Sunday, Nov 15 | 4 pm | ***The Garden of the Finzi-Continis***

This year's special lineup will feature four films of the late Arthur Cohn, hosted by his son, Emanuel Cohn, an Israeli film lecturer, actor and screenwriter, who has inspired and delighted us with his insights and interactive discussion over the past several years. Films will be sent to registrants to be viewed at their leisure. Then we will come together on Zoom to discuss the featured film with our host.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome the following new members to our growing Shearith Israel family:
Audrey & Sargent Aborn, Rachael & David Eisner, Rachel Goldfine & Mark Highman

Mazal tob to **Ellie Neustein & Elijah Kochin**, upon the birth of a baby girl. Congratulations as well to proud grandparents **Robin & Shimon Neustein.**

Mazal tob to **Aviva Sussman,** upon her grandson, Phillip Goldberg, becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Congratulations to **Monica Aboodi**, who will be honored by AJC Westchester/Fairfield as a Leader For Tomorrow Visionary Chair at their 2026 Fall Gala on Sunday, November 8. For more details, go to **tinyurl.com/ajc-westchester.**

Of Interest to Our Community

Our chorister, **Alex Guerrero**, will be performing this Monday, 10/26, at the 7:00 pm *Mazal Bueno: A Portrait in Song of the Spanish Jews* event, held at Ansche Chesed (West End Ave at 100th St). Get tickets at **tinyurl.com/mazal-bueno2026.**

Early Voting starts this weekend and continues through November 1. Make sure your voice is heard at the ballot box!

COMING UP

Learn more at ***shearithisrael.org***

Shearith Israel Members are cordially invited to this very special program

Presented by Congregation Shearith Israel and the Japan Society

Registration Deadline THIS Monday!

Because One Ought

Celebrating a Japanese Story of Courage, Hope, and Renewal

Monday, November 2 | 7:00 pm (following 6:30 pm Evening Services)

Featuring: ***Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, moderator | Ambassador Satoshi Katahira, Consul General of Japan in NY | Kristina Reiko Cooper, virtuoso cellist, composer, and producer | and more!***

Join us for this first-of-its-kind music and storytelling event celebrating the moral courage of Chiune Sugihara and Setsuzo Kotsuji, Japanese heroes who risked their careers and safety to help Jews escape the Nazis during the Holocaust. *RSVP to* ***specialevents@japansociety.org.***

Semiquincentennial Event at Fraunces Tavern

"Between Crown and Congress: New York's Jews During the American Revolution"

Monday, November 2 | 6:30 pm | Free for Shearith Israel Members

Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl Street

Rev. Z. Edinger will explore how New York's small Jewish community experienced the American Revolution and emerged fundamentally transformed by it. By examining the lives of figures such as Gershom Mendes Seixas, Myer Myers, Uriah Hendricks, and the Gomez and Hays families, together with the stories preserved in Shearith Israel's ritual objects and archival documents, we gain a more nuanced understanding of Jewish life during the conflict than the familiar narrative of Patriots versus Loyalists. **Members, use our code "FRAUNCES" to register for free at tinyurl.com/fraunces-tavern!**

KIDS KORNER

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

Abram traveled to a land unknown,
With flocks and herds that he would own.
He led his sheep both near and far,
What was his job beneath the stars?

Season Premiere: **Parent Child Learning: Siddur Decorating**

Motzei Shabbat, November 14 | 6:30 pm | Dalya & Jake | Free; registration required

Join us for the first session of the season! Spend special time learning, creating, and connecting with Dalya and Jake as we dive into the world of tefillah. Everyone will decorate their very own Siddur covers for the Siddur booklets we use every week in Jr. Congregation. Come ready to learn, decorate, and make your siddur uniquely yours! Pizza will be served.

Sephardic Shabbaton for High School Students in NYC

Shabbat, November 6-8 | Hosted by Shearith Israel

Only $65 for CSI Teens plus a friend! Contact **breiss@shearithisrael.org.**